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Proceedings

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CHARLES WESLEY, 'WARTS AND ALL':

The Evidence of the Prose Works

The Wesley Historical Society Lecture 2007

Introduction

According to his more famous brother John, Charles Wesley was a man of many talents of which the *least* was his ability to write poetry.¹ This is a view with which few perhaps would today agree, for the writing of poetry, more specifically hymns, is the one thing above all others for which Charles Wesley has been remembered. Anecdotally I am sure that we all recognise that this is the case; and indeed if one were to look Charles up in more or less any one of the many general biographical dictionaries that include an entry on him one will find it repeated often enough: Charles is portrayed as a poet and a hymn-writer; while comparatively little, if any, attention is paid to other aspects of his work. On a more scholarly level too one can find it. Obviously there are exceptions, but in general historians of Methodism in particular and eighteenth-century Church history more widely have painted a picture of Charles that is all too monochrome and Charles' role as the 'Sweet Singer of Methodism' is as unquestioned as his broader significance is undeveloped.

The reasons for this lack of full attention being paid to Charles are several and it is not (contrary to what is usually said) simply a matter of Charles being in his much more famous brother's shadow; a lesser light, as it were, being outshone by a greater one. No, it is much more complex than that. For example, in his new book, a revised Liverpool Hope PhD thesis I am delighted to say, Dr Gareth Lloyd has shown that Charles Wesley has suffered pretty severely at the hands of his biographers.

¹ See *Minutes of Conference*, 1.p201

Charles was, as Lloyd has shown, a contentious figure whose vision for Methodism did not fit all that well with that to whom the task of writing up the story of the tradition's origins and ethos fell during the nineteenth century. And as these early historians (who, understandably, were to some extent also apologists), sought to explain Methodism's roots and mark out the new denomination's own space on the ecclesiological map, Charles was a somewhat problematic figure. As a result he was consciously side-lined. At least that is Lloyd's argument. The long-term result is that Charles Wesley, a sometimes troublesome individual who fought and lost some important battles for the soul of Methodism (hence the title of Lloyd's book, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity*) has been sanitised by giving him the safe, and indeed inspiring role, of 'the sweet singer of Methodism'. It is a role that has often been as unquestioned as his broader significance has been undeveloped. This picture is one that is drawn on the basis of the poetical material, but it is not true to the full body of evidence, however. And hence a part of the title of my lecture: 'the Evidence of the Prose Works'. What I hope to indicate is something of the other aspects of Charles that are all too often forgotten and to give a portrait of the man as all-round pastor, preacher and poet – and at times a troublesome one at that. I will concentrate on the 'warts and all' part of this portrait. The reasons for this will I hope become apparent at the end of the lecture.

But to return to John's remark that Charles 'least' talent was his poetic. Now it is possible that in saying this, John may simply have been seeking to extol longed-for virtues at the expense of the actual. That may be the case. However, I am not so sure that we should be so quick to brush aside John's comments here. After all, being born before Charles and dying after him, John knew his younger brother throughout the entire 81 year course of the latter's life and for a good 50 of those years the two brothers were near inseparable. They had their differences to be sure. Sibling rivalry, heart-felt theological disputes and a straightforward clash in personality all contributed to what was at times a very stormy relationship indeed; but that John knew Charles perhaps better than almost any other person (Charles' wife Sarah is the chief competitor here) is surely indisputable. So when John says that Charles' least talent was his poetic, we ought at least to consider the evidence.

And here is the heart of the problem: the evidence. What evidence do we have available that would enable us to judge the accuracy of John's

comments regarding his brother? Let us make the question a little broader: what evidence do we have that would enable us properly to assess Charles Wesley as an all-round figure of the eighteenth century and a force both within early Methodism in particular and English church history in general? Some of us will know some of his hymns, but what else is there by which we may judge the theological and historical importance of this man?

Well - at first sight the situation looks good. For example Charles left behind about 850 letters (which is quite a few more than, say, St Paul, and judging by the secondary literature to which Paul's letters have given rise we all think we know quite a lot about him!) And in addition to the 'out' letters (that is, letters written by Charles) there are many hundreds of 'in' letters (letters written to Charles - again a parallel with Paul is tempting - O that we had the letters that the Corinthians wrote to Paul).

Charles also compiled a journal for the years 1736 to 1756, a text that runs to something like 300,000 words. It is true that this journal is very uneven, especially after 1751, but for the latter part of the 1730's and for the crucial decade of the 1740's we have a very substantial account, in Charles' own hand, of his work. In addition there are a few tracts (though probably not more than a half dozen or so)² and a small sample of his sermons. Together these material make up a substantial deposit of primary materials and, one would think, it ought to be possible from them to piece together something of Charles' life and work and assess those other talents (organizational perhaps, homiletic, evangelistic, pastoral, etc.) that, so his brother's remark implies, he possessed.

In the light of this wealth of primary evidence, then, the historian, and given the content of much of the material that has just been mentioned, the theologian, really ought to be able to approach Charles Wesley scholarship with some considerable optimism. Just who was this man, this brilliant character of the eighteenth-century, who could apparently write poetry on almost any topic (including children cutting teeth, Handel's birthday,³ the expected French invasions and even the pugilistic

² A *Short Account of the Death of Hannah Richardson* (1741); Charles was almost certainly responsible also for the work *Strictures on the Substance of a Sermon Preached at Baltimore in the State of Maryland before the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (1785) which gives the author as 'a Methodist of the Church of England'. In MSS form there is also an extended account of Charles' dealings with the French Prophetess Mary Lavington (MARC ref. DDCW 8/12), a treatment, in French, on the Lord's Supper (most of which has been copied from the Catholic writer Fénelon [Wesley College ref. D2/9]) and another treatise upon the Lord's Supper held at the Rylands (ref. DDCW 8/16).

³ ST Kimbrough and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, eds. *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, 3 vols. (Nashville, TN: 1988-1992), 3.p318

abilities of Grimalkin his pet cat. ('I sing Grimalkin brave and bold, who makes intruders fly, his claws and whiskers they behold and squall and scamper by')? A character who, indisputably, composed some of the most magnificent hymns of the Christian tradition. The wealth of primary materials ought to give the scholar access, but the reality is much less encouraging.

Primary Sources: Poetic

Above all the problem lies in the state of primary textual research. Much of the literary deposit that Charles left behind has gone unresearched or else the textual base of what scholars have used can be demonstrated to be questionable. Actually this is true even for the poetical compositions. Charles was, to be sure, a masterful religious poet and we can reconstruct much of his theological thought from an examination of his hymns and other sacred poems and many of these have been researched pretty thoroughly. But as I noted above, Charles' *religious* verse is but a part of his total output. Here is a man who could compose very long poetical texts on any number of 'secular' topics. I do not intend to get into those here, but they are potentially very important and can give us an insight into Charles' family life, his political views, his fears and frustrations with the rough and tumble of day-to-day life as a Methodist leader etc. I will refer to some such poetical compositions in the remainder of this lecture, though the emphasis is very much upon the prose works.

Primary Sources: Prose

The prose corpus is much more of a problem, indeed it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that until only very recently, within the past 10 years in fact, the bulk of Charles' prose materials were quite literally lying around in boxes, uncatalogued, almost entirely unresearched and, in the case of the substantial shorthand materials (of which more in a moment), undeciphered. As I say, the situation has improved somewhat recently, principally due to the fact that the bulk of the papers have now been catalogued. There is still much to be done, however.

The Sermons

Rather than getting into further lengthy theoretical discussion on the challenges and opportunities of wading through Charles' prose works, however, let me give you an example: his Sermons. I have argued elsewhere that Charles' preaching abilities were considerable and that preaching, no less than poetical composition, was at the very heart of his

ministry. A study of his journal indicates that Charles must have preached quite literally thousands of sermons and indeed sometimes his journal is little more than an annotated sermon log. The following extract from 1739 is not untypical.

Saturday, February 10. I expounded to many hundreds at a Society in Beech Lane. **Sunday, February 11.** We prayed for utterance this day. . . . I read prayers, and preached without notes on blind Bartimeus, the Lord being greatly my helper. Let him have all the glory. Returned to pray at Mr Stonehouse's. Miss Crisp asked to be admitted. We had close searching talk, before I expounded to the Society.... **Tuesday, February 13.** Read a letter from Sarah Hurst, pressing me to Oxford, and Cowley (which is now vacant). Quite resigned, I offered myself; opened the book upon those words, "With stammering lips, and with another tongue will he speak to this people" [Is. 28:11]. Thought it a prohibition, yet continued without a will. With Captain Flatman at the Marshalsea; read prayers, and preached from Luke 7:36, the woman washing Christ's feet. The word was with power; all attentive and thankful. Visited Zouberbouler, removed the Fleet. **Wednesday, February 14.** Read prayers at Newgate, and preached the law first, and then the gospel. Sang, "Invitation to sinners." All were affected. **Thursday, February 15.** Preached again at the Marshalsea. Sent for by an harlot (supposed to be dying), and preached Christ, the friend of sinners, I trust to her heart.⁴

Preaching, then, was very much at the heart of Charles' ministry. And he was good at it. According to John Whitehead (1740-1804), John Wesley's first official biographer, and an individual who had heard both John and Charles preach, Charles' sermons were more 'awakening and useful' than John's,⁵ which is high praise indeed when set against John's own not insignificant preaching abilities. Whitehead went on to observe regarding Charles

⁴ References to the journal here are from the manuscript journal (MARC DDCW 10/2). The full text of DDCW 10/2 has been prepared for publication by ST Kimbrough and Kenneth G.C. Newport and will appear in 2008 as *The Journal of Charles Wesley*, 2 vols. (Nashville TN: Kingswood Books).

⁵ John Whitehead *Life of the Rev. John Wesley*, 2 vols. (1793-1796), 1,p292. I owe this reference to Albert C. Outler, ed. *Sermons*, 1p2, n. 6. The comparison is also made by Charles Wesley Flint, who notes that 'Charles was a born preacher; of the three he is rated second to George Whitefield but ahead of his brother John' (Flint, *Charles Wesley and his Colleagues*, p146). No evidence is cited in support of this remark.

His discourses from the pulpit were not dry and systematic, but flowed from the present views and feelings of his own mind. He had a remarkable talent of expressing the most important truths with simplicity and energy;⁶ and his discourses were sometimes truly apostolic, forcing conviction on his hearers in spite of the most determined opposition.⁷

A further very early account of Charles' preaching is that given by Joseph Williams of Kidderminster; again the MS of this has survived. On October 17, 1739, Williams wrote to Charles in the course of which he refers to a report that he has written on hearing Charles preach.

I found him standing upon a table, [says Williams] in an erect posture, with his hands and eyes lifted up to heaven in prayer, surrounded with (I guess) more than a thousand people; some few of them persons of fashion, both men and women, but most of them of the lower rank of mankind. I know not how long he had been engaged in the duty before I came, but he continued therein, after my coming, scarce a quarter of an hour; during which time he prayed with uncommon fervency, fluency, and variety of proper expression. He then preached about an hour from the five last verses of the fifth chapter of the second Epistle to the Corinthians, in such a manner as I have seldom, if ever, heard any minister preach: i.e. though I have heard many a finer sermon, according to the common taste, or acceptance of sermons, yet I scarce ever heard any minister discover such evident signs of a most vehement desire, or labour so earnestly, to convince his hearers that they were all by nature in a state of enmity against God, consequently in a damnable state, and needed reconciliation to God . . . These points he backed all along as he went on with a great many texts of scripture, which he explained, and illustrated; and then freely invited all, even the chief of sinners, and used a great variety of the most moving arguments, and expositions, in order to persuade, allure, instigate and, if possible, compel them all to come to Christ, and believe in him for pardon and salvation.⁸

And all this, says Williams, was done by Charles with nothing but the Bible in his hand.

⁶ In this context it is worth noting that Charles seems sometimes to have put more energy into his sermons than was good for him. On one occasion he got himself so worked up while delivering a sermon on Psalm 23 that he bled from the nose for some time afterwards (see Charles Wesley to Sarah Wesley, June 18 [1763]; MARC ref. DDCW 7/16 and printed in Jackson, *Journal*, 2pp251-252).

⁷ Whitehead, *Life*, 1p370

⁸ MARC ref. DDPPr 1/92,pp2-3

One could cite much more evidence of this sort, but time does not allow extensive review of the relevant primary documents. However, permit me just one more quotation. It is from James Sutcliffe and refers to Charles' preaching at a very advanced age, in fact probably only a year or two before Charles' death and for that reason it is an important insight into the life of a now aged man. 'The preacher', says Sutcliffe,

was an aged gentleman in a plain coat and wig. His voice was clear, his aspect venerable and his manner devout. In his introductory sentences he was very deliberate, and presently made a pause of some moments. This I attributed to his age and infirmities, but in a while he made a second pause, twice as long as before. This to me was painful, but the people took no notice of it. However he helped himself out by quoting three verses of the hymn: 'Five bleeding wounds He bears, Received on Calvary'. And when I was most affected with sympathy for his infirmities, as I then thought, he quoted his text in Greek with remarkable fluency. Coming then to the great salvation, he was on his high horse, age and infirmities were left behind. It was a torrent of doctrine, of exhortation and eloquence bearing down all before him'.⁹

It is worth noting, however, that the picture is not uniform. Just two short counter examples: one of the letters written to Charles complains that he mumbled in the pulpit while another account tells of how Charles went on for over two hours and probably would have kept going a good deal longer had he not been 'booed and hissed out of the pulpit by the lads'.¹⁰ Nevertheless, that Charles was a good preacher seems pretty certain.

Over two hundred years on, we can still tap into some of this energy and vibrancy and hear at least the echo of what Sutcliffe and others heard first-hand; but not much. After an extensive world-wide search only twenty-three potential Charles Wesley sermons have come to light and even here we cannot be completely confident, since it is evident that Charles copied some of those twenty-three from his brother John's MSS.

So what can we deduce from these sermons? What do they tell us about Charles Wesley?

Well this very much depends where one starts. The surviving sermon texts can be divided into roughly two groups. Those that Charles preached before his 'conversion' ('evangelical experience' may be a better term for what happened) in May 1738 and those afterwards. We do not

⁹ As quoted in Flint, *Charles Wesley and His Colleagues*, p148.

¹⁰ See further Kenneth G.C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: 2001), p37

have time to enter into a full discussion on this topic now, but let me give you at least a very brief outline of what seems to be the situation.

We will remember the hymn 'And can it be'. The exact chronological relationship between the composition of that hymn and Charles' experience of 21 May 1738 has been debated.¹¹ However, even if composed later (which seems likely), the hymn is doubtless a reflection upon Charles' experience of May 21. Verse 4 reads

Long my imprison'd spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke; the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and follow'd Thee.¹²

As with converts generally, Charles may well have overemphasised the discrepancy between his situation before the experience and that after it, a trap into which some of his commentators may also perhaps have fallen.¹³ The imagery of the hymn is dramatic: a soul imprisoned by sin in the darkest dungeonal depths is contrasted with a spirit flying free in the glory of celestial light. The wider corpus of Charles' writings does not support such an absolute and total contrast between his life before May 1738 and that after it.¹⁴ However, the sermons do certainly suggest that his experience of salvation, and his homiletic expression of it, did undergo a definite shift somewhere between his leaving America and composing the latest of the sermon texts printed below. This is in fact quite noticeable when one reads the sermons through. The early material, some of it adapted from John but preached by Charles, is characterised by a fundamental uncertainty that salvation will be achieved. Images of races and long roads and the inadvisability of stopping to rest, for if one does one will find the road is even longer when the journey is restarted than it was when it was left off, abound. Christ appears predominantly as a demanding judge and not the 'friend of sinners' that Charles would later claim him to be. Indeed, in some of the sermons Christ barely appears at all.

¹¹Newport, *Sermons* p19 n. 86

¹²George Osborn, ed. *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 vols. (1868-1872), 1p105

¹³See for example A Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free*, pp62ff.

¹⁴A point made by Frank Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by his Letters*, (1948), p33

Charles' sermon on Phil 3.14-15 is not untypical in this regard. In this sermon Charles sets about explaining the road to salvation and encouraging his hearers never once to take their eyes from it, or stop to rest along the way. God has set before the Christian an ideal, perfection; and unless that ideal is constantly striven for (even if never reached) the believer will not find salvation. As reflected in this sermon, Charles' world is a threatening and uncertain place. God demands that the Christian be ever diligent in seeking to reach the ideal of perfection, which includes, for Charles, the observation of all of God's commands; and how unpleasant it will be for the one caught unawares upon the Lord's return. If this were not enough, Charles also perceives that there are two major forces always seeking to drag the believer down. The first is the devil and his evil agents, a company ever seeking to hinder the believer as he treads his difficult path. The second is human nature itself, which is unwilling to bend to the will of God and by inclination seeks what is evil rather than good. Not surprisingly, then, Christians can 'never be absolutely certain of their crown of reward'. The gaining of that crown is dependent upon the waging of a constant battle, and the ultimate triumph of the believer over self and the devil. One may never reach perfection, but God demands that it is a goal after which the believer is constantly to strive. God, it is true, has promised salvation, 'but it must be remembered that all God's promises are conditional, and that we are bound to fulfil our part of the covenant'. Hence one can never be sure of 'the favour of God', and indeed to be so is a danger in itself, for it may promote a false sense of security and turn one from the difficult path which alone leads to the narrow gate.

The sermon is, then, a rather gloomy one. Charles urges his hearers never to rest from their spiritual labours, that is, keeping the commandments and seeking perfection. Salvation is a 'reward which is given' (Charles has struck out the even stronger remark that it is 'wages' which are 'paid'), and since that reward has not yet been given, the task has not yet been accomplished. Nothing short of perfection is required, and the individual must not stop short of that highest 'pitch of piety'. Stopping is fatal for he

that would stand still in the paths of piety must not be surprized if he find that he goeth back therein. He not only wasteth his time, but loseth his ground too: and will find, if ever he awakes out of his sleep, that he has not only less time to run his race in, but more of his course to go through than he before imagined. He that doth not constantly and daily strive

against the storm of vice and torrent of iniquity, wherewith the world is now overflowed, will be infallibly carried down thereby. There is not resting in the mid way between heaven and hell. We must pursue our way to the former, or we shall infallibly make quick advances toward the latter.

There is, then, no instantaneous salvation and the lot of the Christian is uncertain.

Such thinking is clearly psychologically unhealthy and is perhaps both the partial cause and the result of Charles' pessimistic personality, a characteristic that has been commented on before.¹⁵ There is a good deal more of this sort of thing in those early sermon texts, though we have no time further to explore that here.

With 1738, however, a turning point did come. It is not complete and it would probably be unwise to seek to pinpoint an exact day, but the sermons that come after Charles' 'day of Pentecost' are much lighter and we see a Charles who is now fully confident in the love of God and in the power of God to save, and to do so instantaneously.¹⁶

Consider for example the first sermon to have survived from the period after May 21, 1738, a sermon on 1 John 3.14 (written in shorthand). It is divided into two parts, and Charles did not generally preach both parts on the same occasion.¹⁷ Seen as a whole this sermon (and several others like it) differ from the early texts – such is unmistakable. It is true that in this earliest post-'Pentecost' sermon, Charles still finds a place for good works. However, they are now 'the necessary effects or fruits or signs of a living faith' – necessary 'not to make, but to show us acceptable'.

On the question of how one achieves that acceptance in the first place, however, there seems a fair distance between this sermon and the view put forward in the earlier texts. As has been noted, Charles' general position in the earlier material seems to be that God accepts only those who are daily involved in the difficult task of drawing ever closer to that (always elusive) state of perfection. Sins, and sin itself, must be overcome, progress must be made, devotion must be complete and single-minded. All must do whatever is possible, assured only that Christ will make up the deficit when, and only when, the individual has done his very best.¹⁸ In this later sermon, however, the conditions seem easier to fulfil.

¹⁵See for example Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by his Letters*, pp21-23, p33; Mitchell, *Man with the Dancing Heart*, pp72-73 (who appears to be drawing on Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free*, p68).

¹⁶See Newport, *Sermons* pp. 54-66 for a fuller account.

¹⁷See the introduction to the sermon for full details.

¹⁸Note for example

For though God will in consideration of the merits of Christ and upon our own free repentance pardon all those sins, which through the frailty and corruption of our nature we have committed, yet will he never pardon those omissions of duty and commissions of sin which men wilfully live in, through a fond and vain persuasion that is it not required of them to be as holy as possibly they can.

Oh that any one of you would even now arise and go to his Father and say unto him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son!' He sees you now, while you are a great way off, and has compassion, and only awaits your turning towards him, that he may run and fall on your neck and kiss you. Then he will say, 'Bring forth the best robe (even the robe of Christ's righteousness) and put it upon him, for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

This sermon may even be read as a spiritual autobiography. There are, says Charles, three types of person in the world: those who are wicked and seek not God, those who are wicked and do seek God, and those who are righteous. Those in the first state are without hope so long as they remain in it. Unless they seek God, God can do nothing for them. The second group seems to resemble quite distinctly Charles himself during the period leading up to May 1738. Those in the second group are those who are wicked, who know they are wicked, and seek to become righteous; 'the love of Christ seems to constrain them, and they want to do great things for him'. For a while the world seems to have lost its hold upon them; 'the devil, that roaring lion, is chained; and the flesh but rarely troubles them'. However, temptation comes once more and 'their own wickedness makes head against them' and from this time such a person

treads the same dreadful round of sin, repenting and sinning again. His comfort is withdrawn, his peace is lost; he prayed,¹⁹ resolves and strives, but all in vain; the more he labours, the less he prevails; the more he struggles, the faster he is bound: so that after a thousand thousand repeated defeats he finds at last that sin is irresistible. Then does he take up that sad complaint (Romans 7) which he feels the apostle wrote of him, 'That which I do I allow not: for what I would that I do not; but what I hate, that do I . . . Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!'

It is at this point, according to Charles, that righteousness comes. It is instantaneous. The robe of Christ's righteousness is thrown around the sinner. He has come home.

There is an obvious sense, then, in which this sermon differs from those that have gone before it. The gloomy soul-searching seems largely to

¹⁹The tense seems odd in this context. It may be a simple error on Charles' part, or perhaps even a slip brought about as a result of his remembering his own experience.

have gone and in its place has come a conviction that God in Christ has done in a moment what Charles had thought would take a life-time. This is not to say, however, that the pilgrim has landed so safely on the other shore that he need never fear a return to his former state. In fact, says Charles, the belief that the justified sinner might never fall from the state of grace is nothing short of an 'arrogant doctrine of devils'. However, Charles assures his audience that no one may fear that he will (as opposed to may) fall from grace so long as he remembers that it is a real possibility. Even in this sermon, then, there is a sense in which salvation is uncertain (one may detect an anti-Calvinist slant here). There is also a place for good works. Neither of these aspects of Charles' post-'Pentecost' theology, however, seems to occupy the central position in his thinking as it did in the earlier corpus.

Charles' sermons, then, do give us an insight into his work, world and personality and it is not uniform. To draw on the titles of two books on Charles, his heart was not always either 'dancing' or 'set free'. The rather depressive side of Charles and his understanding of the process of salvation is, to be sure, particularly pronounced in the early sermons; but it is not confined to those texts. May 1738 does make a difference, but the rather heavy, doubtful, indeed depressive feel of those early texts will never completely disappear from what Charles had to say and one can detect it in other places too. Indeed, we will see some further examples from the journal.

The Journal

While the MS Journal is a central text for Charles Wesley studies and is able to give us insights into the life and character of this man and the world in which he lived and breathed, it is a far from complete account of his life. It begins with his arrival in America 9 March, 1736 and the last entry is 5 November, 1756. However, even between these two dates there are many gaps. There is nothing at all for 1744 or for 1752-1755. It is true that some of the entries are very long, but in places the journal is very brief indeed and, as was noted above, in places becomes little more than an extended sermon log. These gaps notwithstanding, however, this document is a very important document for the study of early Methodism in general and for Charles' own place within it in particular.

There are some recurrent themes, such as his horror at the thought of the Methodist societies ever separating from the Church of England. Thus on 11 June 1740 Charles entered into his journal the words he had spoken to the society in Blendon:

I told them plainly I SHOULD ONLY CONTINUE WITH THEM SO LONG AS THEY CONTINUED IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.²⁰ My every word was grievous to them. I am a thorn in their sides, and they cannot bear me.²¹

The full text of the journal of Charles Wesley has never been published. To many such a statement may sound strange, for surely we have Charles' journal in the two-volumes published by Thomas Jackson in 1849.²² There is a problem here, however, for if one spends even just a little time with this edition and compares it with the manuscript base utilized by the editor, it is immediately obvious that Jackson's is a far from complete transcription of the originals. Jackson has cut out a fair amount of material, both longhand and shorthand sections. When studied in its entirety, however, this substantial volume is a goldmine of information and presents a story of Charles Wesley that goes well beyond the common picture of him as the diligent hymn-writer quietly working away in the attic of number 4 Charles Street, Bristol.

The manuscript journal has a complex history. The story of its near loss and chance (re)-discovery is now part of Methodist folklore. Upon Charles' death in 1788 the Journal passed into the hands of his wife Sarah and then, upon her death in 1822, into those of his daughter Sally. Sally died in 1828 and the care of Charles' papers became the concern of his eldest son, Charles jnr. It was at this point that Thomas Jackson entered the picture, for he negotiated the purchase of the Charles Wesley papers from Charles jnr. According to Jackson, the MSJ was almost lost at this point but

was found among some loose straw on the floor of a public warehouse in London, where the furniture of the owner [Charles Wesley jnr.] was for a time deposited, several leaves in the volume being cut from the binding, and yet not removed.²³

²⁰These words are written by Charles in small block capitals in the MS with a very clear intention of emphasis.

²¹Kimbrough and Newport, eds. *Journal in loc*

²²See above note 6 for details

²³Jackson, ed., *The Journal of Charles Wesley*, 1pv.

In 1831 the sale was finalised and at the next Wesleyan Methodist Conference the papers were transferred into the ownership of that legal body.²⁴ This included ownership of the MSJ.

But let us return for a moment to the question of Jackson's editing. It was indicated above that Jackson's edition is not an accurate edition of the MSJ and this can easily be shown to be the case. Indeed, turning the pages of the MSJ one will notice fairly frequent pencil marks. Some are expansions of shortened words (thus 'expd' becomes 'expounded' etc.); some are expansions of names (Mr 'P' hence may become Mr 'Perronet' etc.); some others are modernizations of spellings ('ye' becomes 'the' etc), and some are insertions of pronouns ('preached' becomes 'I preached' etc.) But a good many are straightforward deletions. And it is here that the real problem lies. In places whole pages have been struck through with the pencil. That pencil is Jackson's as a comparison of the struck-out text and their subsequent non-appearance in his edition of the journal will conclusively show.

Among the sections cut by Jackson are a number which relate to events that Jackson felt inappropriate to bring to the attention of his readership. An obvious example is the letter that Charles wrote to the Bishop of London on 7 February 1745. The entire letter is omitted by Jackson and one can easily imagine why. It begins

My Lord

I was informed some time ago that your Lordship had received some allegations against me of one E. J. charging me with committing or offering to commit lewdness with her.

Needless to say, Charles then goes on to defend himself against such a charge.

The above letter is recorded by Charles in normal longhand script, but another class of material that Jackson also omitted from his edition of the Journal are those sections that Charles has recorded in his own idiosyncratic form of a system of shorthand devised by John Byrom.²⁵ These are quite substantial and, by definition, among the more interesting parts of the journal. This is because Charles put into shorthand anything that was rather sensitive in order to keep it away

²⁴ See further ST Kimbrough and Kenneth G.C. Newport, eds. *The Journal of Charles Wesley* (forthcoming [2008]).

²⁵ John Byrom (1692-1763) was born in Manchester and educated at Cambridge, being elected fellow of Trinity in 1714. Although he had begun to think about publishing his shorthand system as early as 1723, his work *The Universal English Short-Hand* was not in fact published until 1767. A copy of that work is located in the John Rylands University of Manchester ref. MAB M68.

from general public consumption. An example is this section - in which he reports on the behaviour of his brother. Words that are underlined are in shorthand in the MS.

Friday, November 17 [1749]. Had a conference of three days at Ned Perronet's. Old Mr Perronet was present, and well he was, for my brother flew out when contradicted, crying 'If he must not have so much authority, he would have none at all.' Mr Perronet hardly believed him. I modestly proposed that question 'How far is your or my will a law to our preachers.' But it was touching a sore place, meddling with the *arcana imperii*.²⁶ He showed the utmost uneasiness and impatience, telling me in Greek (on my urging the question) that I should ruin all, and threatening again to run away and live beyond [the] sea. Once more our good old friend humoured and stroked him into tolerable temper. I saw there was no good to be done, and half resolved I would never be at another conference.²⁷

The shorthand in the MSJ contains other things as well. For example, a major section near the very beginning of DDCW 10/2 recounts the story of various allegations of inappropriate behaviour made against John Wesley and General Oglethorpe by two women (Mrs Welch and Mrs Hawkins).²⁸ Actually an examination of this section of the journal reveals that the Wesleys were almost certainly entirely innocent of the charges brought against them. However, in the light of these allegations one perhaps begins to get a much more rounded picture of just why it was the Charles had such a hard time during his months in America in 1736 and why, possibly, he decided to leave so soon after his arrival.

In other places we get a glimpse of Charles' personal life. Consider this entry from April 1748:

Sunday, April 3. Through the divine blessing on the tender care of my friends, I recovered so much strength that I read prayers, and gave the Sacrament to the family. At night my dearest Sally, like my guardian angel attended me. In the loving openness of my heart, without premeditation I asked her 'if she could trust herself with me for life,' and with a noble simplicity she readily answered me 'she could.'

²⁶'State secrets'

²⁷Kimbrough and Newport, eds. *Journal of Charles Wesley* in loc.

²⁸Although not in Jackson's edition of the journal, some of this section was transcribed by Nehemiah Curnock and included in John Telford, *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A. sometime student of Christ Church, Oxford, The Early Journal, 1736-1739* (1910). It is also explored by Elijah Hoole in his *Oglethorpe and the Wesleys* (1863).

Monday, April 4. Frightened at what I had said last night, I condemned my own rashness and almost wished I had never disclosed my feelings.

And there are signs of Charles depressive bouts, doubts or both, such as the following. The day is Feb 13, 1743 and Charles has been visiting the condemned. He is able to cheer those who are about to face death, but then conceals his own thoughts in shorthand.

Rather than live in all earthly comfort, I would choose just now to be cast into the sea with a millstone about my neck—but for the fear of something after death. All this day my heart has been rising in expostulation [?] with God, have I not left all to follow him? Have I not chosen for near twenty hours to be miserable for want of him, rather than happy in the possession of all things else? For his sake I have suffered reproach, denied myself the gratification of my senses, joy and passion, took up my cross to suffer temptation, been afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, suffered so many things in vain, and at last to perish eternally. Who can forbear asking, wherefore then hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? O that I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me?

His judgments are as a great deep, I am lost in them. O that I could think no more!

And then there is material that suggests further dispute with brother John (again often accompanied by indications of doubt and depression).

It is almost certainly John who is the recipient of the letter that Charles mentions here

Saturday, February 16 [1745] In a letter to a friend, wrote

"I am often weary and faint; but is there not a cause? The loss of all things and life itself is nothing to loss of a friend. If my burden weighs you down I must communicate no more; but whatever becomes of me the foundation stands sure. Farewell my sorrowful friend, for I know I have infected you, farewell and I long for our meeting in a better world."

The story of Charles' quite disgraceful behaviour (I am not sure that we can call it anything else) relating to his brother's intended marriage to Grace Murray is well-known. In a sentence or two, what happened was that John fell in love with a woman whom Charles probably considered to be of too low a social class to be the wife of the leader of the Methodist

societies. Anyway, for whatever reason Charles took against the marriage and set about making sure it did not happen. To cut a long story short, Charles persuaded Grace Murray that since she had already been betrothed to the Methodist preacher John Bennet, she must marry him, which she did. John was devastated. There are several shorthand sections in the journal that give an insight into this whole sorry episode, none of which have been examined in any detail to date since they have remained largely undeciphered.

The year is 1749. Charles has learned of his brother's marriage plans and has undertaken a ride from Bristol to Newcastle to prevent it. On October 3 Murray and Bennet were married though, as Lloyd says, 'neither party were keen to go through with the ceremony and it took all Charles' powers of persuasion before they consented'. After this, one or two meetings took place between John and Charles and a third party to seek a resolution to the situation that had now arisen. Charles picks up the story in his journal, mostly in shorthand. Forgive me for lengthy quotation here, but the MS tells a sad tale which has not really been brought fully to the surface before.

Thursday, October 26. Visited my house in peace. Heard that my brother was come. Troubled and burdened, yet went to him. No love or joy or comfort in the meeting. No confidence on either side. He did not want to talk with me. Came home and was much comforted in prayer with Perronet and Jones.

Sunday, October 29 Dead dead dead at the sacrament: rode back quite miserable, through Traten's information that he had seen and been locked up with Grace Bennet; and he was still desirous to marry. Mournful discourse with Sally: lost all strength and heart; weighed down to the earth. Went to talk with him...

Monday October 30 Sent a sad account to Mr Perronet

Dear Sir

I Write out of the fulness of my heart. Last Saturday our friend came hither. I went heavily to see him. He spoke very slightly of the fatal letter, insensible of both his own folly and danger, and of the divine goodness in so miraculously saving him. Yesterday I assisted him at the sacrament, but my mouth was stopped all day, my hands hung down, and my heart fainted ... Forced by his impatience, I had offered him my account of what has lately happened, though I judged it far better to defer it till his passion

should be laid and his eyes opened. It had the effect I expected. He denied the whole. William Shent's account was all lies. Jane Keith's was all lies. His only was altogether true. He had been in no fault at all, in no passion or inordinate affection, but had done all things well, and with the utmost calmness and deliberation. He had been no temptation; the church and work in no danger. That was nothing but my needless panic. As soon as I could recover my astonishment, I told him plainly he was given up to Jewish blindness of heart; that the light which was in him was darkness; that God would overcome; but wherefore should he be smitten and more? I declared I would cover his nakedness as long as I could, and honour him before the people; and if I must at last break with him, would retreat gradually, and hide it from the world. He seemed pleased with the thought of parting, though God knows, as I told him, that I had saved him from a thousand false steps: and still I am persuaded we shall stand or fall together. If he would not foresee the consequence of marrying, I said, he must marry and feel them afterward, while lying at the mercy of the good bishop of Exeter. What the end of this thing will be only God knoweth, but the cloud at present hanging over us looks very black

Tuesday October 31 I had designed to preach, but towards the time lost all strength and heart.

We could go on. Already we have seen that the journal is able to give us a real insight into the life and work of Charles Wesley, and it is not all a story of joy and triumph. There is evidence of Charles' bouts of depression, his doubts, his contesting with God, his contesting with his brother and with others in the Methodist societies. We have skimmed across the surface of some of this, but there is much more to be done. The shorthand sections of the MSJ in particular are particularly revealing and it is a shame that not many Methodist historians have got to grips with the script. Reading it is a challenge to be sure, though it is not impossible by any means.

The Letters

I would like to say a few words about the letters. Unlike the sermons or the journal, Charles Wesley's letters reflect almost the entire course of his life. The earliest one we have comes from January 1728, when the young Charles was at Oxford, and the latest is dated February 13, 1788, just weeks before his death. The precise number of surviving letters is still unclear, but it is probably around 850. The massive task of collecting and transcribing these documents is now well underway, but there is much work still to be done.

Even a brief study of just a small number of these texts will quickly reveal just how central they are to the story not just of Charles, but to early Methodism in general. In these letters Charles' authentic voice can truly be heard. These are not texts written with a view to publication; they are not carefully crafted and edited. They are, rather, often raw texts, unguarded in places and take us very close to the ground and the day-to-day business of the early Methodist societies. In them we read of hopes and fears, plans and problems, theological disputes, triumphs and defeats. And we can read too of Charles' own relationships; with his wife, with his children, with his brother John and other family members and with key figures in the story of early Methodism such as Edward Perronet, John Fletcher, William Grimshaw and Samuel Lloyd. We can read there too of Charles' dealings with the lay preachers and with persons such as the French Prophetess, Mary Lavington. Some of the letters are deeply personal, others clearly meant for public consumption, at least to the extent that they are addressed not to an individual but to, for example, 'the society at Grimsby'; some are heavily theological, others sensitively pastoral (there is a series of letters, for example, where Charles is advising Mrs Jones concerning her rather wayward son and how best to handle this teenager). These texts are, in short, an exceptionally rich seam of primary documentation that enables us to look right over Charles' shoulder and for a moment to see his world with all its challenges, triumphs and frustrations. They are a portal to the eighteenth century and on quiet afternoons in the Rylands you may find yourself momentarily transported back to Charles' world.

Consider an extract from this one. It comes from 1751 and I have chosen it because again it comes on the heels of Charles' effective sabotage of his brother's desired marriage to Grace Murray. As with the journal passages already cited, this letter reflects both the tension between John and Charles and also the deteriorating situation regarding the preachers in general and their relationship with the Wesley brothers. It is written to John Bennet.

My faithful and beloved friend,

You and your partner must make me amends for the loss of my brother, whose love I have small hopes of recovering in this world. But I find my heart knit still closer to you and am humbly confident that neither life nor death shall be able to separate us.

In a former letter *I said what I thought* and upon reasonable proof. Long since then my brother fell in the way of his present wife . . .

My trials are great, but as my day – so is my strength.

I know nothing of that letter to Oldham or J. N.'s [John Nelson's?] corrupting the minds of any. What are the facts you allude to?

The lessening of your affection towards my brother must not lessen your affection towards God, or his people or his work. Yet it will have this effect unless you watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. As to *withdrawing yourself* – stay a little and take company. *First let* us finish the work our Lord has given us to do and *then* you and I will withdraw ourselves – to paradise!

Such material provides an important insight into what was happening 'on the ground' in the Methodist societies and how Charles is reacting to it. As we can see, there are problems.

Just two more quotations so as further to illustrate the sort of material we are dealing with here. As we know, Charles was concerned with the progress of lay-preaching and in particular with the quality of those who undertook it. He was charged with the task of examining the preachers and it is clear that he wished to put a stop to many of them and return them to their former roles. As he famously said in a letter to John Bennet, and his remarks here are typical of Charles' attitude, 'A friend of ours' (Charles clearly has brother John in view) '(without God's counsel) made a preacher of a tailor. I, with God's help, shall make a tailor of him again'.²⁹ In fact in 1756 he wrote to his own brother on the matter in similar terms:

Is it not your duty to stop Joseph Cownley and such like from railing or laughing at the Church? The short remains of my life are devoted to this very thing, to follow your sons (as Charles Perronet once told me we should follow you) with buckets of water, and quench the flame of strife and division which they have or may kindle..³⁰

While on the 21 August of that year he wrote to Samuel Walker on the issue:

Dear Sir

Your last brings a blessing with it. I hope to consider it fully with my brother, who is expected every hour. I have not time to answer, only in few words.

²⁹ See further Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by his Letters*, pp79-90.

³⁰ *Ibid* p.97

Lay preaching, it must be allowed, is a partial separation, and may but need not, end in a total one. The probability of it has made me tremble for years past, and kept me from leaving the Methodists. I stay not so much to do good, as to prevent evil. I stand in the way of my brother's violent counsellors, the object both of their fear and hate.

Obviously a letter like this needs comment and context and we have no space now to engage in such. However, I think even a cursory reading of this text indicates clearly enough that there is a great deal to be gained from this material, of which there is a great deal more, most of which is in Manchester. These letters take us right into the heart of early Methodism and give us a 'warts and all' picture of some of the tensions that are at work within this relatively new movement as it struggles to its feet and seeks to find stability.

Conclusion

I have tried to indicate in this lecture something of the richness of the material that is there to be researched by those interested in the life, literature and legacy of Charles Wesley. I have concentrated upon the prose works and also upon the 'other' side of the story as I have sought to bring some element of balance to the rather too monochrome picture of Charles Wesley as a 'the sweet singer of Methodism' and the great religious poet whose faith was strong, spirit liberated (and liberating) and a compliant help-meet for his elder brother. I am not for a moment denying that there were times when Charles' faith was strong, when his spirit was liberated or that he and John formed a strong team. But it is not the only part of the story.

We should not rule out the importance of the poetic material here, though I have concentrated on the prose materials. Had we wished to it would have been easy enough to find material in poetic form that would support this view. Consider the composition that Charles wrote again on the issue of John's marriage plans:

Ah woe to me, a man of woe
 A mourner from the womb
 I see my lot and softly go
 Lamenting to the tomb

In calm despair I bow my head
 The heavenly loan restore

For O! my latest hope is gone
And friendship is no more

Too happy in his love I was
I was – but I submit
Irreparable is the loss
The ruin is complete

In simply innocency drest
The soft Ephesians' Charms
Have caught him from my honest breast
To her bewitching arms ³¹

And we all know, some of the acidic poetic material to which John Wesley's 'ordination' of Coke and others (Coke was of course already ordained as a priest, we really ought to talk about 'consecration' of a bishop) in 1784.

The criticism is stinging and again shows Charles as an individual very able even at this late point in his life (he is now 77 years of age) to take the firmest of stances in opposition to his brother.

Christ our merciful High-Priest
By thy people's grief distressed
Help us for our guide to pray
Lost in his mistaken way ³²

And the criticism goes on

Wesley himself and friends betrays
By his good sense forsook
When suddenly his hands he lays
On the hot head of Coke ³³

And

So easily are bishops made
By man's or woman's whim?
Wesley put his hands on Coke
But who put hands on him? ³⁴

³¹ Kimbrough and Beckerlegge, 3p320

³² *Ibid* 3p93

³³ *Ibid* 3p81

³⁴ *Ibid* 3p89

Pointed, but in fact relatively mild – consider this one written when Charles learned of Coke's consecration of Asbury as a Bishop. Drawing on the story of how Caligula appointed his horse to a position of great authority in ancient Rome, Charles wrote

A Roman emperor 'tis said
His favourite horse a consul made
But Coke brings greater things to pass
He makes a bishop of an ass.³⁵

This is strong stuff. One ought not to underestimate it. And there is much more in a similar vein to be found in the Wesley MS papers; the letters, the full journal and the tracts no less than the hymns. Charles was not a man to be taken lightly. He was determined, strong, forceful, some might say even somewhat arrogant, and he was quite able to give his brother, and others in the early Methodist movement, a run for their money when he felt it his duty to do so.

In concluding let me ask myself the question of why it is that I gone out of my way to identify some of the more negative aspects of Charles and his relationships with the preachers, his brothers and even, dare I say it, with God? Is it simply because I enjoy the attempt to clast icons? Am I trying to detract from the status of Charles as one of the great spiritual figures of the eighteenth century and a man whose work has had so profound an effect on others? Well no, I am not. For me Charles is a man of immense spiritual power and a person to whom I do look for guidance. The Christian journey can at times be a difficult and even lonely one and it is good if on that journey one can find others who can help point out the way. Charles is such a figure, at least he is for me. And in that context I am strengthened by his flaws and faults, his downs and his tribulations. For all his genius, for all his spiritual power, theological insight and intrepidity in proclaiming the gospel message, Charles was no stranger to the darker side of Christian existence. In fact the evidence of the prose works is that he knew it very well. For me this gives him greater not less importance and authority as a spiritual mentor and a guide to Christian living. In short, I think that any hagiographical account of Charles does him a disservice and, short-changes the grace of God.

³⁵*Ibid* 3p81

While we have not explored this in any detail here, Charles was without doubt a hymn writer of the very finest calibre. Some would say he was the best the English language has ever known. Remember that as you hear these little-known and humble lines:

If well I know the tuneful art
 To captivate the human heart
 The glory, Lord, be thine.
 A servant of thy perfect will
 I here devote my utmost skill
 To sing thy praise divine.

Yes, Charles Wesley is 300. But his voice is worth recovering in all its fullness. He can still speak to us today. And for me at least I find the portrait of him 'warts and all' (which is how Cromwell wanted to be painted you will remember) a more inspiring one than one of him with a halo.

KENNETH G.C. NEWPORT

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BOOK REVIEW

The Mow Cop Revival, 1807, by David Allen. (Tentmaker Publications, Stoke-on-Trent, 2007, pp117. £3.95 ISBN 1901670384)

Drawing mainly from nineteenth century published sources, particularly Herod and Walford, the author has produced a narrative account of the immediate events leading to the first Mow Cop camp meeting in May 1807 and its subsequent outcome, the emergence of Primitive Methodism. The result in effect is a Primitive Methodist view of itself with the author seeking to relate this to a need for a revival in our contemporary society. In setting the context of the events of 1807, Allen fails to place these in a wider context, especially the emergence of localised revivalist groups, notably those which emerged following William Bramwell's West Riding Revival, 1794, and the then political climate in fear of a revolutionary France, nor does he take into consideration more recent scholarship, such as from Carwardine, Hempton, Kent and Werner. A number of errors have crept into the text, mainly with source authorship and inconsistencies in the bibliography. This is not a critical, historical, scholastic analysis but given these limitations the booklet is recommended for those wishing to read the story of the first camp meeting.

D COLIN DEWS

THE RIPON PRIMITIVE METHODIST CIRCUIT :

The pioneering years, 1822 to 1842, and their legacy.

The significance of the Ripon Primitive Methodist Circuit in the growth and development of the Connexion, especially in the north, is now mainly forgotten. Little now survives of its physical presence, most of its surviving former buildings being in other uses. Nevertheless, Kendall recognised the importance of this early pioneering circuit:

The Ripon Circuit, formed in 1822, ultimately grew to be with its branches, one of the most extensive circuits in the Connexion, and, after 1824, when it was incorporated with the newly formed Sunderland District, it was travelled by some of the best known and most capable members of that District.¹

Ripon, created a Branch of the Hull Circuit in June 1820 and with circuit status from the following quarter, would remain in the Sunderland District until 1847, when it was transferred to the Leeds & York District, and then from 1909 to Methodist Union was in the Leeds District..

Graphically, the circuit at this early period extended southwards to the Nidd-Wharfe watershed, south of which were the Leeds and the Tadcaster Circuits; eastwards across the Vale of York to the Ouse and further north to the North Yorkshire Moors; westwards into Nidderdale and north-westwards into Wensleydale. When Kendall was writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, in addition to the Ripon Circuit, the area of the original circuit then included the Bedale, Harrogate, Knaresborough, Middleham, Pateley Bridge, and Thirsk Circuits. At Methodist Union in 1932, Pateley Bridge (138 members) was in the Bradford & Halifax District; Bedale (95), Middleham (137), and Thirsk (90) in the York & Scarborough District; Ripon (170), Harrogate (340) and Knaresborough (68) were in the Leeds District.²

It is fortunate that two manuscript volumes survive for the Circuit

¹ H.B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (nd) vol.II. p.79. [henceforth Kendall].

² *Primitive Methodist Year Book*, 1932 pp359-364.

Quarter Day Minutes, 1828 to 1834, and 1835 to 1842, for these are a major source not only for confirming Kendall's assertion but also setting against other written sources, especially the Connexion's standard histories and biographies.³ Additional sources for information include the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* for this period, with reports and obituaries, although for the purpose of this paper the *Magazine* has not been consulted. Surviving preaching plans are also an important source when used in conjunction with the manuscript records, especially the minutes of the preachers' meeting.

I

The advance of Primitive Methodism into the West Riding⁴ came from two directions. One advance was via Sheffield and Barnsley to the Calder Valley, including Wakefield, Huddersfield and Halifax, although Dewsbury was missioned from Leeds. The main advance, however, via Lincolnshire and across the Humber, was to Hull, which William Clowes first visited in January 1819 and became his power base. Soon Primitive Methodism was established to the west, in Leeds and the lower Aire Valley, and advancing north westwards, via the Yorkshire Wolds and the Vale of York from Hull. Most of the Ripon Circuit was in the West Riding but ultimately would also encompass that part of the North Riding around Middleham and part of Wensleydale.⁵

In Ripon, itself, Primitive Methodism began on 4 March 1820, when accompanied by several friends, Clowes 'went to open Ripon'.⁶ Here a Wesleyan local preacher hardly known to the congregation, planned to conduct worship at the chapel and so Clowes was persuaded to take his place.⁷ In the evening a service was held in the Bondgate house of

³ N(orth) (Y)orkshire C(ounty) R(ecord) O(ffice), Northallerton, Ripon Methodist Circuit Deposit: 2/1/1 a, Ripon Primitive Methodist Quarterly Meeting Minutes & Accounts, 1828-1834 and 2/1/1 b, 1835-1842.

⁴ Until 1974 Ripon was in the northern part of the West Riding; today it is in North Yorkshire.

⁵ Rev. J.W. Thurlby (Ed.), *Souvenir Handbook of Primitive Methodism in Middleham, 1836-1936* (Leyburn, 1936) p.(12-13) reproduces the circuit plan for December to March, 1822-3, which covers much of Wensleydale and predates the two minute books.

⁶ *The Journal of William Clowes, Primitive Methodist preacher (1844)* p.134. [henceforth Journal]

⁷ As Ripon had been the head of a circuit since 1794 it raises the question why the superintendent minister the Rev. John Phillips (d.1858; em1793) or even the second minister the Rev. William Jackson (d, 1863; em 1811) - did not prevent Clowes from occupying the chapel. Both itinerants moved at the following Conference. Was this an afternoon service?

Benjamin Spetch, who had been brought up an Anglican, and among the fourteen converted in the prayer meeting that followed was Moses Lupton (1800-1875; em1822). Also brought up an Anglican, along with his mother and brother⁸ he had originally joined the Wesleyans, but as a Primitive would become the General Missionary Secretary, 1859-65, Deed Poll member, 1864, and President in 1870, being perceived as the Primitive Methodist Connexion's 'law giver'. Most of his ministry would be spent in the pioneering Hull and then the Sunderland Districts. Such were the demands in the early years it is estimated conservatively that during his ministry he would walk 132,000 miles, an average of 3,000 per annum, and preach on 13,270 occasions, an average of 6 per week. He retired in 1866 first to Darlington and then to Sunderland, where he supported the establishing of the Sunderland Theological Institute.⁹ When a little time later Clowes returned to Ripon, there was a society of 66 members. A chapel was opened in Priest Lane in 1822, which had to be enlarged in 1844.¹⁰ In 1881 this was replaced by the present Allhallowgate chapel.

A Primitive Methodist presence was soon established in some of the villages in the area, although not always permanently. At Marton-cum-Grafton, to the south of Boroughbridge, a society was established even before that at Ripon. Mark Noble, a butcher and Wesleyan class leader, offered to help Clowes but on refusing to desist was expelled from the Old Connexion. This enabled his house to be used for preaching and such was the growth of the society that Clowes divided it into three classes; membership soon reached 80 and a chapel followed.¹¹ Amongst the Marton converts was Thomas Dawson (c1804-1856; em 1823); born near Boroughbridge, the son of a Wesleyan local preacher, he was attracted to hearing Clowes preach on seeing 'a strange man, singing strange hymns and tunes'.¹² He itinerated in 1823, travelling for six months in the Guisborough Circuit and then for a further six months at Middleham before ceasing on health grounds, having suffered from asthma since childhood. He would become an influential Connexional lay member, serving on the General Missionary, Publishing, and

⁸ His brother William Lupton (d.1854, aet52; em1828) entered the Wesleyan ministry and subsequently served under the Irish Conference.

⁹ Elaine White, 'Moses Lupton Primitive Methodist itinerant', *Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire Branch)* 75 (Autumn 1999), pp.6-8.

¹⁰ *Allhallowgate Methodist Church, Ripon, 1881-1981* (Bedale, 1981) p2

¹¹ *Journal* pp.134-5

¹² John Petty (rev. ed. James Macpherson), *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (1880) p107 [henceforth Petty]. For a biography of Dawson see: *Earnest Men: sketches of Primitive Methodists., ministers and laymen* (1872), pp.180-187.

District Committees, as well as the Ripon Circuit Steward.

Among other places missioned early by the Primitive Methodists, was Whixley to the east of Knaresborough, and when Clowes spoke there in a barn the outcome seemed promising but was soon abandoned to be established later. Pioneering work was initially more successful at Aldborough, then a rotten borough on the site of a Roman town, where a society of 7 members was formed and at Burton Leonard, to the south of Ripon, one with 20 members; other places visited were Arkendale, Harrogate and Knaresborough.¹³

II

Usually the Circuit Quarter Day began with the Preachers Meeting and was followed by the Full Board, what today would be known as the Circuit Meeting; occasionally there would also be a meeting of the Circuit Committee. These detailed minutes in total provide an insight into the work being carried out in the Ripon Circuit at this early period, and add to our understanding of its early mission and ministry.

Ripon had five travelling preachers in 1828; when it left the Sunderland District in 1847 the circuit along with its two branches of Middleham and Thirsk had seven travelling preachers with two 'to be obtained'. In these years the circuit had sent out five travelling preachers and provided five Deed Poll members. The circuit was served also by a number of itinerants who would emerge as Connexional leaders. A tragic accident prevented John Branfoot (1795-1831; em1821), superintendent 1827-9, from achieving this; in 1829 he moved to the Sunderland Circuit where on Saturday 26 February 1831 along with John Hewson (1793-1831: em1821), he was killed when walking along the waggonway to Hetton.¹⁴ One of Branfoot's colleagues was Matthew Lee (1805-1866; em1827), Ripon being his first circuit; his wife, Mary Walton, whom he married in 1830 was a local preacher. Lee described the Ripon Circuit as:

that famous training ground in the north when the Connexion was young. . . Men strong in limb and inflexible in resolution, to say nothing of zeal and loyalty, were tested to the extremest verge. 'Turnpikes and turnips' were very familiar acquaintances.¹⁵

¹³ Petty, p.107.

¹⁴ Vic Branfoot, *Rev. John Branfoot (1795-1831); a study in Primitive Methodist history, the birth of the railways and family history* (2006). Passim W.M. Patterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism* (1909) p251

¹⁵ W.M. Patterson, *Behind the Stars* (Stanthorpe, Queensland, 1974) p.6. This was originally published in the *Primitive Methodist Leader* (1911).

It was not uncommon for a new preacher to arrive every quarter and stay for only six months; so severe were the conditions that many 'fell by the way'. One such person, a contemporary of Lee in the circuit, was John Butcher (em. 1823), who had been the pioneer missionary from the Bolton to the Isle of Man in 1823; he would finally disappear from the itinerancy in 1842. Was it a sign of future things when the Quarterly Meeting, February 1831, resolved:

That the Meeting receive the resignation of Mr Butcher respecting the doctrines discussed and that he be exon[erate]d.

His resignation at this stage does not seem to have been effective, for he stayed in the circuit, moving to the Brotherton Circuit at the following Conference.

Of those who held Connexional office, was William Lister (1804-1880; em1826), superintendent of the Ripon Circuit, 1836-9, who later would be Book Steward, 1865-70 and President, 1868; he was followed, 1839-42, by John Day (1797-1859; em1821), also brought up a Wesleyan, who a few months before his death was likewise appointed Book Steward. Two other of Lister's contemporaries in the circuit were Joseph Spoor (1812-1869; em1835) and Colin Campbell McKechnie (1821-1896).

Spoor was in the Ripon Circuit 1836-9, and then spent a year in the Middleham Mission. Effectively he would spend almost all his ministry in the north east. Originally a Tyne keel man, what he lacked in book learning was compensated by his high originality and zeal, great powers of endurance and both moral and physical courage.¹⁶ In 1838, when he was in the Boroughbridge Mission,¹⁷ he was involved with his colleague William Fulton (1812-1884; em1837), who had originally intended becoming a Presbyterian minister but had joined the Ranters on moving to Eyemouth, in an incident which created a considerable sensation. This not only indicates something of Spoor's courage but also that open air preaching had its risks. Spoor suggested to Fulton that they should preach one evening in the Ripon Market Place from the cross. Spoor gave out a hymn and began singing when a police constable ordered him to come down, but determined to continue, he refused. Ultimately the constable sent for reinforcements and the two preachers were taken to the gaol, the following day being brought before the magistrates. Their cause was pleaded by William

¹⁶ B. Aquila Barber, *A Methodist Pageant* (1932) p.93.

¹⁷ loc. cit.

Braithwaite, a miller who had originally been a Wesleyan, who had some influence with the bench and they dismissed the case. It later transpired that a publican had bribed the constable to prevent them from preaching. More significantly a long letter appeared in the newspaper defending the right to conduct public worship in the open air and condemning the actions of both the constable and magistrates; it was believed to have been written by Dr. Longley, Bishop of Ripon and later Archbishop of Canterbury.¹⁸ On another occasion Spoor was attacked by a footpad when returning from Harrogate to Knaresborough. The following year, Spoor's health broke down, rupturing a blood vessel and for a year he had to desist. The advance of Primitive Methodism often was at great personal cost, as in Spoor's case. In his place was sent Robert Clapham (d.1901: em1839) who would cease to itinerate in 1846 also on health grounds; he went on to establish a grocery and rope works in Yarm and Stockton, being Vice-President of the Conference, 1891.

Another who would go on to have a considerable influence within the Connexion is recorded in the minutes of the Full Quarter Day held at Marton on 15 March 1839:

Br. Mckechnie be taken & Pleged by this Circuit

This brought into the ministry one who would not only serve in the Sunderland District for fifty years, where he took a leading role in establishing the Sunderland Theological Institute, but also a person who would hold high Connexional office as Editor, 1876-87, and President, (1880). He began the *Christian Ambassador* in 1854, and *Springtime* in 1886, as well as producing the new hymnal in 1887. Such was the nature of the demands and hardships on this youth, who itinerated at sixteen, that he came very close to leaving the ministry almost before he reached Ripon. Born in Paisley, where he became a local preacher at fifteen, he was accepted by the Glasgow Quarter Day in March 1838 to supply a circuit and informed he was going to Ripon. In those pre-railway days the journey took three days: the first day he went by canal to Edinburgh, the next by steamer to Newcastle and finally by stagecoach to Ripon. So despondent was he on the journey, that he decided to return home, but then had second thoughts; Primitive Methodism almost lost one of its most influential preachers, who by the end of the century exercised considerable influence on the shaping of its ministry.¹⁹ In the circuit he was greatly influenced by the unlettered but spiritually powerful, Spoor .

¹⁸ Ebenezer Hall, *The Earnest Preacher: memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Spoor* (1870) pp.79-82.

In the circuit McKechnie experienced something of the financial strains so often found within Primitive Methodism. He was paid £3.10.0 [£3.50] per quarter, with no allowance for board and lodgings, which had to be provided gratuitously by the members. This fell mainly on the Ripon society members, who became dissatisfied by the arrangement, especially as the circuit steward had a surplus of over £70.²⁰ Braithwaite argued a case for a board and lodgings allowance, rather than a goodwill dependency, but Thomas Dawson, as Circuit Steward, opposed the proposal on the grounds that the existing system led to more extensive pastoral work; no allowance was granted. As Braithwaite's house was being used as the young ministers' lodgings, he declined to house them any longer and suddenly McKechnie found himself homeless, although somebody else soon took him in. Nevertheless, there is evidence of a change soon after for when Joseph Dale (em1839), who would cease to itinerate in 1847, came to the circuit it was agreed to pay him' 5/- [25p] pr week. . . for Meat, Bills. Fire &c'²¹

That many of the leading Connexional officials in the nineteenth century were connected with the circuit supports Kendall's view but against this must be noted also that there were those who that subsequently ceased to itinerate, although in the case of Robert Clapham he became a leading layman. Occasionally one of the preachers would find fame in another denomination. One such person was George Wilson McCree (1821-1892; em1842), of Scottish descent who came from Newcastle where his family were connected with Nelson Street chapel. His biographer significantly fails to record that he was for a time a Primitive Methodist itinerant; beginning in 1841 at Pateley Bridge, the following year being stationed at Ripon, and then disappearing. Joining the Baptists he now held a pastorate at Boroughbridge where from 1816 services had been held in a hired house until a chapel was opened in the nearby hamlet of Langthorpe in 1824. The Baptists remained a feeble and struggling cause, along with another intermittent society at Dishforth, and in this sense reflected the early struggles of Primitive Methodism to survive. Later, in 1848, McCree would become second minister at Bloomsbury Baptist, London.²²

¹⁹ John Atkinson, *Life of Rev. Colin C. McKechnie* (1898) p.24

²⁰ Up to 1836 the minutes also recorded in detail the circuit finances but it is not possible after this date to precisely verify the financial situation and whether there was a balance of over £70. However the March 1839 Quarter Day agreed to report a surplus of £60 to the District Meeting: no figures are quoted at subsequent meetings.

²¹ Adjourned Quarter Day Minutes, 21 May 1840

²² McCree, *George Wilson McCree: his life and Works, with extracts from his journal* (1893) *passim*. J Wheeler Robinson et al., *The Baptists in Yorkshire, being the centenary volume of the Yorkshire Baptist Association* (1912), pp.160-1.

Others just vanished from the records. Thomas Davidson (em: 1828) came to the Ripon Circuit in 1830; eighteen months later he disappears from the Connexional records. At a Circuit Committee Meeting 11 August 1831 it was agreed to send a delegation to clarify if he had offered himself to the Wesleyan Methodists; at the adjourned meeting on 23 August, as a proper reply had still not been received, it was agreed to attempt to obtain a replacement.²³ His successor was Ann Wilson (f1.1828-31) who was described at the March Quarterly Meeting 1832 as 'just received'.²⁴

Access to the minutes also adds to our knowledge of the use of female preachers, both itinerant and hired local preachers, especially to the published research of E. Dorothy Graham.²⁵ That Ann Wilson briefly travelled in the circuit has already been noted.²⁶ Perhaps one of the most well known female preachers was Mrs. Mary Porteous (1783-1861; em1828) who began her itinerancy in the Ripon Circuit in 1828 under the superintendency of William Lister and left in 1830 for the Carlisle Circuit. That female preachers can be looked upon as 'cheap labour' is inferred from the minutes which record quarterly payments to her of £2.2.0 [£2.10] in August 1829, February and May 1830, less than that paid to the male itinerants two of whom received £9.2.0 [£9.10], although this was probably also to support a family; two others, probably single, were each paid £4.

There was an attempt to obtain a further female preacher at the circuit meeting on 15 December 1834:

That we call out another preacher if Mary Ball proves a failure.

²³ William Leary, *Ministers & Circuits in the Primitive Methodist Church, a Directory* (Loughborough, 1990) is compiled mainly from the Minutes of Conference.

However, access to local records can supplement Leary's work, as in the case of Davidson, whom Leary shows - 1829 Darlington (18 months); 1830 Ripon (18 months); 1831 disappears. From other sources it is now known that he served in the Alston Branch from 1828 before going to Darlington, that his first name was Thomas and the reason he disappears from the official records.

²⁴ Soon after, an Ann Close, married, appears on the plan but in March 1834 her name is removed for using unbecoming language when differing with her mother-in-law. Are Ann Close and Ann Wilson the same person?

²⁵ E. Dorothy Graham, *Chosen by God: a list of the female preachers of early Primitive Methodism* (Bunbury, 1989)

²⁶ Graham (1989) p.25 does not record Ann Wilson as being in the Ripon Circuit.

As there is no record of payments to Mary Ball (1810-1866; em1834) and who in 1836 went to the Whitby Circuit, it must be presumed that the circuit failed to obtain her services.

The circuit also made use of female hired local preachers, one of whom, Mrs Elizabeth Mortimer (1823-1877), *née* Grayshon, came from Shipley, having become a local preacher here in 1839; she came to the Ripon Circuit in 1841, and would serve later at Pateley Bridge.²⁷

If the minutes of the Preachers meeting record the decisions regarding the preachers and the Full Board where preaching would take place, then the Circuit plan was the formal outcome of this process. The Pateley Bridge plan for October to January 1841-2, for example, has fifteen preaching places on the Sabbath. There were two itinerant preachers: John Jobling (1806-1889; em1833) was the superintendent with McCree as second minister, both living in the market town. There were also 12 local preachers, 7 exhorters including two paired together, and 6 auxiliaries, although one name was blank; these were assisted by 6 bands of prayer leaders. Thus there were in total 27 on the Sabbath plan to supply the fifteen preaching places, of which five had two services each Sunday, eight fortnightly and another three varied. During the quarter there were between 14 and 20 services each Sunday. The Weekday plan had twenty places, the two ministers systematically visiting each place every fortnight. In addition there was a Connexional fast day on 10 November for 'a general revival of religion' and a series of revival meetings arranged.

III

Primitive Methodism uniquely operated a system of circuit and branch. This was a half-way situation for the branch to gain circuit status. The branch had the powers to operate their own affairs subject to the supervision of the parent circuit:

A Branch is that part of a circuit which has its distinct preachers' plan and quarterly accounts, its Branch Committee and Branch Steward, and its preparatory Quarterly Meetings; and besides these, it has its distinct religious services, institutions, anniversaries, and official meetings. . . as those of a circuit, with this difference, that those affairs are, within each quarter, liable to the supervision of its Circuit Committee; and at the

²⁷ *Shipley & Saltair Times* (23 February 1877) James Myers, *Eventide Review of Primitive Methodism in the Otley Circuit* (Guiseley, 1920) p.3.

end of each quarter, these affairs are subject to its Circuit Quarterly Meeting.²⁸

In practice the circuit's full quarter board would receive reports from its branches. If the branch was unable to continue to manage its affairs, as sometimes happened, it could be brought back into the circuit. The minutes of the Ripon Circuit reflect this unique Primitive Methodist arrangement. Pateley Bridge obtained Branch status in March 1838, with two preachers, circuit status followed in 1840; Ripon now became the Home Branch, Middleham also being a branch. The following year Thirsk and Knaresborough became branches, although the latter seems to have been a short-lived arrangement.

The Preachers Meeting was responsible for receiving reports and complaints regarding existing preachers, receiving 'on trials' and those onto 'full plan'. The Ripon Circuit Home Branch Preachers Meeting on 17 December 1841 resolved, for example:

G. Foster's case in reference to neglecting Roecliffe through mistake, be looked over.

T. Roper be forgiving [*sic*] for missing B[urton] Leonard the day being wet & he having but lately recovered from a severe illness.

Amongst other decisions made at that meeting was to sink J. Metcalfe four places on the plan for missing four appointments; as local preachers were listed in order of seniority, this was a means of reducing their status. Five days later when these minutes were brought before the full preachers meeting at Middleham this minute was not accepted.

Most of the charges were regarding missed appointments but an unusual case, although not unique, came before the meeting on 14 September 1835:

That Bros. Dent²⁹ and Glendenning³⁰ speak to Br. Barker relative to his taking his niece-in-law with him to his appointments and which have been the cause of much scandal. Having been admonished on the

²⁸ *The General Consolidated Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (1849) p.103.

²⁹ Rev. William Dent (1806-1884; em.1827), Ripon Circuit 1834-6; served again in the circuit, 1842-4

³⁰ Rev. C. Glendenning (em.1829), Ripon Circuit, 1834-6; he disappears from the ministry in 1837.

subject before, if he still persists in this impropriety and so not meet in class, that this office together with his membership cease.

The avoidance of scandal remained an important consideration, especially when it might discredit not just the individuals involved but more importantly the greater work of Primitive Methodism. Why he was taking his niece-in-law with him is no longer known, unless there was a romantic attachment; that in addition he was not also meeting in class may imply other issues were involved. However, as there are no further references it must be presumed all was resolved.

Another case, that of T Clarke of Spofforth would continue for about two years, although of concern to the preachers meeting, was really one which could only be resolved by the full quarter board. On 18 December 1840 there was an indication of what was to emerge when the preachers meeting learned of a charge against Clarke of irregularities affecting his status as a local preacher, referring it to the full board, meeting on that same day, where it was agreed:

T. Clarke of Spofforth be forgiven the charges laid against him on condition that he pay the 15/- [75p] which he received ...for the Spofforth S[abbath] School, into the hands of the Treasurer of the said school and that he acknowledge his fault in making false statements and that he promise to do better in future.

A note added underneath recorded that he had paid the money, confessed his faults and would do better. Here the matter should have ended but at a subsequent meeting held at Ripon on 2 September 1841, raised initially at the Preachers Meeting and again referred by them to the full board, he was subsequently suspended for three months both from preaching and exhorting for improper conduct. A note later loosely inserted into the minute book clarified the charge, he having been found guilty as Chapel Steward of not keeping correct financial accounts. He had also ignored the trustees' instruction not to beg for financial support for whitewashing and painting the chapel, although it was accepted this did not affect the anniversary collection. Further concerns raised at the following preachers meeting on 17 December now concerned his neglecting of his preaching appointments and referred again to the full board. Five days later when the Ripon Branch minutes were brought to the Circuit Preachers Meeting at Middleham this was not accepted. However, the full board that followed agreed:

That a letter go from this Qr Day to Spofforth society stating to them that on account of so many personal & private quarrels we hereby give them notice that whoever they are that is the author of any such broils & disturbances in future without reference, shall be arraigned before a preacher & leaders meeting, and if found guilty, be forthwith expelled from society

At the next full board held at Marton on 22 March 1842 it was agreed to form a committee to meet the Spofforth society in the following week to hear further charges brought now by J. Elsworth, against Clarke, and that their decision would be final. At the next preachers Meeting on 29 June it was recorded that Clarke had resigned as a preacher.

The case of Clarke and the Spofforth society raises some interesting questions. Clarke may have had a personality that may not have made it easy for him to work with other people and perhaps was more likely to go his own way. He also seems to have lacked the financial acumen to keep proper financial records but given the generally low social standing of Primitive Methodism at this period, often poorly educated, were there more at Spofforth who could have done better?³¹ Perhaps, however, in these close knit village communities, no doubt with inter-married families, such disputes as this soon got out of hand as personalities began to play a part. Yet this was not the only dispute the circuit had to face at this period for in another case, the details of which are not clear, the circuit was prepared to take it to the Connexional General Missionary Committee. Primitive Methodism grew despite such difficulties.

IV

The minutes provide wide information on Primitive Methodism around Ripon, including the arranging of love feasts, sacramental and anniversary services. New places for preaching and the withdrawing from others are recorded, along with requests to build and open new chapels, often with the related financial arrangements. Until the end of

³¹ Although Primitive Methodism tended to draw its membership at this period from the 'poor,' not all its members were of a low social standing. William Braithwaite, the former Wesleyan, was a Ripon miller; in Nidderdale two local preachers, Richard Pullan (d1854) of New York and Edward Bentley at Low Laith, both operated flax mills.

1835 there are also detailed statistics listing each society, their membership and income from collections, as well as outgoings to the preachers. A diligent reading of the minutes can recover something of the otherwise lost histories of former societies. This may be illustrated by the cases of Kirby Malzeard and Boroughbridge.

In February 1829 when the minutes begin, Kirby Malzeard had 18 members, increasing to 22 the following quarter and in May it was agreed that Branfoot would attend a meeting of the trustees to find out the financial arrangements, both money to be lent and interest to be paid, for a new chapel. In August, the Quarter Day approved the new trustees and agreed for the new chapel to be purchased from Timothy Bonwell, a stonemason, for £100, but he was not willing to sell. It would appear that negotiations continued, for in October the Quarter Day was only willing to agree to a price of £80, after deducting £20 for selling the lease. Dawson, the Circuit Steward appears to have been requested to produce an alternative plan if the chapel was sold, by implication to someone else. Meanwhile, in the August it was agreed that the travelling preacher would be planned once a month on a Sunday evening and in November it was agreed to request the use of the New Connexion chapel³² for a weekday preaching meeting. Later, in the autumn of 1837 it was necessary to arrange a missionary meeting to assist the chapel.

Although it is not exactly clear what the negotiations were about it is possible to interpret them. Bonwell had presumably built the chapel and possibly at first the Primitive Methodists leased them from him, meanwhile negotiating to purchase them. Presumably this was successful for the religious Census, 1851, states that the chapel then in use was built in 1829 and in 1940 they were not shown as being rented. Meanwhile, the early growth in membership was not maintained, with only 8 members in November 1829. The following year there seems to have been a proposal for Kirby Malzeard to join the Bedale Circuit but this does not seem to have materialised. In 1851 its congregation was given on the census day as 17 in the afternoon and 15 in the evening, with an average over the year of 30 and 35 respectively. The chapel held 100, the same as in 1940, with no ancillary premises. The society, by then with a membership in single figures, survived until 1961, unlike the

³²Ebenezer Methodist New Connexion chapel, then in the Leeds Circuit was opened on 22 May 1803, the sermon being preached by Watson Wild; in time the family would become Primitive Methodist.

village's Wesleyans with their chapel built in 1826, holding 140, and probably in use for less than fifty years.³³

If Primitive Methodism at Kirby Malzeard managed to survive more than a century and a quarter, despite New Connexion, and for a time also a Wesleyan, presence in the village, in Boroughbridge it was another matter. Here it was recorded in February 1829 and with 7 members the following May; reduced to one member in August. There is no further mention until August 1830 when it was agreed that Thomas Oliver (1804-1878: em1825), the superintendent, would make enquiries regarding the chapel they formerly occupied. In the following November it was resolved that if a reconciliation took place at Boroughbridge, implying that the society had collapsed from an internal dispute, it would be put back on the plan but this did not materialise, for in January 1831 it was decided not to preach here for the time being. A further, short-lived attempt was made again in September 1835 but six months later was given up. Then in March 1837 it was decided to make Boroughbridge a mission, Spoor being appointed in December 1837. As a result of his efforts it was reported to the March 1838 Quarter Day that there were 5 members and 21 on trial, although despite his considerable efforts it was not looked upon as 'one of his marked successes'.³⁴

Little more is known about the work in Boroughbridge which seems again to have faded out, for there is no mention of the Ranters here in the Religious Census, 1851. However, by 1866 there appears to have been a link with Roecliffe, where the Primitive Methodists chapel was built in 1835, and the Primitive Methodists did finally build a chapel. Yet in the 1870s the cause seemed still to be struggling. Later, they shared the Congregationalists chapel of 1804 but this arrangement ended when in turn this chapel was destroyed by fire in 1890. Primitive Methodism again ceased, this time never to be re-established in the

³³ John Wolfe (Ed), *Yorkshire Returns of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship. vol.2. West Riding (North)* (York, 2005) p.48. It is not certain when the Wesleyan chapel ceased to be used for worship; it still appeared in the circuit records in 1878 without appointments but had been taken off the plan by 1887. *The Evangelist and Pastor; being the autobiography and reminiscences of the Rev. Joseph Whitehead Wesleyan minister* (London, 1879) p.57 records his preaching at Kirby Malzeard when he was in the Bedale Wesleyan Circuit, 1848-1850. Whitehead (1813-1885, em1839) notes (p.56) that the Wesleyan Reform Agitation 'affected our people at Masham'; did these Reformers leave Wesleyan Methodism and end up in Primitive Methodism, as there was no Reform cause at Masham? If so, did the same occur at Kirby Malzeard or could they have gone over to the Methodist New Connexion?

³⁴ Hall (1870) p. 77. As the minutes were no longer recording the membership figures by this date they cannot be verified from this source.

their attempts, Baptists, Congregationalists and Primitive Methodists all failed to firmly establish themselves in Boroughbridge, the explanation for which is not clear. However, in 1851 the Wesleyans had the largest congregation, even over the Anglicans, and in 1887 the market town was created the head of a new circuit on being separated from the Ripon Wesleyan Circuit. Could it be that Wesleyan dominance in the town, with a population of perhaps a thousand, really created little space for other Protestant, non-Anglican denominations?³⁵

V

There is a sense that Primitive Methodism, both in the Ripon Circuit and most of its subsequent daughter circuits, always had an element of precarious survival, especially when membership was drawn from the 'poor' of society and there were few wealthy members. This was even more so when economic and population decline were interlinked; with fluctuating trade and the trade cycle inevitably having an impact on chapel communities. By 1900 Primitive Methodist chapels at Greenhow Hill, Lofthouse and West End had all closed: The only additional society at this period was at Glasshouses, a Wesleyan model mill village, where a chapel was opened in 1875.

The relatively short-lived Greenhow chapel, opened in 1839, served a lead mining community on the watershed situated high above Nidderdale and Wharfedale. The Religious Census, 1851, shows it as having an average congregation of 50 with a Sunday school of 17³⁶ but the decline in lead mining on the remote and bleak Greenhow Hill, where mining was at a standstill by 1895, certainly saw the chapel's closure by then, if not some years earlier. A similar situation developed at West End in the Washburn Valley, a tributary of the Wharfe, where the fortunes of Methodism was closely linked to the cycles of economic boom and depression, here especially linked to the fortunes of the four local flax mills. A Primitive Methodist chapel was opened close to Low Mills in 1829 and in 1838 the September Quarter Day gave permission to add a gallery. In 1889 Low Mills, then the last mill in the valley,

³⁵ Kathleen M. Reynolds, *A History of the Christian Community in the Parish of Aldborough, 1330AD to 1980AD* (Harrogate, 1984) pp. 102ff. NYCRO, Ripon Methodist Circuit Deposit: 12/1 Boroughbridge Primitive Methodist Mission Chapel Account Book, 1873-1876.

³⁶ Wolfe (Ed), (York, 2005) p.18

ceased production; the Primitive Methodist chapel followed in 1897, being sold in 1901, although the building appears to have remained until the village was drowned by the Leeds Corporation Thruscross Reservoir in 1966. The Wesleyan chapel of 1837, a little further away, followed a similar pattern and after the First World War its membership remained in single figures until closure in 1963 and subsequent demolition.³⁷

Lofthouse in upper Nidderdale, at the extremity from Ripon, is another example. Recorded as having 11 members in 1829, by 1832 it had lost its Sunday appointments, being reduced to a weeknight class. Lofthouse, after initial successes, was struggling but recovered following a great revival in 1840, similar to what had occurred in the 1820s with the conversion of Thomas Dawson and Moses Lupton, bringing into Primitive Methodism those from Wesleyan Methodist families. In 1876 it was possible to build a chapel but by 1900 membership was reduced to one and it officially closed in 1903 leaving the adjacent Wesleyan chapel to maintain a Methodist witness, this society having existed by 1761.³⁸ However, if remoteness from a railway network was a factor in maintaining economic activity and prosperity at Greenhow Hill and West End, and thus contributing to chapel closure, ironically in 1907 Lofthouse was linked to Pateley Bridge by the Nidd Valley Light Railway.

By Methodist Union in 1932, the Ripon Primitive Methodist Circuit was already experiencing, similar closures, Galphay and Potteries having closed at the beginning of the century and by the Second World War followed by Burton Leonard, Gownley Foot and North House. When in 1942 the Ripon (Allhallowgate) Circuit became part of the new Ripon Circuit, services were only being held intermittently at Marton, Roecliffe and Winkley, all soon closing. Elsewhere, Masham chapel, damaged by enemy action, closed and the society united with that of the ex-Wesleyans. One of the last village survivors was at Kirby Malzeard where the Long Swales Primitive Methodist society united with Ebenezer, formerly United Methodist and of New Connexion origins, in the 1960s.³⁹

Financially, in its rural heartland there was a continuing struggle to maintain the itinerancy, especially during periods of economic depression; the consequences of the trade cycle were never far away. In

³⁷ DCD[ews], 'Methodism in the Upper Washburn Valley; West End and its chapels', *Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire Branch)* 61 (September 1992), pp.14-23.

³⁸ [J.M.G. Dawson], *The History of Methodism in Lofthouse, 1758 to 1982* (Harrogate, 1982) pp.9-10. 3

³⁹ *Allhallowgate Methodist Church, Ripon, 1881-1981* (Bedale, 1981) p 8-9

1852, for example both the Pateley Bridge Circuits had two ministers each, the Wesleyans having 974 members and the Primitives 229 members, albeit paying considerably lower assessments to support the itinerancy. In 1869 the Primitive Methodists received District permission to replace a married preacher by a single man, the second minister's home and furniture being sold; the single man in future went into lodgings. Clearly a financial saving, this was not the end of the matter for in 1886 the circuit became a single station and so continued until 1933.⁴⁰ In the end it was in the growing town of Harrogate where there would be long-term progress. The work was finally established here by the late 1830s, albeit not easily. In 1834 it was agreed to mission Harrogate but the town came off the plan soon after; a further attempt at full preaching was agreed in September 1838 but six months later was given up. Another attempt was made in 1839 although the society here at this stage was from amongst the very poorest and unable to provide accommodation for the preacher; permission was also granted to obtain a chapel.⁴¹ The March 1840 Preachers Meeting agreed to preaching on Sundays at 10.30 and 2.00 and then the December 1841 Full Board agreed:

That the friends at Harrogate have liberty to proceed with their chapel, provided that they can find money & sufficient responsible trustees and the test of sufficiency be left to the superintendent.

A chapel does not seem to have been built at this stage and for a time a rented schoolroom was used, until in 1855 one was opened in Westmoreland Street. Then in 1872 it was replaced by an Italianate style chapel, now shop premises, in Mount View in Cheltenham Parade and in turn succeeded by the gothic Dragon Parade in 1900. This single station attracted some of the Connexion's leading ministers, including the Rev. Edward McLellan (1870-1967: em1893), 1918-1921; President in 1931, he left to serve as the Connexional Editor, 1921-26. Similarly, Benjamin Aquila Barber (1870-1940; em1899), in the circuit 1921-31 on the eve of Union also became the Connexional Editor. In turn he was succeeded in Harrogate until 1935 by J.G. Bowran (1869-1946; em1889), who wrote under the pseudonym 'Ramsay Guthrie' and was President in 1928. The chapel also had a tablet in memory of John Flesher (1801-1874; em1822), who died at Forest Moor House near Knaresborough; during his time as Book Steward, 1842-52, he had introduced a new

⁴⁰ Bernard Jennings (Ed.), *A History of Nidderdale* (Huddersfield, 1967) p.431.

⁴¹ Atkinson (1898) p.28

hymn book that caused considerable controversy and dissent.⁴² Yet even here the long-term future became uncertain and in the 1960s Dragon Parade closed, the chapel being demolished.

In its years the Ripon Primitive Methodist Circuit certainly had an impact both on the religious life of this part of the West and North Riding, as well as on the wider Connexion. Yet by the time of the Religious Census, 1851, the pioneering days were already over; the second half of the century saw some consolidation but decline soon followed. Perhaps this is not surprising where, with the exception of Harrogate, Primitive Methodism found its roots amongst those mainly on the margins of society.

There is a continuing sense from the circuit minutes of a struggle to survive and an element that the work in many ways was transient, never free from the impact of outside factors, such as the trade cycle and local fluctuations in prosperity, both impacting on demography. By the end of the nineteenth century rural chapel closure was a reality and rural Primitive Methodism was in decline, not just in the original area of the Ripon Circuit but in many other parts of the country. Today, of former Primitive Methodist chapels, besides Allhallowgate, Ripon, only Aiskew at Bedale and two tiny chapels in coverdale continue in use. With hindsight this raises the question as to the extent Primitive Methodism could have continued into the twentieth century and sustained its itinerancy faced with this decline. Becoming part of a larger Methodist Church at Methodist Union may have led to an immediate number of closures, especially in those villages where there was a Wesleyan cause, but would these Primitive Methodist societies in all but a few places, have survived much longer?

Two hundred years after Primitive Methodism emerged in North Staffordshire as a revivalist sect and seventy-five years after Methodist Union, the initial impact of the Ranters on most of the villages in this part of Yorkshire, once part of the extended, pioneering Primitive Methodist Ripon Circuit, would now be almost forgotten, lost even to folk-memory, except for the survival of these two remarkable minute books. If there is now a sense of Ichabod, the glory having now departed, the impact of those early years of the Ripon Primitive Methodist Circuit should not be underestimated, as Kendall rightly recognised..

D COLIN DEWS

⁴² Bernard Jennings (Ed), *A History of Harrogate & Knaresborough* (Huddersfield, 1970) pp.390-1. A.L. Wigley, *Dragon Parade Methodist Church, 1900-1950: souvenir handbook of the jubilee celebrations* (Harrogate, 1950) passim.

BOOK REVIEWS

Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity. by Gareth Lloyd. Oxford; Oxford University Press 2007 pp. xiv + 258. ISBN 978-0-19-929574-6. £45.00.

Gareth Lloyd will be known to members of the Wesley Historical Society as the Methodist Church Archivist at the John Rylands University Library at Manchester. His book has been written from the point of view of one who has a day-to-day familiarity with the primary sources. This is demonstrated in the way in which he has been able to present a Charles Wesley who is in some ways familiar to us, but in other ways seems remarkably new. As Lloyd points out, the traditional picture of Charles Wesley was that portrayed by Thomas Jackson, which was coloured by an uneasiness felt by nineteenth-century commentators about the early history of Methodism. To preserve John Wesley's reputation, his brother was put safely out of the way as the great hymn writer, and his other contribution to the development of the Methodist movement was neglected or distorted.

The result is a book that removes a great deal of traditional clutter; or (to change the metaphor) it is like seeing Charles Wesley through a window that has been freshly cleaned, so that what was blurred becomes sharp and clear. Lloyd tells the story in its familiar outlines, but with new and telling detail, beginning with the Epworth Rectory; at this stage there is nothing new except the sharp and accurate portrayal of this complex and sometimes dysfunctional family (Samuel, the absent or inadequate father, escapes lightly here). The surprise comes soon after. The revisionary reading begins with the dismissal of the Georgia experience in one paragraph: Lloyd is more interested in what he aptly calls the 'complementary and conflicting personalities' of the two brothers, which included 'Charles's apparent dependence on his domineering brother, their latent rivalry, and the mutual fear that other relationships would challenge their special understanding'

Lloyd's reading of the relationship is convincing. He sees the post-conversion years as a time when the two brothers worked in tandem, actively and harmoniously, to promote the gospel throughout the country. Sometimes Charles left London as John returned, the two of them keeping up an endless round of preaching, exhorting, and reproving. During those years Charles was probably the only person with whom John could share his hopes and aspirations, for John (whose character is sharply delineated here) had an inability to relate to the feelings of others, brooked no rival to his authority, and tolerated no intimate - except his brother. The years before Charles's marriage in 1749 were an astonishing period in which the

human limitations of both brothers were transcended: they were both 'fearless, energetic, and completely devoted to the work of God'. Together they saw off the threat of Moravian Quietism and Calvinistic Methodism, united in heart and mind.

What changed everything was Charles's marriage, followed by what Lloyd calls the 'bizarre affair' of John's entanglement with Grace Murray, and Charles's intervention, from which he emerges with little credit. He must have been impelled by motives that he could not have acknowledged openly, but which emerged two years later in his almost hysterical poem written on learning of John's marriage to Mary Vazeille 'My other self, but more beloved...O what a mighty loss is mine!'. The loving relationship between the brothers seems to have been so tense that it proved unequal to the inevitable changes of circumstance; and Charles's decision to leave the itinerant ministry in 1756 was a further separation, though never a complete one.

Charles moved to London in 1771, partly to promote the chances of his musical children, but also to exercise an influence on the Methodist societies as they developed in the 1770s and 1780s. During this time, the crucial question was that of the relationship to the established church: there were as many opinions about what this should be as there were Methodist preachers, each one struggling with the possibility of separation and the problems leading up to it, such as the availability of pulpits in the new chapels, the distribution of Holy Communion, and the possibility of ordination. Charles's insistence on preaching every Sunday at City Road chapel led to accusations from some London preachers that he was a 'persecuting clergyman'; and he did not help matters by his own quick temper and sharp tongue. As Lloyd beautifully puts it in an earlier context, 'mildness in the face of provocation was most uncharacteristic of Charles Wesley'.

The last years were spent battling to preserve what was left of 'church Methodism' in the face of people such as the ambitious Thomas Coke or the malicious John Pawson, whose manuscript narrative for the year 1788, quoted here, is a disgrace to human feeling, let alone the brotherhood of preachers. Such was the animosity towards Charles by some of his separatist contemporaries that, as Lloyd quietly remarks, 'it is surprising that they left him with any reputation at all'. Their views coloured those of later historians, and it is here that the nineteenth-century view of the development of Methodism is most unfair to Charles. I am convinced that Lloyd is correct and that his account is a belated rectifying of an injustice. It should do much to set the record straight.

It would have been an even better book with some of Charles' s hymns. In his anxiety to dispose of Charles's status as the hymn writer of Methodism but no more, Lloyd sweeps the hymns into a discrete two-and-a-half page section of Chapter 4 ('Charles Wesley the Paradoxical Anglican'). I can see why he has done this, on the grounds of the direction of the book and of its length; but they might have had some attention, not just because they are so magnificent, but because they could have frequently illuminated the argument. The controversy with Whitefield and the Calvinistic Methodists is found on every page of *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* (1741-2), and the Methodist view of the Eucharist, and its relationship to Anglican practice, is nowhere better shown than in *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1745), versified from the writing of the Anglican Daniel Brevint. Others indicate political and social loyalties and concerns that are significant in assessing the historical development of the Methodist movement.

But the hymns have been written about by many people, and their omission here is understandable; although I think a brief mention of some of them could have made this study even better than it is. As it stands, it is one of those few books that says something really new. From henceforth, it will be indispensable to the history of Methodism.

J. R. WATSON

Protestant Nonconformist Texts: Volume 3: The Nineteenth Century, edited by David Bebbington, with Kenneth Dix and Alan Ruston. (Ashgate 2006 pp400 £75 ISBN 0 7546 3850 2)

The Association of Denominational Historical Societies and Cognate Libraries (ADHSCL) is a body with a cumbersome name, an unpronounceable acronym but a useful purpose: to encourage scholarly co-operation across the denominations and to challenge the tunnel, silo or bunker mentality which can infect ecclesiastical history when approached from a particular denominational tradition. One of the Association's projects, guided by its founding convener Professor Alan Sell, has been the publication of four volumes of *Protestant Nonconformist Texts* illustrating the life and thought of the various Protestant denominations in England and Wales beyond the pale of the Established Church. Two volumes have appeared so far, including that dealing with the nineteenth century, which has been edited by David Bebbington with Kenneth Dix and Alan Ruston.

The growing strength and sheer variety of Protestant Nonconformity in the nineteenth century presents a portfolio of challenges to anyone seeking to gather an anthology of this kind. As well as the vast quantity of material clamouring for inclusion, there is the need to balance the interesting but

assess the significance of a wide range of different groups. The editors are to be warmly congratulated on presenting a volume which attains breadth without sacrificing depth, and which finds room for the quirky and the eccentric without neglecting the mainstream of Nonconformist life. Here may be found the utterances of denominational leaders and the experience of ordinary church members, headline-grabbing controversies and the routine of chapel life, the ethos of the stronger denominations and the preoccupations of comparatively small or obscure groups. Thus Swedenborgians, Cokelers and Huntingtonians find mention alongside Unitarians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodists. The 245 extracts are grouped into ten thematic sections: sermons, theology, writings (including philosophy, science and fiction), worship, spirituality, chapel, women, mission, public issues and denominations. Each section has an introduction with suggestions for further reading; each extract and author is placed in context, with appropriate references; and David Bebbington's opening essay is a masterly condensed history of nineteenth-century Nonconformity.

As might be expected, Methodism is given extensive coverage. Three of the ten sermon snippets in part one are Methodist: Adam Clarke on 'Genuine Happiness the Privilege of Every Real Christian in this Life', Morley Punshon in declamatory mode on the offer of the Gospel (would any preacher today use the word 'feculent?') and Hugh Price Hughes on 'Christ the Greatest of Social Reformers'. Among the theologians are Watson, Arthur, Pope and Lidgett; W.H. Dallinger represents the scientists and Mark Guy Pearse the novelists (along with the portrait of Dinah Morris from *Adam Bede*). Hugh Bourne describes the camp meeting, and there are accounts of worship in Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist settings. The Christian life is treated in narratives of conversion, guidance on social issues (especially temperance) and accounts of holy dying. The final section, on 'denominations', includes J.H. Rigg's defence of the Wesleyan polity and his pugnacious critique of the Oxford Movement. Since the texts are printed in chronological order, it is possible to trace development through the century, although sometimes the assigning of material to different sections makes this difficult: William Arthur's discussion on entire sanctification (1856), for example, appears in the theology section, whereas experiences of full consecration dated 1810 and 1895 are a hundred pages later under 'spirituality'.

As has been seen, Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists are well-represented in this collection. Other groups fare less well. The Bible Christians appear twice, and both extracts derive from William O'Bryan; the New Connexion is not mentioned at all, although that former MNC preacher William Booth features more prominently. The UMFC appears only in the context of reform controversies of 1835 and 1850, and not everyone would agree that Everett, Dunn and Griffith were expelled 'for advocating reforms that would restrict the arbitrary rule of Jabez Bunting

and his associates' (page 364)! Ancient loyalties notwithstanding, these were comparatively small communities, and they remain seriously under-researched.

In a rich collection of fascinating texts, two documents with a Methodist bearing amused this reviewer. The 'Condensed Manual of Care Taker's Duties', published by the Derby architect and local preacher John Wills in 1893 in his *Hints to Trustees of Church Property* might be reprinted for property stewards, especially the advice on good ventilation and on keeping the chapel heating at 60 degrees (pages 158-60). In a foretaste of things to come, an extract entitled 'The Future of Methodism' cites J.H. Blunt's *Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties and Schools of Religious Thought* on Methodism: 'it may be said that there is nothing that really differences [sic] the Methodist community from the Church of England except the assumption of the sacerdotal office and sacerdotal functions by its ministers. . . . The day may come when the better instructed Methodist preachers may seek and obtain episcopal ordination, and when the less educated class may also have work assigned to them analogous to their present work ...' (page 386). One can only imagine Dr Rigg's response, but was it not prescient of much of the ecumenism of the twentieth century?

MARTIN WELLINGS.

Bold as a Lion: John Cennick, Moravian Evangelist by Peter Gentry and Paul Taylor (Life Publications, 2007; pp.176; £9.95 plus £1.95 p&p. ISBN: 13-978-095545940-5)

John Cennick has been accorded little more than a walk-on part by most historians of early Methodism. His life was quite a short one (he died in 1755 at the age of 36) and his pilgrimage from his Anglican roots through association with the Wesleys and then with Whitefield to the Moravian fold in which he eventually found his spiritual home, did nothing to encourage the cherishing of his memory. So he has been largely forgotten except as the author of a handful of hymns.

The present work is therefore to be welcomed as meeting a need. The authors tell his story in a sympathetic but not uncritical way. Chapters 1 to 4 are biographical and chapters 5 to 8 then deal with themes that arise: Cennick's theology, Cennick as evangelist and preacher, his hymns and poems, and his significance for this 'post-modern' age. Four appendices, a bibliography and index round off the book, and there is a section of maps and illustrations.

Cennick emerges from these pages as a precocious but gifted recruit to the very earliest ranks of the eighteenth-century Evangelicals; one who won the confidence and approval of the Wesleys and Whitefield, and did not entirely forfeit their good will when he moved on. He wrote some 750

hymns and poems, but judging by those quoted in chapter 7, few except those that remain in use have any real merit. Comparison with the hymns of Watts and the Wesleys confirm this. At best, in the words of the authors, 'Cennick was expressive, sometimes rugged and vividly descriptive.' (p.125)

It is as an attractive personality and a dedicated and effective evangelist that he most deserves to be remembered and honoured. The authors of this book have made a convincing case.

The book is available from N. Seeds at 16 Linacres Road, Leicester LE3 IRE.

JOHN A. VICKERS

Bradshaw Gass & Hope. The Story of an Architectural Practice - the first one hundred years 1862-1962 by Jane & Timothy Lingard (Gallery Lingard, 2007; pp.240; HB £23.50. ISBN 978-0-9556035-0-1

The Bolton-based architectural practice of Bradshaw Gass & Hope, established in 1862 by Jonas James Bradshaw (1837-1912), a Methodist, today has a remarkable archival collection and this is the emphasis of the book. Only in this context are the private lives of the partners recorded. A selection of the range of buildings designed over a century, from town halls to schools, cotton mills to hospitals, houses to churches, are described and illustrated, Roger Oldham, and later Cyril Farey, producing beautiful perspective drawings. An unanswered question is whether the local Wesleyan Barlows, cotton spinners, were clients of Bradshaw because of the Methodist connection and if they were influential also in the partnership designing the town's Wesleyan Victoria Hall (1898-1900), which in turn led to the Leysian Mission (1902-4), the opening of a London office and other central halls, notably Liverpool (1904-5). Amongst other schemes was that of the Wesleyan Medak College and church, India (1916-25), now the largest Church of South India cathedral. The range of architectural drawings enables similarities in designs to be identified - the tower and dome of the Leysian Mission, for example, has a parallel in cotton mills!

This is an excellent book but there are some weaknesses. The authors seem to struggle both to put Methodist central halls into the context of the Forward Movement, including the reason for providing shops for income generation, and to use appropriate Methodist terminology. In places the text suffers both from typographical and factual errors and it does seem unnecessary to repeat a number of the illustrations. Regrettably there is no index. Nevertheless, for those interested in architecture, and especially Methodist central halls, this book is recommended. .

D COLIN DEWS