

**COLLIERS AND CHRISTIANITY: RELIGION IN THE COALMINING COMMUNITIES  
OF SOUTH WALES AND THE EAST MIDLANDS c1860 TO 1930s WITH A  
PARTICULAR FOCUS ON THE RHONDDA VALLEYS IN SOUTH WALES AND THE  
HUCKNALL AND SHIREBROOK AREAS IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND  
DERBYSHIRE**

**MARGARET ELEANOR KIDGER, BA (Hons), MTh**

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**Wilford Parish Church, Nottingham**

**Clifton Colliery in the background**

**Undated photograph**

## Abstract

Many studies that have examined the issues of 'secularisation' and 'religion and the working class' have been based on large cities. This study, after first reviewing the debate on these issues, looks at institutional religion in coalmining communities in the East Midlands and South Wales from 1860 to the 1930s. It focuses particularly, though not exclusively, on Hucknall and Shirebrook in the East Midlands and the Rhondda Valleys in South Wales. The difficulties faced by the churches in providing for the needs of the rapidly growing mining communities are then outlined; the progress made by Nonconformity, Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism is examined and the contribution that the churches made to the lives of both church members and communities is assessed. The study also looks at the contribution of the miners themselves to institutional religion. The final chapter focuses on the inter-war years and assesses possible reasons for the widespread decline in religious commitment during that period and in so doing examines the extent to which the churches themselves may have inadvertently contributed to their own decline. Overall this study argues that institutional religion made a significant contribution, at least until 1914, to the life of the mining communities. It was mainly in the interwar period that, for a variety of reasons, secularisation in these working class communities increased.

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Baptist, Congregationalist, Methodist and Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Churches for denominational statistical information. I am particularly grateful to the staff at the National Library of Wales; their knowledge of the Welsh language enabled me to make use of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist yearbooks written wholly in Welsh! The staff of the South Wales Miners' Library at the University of Swansea were very helpful; I particularly valued the opportunity to study the transcripts of interviews of former miners. Also in Wales is the residential library of St Deiniol's (now Gladstone's Library) at Hawarden. This has provided me with a comfortable, peaceful environment in which to read, write and generally make progress with my work. My thanks also to the staff there and at the Hallward Library and the East Midlands Collection Library of the University of Nottingham for their help in locating and obtaining the necessary books and answering queries. The University has also provided excellent supporting facilities for PhD students, for which I am grateful.

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### Abbreviations

DRO	Derbyshire Record Office
GRO	Glamorgan Record Office
ILP	Independent Labour Party
NA	Nottinghamshire Archives
NLW	National Library of Wales
NMA	Nottinghamshire Miners' Association
NMIU	Nottinghamshire Miners' Industrial Union
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
RC	Roman Catholic
SWMF	South Wales Miners' Federation
SWMIU	South Wales Miners' Industrial Union
SWML	South Wales Miners' Library

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## **Introduction**

### **Aim of study**

One of the main aims of this study on religion in the coalmining communities of South Wales and the East Midlands from c1860 to the 1930s is to contribute to the on-going debates on 'secularisation' and 'religion and the working class'. As chapter one will demonstrate, there has already been much research on these two subjects, most of which has been based on studies of specific areas – usually large cities; so why look at yet another area or areas? Principally because if meaningful generalisations are to be made on these subjects a vast amount of research on different areas, cultures, communities, occupations etc is still necessary.

### **Choice of area for study**

Coalmining communities from two different coalfields – the Rhondda valleys mainly, with some references to the Aberdare and Merthyr Tydfil areas, in South Wales; and the Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire area of the East Midlands with a particular, but not exclusive, focus on Hucknall and Shirebrook – have been selected for this study because as coalmining communities they are archetypal working class communities yet dissimilar to both working class communities in major towns and cities on the one hand and to the farm labouring community in agricultural villages and hamlets on the other. The reason for looking at two coalfields rather than one is that it would be unwise to make generalisations based on one area alone, since there could be factors specific to that one geographical area which would not apply to other

coalfields. The two regions chosen are, as chapter two will show, very different physically and culturally. Thus, if in respect of religion they prove to be similar, any generalisations made concerning religion in coalmining areas are more likely to be valid.

### **Main objectives and questions that will be asked**

The main objectives of this work are not only to build up a picture of the progress and numerical strength of differing denominations and churches within the communities examined and over the period covered, but also to examine what the churches contributed to the general quality of life in these working class communities. The degree of involvement the miners had, particularly in leadership roles, in their respective churches is considered, though it is the mining communities rather than miners that are the particular focus for study. Were the churches in these communities really churches *of* the people or were they only churches *for* the people?

Much of the literature reviewed in chapter one presents a negative picture concerning the long-term effect on religion of industrialisation and urbanisation. This is arguably due to the tendency of many scholars to use secularisation as a focus of their study of religion in modern times. Whilst not denying the evidence for secularisation and the alienation of many working class people from religion, if one changes the focus and examines, as this study does, the contribution that institutional religion made to the lives of the working people and their communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a more positive picture of the social significance of

institutional religion, up to at least 1914, emerges. The main questions that are considered in this work are: In what ways did the two coalfield areas studied differ from each other? How did the churches respond to problems arising from the rapid development of their communities and the challenges posed by the nature of the coalmining industry itself? What role did the miners themselves have in their churches? What impact did the First World War have on church and society in the mining areas? How did the churches react in the 1920s and 1930s to industrial strife in the mining industry and the economic depression that followed? and, Did the churches inadvertently contribute to their own decline in that difficult period?

### **Main Thesis and Outline of Study**

In the process of considering the above questions, examining the progress of the churches in the mining communities and building up a picture of the impact of religion on the daily lives of workers and their families, it became obvious that the inter-war years presented a rather different picture of the social significance of religion from that of the pre First World War era. The main thesis that emerged, and is therefore argued in this study, is:

*Churches of all denominations, despite the problems they encountered and the weaknesses inherent in their organisation, made highly effective provision for the spiritual, social, cultural and educational needs of the coalmining communities, some of the impetus for this provision coming from the miners themselves; secularisation and decline in church membership did not develop to any great extent until the inter-war years.*

Chapter one looks at arguments put forward by some of the more influential writers on the subjects of secularisation and religion and the working class. Chapter two, which provides the necessary background to the communities studied and to the nature of the coalmining industry, pinpoints problems that were either specific to, or particularly acute in, churches in coalmining areas. Chapters three, four and five examine Nonconformity, Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism respectively. These chapters outline the progress made by the respective churches as the mining communities developed, and the activities they provided for their own members and for their communities. The extent of response by the miners, especially in leadership roles, is examined too. In the case of the Anglican church, the social background of the clergy and the degree of their empathy with their congregations and communities are also considered. Chapter six examines the response of the church and the miners to the First World War. Chapter seven looks at the problems of decline in the inter-war years, a period of immense industrial strife and economic depression, and it examines the extent to which the churches may have inadvertently contributed to their own decline. The study is supported by statistical evidence presented in the form of graphs and tables. In the conclusion the contribution that this study has been able to make to the debates on secularisation and religion and the working class is indicated, the main questions that this study has considered are revisited and conclusions drawn, the thesis argued re-stated, and areas where further research would be desirable suggested.

### **Main Resources Used**

For South Wales the two most valuable resources were: the evidence given to, and the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Church of England and Other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* (report published in 1910); and the transcripts of the audio tapes, in the South Wales Miners' Library at Swansea University, of former coalminers who had worked in or near the Rhondda valleys during the period covered by this study. Unfortunately similar resources do not exist for Nottinghamshire. However the Nottinghamshire County Archives has quite extensive archival material for some churches. In respect of Hucknall it holds a virtually complete run of Hucknall Parish Church magazines. This source proved invaluable in encapsulating the concerns and views of the clergy in both the First World War and in the inter-war period. These magazines also demonstrated the financial difficulties experienced during the inter-war period. The same office also holds the Southwell Diocesan Magazine covering the period of this study. The East Midlands collection at the University of Nottingham has an almost complete set of Southwell Diocesan Calendars, therefore useful diocesan material was readily available. For Nonconformist churches the collection at the Nottinghamshire County Archives is patchy, but for Nonconformist churches in Hucknall it is fairly good, especially so for the Baptist church.

In addition to the above, the County Archives of both Glamorganshire and Nottinghamshire hold pamphlets and typescripts outlining the history of many churches, both Nonconformist and Anglican. Local libraries also proved



fruitful sources for the histories of some churches. Statistical information on Nonconformist churches was taken from the denominational year books of the Baptist, Congregationalist, Methodist and Calvinistic Methodist churches housed at: Regent's Park College, Oxford; Congregational Church Headquarters, Nottingham; the Wesley Centre, Oxford and the National Library of Wales respectively. Statistics for Methodist churches (excluding Calvinistic Methodist) proved to be less useful because they are only published for the circuit, not the individual church. The Roman Catholic diocesan archive office for the Diocese of Nottingham provided some useful statistical information for the Catholic churches in the Diocese.

Useful secondary source material which provided a good background to coalmining history and to the areas studied included: A. R. Griffin *Mining in the East Midlands 1550 – 1947* (London: Cass & Co., 1971), E. D. Lewis *The Rhondda Valleys: A Study in Industrial Development 1800 to the Present Day* (London: Phoenix House, 1959) and J. May *Rhondda 1203 – 2003: The Story of the Two Valleys* (Cardiff: Castle Publications, 2003). Local newspapers were useful sources for specific occasions (for example the laying of a foundation stone for a new church) and for getting the general mood of the time, since this study has endeavoured, as far as is possible, to look at events and churches through contemporary eyes, especially those of the working people themselves.

### **Limitations of Study and of Materials Available**

Perhaps one of the main limitations to researching for this study was the inability of the researcher to read Welsh, which obviously precluded the use of documents relating to the history of specific Welsh chapels. However, during the period studied the use of English was increasing in the Rhondda Valleys, and so much valuable contemporary material was in English. Another major limitation was the patchiness of material available – plentiful for some areas and churches, non-existent for others. Furthermore the material available for the two areas studied sometimes precluded useful comparisons. For example both diocesan and parish magazines are available for Southwell Diocese but far less are available for Llandaff Diocese and no parish magazines have been located for the Rhondda parishes. On the other hand, much material is available for political activities of miners in the Rhondda area but very little has been traced for the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Even within one coalfield area the amount of archival material available varies from place to place. Thus there is much more material available for Hucknall than for Shirebrook. However, hopefully, it has been possible, despite these limitations, to gain a reasonably accurate overall picture of institutional religion in the two coalfields during the period examined.

## Chapter 1

### The Key Issues Debated: A Literature Survey

#### Introduction

Since mining communities were predominantly working class and the period being examined includes a time of national decline in adherence to institutional religion, the two key issues which form the background to this study are 'secularisation' and 'religion and the working class'. These two issues are to some extent inter-related but for the sake of clarity this chapter will examine them separately. The 'secularisation thesis', as stated by Bryan Wilson in the 1960s, will be looked at first, followed by the views of A. D. Gilbert and David Martin, who, like Wilson, began their writing on secularisation in the 1960s and 1970s. Then the arguments of revisionist and post-modernist challengers of this thesis will be considered; particular attention being given to the views of both Callum Brown and Hugh McLeod, since in his latest works Brown challenges the whole social scientific approach to secularisation and proposes an alternative, whilst Hugh McLeod writes extensively in a highly considered, nuanced way on the subject as it relates not just to the United Kingdom but also to Western Europe and the United States of America. Finally, in this section, conclusions will be drawn as to the relevance and limitations of secularisation theories to the study of institutional religion.

The debate on religion and the working classes will then be examined chronologically, beginning with two opposing nineteenth century views.

Finally, works relating specifically to religion in coalmining areas will be examined in order to see what they contribute, either explicitly or implicitly, to the debates on the two key issues looked at in this chapter. Any conclusions that can be drawn from this literature survey of the two key issues will be stated.

### **The Secularisation Thesis**

This thesis, proposed originally in 1966 by Bryan Wilson, a sociologist at Oxford University, is debated in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* edited by Steve Bruce (published 1992).<sup>1</sup> The thesis as re-stated by Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce asserted that 'the social significance of religion diminishes in response to the operation of three features of modernisation namely social differentiation, societalisation and rationalisation'.<sup>2</sup> Basically this thesis is related to the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation on religion. By 'social differentiation' Wallis and Bruce are referring both to the taking over by various secular authorities of such functions as education and social welfare that were formerly the province of the church, and to the generation of social class and class conflict. By 'societalisation' they mean the change from a predominantly community-oriented society to one that is more nationally oriented, and by

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8 – 9.

'rationalisation' they primarily mean the advances in science and technology that have given people rational explanations for many things that were formerly inexplicable and regarded as matters of divine providence.

Wallis and Bruce claimed that the thesis 'was one of sociology's most enduring research programmes' and that it had generated much criticism but nevertheless few had attempted 'a comprehensive alternative theory'.<sup>3</sup> Arguably the fact that few had attempted an alternative theory does not indicate the adequacy of the existing theory but rather that no master factor could be globally applicable in an increasingly complex world. It is perhaps hardly surprising though that Wilson, a sociologist, should formulate such a thesis, since in the 1960s and 1970s many academics tended to hold Marxian views of both history and society (whether or not they were themselves politically Marxists). Those with a Marxian view of society expected the gradual demise of religion and believed in adopting a master factor to explain historical and economic developments.

However even in the 1990s Wallis and Bruce still regarded this thesis as 'the orthodox model'<sup>4</sup> and claimed that 'it was a paradigm which could continue to support worthwhile research and explanation' and was 'not yet in need of replacement'.<sup>5</sup> They did allow that there were notable exceptions to the thesis, namely where 'religion finds or retains work to do other than relating

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<sup>3</sup> Wallis, R. and Bruce, S. in Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> See Wallis, R. and Bruce, S., 'Secularisation: The Orthodox Model' in Bruce, S., *Religion and Modernization*, pp. 9 – 29.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

individuals to the supernatural'<sup>6</sup>: where for example it reinforced cultural identity or eased cultural transition. David Martin (whose work will be examined below) also argued that religion was strong wherever it reinforced cultural or national identity and he cited Poland, Malta and Eire as examples.<sup>7</sup> Wallis and Bruce also argued that religion was resilient and was unlikely to disappear from the modern world, but that it would survive only in a privatised form and would be without social significance. Conservative churches and sects had admittedly grown as the mainstream churches had become more liberal, but nevertheless, Wallis and Bruce claimed, these gains for religion nowhere near compensated for the numbers lost. As to the social significance of religion, it was determined, they argued, by 'the extent to which religion makes a difference to the operation and standing of social roles and institutions ... and to the beliefs and actions of the individual'.<sup>8</sup> This sounds a reasonable argument but to what extent can the social significance of religion be measured? As will be demonstrated in chapters three and four of this study, the acceptance of the church's teaching that one is loved by God, that one has worth in his sight and will have eternal life, together with all the educational, social and cultural facilities provided by the churches must have added to the quality of many working class lives in the harsh industrial world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but it would not necessarily have given them any political or social status. So would working class religion have counted as 'significant' within the terms set out in this

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, D., *A General Theory of Secularisation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, p. 11.

version of the secularisation thesis? Arguably too Wallis and Bruce underestimate the social significance of Christians today, many of whom are in the forefront of fighting for social justice, for example against poverty and for fair trade. They often act (with others perhaps) as the conscience of the nation.

Bryan Wilson in his reflections on the thesis seems to have confused power and significance. Thus he asked questions such as 'Do the churches influence big business? Do business corporations regularly consult the will of God in planning their commercial strategies? ... Is trades union policy forged only after prayerful counselling?'<sup>9</sup> He then contrasted this modern scenario with the role of religion in pre-industrial society, where, he claimed, 'monarchs were brought cringing for forgiveness to religious shrines'.<sup>10</sup> He was thus defending the thesis by focussing on the middle ages when indubitably the church had very considerable power. It is however possible to argue that an organisation or a person can have social significance without having power. Power and significance are not the same.

### **A. D. Gilbert**

In *Religion and Society in Industrial England* (published 1976) Gilbert, like Wilson, argued that modern industrial society had led to religious decline though he acknowledged that in the short-term it gave rise to increased religious activity. This was due, he argued, to the rise of religious pluralism which coincided with the beginnings of industrialisation. It engendered

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson, B. in Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, p. 199.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

conflict with the established church as Nonconformity fought initially for legal equality with, and later for the disestablishment of, the Anglican church. The battle was fought out in Parliament. The older order – the landed gentry (mostly Tories) – supported Anglicanism; the new order – commerce and industry (mostly Liberals) – supported Nonconformity. The conflict kept religion centre stage and therefore socially significant until the First World War, masking the secularising factors inherent in a modern industrial society.<sup>11</sup> Gilbert is undoubtedly right in that the conflict would have added political significance to institutional religion, but it is doubtful whether that would have added to the undoubtedly popular appeal of religion in the nineteenth century. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, had no political power in the UK but, like Protestantism, it experienced significant growth; Mass attendants grew from 482,000 in 1851 to 960,000 in 1913.<sup>12</sup>

In *The Making of Post-Christian Britain* Gilbert acknowledged the dominant role of institutional religion in early modern industrial society when chapels were able to provide a sense of security in new and alien communities but argued again that this was only a temporary phase until ‘a distinctively modern social order’ could emerge.<sup>13</sup> One could however argue more positively that institutional religion which provided for the spiritual, educational and cultural needs of developing communities was a major force enabling modern civilised communities to emerge.

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<sup>11</sup> Gilbert, A. D., *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740 – 1914* (London: Longman, 1976), pp. vii – viii and 207.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Gilbert, A. D., *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularisation of Modern Society* (London/ New York: Longman, 1980), p. 83.



### David Martin

Gilbert confined his arguments on secularisation to Britain; David Martin on the other hand was and is very wide ranging in his treatment of the subject, since he endeavours to cover the whole of Europe (including Britain) and the United States and in his later works, when he looks at Pentecostalism, he focuses also on Latin America and Africa. Despite his almost global approach to the subject one of his main concerns is to establish a general theory of secularisation. He began writing articles on this subject in the 1960s.<sup>14</sup> In 1978 his major work *A General Theory of Secularisation* was published. In this work he emphasised that there was no one statement on secularisation that covered all situations; in fact all one could claim, he argued, is that 'in historical circumstances a,b,c a development p,q,r tends to occur with these and these appropriate qualifications'.<sup>15</sup> He argued too that secularisation trends were not necessarily irreversible. Martin would appear then to be more nuanced in his approach to the subject than either Wilson or Gilbert though in fact he actually makes many rather simplistic generalisations about religion in particular countries. His basic approach is to divide societies into categories according to 'the degree of' [religious] 'monopoly present when a given society achieved its modern form'.<sup>16</sup> For each of his categories, however, Martin looks less at the degree of religious practice than at the

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<sup>14</sup> Martin, D., 'Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularisation' in Gould, J. (ed.), *Penguin Survey of the Social Sciences* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) [reprinted as chapter 1 in Martin, D., *A General Theory of Secularisation*, pp. 1 – 12]; and 'Notes Towards a General Theory of Secularisation' in *European Journal of Sociology*, 10 (December 1969), pp. 192 – 201.

<sup>15</sup> Martin, D., *A General Theory of Secularisation*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

political consequences of denominational adherence, for example 'members of the Nonconformist church in Britain and Scandinavia have a propensity to vote Labour or Liberal and active members of the state church have a propensity to vote Conservative'.<sup>17</sup> Arguably such generalisations, irrespective of their degree of accuracy, and even if seen as pertaining to the politics of the 1970s, contribute little, if anything, to the religious state of the nation. On social 'differentiation' Martin would agree with Wilson, Wallis and Bruce that it is a feature of modern societies but he does allow for differences in this matter between societies, and he contrasts the USA and the UK as an example of difference. The role of the state in matters of social welfare in the USA is limited, thus the churches are able to 'fill the interstices of social provision' whereas in the UK social provision by the churches contracted 'as centralised state agencies and centralised media replaced them'.<sup>18</sup> (Martin also examined the effect on religion of industrialisation but since this aspect is concerned mainly with religion and the working class it will be considered later in this chapter under that heading.)

In his more recent work *On Secularisation: Towards a Revised General Theory* all the chapters have already been presented as lectures and some of them have already been published. The main development from his earlier work is that Martin has extended his geographical range, as noted earlier, and now includes Latin America and Africa. He focuses on Pentecostalism, since like Catholicism it is an international religious movement that is particularly strong

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 75 – 76.

in both Latin America and Africa.<sup>19</sup> In *On Secularisation: Towards a Revised General Theory* he argues that Pentecostalism is a major narrative of modernity; a modernity not based on rationalisation and bureaucracy, as in the West, but on the equally viable, though very different, qualities of 'empowerment', 'enthusiastic release' and 'personal discipline'.<sup>20</sup> Arguably though these qualities were equally manifest in revivalism which was such a feature of Nonconformist religion in nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain (especially in Wales). Martin has a more positive view of the future of Christianity, particularly in its Catholic and Pentecostal forms, than most sociologists and historians have. Martin's particular strength is that he takes account of the many historical, geographical, political and religious factors that affect secularisation, though in so doing it is difficult to comprehend what his 'general theory of secularisation' (whether original or revised) actually is.

### **Critics of the Secularisation Thesis:**

#### ***(a) Robert Finke***

One of David Martin's strengths, as indicated above, is that he does allow for differences in societies in a way which the secularisation thesis as stated by Wilson, Bruce and Wallis does not; unsurprisingly therefore the secularisation thesis has in more recent years had its critics. One of the major grounds of criticism was that the thesis did not seem to apply in the case of the USA. Thus Robert Finke argued that 'the historical evidence on religion in the USA

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<sup>19</sup> His two works on Pentecostalism are: *Tongues of Fire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), and *Pentecostalism: The World their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Martin, D., *On Secularisation: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 142.

does not support the traditional model of secularisation' since in America 'modernisation did not usher in a new era of secularisation'. He claimed that church adherence rates showed a great increase in the nineteenth and 'a remarkable stability throughout the twentieth century'.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore church adherence rates were higher in urban areas. He was therefore critical of the fact that the secularisation thesis presumed the effects of modernisation to be the same in all societies. Finke's own explanation for the difference between America and Western Europe was that America has never had a state church and therefore had a multiplicity of religious options: the 'lack of religious regulation had a major impact on the expression and organisation of religion in America'.<sup>22</sup> However, as Steve Bruce argued in his chapter on 'Pluralism and Religious Vitality', there was no lack of denominational choice in the UK by the nineteenth century, so Finke has not explained why freedom of choice worked in encouraging and sustaining religious practice in one country but not in another. Nor was there any reason that in the UK people's preferences for a particular brand of religion could not have been met by the people themselves as was the case in the USA.<sup>23</sup>

***(b) Michael Hornsby-Smith***

Much of the research on Roman Catholicism in twentieth century Britain has been done by Michael Hornsby-Smith. In his chapter on 'Transformations in English Catholicism' Smith criticises the usefulness of the term 'secularisation'.

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<sup>21</sup> Finke, R. in Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, pp. 163 – 164.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, pp. 189 – 190.

He is 'wary of such a catch-all term'; it is 'more helpful to sociological analysis' he argues 'to recognise the multi-dimensional character of contemporary Catholicism'.<sup>24</sup> 'Post Vatican Two' had brought new growth in some areas and decline in others, but, Hornsby-Smith claims, to call 'these transformations 'secularisation' was to fail to recognise the evidence of institutional revival'.<sup>25</sup> Arguably Hornsby-Smith has a valid point here, for the very use of the word 'secularisation' naturally directs a researcher to seek evidence for it and tends to preclude more positive views of the role of religion in society. A remark of Callum Brown in his chapter entitled 'A Revisionist Approach to Religious Change' seems to confirm that this is so. He argues that hitherto evidence had only been gathered 'to demonstrate the workings of secularisation, not to confirm or falsify it'.<sup>26</sup> McLeod makes a similar comment: 'secularisation as an interpretative key has often led to a one-sided emphasis on symptoms of religious decline to the exclusion of equally significant religious innovations'.<sup>27</sup> It could also lead, he claims, to a seemingly neutral term being used to 'conceal a polemical agenda'.<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey Cox also argues 'there is something about the theory of secularisation that leads repeatedly to a stripping away of the legitimacy of the religious point of view of individuals in the modern world'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Hornsby-Smith, M. in Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, p. 139.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, C. in Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> McLeod, H., *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Cox, J. 'Master Narratives of Long-term Religious Change' in McLeod, H. and Ustorf, W. (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe 1750 – 2000* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p. 205.

**(c) Jeffrey Cox**

As his remark quoted above indicates, Cox too is a critic of the secularisation thesis. He argues that it was absurd to see the industrial revolution as a prime source of secularisation when it was actually accompanied by revival and growth of all forms of religion.<sup>30</sup> One of Cox's major arguments is that all modern western societies were pluralistic in matters of religion. Cox however is using the term 'pluralistic' in a wider sense than David Martin did, for by 'pluralism' Cox means not just a multiplicity of different denominations but that modern societies displayed a 'mosaic of belief and unbelief, devotion and apathy, faith and agnosticism, individualistic and corporate religion and confusion'.<sup>31</sup> Pluralism was one of the main ways in which churches in the modern world differed from their past. 'The watershed separating the religious past from the religious present' was, he argues, not the industrial revolution but the emergence of the secular state.<sup>32</sup> Arguably though this is not a very clear cut watershed as for example in the United Kingdom some church and state links exist even today; though one would certainly concur with Cox's statement that modern western societies are pluralistic in religion. Cox clearly shows himself as a revisionist historian by challenging some of the gloomy predictions of Weberian sociologists who argued that a technological society which demystifies the world undermines religion and that the competition between rival value systems – scientific and religious – 'leads to

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<sup>30</sup> Cox, J., *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870 – 1930* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

indifference and unbelief' so that religion becomes 'a merely marginal phenomenon in all advanced industrial societies'.<sup>33</sup>

Despite Cox's criticisms of the secularisation thesis he nevertheless argues that a theory of secularisation 'remains the most influential general account of religion in modern Europe and in the modern world'<sup>34</sup> and that the evidence of decline in the significance of religion 'in modern European history is overwhelmingly persuasive'.<sup>35</sup> Cox claims that on the subject of religion in modern society 'it is not yet possible to invoke an alternative master narrative' to that of secularisation.<sup>36</sup> But is a 'master narrative' necessary? Is it not acceptable simply to examine what institutional religion has offered a particular state at a particular era and how it has been both offered and received? Undoubtedly secularising trends in both church and society would emerge from such an approach but so too would the positive impact of institutional religion.

**(d) Callum Brown**

Callum Brown remains one of the strongest critics of the secularisation thesis and his views have developed over time. In 1992 Brown's main objections to the thesis were: it assumed that religion would inevitably decline in modern society and this was not the case in either the USA or in Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; societalisation did not necessarily

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 10 – 11.

<sup>34</sup> Cox, J., 'Master Narratives of Religious Change' in McLeod, H. and Ustorf, W., (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom*, p. 201.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 205 – 206.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

lead to decline in religion; in fact, in the UK religion acted as a unifying force promoting the same moral and social values across the nation (he cited respectability as an example of this); religion maintained its social significance across the change from pre-industrial to industrial society and in pre-industrial society religious adherence was not universally high in the UK since in many parts of Britain 'the paucity of churches and problems of transport made high levels of church attendance impracticable'.<sup>37</sup> This latter point is certainly valid as this study will affirm; the vast parish of Ystradyfodwg in the Rhondda had originally only one Anglican church.<sup>38</sup>

Like Hornsby-Smith, Brown views religion as changing over time and adapting to change rather than necessarily declining. He took as an example the way in which religion changed in the UK from having an established church with the power of state monopoly to religion which took the form of 'vigorous Dissent and chapel-building' that led to 'increased provision per capita and higher levels of church going'.<sup>39</sup> He argues that the social significance of religion must rest upon 'popular acceptance, enthusiasm, or acquiescence in religion, as demonstrated by some significant degree of religious adherence and practice'.<sup>40</sup> This is a very valid argument. Furthermore by using graphs of membership statistics, which he had drawn from Currie, R. et al *Churches and Churchgoers*, showing that church membership in the UK peaked in 1904-5 and was then followed by small peaks and troughs until the end of the 1950s,

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<sup>37</sup> Brown, C. in Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> See chapter 2, p. 67.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, C. in Bruce, S (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, pp. 39 – 40.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.



Brown argues that the 'notion that urbanisation and industrialisation instigate the decline of religion'<sup>41</sup> is eroded and negated. In fact, he argues, 'church growth slowed down, stagnated and declined when urbanisation was slowing down and stagnating'.<sup>42</sup> One of the causes for this stagnation, Brown argues, was 'the disappearing role of the in-migrant – diminishing the "new blood" to sustain church recruitment'.<sup>43</sup> He argues too that 'replacing existing secularisation theory cannot involve generating simple, mono-causal theories of religious change'.<sup>44</sup> This is a view that makes sense in the globalised world of today.

In 2001 Brown's controversial and influential book, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*<sup>45</sup> was published. Here Brown makes the startling and controversial claim that, far from secularisation being a gradual process extending over several centuries (the view favoured by Hugh McLeod),<sup>46</sup> secularisation emerged suddenly about 1963, continued unremittingly and with great rapidity and was virtually complete by the end of the century,<sup>47</sup> to the extent that one could call this period 'the death of Christian Britain'.

But Brown does more than present a significant change of date as to when secularisation took place. As a post-modernist he is critical of the entire social

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, C., *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800 – 2000* (London/ New York: Routledge, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> McLeod, H. in Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, C., *The Death of Christian Britain*, p. 1.

scientific approach to the subject, which, he rightly argues, focuses on the easily quantifiable and has a tendency to polarise society, for example into churchgoers and non-churchgoers, the religious and the non-religious etc.<sup>48</sup> Instead Brown focuses on what he terms discursive Christianity, that is the way that Christian religiosity permeated the whole of society and formed a major part of each individual's self-identity, whether or not they were believers. This, he argues, is discerned partly in the fact that Christian protocols of behaviour were generally subscribed to and partly through studying the 'voices of the people' in autobiographies, biographies, oral history testimonies and the popular media of the day which promulgated this Christian infused culture. It was not until discursive Christianity waned, as it did very suddenly in the 1960s, that 'secularisation could take place'<sup>49</sup> Brown argues. He suggests that women's loss of interest in religion was the main reason for this sudden change.<sup>50</sup>

Certainly the 1960s was a decade of considerable change – the post-war period of austerity was over; the post-war generation was growing up and a distinctive youth culture was evolving; higher education was expanding rapidly and authority, formality and tradition were being challenged increasingly. However, as Hugh McLeod rightly points out, ideas that became fashionable in the 1960s had for the most part been aired at an earlier date and those responsible for making sweeping changes in the 1960s had their

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>50</sup> Women, Brown claimed, abandoned their 'angel in the house' role. See *The Death of Christian Britain*, pp. 9 – 10.

formative periods in earlier decades.<sup>51</sup> Thus the ground was 'well prepared for the crisis of Christendom in the 1960s'.<sup>52</sup> Arguably therefore Brown exaggerates the suddenness of secularisation, for as this study will show there was already considerable decline in Sunday school attendance in the coalmining areas in the 1930s, which would almost certainly have its impact on the next generation.

It is obvious from the above that for the period up to the 1960s Brown virtually equates Christianity with British culture, since he argues that 'the mere presence of Christian churches or Christian people does not make, and never has made, Britain Christian and their mere gradual disappearance does not in itself make it un-Christian. What made Britain Christian was the way in which Christianity infused public culture and was adopted by individuals, whether churchgoers or not, informing their own identity'.<sup>53</sup>

Certainly in *The Death of Christian Britain* Brown seems to be over-dismissive of the role of Christian churches and Christians in making Britain Christian. How else is a country to be Christianised without the presence of churches and churchgoers? Arguably too Brown is being over-simplistic in virtually identifying Britain's culture with Christianity. One would not deny that Christianity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had indeed penetrated deeply into society through the churches, Sunday schools, education and indeed the media to the extent that many historians and

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<sup>51</sup> McLeod, H., *The Religious Crisis*, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>53</sup> Brown, C., *The Death of Christian Britain*, p. 8.

sociologists of religion refer to 'diffusive Christianity' (a term first coined by E. S. Talbot). However the typical Victorian values of respectability, thrift, sobriety etc which formed part of Britain's culture stemmed at least as much from individuals' desires to be accepted and upwardly mobile in society as from their commitment to Christ.

However, possibly Brown is being deliberately provocative in this work in order to challenge the social scientific emphasis on easily quantifiable measures to establish the social significance of religion. Interestingly though, he still makes great use in all of his work of one of their tools, namely statistics, to demonstrate rapid decline in many areas of religion from the 1960s.<sup>54</sup>

It would seem however that Brown's challenge to former ways of regarding secularisation has had some success, since in a contribution of Brown's to *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe 1750-2000* he claims that the view of secularisation as a long-term and inevitable process has less support today<sup>55</sup> and in his own *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* he argues that most sociologists and historians now place the centre of religious change in the twentieth rather than the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup> This is a view with which this present study concurs. Brown argues too that 'the language of academic debate has now started to change from religious 'decline' to

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<sup>54</sup> See for example Brown, C., *The Death of Christian Britain*, pp. 187 – 192.

<sup>55</sup> Brown, C. in McLeod, H. and Ustorf, W. (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom*, p. 37.

<sup>56</sup> Brown, C., *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (London/ New York: Pearson Longman, 2006), p. 11.

religious change'.<sup>57</sup> This point of using the term 'change' rather than 'decline' was made in the early 1990s by Hornsby-Smith (see above).

Brown continues to identify Christianity with culture and uses a powerful image in defining secularisation as that which 'fillets the religious spine out of the body of human culture'.<sup>58</sup> Brown also continues his post-modernist view of emphasising the importance of personal narrative in a study of religion; thus he argues 'the historian of modern religion must contemplate "the end of the social" in the social history of religion, and "the rise of the self" or the "personal"'.<sup>59</sup> Personal testimony is indeed very interesting and is used in this study. It certainly has the advantages of enabling one to view the situation through the eyes of the individual who experienced it and drawing attention to some practices of religion (for example personal Bible reading and personal prayer) that are not easily statistically measurable.

*Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (published 2006) is a commissioned text book which presents a chronological overview of religion, culture and society in that century. It is also a further reworking of his own theory, which was seen as fairly startling in 2001. Ironically though, as Brown himself acknowledges, terrorist activities in the early twenty-first century have put religion 'back on the agenda'.<sup>60</sup> One of Brown's main arguments in this book is that in the last fifty years there have been three profound cultural forces: secularisation, world-wide religious militancy and a rise in spirituality

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<sup>57</sup> Brown, C. in McLeod, H. and Ustorf, W. (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom*, p. 37.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>60</sup> Brown, C., *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p. xv.

not necessarily related to any external god or formal creed.<sup>61</sup> But surely the last of these could only come into being if the first was already far advanced and religious fundamentalism, if not actual militancy, often arises as a reaction against secularisation.

**(e) Hugh McLeod**

In *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (published 2007) McLeod argues that the secularisation thesis is not a convincing way of *explaining* how and why secularisation happened nor is it able to predict what will happen to religion in the future in any part of the world, but secularisation is a useful *description* of what has actually happened to religion since the seventeenth century.<sup>62</sup> The decline of Christendom, which is the historical framework McLeod takes here (because it emphasises religious change rather than religious decline) has taken place, McLeod states, in four distinct stages: de facto religious toleration from the late seventeenth century onwards; the publication of anti-Christian ideas allowed from the beginning of the eighteenth century; separation of church and state taking place at different times in different places; and the complex but 'gradual loosening of ties between church and society'.<sup>63</sup>

In Steve Bruce's *Religion and Modernization* (published 1992) McLeod argues that industrialisation and urbanisation, which Bryan Wilson and others argued were the main causes of secularisation, were two-edged in their implications

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. xv.

<sup>62</sup> McLeod, H., *The Religious Crisis*, pp. 16 – 17.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 19 – 20.

for religion. On the one hand the population shift led in the short-term to shortage of church accommodation in the mushrooming towns but on the other hand these areas were 'often strongholds of Protestant sectarianism'<sup>64</sup> and all the denominations showed an eagerness to evangelise the new areas. Factors that contributed to a decline in religious adherence in the second half of the nineteenth century, McLeod argues, were: intense social conflict between the classes that led to alienation of the working classes from religion; agnosticism arising from Darwinism and biblical criticism; technological advancement in agriculture and medicine, therefore less reliance on magic (which according to McLeod was linked with religion in some rural communities); the increasing role of the state in education and welfare; and increased affluence leading to increase in leisure facilities. This latter cause however worked initially in the churches' favour, since they became one of the first providers of leisure facilities.

McLeod is in agreement with Brown that the 1960s was a time when a 'revolt in the name of individual freedom against all restrictive moral codes swept across the whole of the Western world'.<sup>65</sup> However, as stated above, McLeod is critical of Brown's view on the suddenness of secularisation mainly on the grounds that all the views leading to the changes in the 1960s had been expressed at an earlier date. In all of McLeod's works the focus is mainly on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which he claims was when church decline was particularly rapid.

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<sup>64</sup> McLeod, H. in Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, p. 61.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Also in all of his work McLeod sees social class as a very significant factor in religious adherence; in this respect too he differs from Brown, who, as a postmodernist, objects to the social scientific approach that tends to categorise people. McLeod's view of the importance of social class leads him to a further criticism of the secularisation thesis of Wilson et al since it 'glosses over the important internal differences (in the level of church attendance) within each city'.<sup>66</sup>

One very significant conclusion which McLeod draws from his researches into the three cities of London, Berlin and New York is that 'the search for some master factor, which might provide a key to the whole process of secularisation, is misguided'.<sup>67</sup> In fact the religious situation in the nineteenth century was 'influenced by the interaction of a complex mix of factors, which were present in varying proportions in different countries and regions'<sup>68</sup> he argues. This argument is similar to that of David Martin (see above).

In *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe 1750 – 2000* McLeod states that the study of social history was popular in the 1960s and 1970s so this led to the focus on the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation. As a result a lively debate had ensued on 'the role that fundamental social changes have played in the decline of Christendom'.<sup>69</sup> This is indeed an interesting issue to consider but one could equally well have asked 'what role did institutional religion play in the lives of those caught up in these fundamental social

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>69</sup> McLeod, H. and Ustorf, W. (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom*, p. 16.



changes?’ (This is basically what this study will be asking). The answer to this latter question is likely to be rather different, one suspects, to the answers to the issue raised by McLeod and others.

In *Secularisation in Western Europe 1848 – 1914* McLeod concludes that the story of religion and secularisation is a complex one in which pluralism should be given pride of place – a view that is very similar to that of Cox. He also argues that possibly in both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries there have been many who were ‘neither fervent believers nor convinced unbelievers’<sup>70</sup> and it is ‘the practices of the less committed which provide a good indicator of the relative strength of religious and secular influences’. By using this criterion the balance between religious and secular was, until the 1960s, fairly even; ‘since then it has tipped in a more decisively secular direction’.<sup>71</sup>

### **Conclusions on the Relevance and Limitations of Secularisation Theories**

That secularisation theory is generally regarded as an important and therefore relevant aspect of a study of religion is clear from the fact that it has engaged the attention of sociologists and historians for over forty years and is still hotly debated. There is however no consensus on the causes, dating or even value of the term ‘secularisation’, and this tends to limit its usefulness. This study will aim to show that although secularisation is clearly a relevant factor in discussing religion, too great a focus on it obscures and undervalues the

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<sup>70</sup> McLeod, H., *Secularisation in Western Europe 1848 – 1914* (New York: St Martin’s Press and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 288.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

enormous contribution that religious institutions have made not only to the spiritual welfare of the people but also to their educational, cultural and social welfare.

### **Nineteenth Century Opinions on Religion and the Working Class:**

#### ***(a) Horace Mann***

McLeod claims that 'working class alienation had been a major concern of the churches since the first half of the nineteenth century'.<sup>72</sup> This was indeed so. Frederick Engels, writing on *The Condition of the Working Classes in England in 1844* argued that the masses were for the most part totally indifferent to religion.<sup>73</sup> Horace Mann, who organised, produced and commented on the Religious Census of 1851, made virtually the same claim: 'the labouring myriads of our country ...' (are) 'thoroughly estranged from our religious institutions'. They are '*unconscious Secularists* – engrossed by the demands, the trials, or the pleasures of the passing hour, and ignorant or careless of a future'.<sup>74</sup> Engels forecast a total abandonment by the working class of a religion that in his opinion had served only to make the workers 'obedient and faithful to the vampire property owning class'.<sup>75</sup> Mann clearly desired a very different end. He believed that the working class were the ones who were 'most in need of the restraints and consolations of religion'.<sup>76</sup> He was clearly

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<sup>72</sup> McLeod, H., *The Religious Crisis*, p. 54.

<sup>73</sup> Engels, F., 'The Condition of the Working Classes', p. 126, as quoted in Wickham, E. R., *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957), p. 111.

<sup>74</sup> Mann, H., 'On the Religious Census' as quoted in Moore, J. R. (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. 3: *Sources* (Manchester: University Press, in assoc. with Open University, 1988), pp. 315 – 320.

<sup>75</sup> Engels, F. in Wickham, E. R., *Church and People*, p. 111.

<sup>76</sup> Mann, H. in Moore, J. R. (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. 3: *Sources*, p. 316.

writing from the perspective of a middle class Victorian Christian and one who obviously regarded regular attendance at public worship as the hallmark of a Christian.

**(b) Thomas Wright**

Clearly not everyone shared Mann's opinions. Thomas Wright, a journeyman engineer who obviously considered himself one of the 'labouring myriads', totally disagreed with Mann's judgement. 'Attendance at a place of worship is not necessarily a proof of religious feeling ... working people are not irreligious. Brotherly love abounds among them ... to speak of their ... being actively opposed to religion, or religious institutions, is simply to talk nonsense'.<sup>77</sup> Wright was very critical of the church (especially the established church) on the grounds that it did not practise what it preached and that it was 'emphatically not the Church of the people'.<sup>78</sup> Wright clearly saw 'brotherly love' as the hallmark of Christianity, yet it is possible to exercise brotherly love without being a Christian. If however Wright is correct in his description of the working class, it would seem that 'unconscious *Christians*' might have been a more accurate description of them than Mann's 'unconscious *Secularists*'.

Mann and Wright clearly use very different criteria in their concept of religion and not surprisingly come up with very different opinions. This is indicative of the complex nature of any discussion on the subject. In part stimulated by the publicity surrounding the Religious Census, all the churches worked

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<sup>77</sup> Wright, T. in Moore, J. R. (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. 3: *Sources*, pp. 321 – 322.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

exceedingly hard for the rest of the century to regain the allegiance of the working class.

### **Twentieth Century Views on Religion and the Working Class :**

Literature on 'religion and the working class' in the second half of the twentieth century is vast. Therefore only a few significant texts drawn from different periods and from different perspectives will be examined here.

#### ***E. R. Wickham***

By the mid-twentieth century it was almost taken for granted that in the major industrial cities the working class were by and large alienated from institutional religion. The Diocese of Sheffield inaugurated an industrial mission, whose task it was to examine the how and why of this alienation before developing a strategy to tackle the problem. As a result E. R. Wickham, then Industrial Missioner, produced *Church and People in an Industrial City*. Wickham claimed to break new ground in church history by focussing on the history of the church in the society in which it was set instead of isolating the church from its setting and focussing on personalities or theologies or ecclesiastical institutions and then blaming the church's problems on current events and contemporary life.<sup>79</sup> Wickham's study, which looked at the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation on the churches, is limited to Sheffield but he suggested that the result of his findings would be universally applicable. One of Wickham's arguments was that 'the industrial working class

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<sup>79</sup> Wickham, E. R., *Church and People in an Industrial City*, pp. 11 – 12.

culture pattern had evolved lacking a tradition of the practice of religion'.<sup>80</sup> Wickham's whole picture is fairly gloomy – industrialisation had alienated the working class from religion. There was a religious boom in the second half of the nineteenth century but that had been mainly middle class and from the 1880s through to the 1950s the churches in the industrial and urbanised areas of the country had steadily declined.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps this gloomy picture was inevitable since Wickham's focus had been on 'how did the industrial areas arrive at a numerically small number of religious adherents?' rather than on 'how did the church affect the lives of working people and how have those people contributed to the life of the church?' As already argued, results do depend to a significant degree on the focus of the question.

#### **Marxian Historians of the 1960s and 1970s:**

The 1960s and 1970s were the time when Marxian views of history were dominant in the academic world. Thus great emphasis was laid on social classes and class conflict in religion as in other fields. Marx himself had believed, and no doubt hoped, that the working classes would, when they were the dominant class, abandon religion; arguably therefore Marxian historians (irrespective of their own political views) were expecting evidence of class conflict and alienation of the working class from religion. In any case, they certainly tended to present a picture of general alienation from religion by the working class, especially those in the major cities.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

**(a) E. P. Thompson**

E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) was very negative in his assessment of the role of religion in the lives of the working class. He was especially critical of Methodism, claiming that it weakened the poor by encouraging submission as a great Christian virtue, since it underpinned the aim of employers – a submissive workforce.<sup>82</sup> He admitted that ‘Methodism, with its open chapel doors, did offer to the uprooted and abandoned people of the Industrial Revolution some kind of community to replace the older community patterns which were being displaced’.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless he argued that ‘any religion that places great emphasis on the after-life is the chiasm of the defeated and the hopeless’.<sup>84</sup> However, as later research would show, it was not usually ‘the defeated and hopeless’ among the working class who were the ones who were attracted to religion; even so Thompson’s work was clearly seminal and it is still in print today.

**(b) K. S. Inglis**

Another very negative 1960s account of the churches and the working class that was very influential in academic circles for many years was K. S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*. In his opening paragraph Inglis stated ‘from the beginning of the’ (nineteenth) ‘century, the spiritual destitution of the lower orders was a commonplace of religious

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<sup>82</sup> Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1980, but first published 1963), p. 390.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 416 – 417.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 419.

discussion'.<sup>85</sup> His major argument echoes that of Horace Mann (see above) that in 1850 the majority of the working class did not attend any place of worship. Considerable efforts were made by all the denominations after this date to win them, but attendance did not improve. The apparent success of the Roman Catholics to attract the working class was due simply to the presence of the Irish and their tendency to produce very large families. Even the Salvation Army, which he acknowledged was much more working class in its ethos than all the other churches, had not really succeeded in reaching the masses.<sup>86</sup>

**(c) James Obelkevich**

Obelkevich clearly regarded the effects of capitalism and social class as of prime importance for the history of nineteenth century religion. At the time he was writing (1970s) issues of social class were, as already indicated, of major concern to the academic world, but unlike most of the other writers Obelkevich chose to study religion in relation to rural rather than industrial society. His work was entitled *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875*. He chose this particular period because it was the time when the countryside, like the industrial areas, was being transformed by capitalism. He argued that the effect of capitalism was to change a society based on rank to one of social class; thus farmers and labourers became separate classes with different religiosities. The farmers tended to withdraw from a community

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<sup>85</sup> Inglis, K. S., *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

focus into a family focus; the family, rather than the community, became a religious unit. Farmers also became associational rather than communal in their interests.<sup>87</sup> The labourers tended to hold on longer to community habits and values, but when they did reorient themselves to the capitalist society they developed a new class culture and class consciousness where not only Methodism but also trade unionism flourished.<sup>88</sup> The churches had to grapple with the problem of maintaining themselves as a religious community when society around them was breaking down into separate social class communities. Overall Obelkevich's main arguments are: studies of religious life cannot be reduced to social class but are unintelligible without reference to it; working class religion tended to be syncretistic – a mixture of Christianity and paganism, but the main concern of the working class was always immediate and practical; superstition, like orthodox religion, diminished with the rise of the class structure; and both institutional and popular religion flourished and declined together in a period of social change.<sup>89</sup>

***(d) David Martin***

Obelkevich, as stated above, argued that it was capitalism that changed society into one of classes, rather than ranks. Martin, on the other hand, argued that it was large-scale industry that created class because it led to a culture of 'us' and 'them' and weakened the 'vertical bonds personally binding

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<sup>87</sup> Obelkevich, J., *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. viii – xi.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 312 – 313 and 331.



master and man'.<sup>90</sup> He does however, as is his custom, allow for different situations. Thus he claimed that in a 'culture dominated by myth of individuality and achievement' only a 'mild gradient of status levels' will emerge.<sup>91</sup> Martin sees this maintenance of a personal bond between different status levels as very powerful and important in social class relationships. His arguments here would tend to support Robert Moore's contentions (see below) that Methodism with its emphasis on individual salvation tended to inhibit the development of class consciousness and that while miners and mine-owners saw themselves as being involved in a common enterprise class relations were good.

Martin also argued that religious institutions were adversely affected by the presence of heavy industry and that this was especially so where the area concerned was a large urban area of a strongly proletarian character.<sup>92</sup> This claim would certainly accord with E. R. Wickham's findings on Sheffield (see above) but Martin's argument, as this study will show, did not apply to South Wales (or at least not in the nineteenth century). However, since Martin also argued that where religion is related to nationalism and cultural identity it is strengthened<sup>93</sup> it may explain the relatively high religious adherence of the working class in South Wales.

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<sup>90</sup> Martin, D., *A General Theory of Secularisation*, p. 83.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

### **Revisionist Historians:**

Arguably the most significant authority on religion and the working class is Hugh McLeod, whose first book on the subject was published in 1974, but as he continues to write on this subject, his work will be examined at the end of this section.

#### ***(a) Callum Brown***

Brown's views on institutional religion and the working class are far more positive than the views of the Marxian historians. In an article entitled 'Did Urbanisation Secularise Britain?' in *Urban History Yearbook 1988* Brown argues that it was very difficult to analyse the social composition of churches, but from the little research that had been done in this field 'it is clear that a significantly high proportion of churchgoers were composed of skilled working class groups'.<sup>94</sup> He argues too that after 1850 it was common practice of the churches in growing urban communities to establish mission stations in the working class areas which were then encouraged to become self-supporting. Many of the new urban churches were in fact formed like that. Thus there was 'constant recruitment from the 'un-churched', predominantly upwardly-mobile members of the working classes'.<sup>95</sup> He argues that overall therefore among church attenders the proportion of working class was at least half.<sup>96</sup> It is however the attendance of the skilled working class that Brown

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<sup>94</sup> Brown, C., 'Did Urbanisation Secularise Britain?' in *Urban History Yearbook 1988* (New York/ London: St Martin's Press, 1988), p. 8.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

emphasises, an observation that other writers have also made (see under Hugh McLeod below)

*(b) Sarah Williams*

Obelkevich's argument, that superstition, like orthodox religion, diminished with the rise of the class structure and that both institutional and popular religion declined together in a period of social change, was certainly not the argument of Sarah Williams. In fact her study *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark c1880-1939* (published 1999) seeks to demonstrate that popular beliefs, which included superstitions, folk customs and traditions, were 'not confined to the traditional rural setting nor were they just hangovers of an earlier era' but 'continued to be expressed within the local urban subcultures of London'.<sup>97</sup> Williams is critical of both Marxian historians and some Revisionist historians (for example Jeffrey Cox, Callum Brown and Hugh McLeod) for their constant focus on religious institutions and easily measurable aspects of religion like membership figures, all undergirded by the theory of secularisation. She contends that 'if we are to understand 'popular religion' as a cultural phenomenon with its own parameters, concerns and definitions we need to be willing to move away from these familiar lines of questioning and begin to explore belief in new and wide-ranging ways which will inevitably take us beyond the urge to measure and quantify religion whether in favour of or in reaction to a linear scale of secularisation'.<sup>98</sup> Her

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<sup>97</sup> Williams, S. C., *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark c1880 – 1939* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4 – 5.

argument is that the working class did absorb the truths of religion and lived by them – an argument that is not dissimilar to that of Thomas Wright (see above). The working class continued to attend church for rites of passage and occasions like the new year watch night services, they ‘sang hymns in one another’s homes, prayed in private’<sup>99</sup> and observed the Sabbath as a day of rest etc; but all this specifically Christian behaviour was mixed with much superstition. Overall then Williams’s views on religion and the working classes is a much more positive one than that of the Marxian historians, but then not only was her criterion of religion somewhat different but she was writing thirty years or more after them and perspectives had changed over time.

### **Hugh McLeod on the Church and the Working Class**

McLeod began his academic career in the 1970s, when issues of social class were predominant in the academic world and unlike some of his contemporaries he has remained true to his original insights. Thus in his earliest book *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (published 1974) McLeod stated ‘By the 1880s, the substantial separation from the churches of the urban working class had for long been an accomplished fact’<sup>100</sup> and in his latest work *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (published 2007) McLeod argues that ‘over Western Europe as a whole the group most alienated from the churches was the working classes – especially in the cities and in mining areas’.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> McLeod, H., *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), p. x.

<sup>101</sup> McLeod, H., *The Religious Crisis*, p. 26.

The reasons he gives for this alienation are that many workers adopted socialism or anarchism as their 'religion' and developed a strong working class consciousness which led to their resentment of other classes and to what they saw as the identification of the churches with the higher classes. McLeod's views here are possibly coloured by the fact that he was looking at the whole of Western Europe, much of which was arguably more alienated from religion than was the case in the UK. Certainly the link of the miners with socialism and anarchism seems to have taken place much earlier in France if Zola's novel *Germinal* is an accurate representation of the working class in France. By contrast, the central thesis of Robert Moore's *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics: the Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (see below) is that 'the effect of Methodism on a working class community was to inhibit the development of class consciousness and reduce class conflict'.<sup>102</sup> Robert Lee (see below), however, would tend to agree with McLeod in his assertion of the alienation of miners from the church (at least from the Anglican church in the Durham Diocese).

McLeod is however not entirely negative in his views of religion and the working class. Thus in *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian England* (published 1993) McLeod acknowledges that oral evidence has suggested that religion played a considerable role in the lives of working class families. This evidence had had the effect of persuading him 'that the church going minority in the

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<sup>102</sup> Moore, R., *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Cambridge: CUP, 1974), p. 26.

Victorian working class was larger than has previously been realised'.<sup>103</sup> McLeod also distinguishes between skilled and unskilled workers. In Bethnal Green, which was the working class area he particularly focussed on in his early work *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, he stated that the skilled workers appeared in large numbers in church registers, the semi-skilled were well represented but the unskilled were almost entirely absent.<sup>104</sup> He attributed this to the fact the unskilled poor were too concerned with mere survival to worry about the deeper meaning of life.<sup>105</sup> To them Christianity was not about church going but 'doing the best you can and doing nobody any harm'.<sup>106</sup> These observations are not dissimilar to those of Thomas Wright (see above) except that Wright did not distinguish between the skilled and unskilled working class. McLeod's findings concerning the differences in religious adherence between the skilled and the unskilled workers are confirmed by others. A study of Bradford Nonconformist congregations by Rosemary Chadwick found that 'skilled workers and working class women were reasonably well represented: the shortfall was of unskilled and semi-skilled men'.<sup>107</sup> Robert Moore found that labourers in the mining industry were under-represented in Methodist leadership roles and that those miners who occupied such roles 'were a working-class elite of piece-rate workers'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> McLeod, H., *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian England* (Bangor: Headstart History Series, 1993), p. 32.

<sup>104</sup> McLeod, H., *Class and Religion*, p. 32.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48 – 53.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>107</sup> In McLeod, H., *Religion and Society in England 1850 – 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 63 – 64.

<sup>108</sup> Moore, R., *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics*, pp. 73 – 74.

And as already stated Callum Brown in his remarks on church attendances emphasises the skilled working class.

Certainly this research of McLeod and others on the divisions within the working class negates Marx's argument that religion was the opiate of the poor, because the reverse was true – the very lowest classes were the least inclined to seek other-worldly compensations. Those who did so were drawn from positions of relative security – artisans and lower middle class. Interestingly though they were also the ones who were drawn to political movements. Arguably through either church or politics they were seeking a greater quality of life and upward mobility.

Overall one could argue then that the Marxian historians underestimated the role of religion in working class life, or at least failed to distinguish the difference in response to religion between the skilled and relatively prosperous working class and the unskilled and poor working class. It is clear too that opinions as to whether the working class were religious or irreligious depended to a large extent on how 'being a Christian' was defined.

#### **Writers on Religion in Coalmining Areas:**

##### ***(a) E. T. Davies***

The main focus of Davies's *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (published 1965) was the old iron belt of South Wales (a region that extended along the head of the South Wales valleys from Hirwaun in Glamorganshire to Blaenavon in Monmouthshire and included the towns of Merthyr Tydfil and

Aberdare). He wrote at a the time when, as already stated, the relationship of social class and religion was a major concern. His main argument was that 'Nonconformity was essentially working-class in character as long as these industrial communities were dependent upon the iron-industry'.<sup>109</sup> When, at a later date, coalmining became the major industry of South Wales the leadership of Nonconformity changed from being working class to being middle class. His reason for this claim was that whilst the early iron masters were predominantly English and Anglican (so the iron workers themselves took on leadership roles in Welsh Nonconformist churches) the coal owners, managers and officials were themselves mainly Welsh, Nonconformist and middle class. In this situation the 'colliery-manager - chapel-deacon man' became the norm.<sup>110</sup> Davies is however referring to leadership roles in Nonconformity, rather than to religious adherence generally. Thus his work did not necessarily support the contention that industrialisation led to working class alienation from the churches and thus to secularisation.

Davies, who was an Anglican priest, was fairly positive about the role of the Anglican Church, though he claimed that it never fully engaged in Welsh culture and so never regained the allegiance of the Welsh people.<sup>111</sup> He was more negative about Nonconformity, for example he was critical about the Nonconformist emphasis on individual salvation and its lack of concern for social conditions.

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<sup>109</sup> Davies, E. T., *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1965), p. 18.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137 – 138.



**(b) Robert Moore**

Robert Moore's *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (published 1974) was also researched and written at the time when a Marxian view of history dominated. Moore, in fact, was very interested in the sociology of English labour history as well as being interested in the sociology of religion. His inspiration for undertaking this study of the effects of Methodism in a mining community arose from his reading of Max Weber's arguments concerning religion and politics. Weber argued that believers regarded their occupation as a vocation to be fulfilled ethically and rationally. They also desired the ethical transformation of the world, but not by means of radical politics. Instead they believed that this could be brought about by changing individuals. This idea of minimal intervention by the state to bring about ethical change was, Weber argued, compatible with the laissez-faire political doctrine of the Liberal party. Weber argued too that the ethical rational religion he had described was typical of the artisan and craftsman in a modern industrial society but not of the proletariat, who were totally indifferent to religion.<sup>112</sup> With all these ideas in mind Moore aimed in his intensive study of the small mining communities in the Deerness Valley in County Durham to explore 'the inter-relationship between religious, political, economic and ideological factors'<sup>113</sup> as they affected the lives of the miners.

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<sup>112</sup> Moore, R., *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics*, pp. 21 – 23.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Moore's particular field of interest was the political effects of Methodism; did it encourage or inhibit the development of class politics? and how were beliefs sustained in changing economic and political circumstances? His main thesis was that 'the effect of Methodism on a working class community was to inhibit the development of class consciousness and reduce class conflict'.<sup>114</sup> As Moore pointed out, in Methodist theology the great divide is not between the different social classes but between the 'saved' and the 'unsaved' and that cuts across class divisions.<sup>115</sup> Methodist soteriology aimed to create new men, not new societies. Moore's thesis certainly indicates the impact that religious belief can have on secular life. However Moore acknowledged that theology, for most people, was not the only determinant of action and therefore that changing circumstances can alter one's actions and beliefs. Up to the 1920s the miners' trade union leaders (mainly Methodists) believed in a policy of 'reason and reconciliation as a means of settling disputes'<sup>116</sup> but this good relationship between mine owners and miners' leaders broke down as economic circumstances deteriorated and the owners pursued profit even in difficult circumstances. This, Moore argued, led to the lengthy strikes of 1921 and 1926 when 'the miners faced the owners and the government as miners not as Catholics, Methodists or Anglicans. The solidarities of the workplace over-rode all other loyalties'.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pp. 26 – 27.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

The response of Methodism, as a denomination reluctant to allow industrial disputes to divide its membership, was to refuse to take sides in the conflict. Instead it focussed its efforts in the traditional way of caring for those in need in the communities. Moore argued that socialist ideas had challenged the Methodist world view and that their refusal to take sides meant effectively 'the assertion of one group's traditional beliefs against the new ideas of another group'.<sup>118</sup> This conflict, essentially a generational conflict, led to increasing alienation from Methodism as the century progressed. Not all the Methodist miners in the Deerness valley held to the traditional Methodist/Liberal views outlined above; some were both Methodists and socialists (albeit of the ethical rather than the Marxist brand of socialism). Such men, Moore claimed, did not inherit their ideology from Methodism, though Methodism had provided them with 'organisational and oratorical skills'<sup>119</sup> that could easily be transferred to trade union leadership or politics. This transference of skills learnt through membership of Nonconformity certainly happened in South Wales, as chapter seven of this study will demonstrate.

Moore's research revealed that labourers in the mining industry were under represented in Methodist leadership roles and, as stated above, those who occupied such roles tended to be a 'working class elite of piece-rate workers'.<sup>120</sup> Like Davies, Moore is referring to leadership roles; there is no

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

suggestion that the unskilled were totally indifferent to religion, as Weber had argued.

Although Moore's exceedingly well researched work has a very narrow focus (it is limited to the study of one occupation in one valley and he is concerned merely with the practical results of Methodist belief, not its spirituality) it is a seminal work, not just on Methodism and politics or even religion in mining communities, but on the many factors in people's lives that influence their world view and therefore their actions; it has shown how changed circumstances can alter one's world view.

**(c) Robert Pope**

Pope's two relatively recent books (1998 and 1999 respectively) *Building Jerusalem: Nonconformity, Labour and the Social Question in Wales 1906-1939* and *Seeking God's Kingdom: The Nonconformist Social Gospel in Wales, 1906-1939* also demonstrate the inter-relationship of religion and politics, as do his periodical articles.<sup>121</sup> Pope's work is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a recent and useful background to the social, political and religious situation in South Wales in a crucial period in its history – 1906-1939 – a time when Wales moved from being dominated politically by the Liberal party and religiously by Nonconformity to the time when socialism dominated politically, Nonconformity was declining and society was becoming increasingly secular. Pope's work therefore relates to the key issues of

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<sup>121</sup> Pope, R., 'Facing the Dawn: Socialists, Nonconformists and *Llais Llafur* 1906-1914' in *Llafur Journal of Welsh Labour History*, 7 (1998 – 1999), pp. 77 – 87; and 'Pilgrims Through a Barren Land: Nonconformists and Socialists in Wales 1906 – 1914' in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* 2000, new series 7 (2001), pp. 149 – 163.

'secularisation' and 'religion and the working classes', since it demonstrates that the changing political scene in Wales and Nonconformity's reaction to it, together with the change of emphasis in Nonconformist theology, which sought to address the social problem, contributed, albeit inadvertently, to secularisation and adversely affected Nonconformity's relationship with the working class.

The main argument in *Building Jerusalem* is that Nonconformity's inadequate response in the early years of the twentieth century to the growing popularity of the labour movement sealed the fate of the Nonconformist denominations.<sup>122</sup> 'The future of Nonconformity' Pope argued 'became indissolubly bound to its reaction to the labour movement and to the new political message'.<sup>123</sup> Arguably Pope is rather overstating the case here since other factors, namely the increasing acceptance of biblical criticism and Darwin's theory of evolution and more opportunities for and more providers of leisure and education must also by this time have been having their impact on religious adherence. Even so the rise of the labour movement, which under Keir Hardie was being proclaimed as true Christianity but in its more Marxist emphasis was anti-religious, was undoubtedly a significant factor not only for the future of Nonconformity but for the future of institutional religion. The fact that socialism was being presented by Hardie and others in the Independent Labour Party as 'true religion' not only succeeded in transforming South Wales from 'being a Liberal to a Labour stronghold but it

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<sup>122</sup> Pope, R., *Building Jerusalem: Nonconformity, Labour and the Social Question in Wales 1906 – 1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), pp. 3 – 4.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

also precipitated the nation's ultimate secularisation. Religious and spiritual needs were not to be met through prayer and worship but in altruism in the secular sphere<sup>124</sup> Pope argues. This idea of practical Christianity being more important than regular attendance at worship clearly was not new; it was the argument used by Thomas Wright back in 1873 (see above) but there it was applied to the labouring masses who according to Horace Mann were already alienated from religion (see above). Here Pope is applying it to working men who up to that point in time were committed adherents to religion. Thus socialist propaganda certainly had the potential to precipitate secularisation. The impact of the labour movement on institutional religion will be examined more fully in chapter seven.

Pope also argues that Nonconformity was accused of neglecting the temporal needs of the people<sup>125</sup> its focus had been on 'building great temples and providing men with the hope of eternal happiness'.<sup>126</sup> Undoubtedly this was true – chapters three and four of this study will demonstrate the great focus on church building and certainly one of the major foci of traditional Christian theology is eternal life. But surely the proclamation of eternal life is one of the main factors that are unique to religion, whereas it could be argued that building a better environment is primarily the function of secular institutions.

Pope argues that the greatest failure of Nonconformity at this period was its refusal to take political action when social problems required political

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<sup>124</sup> Pope, R., 'Facing the Dawn', p. 85.

<sup>125</sup> Pope, R., *Building Jerusalem*, p. 78.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

measures for their alleviation.<sup>127</sup> It is however debatable whether taking political action is part of the function of institutional religion. Bishop Hensley Henson of Durham (see below) for example was certain that political action was not the work of the church.

But Pope did not believe that Nonconformity's lack of appetite for political action reflected a lack of interest in social issues. The Union of Welsh Independents had in 1911 inaugurated an inter-denominational 'Welsh School of Social Service' that met annually to 'engage in the discussion of social problems from a specifically Christian standpoint, with a view to formulating a Christian response'.<sup>128</sup> Ironically no working men or leaders of working men were involved nor did clergy representatives come from the places most affected by social problems.<sup>129</sup> However, working men would have been unlikely to have the necessary time away from work to attend such events, even if they had been invited.

In *Seeking God's Kingdom* Pope again argues that withdrawal of the working classes from Welsh Nonconformity could not be attributed to Nonconformity's 'lack of social concern, or of a socially oriented theology'.<sup>130</sup>

In *Seeking God's Kingdom* Pope provides a thorough critique of modern theology, especially the liberal theology of four Welsh Nonconformist

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., pp. 134 – 135.

<sup>130</sup> Pope, R., *Seeking God's Kingdom: The Nonconformist Social Gospel in Wales 1906 – 1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 31.

theologians<sup>131</sup> (all of whom held influential positions in the academic world) who were seeking a social interpretation of the gospel. Pope's analysis of Nonconformist theology will be examined in more detail in chapter seven. But in examining their theology Pope asks 'whether or not they offered a tenable social gospel in reality'.<sup>132</sup> Overall Pope implies that they did not; since 'they offered no doctrine of sin, whether personal or structural to support the claim that sin was the cause of social problems';<sup>133</sup> and furthermore their theology 'was wholly individualistic and lacked any real definition of society. But more importantly, it undermined the need for a church and the need for a saviour'.<sup>134</sup> He nevertheless acknowledges that liberal theology made a lasting contribution to the progress of Christianity in that it demonstrated that 'the church had to address itself to moral and social matters as well as primarily religious and soteriological issues ... the church must speak to the context in which it finds itself'.<sup>135</sup>

From Pope's work one could argue somewhat negatively that the efforts of Nonconformity to respond to the needs of industrial society had led to secularisation of the church itself in that its theology had tended to become human centred, focussed almost exclusively on this life; or more positively one could argue that Christianity had been transformed by liberal theology

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<sup>131</sup> David Miall Edwards, 1873 – 1941 (Professor at Memorial Congregational College, Brecon); Thomas Rees, 1869 – 1926 (Principal of Bala-Bangor Congregational College); John Morgan Jones, 1873 – 1946 (succeeded Thomas Rees as Principal of Bala-Bangor); Herbert Morgan (a Baptist, but like the above had been a student at Mansfield College, Oxford; in 1920 became Director of Extra-mural Studies at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth).

<sup>132</sup> Pope, R., *Seeking God's Kingdom*, p. 38.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.



into embracing a broader focus of concern. A particular strength of Pope's work is his depth of understanding of political, social and above all theological issues of the time. Thus one gets not simply an account of what happened but, more importantly, of why it happened.

**(d) Robert Lee**

Lee's *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield 1810-1926: Clergymen, Capitalists and Colliers* (2007) was published well after research for this present study had begun. The past tense will be used in referring to Lee's work because sadly he has recently died. Lee's work was thoroughly researched, well planned and well argued and obviously provides a useful source of comparison for studies, such as this one, of religion in other coalfields. Lee clearly stated that the purpose of his work was 'to examine the transformation of the Durham Diocese, with particular reference to the industry and people of the coalfield'.<sup>136</sup> His focus therefore was somewhat different from this study which is not particularly concerned with diocesan transformation, although clearly the Dioceses of Llandaff and Southwell had a considerable role in providing for the needs of the coalfield. Lee's presupposition was 'that much of the work and intent of the church was worldly, operating in an essentially conservative way to support existing structures of property ownership and social hierarchy'.<sup>137</sup> It would appear that

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<sup>136</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield, 1810 – 1926: Clergymen, Capitalists and Colliers* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Lee was expecting to find that the Durham Diocese, even in its attempts to reform, was in actuality upholding the status quo.

This present study, as stated in the introduction, aims to look not only at numerical strength and progress of the churches but also at what they contributed to the quality of life in the mining communities and, where known, at the role of miners themselves within their churches. These rather different perspectives indicate that though the factors examined may be similar the emphases and conclusions are likely to be somewhat different.

A major focus of Lee's work was to assess the effectiveness of the action taken by the Durham Diocese in 1860 to employ many more clergy in order to establish new churches in the rapidly developing mining communities. The clergy to be recruited were to come from the lower middle or the working class since it was assumed that this would enable them to form a closer bond with their working class communities than men from the higher social classes could.

As the subtitle of Lee's work indicated, he organised his study under three key elements of this diocesan mission – clergy, capitalists and colliers. Lee's insights and arguments on these important elements will be examined in the appropriate chapters of this study and compared with the situation in the two coalfields studied here. Unfortunately Lee devoted very little space in his work to the subject of church planting and progress, which in this study is considered as an important aspect of institutional religion. Lee merely stated that 'New churches were built and hundreds of new clergymen were

ordained'.<sup>138</sup> He admitted that this was a 'tremendous feat'<sup>139</sup> but he was critical of this church planting because he regarded it as an attempt by the Anglican church to colonise the coalfield when the miners had already decided that they did not want or need these churches since they had already 'surrendered themselves to the robust down to earth embrace of nonconformity'.<sup>140</sup> Admittedly Nonconformity was generally more popular among the mining population than was Anglicanism, as this study will demonstrate, but to accuse the Church of England of 'colonising' the coalfield was arguably a little unfair, since every coalmining community was perforce developed within an existing ecclesiastical parish. It was simply that some of these erstwhile rural parishes were geographically very extensive; thus when coalmines were sunk on the periphery of such parishes the existing parish church was too far distant and often too small to accommodate the incoming miners and their families. The Church of England in building new places of worship in the heart of the mining communities was not therefore 'colonising' but merely attempting to cater for the demographic revolution that coalmining had caused.

Lee's overall conclusion on the Diocesan mission to the coalfield was that despite all the new churches built, the thousands of pounds spent and all the effort put into the project, it was a failure. 'The sense that there remained a deficit in understanding between the Church and the coalfield community, as

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

wide after the 1860 reforms as it had been before, is impossible to avoid'.<sup>141</sup> His negative conclusion was arguably inevitable given the fact that he chose to end the period studied at 1926; a year that marked the nadir of industrial problems in coalmining areas and coincided with the time when Hensley Henson was Bishop of Durham. Henson had a cohort of clergy who were socialist sympathisers but he was adamant that his clergy did not involve themselves with 'political constitutions or schemes of social changes, or projects of economic organisation'.<sup>142</sup> He himself was arch-Conservative and vehemently opposed to socialism; factors which were not likely to foster good relations with coalminers who were by this time very politically conscious and mainly ardent supporters of the Labour party.

Lee also argued that the Durham Diocese had 'clung to its Trollopian aura while simultaneously trying to convert political remoteness into social relevance'.<sup>143</sup> This conclusion matched his presupposition. Strangely, Lee barely mentioned<sup>144</sup> in his work the creation of the Diocese of Newcastle which was carved out of the Durham Diocese in 1882; yet one would have thought that this splitting of a large diocese into two more manageable units would indicate that Durham was actively participating in contemporary diocesan reform rather than clinging to the past.

On the question of secularisation, Lee argued that 'industrialisation per se did not bring about secularisation'; rather it was the 'gradual erosion of

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>144</sup> Lee's only reference to this is in his General Introduction, pp. 3 – 5.

confidence in the efficacy of faith' that was responsible. 'The Church did not have sufficient answers to the problems of everyday life'.<sup>145</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In summary – it is clear that most academics today agree in rejecting the notions that modernisation (more specifically, industrialisation and urbanisation) led inevitably to secularisation and that one master factor was responsible for it. There is however less general agreement on the chronology and causes of secularisation. The very use of the term 'secularisation' is disputed. A further problem arises with regard to the criterion on which secularisation is to be judged; is it to be judged on an institutional or a personal basis?

The debate on religion and the working class reveals that a major problem revolves around the criteria used for being Christian – are church attendance and adherence to credal statements the key hallmarks of a Christian or are neighbourliness and brotherly love the essentials? The other important point that emerges is the difference in response to religion between the skilled and the unskilled working class. The former were in fact well represented, even at the leadership level, in institutional religion; the latter were on the whole indifferent to religion, their focus being on immediate physical concerns. McLeod consistently views social class as being a significant factor in religious adherence; Brown, on the other hand, objects to categorisation of people and emphasis on social class.

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<sup>145</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 286.

Two significant, though unsurprising, factors that emerge from the debates are that both issues are very complex and that, to a large extent, the writer's perspective, the questions s/he asked and his/her presuppositions naturally affect both the arguments used and the conclusions reached.

The issues debated above are clearly relevant to this study of mining communities. Obviously there are differences between factors applying to London and other major cities (on which much previous research has been based) and those which apply to mining communities which tended to be either industrial villages (as in the East Midlands) or conglomerations of such villages, as was the case in the Rhondda. The nature of these mining communities and the coalmining industry will therefore be examined in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2

### **Coal Mining: Industry, Communities and the Challenges for the Churches**

#### **Introduction**

The main thesis of this work, as stated in the introduction, is that *churches of all denominations, despite the problems they encountered and the weaknesses inherent in their organisation, made highly effective provision for the spiritual, social, cultural and educational needs of the coalmining communities, some of the impetus for this provision coming from the miners themselves; secularisation did not develop to any extent until the inter-war years.* Chapter one however has shown that many sociologists and historians have seen secularisation and alienation of the working class from religion as key features of modern industrial society. Arguably though the great focus on secularisation and alienation has tended to ignore and therefore underestimate the important contribution of institutional religion to working class community life, which is an area that this study will explore. The main purpose of this chapter is to provide the necessary background for subsequent chapters, but it will also indicate the many difficulties that the churches had to overcome in order to provide for the needs of these rapidly growing mining communities. Arguably an understanding of the problems which the churches faced is helpful in assessing the achievements of institutional religion. Some of the difficulties admittedly arose from weaknesses inherent in the churches themselves, but most sprang from the nature of the communities or of the coalmining industry itself.

The considerable difference between the landscape and language culture of the East Midlands coalfield and that of South Wales will be outlined, together with the impact this had on the nature of the mining communities that developed in these areas and the problems such development presented for the churches. Then a very brief account of the chronology of coalmining in the two areas will be given since this too had some bearing on the kind of communities that developed and the provision that was made for institutional religion. It will also be demonstrated that the coal industry by its very nature led to subsidence that affected a number of church buildings; disasters that killed large numbers of miners; and difficult working conditions that provoked industrial strife; all of which presented difficulties for many churches. Finally the unpredictable development, viability and duration of individual coalmines, which led to a high migratory tendency among miners, will be examined, though here it will be argued that on balance this migratory tendency was actually an advantage to the churches.

**Difference in the landscape of the two coalfields and its impact on their respective coalmining communities.**

Physically the East Midlands is an area of gentle undulating hills and wide, mainly flat, valleys, hardly any land rising above six hundred feet. This coalfield landscape is therefore a complete contrast to that of South Wales, where the coalmining communities were mainly in narrow, steep-sided river valleys, divided from each other by hills and mountains rising in



places to over two thousand feet. The landscape inevitably determines the kind and the shape of communities formed there.

In Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire space for industrial and community development was not a problem and quite large mining communities were developed in or adjacent to existing industrial villages. Hucknall in Nottinghamshire (a community that will feature prominently in later chapters) is an example of such development. In 1861 Hucknall had a population of 2,836, most of whom were engaged in either agriculture or framework knitting. In 1881, by which time two coalmines had been sunk in Hucknall itself and two more were sunk nearby, the population had risen to over 10,000 and by 1901 to over 15,000. Coalmining became and remained for generations the dominant industry in Hucknall but this did not prevent further industries developing there.<sup>1</sup>

To give an example of the multiplicity of mainly working class occupations in Hucknall, the census of 1881 shows that in Whyburn Street in the Butler's Hill area of Hucknall, in addition to seventy-seven coalminers, there were framework knitters, railway workers, cigar factory workers, a builder, a brick maker, a stone quarry labourer, a cotton trade worker, a silk stockinger, a cotton stockinger, a carpenter, a carrier and grocer, a hawker, a horse dealer, a wheelwright apprentice and a blacksmith. However the baptism register of St. John's Church (also in the Butler's Hill area of Hucknall) for the period 14 July 1890 to 29 November 1891 shows that of the ninety-six children baptised only seventeen were children of

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<sup>1</sup> The other industries were: hosiery, Shetland shawl making, cigar making and, later, Rolls Royce aero engines.

non-miners.<sup>2</sup> Clearly mining families predominated – at least on the Butler’s Hill estate.

Robert Lee, writing about the Durham coalfield, argues that in the mining parishes inhabited by other industrial workers there was ‘conflict (or at least a deficit of understanding) between miner and non-miner into which unwary clergy might stray’.<sup>3</sup> There does not seem to be any evidence of such conflict in Hucknall, even during 1921 and 1926, the years of lengthy strikes in the mining industry. However, in Hucknall the other principal industry was not iron or shipbuilding, as was the case in County Durham, but hosiery, in which many wives and daughters of miners were employed. Certainly the clergy of Hucknall were not sympathetic to the miners’ strikes, as chapter seven will show, so their attitude may have stemmed from their knowledge that other parishioners were suffering as a result of mining disputes.

In complete contrast to the spaciousness and centrifugal development of the coalmining communities in the East Midlands and their capacity to incorporate further industrial development, in the Rhondda valleys of South Wales development of communities could only be linear and once the mining industry had developed there was no usable space for other industries since in 1913 in the ten miles of the Rhondda Fawr and the seven miles of the Rhondda Fach there were a total of fifty-five collieries

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<sup>2</sup> St John’s Church, Hucknall, Baptism Register (Microfiche copy of PR,20,671 in NA).

<sup>3</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield, 1810 – 1926: Clergymen, Capitalists and Colliers* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), p. 6.

employing 48,000 men and boys.<sup>4</sup> By 1921 these narrow steep-sided valleys had a population of 162,717. The resulting mass of houses, mines, shops, chapels etc that together formed the Rhondda Urban District all ran virtually parallel to the main roads and the railway. In each of the two Rhondda valleys the individual communities merged into each other, though each village or township maintained a very strong sense of local community centred on pit or chapel.<sup>5</sup> Overall the Rhondda was not only an overwhelmingly working class society, as arguably all mining communities were, but also, unlike Hucknall, was one whose sole *raison d'être* was the coal industry. This had some important consequences: when the livelihood of a whole community is dependent on one industry there is likely to be militant united action when that livelihood is threatened, and massive unemployment, great distress and large numbers emigrating from the area when that industry declines. As chapter seven will show, this was certainly the case with the Rhondda valleys in the inter-war period.

One other, very obvious difference between the two coalfields was that of language culture. In the coalmining communities in Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire naturally all the inhabitants spoke English. In South Wales generally, and in the Rhondda in particular, during much of the nineteenth

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<sup>4</sup> May, J., *Rhondda 1203 – 2003: The Story of the Two Valleys* (Cardiff: Castle Publications, 2003), p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 15 and 39; and Gilbert, D., *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850 – 1926* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 54 – 67.

century when considerable coalmining development took place the vast majority of miners and their families were Welsh speaking, some monoglot Welsh speaking. However by 1911 the number of English immigrants to the Rhondda totalled well over 11,300 and there were over 900 from Ireland.<sup>6</sup> This increase in the number of monoglot English speakers, together with the fact that English was the language used in the militant South Wales Miners' Federation, led inevitably to a much greater use of English in the twentieth century.

### **Problems which the rapidly developing mining communities posed for the Anglican Church**

#### ***(a) In South Wales***

Clearly the great increase in population in all coalmining areas necessitated extra provision for its spiritual needs. The needs of South Wales were on the whole greater than those of the East Midlands. The fact that there were two language cultures necessitated duplication of resources. As Canon Evans of Rhymni expressed the problem to the Church Pastoral Aid Society in 1887:

Let there be a village of three or four hundred people who feel their spiritual needs, and let the population be English and Welsh, and instead of one service you must have two services, instead of one pastor you must have two pastors, instead of one Church choir you must have two Church choirs, instead of one Bible class you must have two Bible classes, instead of one Church worker, tract distributor, or district visitor, you must have two Church workers, tract distributors, and two district visitors. This

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis, E. D., *The Rhondda Valleys: A Study in Industrial Development, 1800 to the Present Day* (London: Phoenix House, 1959), pp. 238 – 239.

dualism pervades the whole organisation of a parish or district where the two kinds of population have come together.<sup>7</sup>

Some large parishes had a separate church for their Welsh speakers. This was certainly the case in the parish of Ystradyfodwg in the Rhondda, where the original parish church of St John (which prior to the development of coalmining in the Rhondda had served the whole of the two Rhondda valleys, but by the end of the nineteenth century served a much smaller area) now served the needs of Welsh speakers only and three other churches, where services were in English, were built. The interviewers for the *Royal Commission on the Church of England and Other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* were rather critical of what they considered as inadequate provision for Welsh speakers in this parish.<sup>8</sup> Arguably therefore as E. T. Davies observed the Anglican church in Wales failed to identify fully with Welsh culture (see chapter one). However, whether or not this was the case the fact that two language cultures needed separate provision added considerably to the financial commitments of the parishes.

Another great difficulty facing the Anglican church in the South Wales coalfield was the huge increase in the population there. In fact Glamorganshire between 1861 and 1911 had the greatest population

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<sup>7</sup> Brown, R. L., *Reclaiming the Wilderness: Some Aspects of the Parochial Life and Achievements of the Diocese of Llandaff during the Nineteenth Century* (Welshpool: R. L. Brown, 2001), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Royal Commission on the Church of England and Other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire*, Vol. 2: *Minutes of Evidence* (London: HMSO, 1910), pp. 186 – 187, qs. 5402 – 5436.

increase in the United Kingdom. Its population increased by 253% whilst that of England and Wales as a whole increased by 80%.<sup>9</sup>

However rapid population increase was not the only problem. As Callum Brown argues, many parishes in the United Kingdom were geographically vast (see chapter one). This was certainly the case in the parish of Ystradyfodwg which in 1801 covered 24,515 acres.<sup>10</sup> It extended from Rhigos in the north to Penygraig in the south and encompassed the two Rhondda valleys and the small valleys leading off them. This parish had only one small Anglican church situated approximately in the middle of the Rhondda Fawr; this provision was clearly inadequate to serve two different language cultures in such a vast area of mountainous territory. Therefore the need for extra churches in these rapidly developing valleys was acute.

Clearly providing extra churches in the new mining parishes and staffing them cost money. Obtaining the necessary money was problematic. Creating new Anglican parishes or sub-dividing existing ones entailed complying with innumerable legal requirements concerning the size and structure of a consecrated church, the income of the incumbent and the size of the parsonage.<sup>11</sup> Robert Lee claims 'Parish creation schemes had to negotiate mountains of red tape laid in their path by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the correspondence generated was suffused with

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas, B., 'The Migration of Labour into the Glamorganshire Coalfield 1861 – 1911' in *Economica*, 10 (November 1930), p. 277.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, E. D., *The Rhondda Valleys*, p. 228.

<sup>11</sup> For details of these requirements see Brown, R. L., *Reclaiming the Wilderness*, pp. 14 – 17.

that common Victorian frustration: local knowledge at variance with central authority'.<sup>12</sup> The Parish of Ystradyfodwg was a good example of this latter point; from each year between 1864 and 1872 inclusively they applied unsuccessfully to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for a grant towards church building because the population of their vast parish was increasing rapidly. They were refused because at the time of the census of 1861 the population of Ystradyfodwg was just below 4,000 (the minimum population figure for the acceptance of grant application by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners). The parish was able to produce ample proof from other sources that even in 1864 (when they first applied for a grant) their population was well above that figure and was rising rapidly each year, since mining development was proceeding rapidly. But it was only after the census figures for 1871 had actually been published that their application was successful, by which time the population of Ystradyfodwg had risen to 16,914<sup>13</sup> and thirty pits and levels were already operating in the Rhondda valleys.<sup>14</sup> One could certainly say therefore that the Anglican system could be rather inflexible, which made effecting change a lengthy and difficult process.

There were admittedly many national and local grant-giving agencies: Queen Annes's Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, the Church Building Society, the Church Pastoral Aid Society and the Additional

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<sup>12</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield, 1810 – 1926*, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> The Census figure for 1871 gives the population of the Rhondda as 23,950 but by then the Rhondda included parts of the parishes of Llanwonno and Llantrisant (see Lewis, E. D., *The Rhondda Valleys*, p. 234).

<sup>14</sup> Brown, R. L., *Reclaiming the Wilderness*, pp. 25 – 26; and for statistical information see May, J., *Rhondda*, p. 20.

Curates Society; and for Llandaff Diocese: the Llandaff Diocese Church Extension Society, the Bishop of Llandaff's Fund and the Llandaff Poor Benefices Fund.<sup>15</sup> The problem with all these grants was the uncertainty of receiving them because parishes had to apply for them annually and if the funds of the particular charity were low in that year the money would not be forthcoming. It was, in any case, usually necessary for the parish applying for a grant to have to match that grant from its own resources. This was not easy; partly because mining communities were predominantly working class and therefore not wealthy but also because only a relatively small proportion of the mining families were Anglicans. One might have assumed that wealthy landowners, who received royalties on the coal mined under their land, and industrialists who had made their fortunes out of coal would have provided the necessary churches. Admittedly some of them did. However there were frequent complaints from diocesan and other sources that only a minority of such people were prepared to use some of their wealth to provide for ministry to people whose toil enriched them.<sup>16</sup> As early as 1879 some members of the Llandaff Diocese Church Extension Society were critical of the many industrialists who had amassed fortunes and yet had contributed nothing

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<sup>15</sup> For details of these grant-giving agencies and the use made of them by the Llandaff Diocese, see Brown, R. L., *Reclaiming the Wilderness*, pp. 22 – 33.

<sup>16</sup> *Llandaff Diocesan Magazine*, 3 (March 1904); Brown, R. L., *Reclaiming the Wilderness*, p. 31; Jones, I. G., *Communities: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1987), p. 106.



to the spiritual welfare of the masses they were responsible for bringing into the Diocese.<sup>17</sup>

Even where there were beneficent landowners and industrialists problems could arise. Robert Lee is in fact very critical of such benefactors; he argues that they exerted a very great influence over all church matters which some of them exploited to the full<sup>18</sup> and this influence, he believed, 'made churches less attractive to working people and operated to the overall detriment of the mission'.<sup>19</sup> Lee is arguably overstating the case for without the gifts of benefactors many churches could not have been built but certainly in the Rhondda such help, welcome though it was, did cause some problems. Thus the Crawshay Bailey family built a church at Ton Pentre in the Rhondda. It opened for worship in 1881 but since it was conveyed as private property it 'could not be consecrated and become eligible for the assignment of an ecclesiastical district'<sup>20</sup> which was what William Lewis, the incumbent of Ystradyfodwg, had hoped it would become so that he would have been relieved of some of the responsibility for that part of his still vast parish. The Crawshay Baileys had also chosen to build the church in Bath stone, a material not particularly suitable for the damp climate of the Rhondda (according to John May Rhondda's

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<sup>17</sup> *Llandaff Diocese Church Extension Society*, Meeting 17 April 1879 (D/DL/DC D34 in GRO), pp. 8 – 11.

<sup>18</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 181.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>20</sup> Prichard, T. J., *Representative Bodies: Glimpses of Periods in the History of Upland Glamorgan with the Aid of Contemporary Personalities* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1988), pp. 152 – 153.

annual rainfall is over ninety inches).<sup>21</sup> When faults appeared in the building the Crawshay Bailey family were very reluctant to rectify them.<sup>22</sup> Another benefactor, Mrs Llewellyn of Baglan Hall, who was responsible for building St Peter's church at Pentre (Rhondda), insisted on providing a very large edifice in the gothic style complete with tower and transepts and containing sculptured stone, mosaics, stained glass and wrought iron features.<sup>23</sup> In view of the facts that so many churches were required in order to provide adequately for the residents and that buildings in coalmining areas are likely to be affected by subsidence it might have been better, and certainly cheaper, to have provided more 'tin tabernacles' rather than a few heavy stone structures.

***(b) In the East Midlands***

As indicated above the problems for Anglicanism in the South Wales coalfield were admittedly particularly acute but the Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire coalmining communities also faced difficulties. At the Parochial Visitation of Bishop Edwyn Hoskyns of Southwell in 1911 it was recorded that in the Alfreton Deanery eighteen out of the twenty-two parishes were coalmining parishes, and of these eighteen three needed large new churches and seven urgently needed mission rooms.<sup>24</sup> The Staveley Deanery had even greater problems, for Bishop Hoskyns

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<sup>21</sup> May, J., *Rhondda*, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Davies, M., *A History of St David's, Ton Pentre* (D/D CW/L102 M in GRO).

<sup>23</sup> Prichard, T. J., *Representative Bodies*, pp. 167 – 168.

<sup>24</sup> Austin, M., *Under the Heavy Clouds: The Church of England in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire 1911: The Parochial Visitations of Edwyn Hoskyns, Bishop of Southwell* (Cardiff: Merton Press, 2004), pp. 132 – 133.

remarked that even if the 'Church Extension Society of the Diocese was to place the whole of its annual income in this rural deanery for a period of five years they would not do more than equip the Church with the bare necessities of life'.<sup>25</sup>

Extensive parishes with rapidly developing populations in areas a considerable distance from the existing parish churches were not unique to the mining valleys of South Wales. The parish of Bolsover in Derbyshire, when mining was developed there, experienced similar problems in that the bulk of the new mining population was three or four miles away from the parish church.<sup>26</sup> However, even in Hucknall, where none of the population would be further than between one and one and a half miles from the parish church and where the ground was nowhere excessively high or difficult to traverse, the need was felt for first one and later two daughter churches to cater for the needs and the convenience of the new and growing population. Arguably the felt need here was stimulated by contemporary denominational competition, for as chapter three will show the Nonconformist denominations were very active in Hucknall, and not least in the Butler's Hill area where many of the newcomers lived.

Arguably too the problems of providing an adequate number of churches in the new mining communities was greater for the Anglican church than for the other denominations, since as the established church it believed itself responsible for the whole parish, not simply for a gathered congregation. For example Bishop Hoskyns of the Southwell Diocese (then

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

consisting of the whole of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire) commented in 1911 that in a few mining communities where there was no Anglican presence he feared that the Nonconformists would not be able to grapple with the pastoral situation since they had few resident ministers.<sup>27</sup> Hoskyns clearly typified the clerical orientation of the Anglican church. The Nonconformists, unlike Anglicans, were able to set up places of worship relatively easily; any house or barn would do, they didn't need consecrated buildings, priests or permission from any central authority to begin meeting together. Their problems arose from the need to finance the building and maintenance of churches.

The problem of financial support from landowners and industrialists for building churches was less acute in the Diocese of Southwell but even so Bishop Hoskyns also expressed his criticism of those employers who were not interested in the 'moral and spiritual welfare of their people'<sup>28</sup> and he praised those who were.

Bishop Hoskyns seemed more alert to the problems that mining could cause to buildings since he recommended the provision in mining areas of simple mission buildings, then later 'spacious churches, not necessarily expensive, nor in colliery areas very heavy lest they crack'.<sup>29</sup> No doubt the main reasons that such practical common sense did not prevail were firstly munificent benefactors liked to indulge their own tastes in

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

architecture and secondly Anglicans would not want their buildings to look inferior to those of the Nonconformist churches.

### **Financial problems of the Nonconformist churches**

Financial problems connected with providing churches were not limited to the Anglican church since virtually all the records of Nonconformist churches that one reads indicate financing new churches and rebuilding or enlarging existing ones, which the vast increase in the population of these mining areas required, caused considerable difficulties. E.T. Davies viewed the speedy building of chapels by lay dominated Nonconformists as both a strength and a weakness. It was a strength in that it enabled them to establish their churches much more quickly than it was possible for Anglicans to establish theirs, but its weakness was that it led to overbuilding of chapels with small congregations.<sup>30</sup> It seems however that some of the chapels which had small congregations were launched by migrants coming into a particular community and insisting on establishing their own denomination or sect there instead of joining one of the existing Nonconformist churches. As will be seen in chapter three, this certainly occurred in Hucknall.

Occasionally there were splits within a church because some of the members regarded the other members as either ungodly or in doctrinal error and therefore no longer wanted to worship alongside them. They would then go and found their own church. At Capel Rhondda in

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<sup>30</sup> Davies, E. T., *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1965), p. 17.

Hopkinstown some misunderstanding arose at the end of the nineteenth century and the Minister and a number of members broke away from the church and commenced meeting in the Workmen's Hall where they held services in English. This group later formed the English Baptist church at Pwllgwaun. Not surprisingly, this split meant that in 1902 Capel Rhondda was struggling financially.<sup>31</sup> In Ferndale, in the Rhondda Fach, there were for some years two English Baptist churches – Bethel and Zion – that had resulted from a split. These splits were frowned upon by the Baptist denomination; the English Baptist Association for the Pontypridd district commented that two English Baptist churches 'in such close proximity were unnecessary and unseemly'.<sup>32</sup> Such splits, regarded by those outside the situation as unnecessary, often drew adverse comments, for example, in *Drysorfa* (a Calvinistic Methodist magazine) in 1852 it was argued that the motive for building many small independent chapels had been to 'gratify the conceit and personal feeling of some ten or twelve members' who chose rather to 'reign over a society where there were only five members, than to serve in a church where there were three hundred'.<sup>33</sup> W. R. Lambert also argued that 'many chapels were built under the influence of sectarian zeal or personal ambition without due regard to the heavy debts left upon them'.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Rickards, P., *Capel Rhondda (Hopkinstown), 150 Years of Christian Worship 1853 – 2003: A Review of Its History* (a computer-printed publication in GRO), pp. 5 – 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Glamorgan and Carmarthen English Baptist Association Report for the Year Ending June 30 1912. Read before the Association at Bethany, Treherbert, June 23 to June 25 1913* (D/D Bap 2/2 in GRO), p. 41.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in the *Church Quarterly Review*, 15/ 29 (October 1882), p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> Lambert, W. R., 'Some Working Class Attitudes Towards Organised Religion in Nineteenth Century Wales' in *Llafur*, 2/1 (Spring 1976), p. 5.

Arguably too some of the rebuilding and enlarging of Nonconformist churches that was virtually endemic in late nineteenth century Nonconformity, and not confined to mining regions, owed more to denominational rivalry and the excessive optimism of local congregations than to the pressure of congregational growth. An example from Hucknall illustrates this point. The Primitive Methodist church in Hucknall existed before the influx of miners but after the sinking of the mines this denomination was quick to establish a daughter church in the Butler's Hill area of the town where, as already stated above, many mining families lived. That church plant was probably justified but in 1895 'Bourne', the main Primitive Methodist church, decided to sell their old church and build a much larger and more prestigious church situated in one of the main thoroughfares of Hucknall where both the Baptists and the Wesleyans had their churches. The cost of this new church was about £4,000. Admittedly they hoped to sell their old church for £1,500, but the rest of the money would have to come from their own resources because they had no wealthy benefactors to call on. By the time of the stone laying in May 1895 they had only succeeded in raising £310 16s 0d.<sup>35</sup> A further £12 was raised at their memorial brick laying ceremony in July.<sup>36</sup> At the opening ceremony in February 1896, where two days of celebrations had raised a mere £67, the District Minister confessed that though he was confident that they had made the right decision in building this church some people were nervous of this optimism. This nervousness was hardly

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<sup>35</sup> *Hucknall Morning Star and Advertiser*, 3 May 1895, p. 5, col. 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 July 1895, p. 5, col. 3.

surprising given that in addition to their debt the estimated income from this church was assessed at £130 per annum, whilst the estimated expenses were £120 per annum.<sup>37</sup> It must have taken Bourne many years to pay off their debt.

Unlike the Anglican Church, Nonconformist congregations were responsible for both the appointment and payment of their ministers, both of which added to Nonconformist financial burdens and meant that sometimes such churches had lengthy ministerial vacancies. Zion English Baptist church in Pentre, Rhondda, for example was without a minister for four years from 1929. During this time the church had interviewed over twenty candidates but those interviewed either were deemed unsuitable or refused the salary on offer. A joint pastorship with another church could have been a solution to their problems but Zion refused this. This period coincided with a great depression in the coal industry which added to Zion's financial problems.<sup>38</sup> Not surprisingly, even the most successful churches tended to suffer when they had long periods without a minister. Tabernacle English Baptist church in Porth, which as chapters three and seven will show was a thriving church, when it had no pastor between 1908 and 1912 became 'somewhat degenerate': their membership decreased, the children's services on Sunday evenings ceased and the Band of Hope was in abeyance through lack of leadership.<sup>39</sup> It is clear then that despite the democratic organisation of Nonconformist churches and

<sup>37</sup> *Hucknall Morning Star and Advertiser*, 21 February 1896, p. 7, col. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Hughes, D. C. and Sandiford, E., *Zion 100: A History of Zion English Baptist Church Pentre 1865 – 1965* (no publication details, in GRO), pp. 27 – 29.

<sup>39</sup> *The Tabernacle Porth 1874 – 1924: a Jubilee Souvenir*, (D/141/7 in GRO), p. 18.



the fact that their very existence, unlike that of Anglican churches, does not depend on them having pastors they did suffer without them. Indeed their democratic organisation may well have contributed to their problems, for as J. R. Roberts pointed out, in South Wales during this period there was much 'competitive remuneration'; thus pastors who 'declined a call', Roberts argued, may not have been led by God but by the desire for the best living.<sup>40</sup> Ironically, when a church most needed a pastor because its numbers were falling it would almost inevitably be in financial difficulties and therefore least able to make a good offer to attract a minister.

### **Chronology of mining development in the two coalfields and its effects**

In the East Midlands the exposed coalfield<sup>41</sup> in the west of the region was in the main fully developed by the middle of the nineteenth century. The next phase of development took place in the concealed coalfield<sup>42</sup> of Nottinghamshire, mainly during the 1860s and 1870s. During this period mines were sunk in Hucknall, Annesley, Bulwell, Bestwood, the Meadows area of Nottingham (known as Clifton Colliery), Linby, Watnall and Newstead (all these were in the Leen valley) and at Huthwaite, Teversal, Silverhill and Sutton to the north of the Leen valley. The next wave of mining expansion was 1890-1910 and took place further north on the

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<sup>40</sup> Roberts, J. R., 'Bethany English Baptist Church Treherbert, 1868 – 1914' (Dissertation for BA Hons., Polytechnic of Wales, Department of Languages, 1989), p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> An exposed coalfield is one where coal is easily obtainable since it outcrops in parts on the surface and mineshafts are not deep.

<sup>42</sup> So called because coal does not outcrop on the surface and mineshafts have to be considerably deeper to reach the coal.

Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire border; new collieries included those in Bolsover, Creswell and Shirebrook (in Derbyshire) and Warsop and Forest Town (Mansfield) in Nottinghamshire. One exception to this northern development was the sinking of a colliery at Gedling (just east of Nottingham). The last major expansion came in the 1920s mainly in the area of Nottinghamshire known as the Dukeries where mines were sunk at Bilsthorpe, Blidworth, Ollerton, Clipstone, Edwinstowe and Rainworth.<sup>43</sup> At this period there were also two collieries sunk much further north near the Yorkshire border at Harworth and Langold. (Post Second World War there was some further development, but that is outside the period being considered in this study).<sup>44</sup>

In South Wales coalmining developed initially in the old iron belt and had reached the lower Rhondda by the first half of the nineteenth century. However it was the discovery of steam coal<sup>45</sup> in the Upper Rhondda in the 1850s that led to the great coal rush. By 1870 (as already stated) some thirty pits and levels were operating in the Rhondda. Development continued for the rest of the nineteenth century, but after that only a few more mines were sunk, the last one to be sunk in the Rhondda being in Treorchy in 1922.<sup>46</sup> The main difference in the chronology of mining

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<sup>43</sup> These are all referred to as the Dukeries collieries by Waller, R. J., *The Dukeries Transformed: The Social and Political Development of a Twentieth Century Coalfield* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), though on a strict definition of the area known as the Dukeries they probably would not all be included.

<sup>44</sup> For fuller details of all these developments see: Griffin, A. R., *Mining in the East Midlands* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1971); and Waller, R. J., *The Dukeries Transformed*.

<sup>45</sup> A high quality coal used primarily as fuel for firing steam locomotives (Rhondda steam coal was used by the Royal Navy until the 1920s when oil became the preferred fuel).

<sup>46</sup> May, J., *Rhondda*, p. 39.

development in these two coalfields was that whereas coalmining continued to develop and prosper for much of the twentieth century in Nottinghamshire, in the Rhondda development ceased in the early 1920s and almost immediately a rapid decline set in.<sup>47</sup>

In the Rhondda therefore development of coalmining was confined to a relatively narrow time span of intense activity. Looking at the Rhondda as it is in the twenty-first century it would seem that housing throughout the two valleys was fairly uniform, mainly terraced with no front gardens. Very little of it was company built and a considerable number of homes were owner occupied – which, as will be noted in chapter seven, proved to be a problem during the great depression of the late 1920s and 1930s. In Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire on the other hand a large proportion of miners' housing in both nineteenth century pit villages like Annesley and twentieth century ones like Ollerton was company built and owned. There was considerable difference between early unplanned mining communities like Bleak Hall in Nottinghamshire built in the early years of the nineteenth century and those built in the 1920s which were very well planned. The former had tiny houses with no amenities like sanitation and running water. The latter consisted of good sized houses with all modern conveniences such as electricity and hot water. Butterley's, the mining company responsible for building virtually a company town at Ollerton, also incorporated a sizable Anglican church at the centre of their carefully planned development and they contributed towards the stipend of the

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<sup>47</sup> For more details of coalmining development in the Rhondda see Lewis, E. D., *The Rhondda Valleys*.

priest. They also supported the development of other denominations,<sup>48</sup> which seems to indicate that even in the 1920s when attendances at churches were beginning to decline some employers still gave high priority to institutional religion. Admittedly the more cynical might attribute Butterley's motives to a desire to encourage a sober, moral and industrious workforce. Waller, for example, comments 'Although the companies insisted that they were concerned solely with the spiritual guidance of the miners, their concern with religion fits in with their policy of making every aspect of life in the colliery villages a matter for their scrutiny'.<sup>49</sup>

The original plan for Edwinstowe did include places of worship as well as 956 houses and amenities such as schools, an institute and a drill hall.<sup>50</sup> In the event only 297 houses, albeit of very high standard with all the modern facilities included, were provided along with a school, a sports field, bowling green and pavilion. The reason for this curtailment in the original plan was doubtless that of industrial strife and depression since the date was 1926; money would not have been easily available either then or in the following years.<sup>51</sup> It is perhaps significant though that leisure and sport obviously took priority over religion in the minds of the developers. This certainly would not have been the case in the nineteenth

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<sup>48</sup> For details of Ollerton, other 'company villages' and religious activity that was supported by the coal companies in the Dukeries, see Waller, R. J., *The Dukeries Transformed*, pp. 75 – 107 and 175 – 188.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>50</sup> Woodhead, M., 'Peer and Pitman' in *The Nottinghamshire Historian*, 82 (Spring/Summer 2009), p. 17, but based on an article in the *Retford Times*, 2 May 1924.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

century when earlier mining communities were built; even Bleak Hall, which consisted of only two rows of houses and had no sports facilities, had a Primitive Methodist church.

Robert Lee made a valid point therefore when he stated 'there is no such thing as a typical mining community';<sup>52</sup> since all the above indicates that the location, size and date of development of mining communities had a significant impact on the nature of each mining town or village. On the other hand, mining communities do have much in common arising from the nature of the coal industry itself and this too had its impact on institutional religion.

**Factors arising from the nature of coalmining that caused problems for the churches:**

***(a) Subsidence***

Robert Lee (referring to the Durham coalfield) stated 'By the late nineteenth century the subsidence problem had become so acute and so widespread that a diocesan meeting was called to discuss the issue'.<sup>53</sup> He then quoted from a letter of a mine owner to an incumbent who had obviously complained of subsidence. The mine owner wrote 'It is not my wish to damage the church. I am afraid that in all colliery districts there is a risk of subsidence however anxious one may be to avoid it'.<sup>54</sup> Subsidence was certainly a problem for some of the churches in the two coalfields being examined here, hence Bishop Hoskyns's recommendation,

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<sup>52</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 193.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

quoted above, that churches in the coalfield should not be too heavy. However, since many of the churches had been in existence from medieval times it would not be easy to avoid the problem. St Andrew's church at Skegby (Nottinghamshire) was one such, but it had been restored and enlarged in 1870 by the addition of a clerestory and a nine-foot extension eastwards. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, due to subsidence, girders had to be used in the repair of the tower, the chancel had to be supported by timber balks and the old vicarage next door to the church had to be demolished because it was so badly affected by subsidence.<sup>55</sup>

Another Nottinghamshire church that was a victim of subsidence was Greasley<sup>56</sup> parish church, also a medieval church, but one which by 1866 seems to have been in a poor condition though whether this condition was due to subsidence is not stated. Restoration was carried out that cost £900 but 'a few years later, subsidence due to mining operations caused great cracks to appear in the masonry, followed by the breaking away of the nave from the tower and the chancel from the nave'.<sup>57</sup> As a result of all this a major restoration, indeed practically a rebuilding of the church was carried out in 1896. This church was very fortunate in that the total cost was met by Earl Cowper, the Duke of Rutland and Messrs Barber-Walker and Co., the coal owners.

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<sup>55</sup> Clay-Dove, W., *The Story of Skegby and Stanton Hill* (published by author, c1984), p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> There was no coalmine at Greasley but subsidence would be from neighbouring Moor Green colliery.

<sup>57</sup> *The Story of Greasley Parish Church Nottinghamshire* (published by Greasley PCC in 1984 but based on a guide book to the church published in 1947), p. 11.

Not surprisingly, given the intensity of mining in the Rhondda, some of the churches here were badly affected by subsidence. The first church of St Illtyd at Williamstown was being built in 1891 and the nave and tower, which was all the church would consist of, were nearly completed when the arch and bell tower fell and the side walls collapsed, injuring three faithful members. A second church with a chancel added was erected but even that needed its roof replaced in 1912.<sup>58</sup> All Saints church in Treherbert showed signs of movement, again due to subsidence, within a few years of being built. That particular church could only afford to do the most urgent repairs; the less urgent had to wait many years for completion.<sup>59</sup> One presumes that these churches had no wealthy benefactors or colliery owners to come to their aid.

St Stephen's Ystrad Rhondda was yet another victim of subsidence. At a vestry meeting on 4 November 1899 part of a letter that they sent to their solicitors is recorded. It stated

I am also requested to write to you about the state of St Stephen's church. The solid stone arched work above the west door is cracked through, also the stone window recess and the walls at the south-west corner of the church, and the cracks are extending as if the south-west corner of the building is going to sink and drop off from the rest. Will you please see the Estate people, and if necessary write to Llwynypia colliery about the matter.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Howells, M., *History of the Church of St Illtyd, Williamstown 1894 – 1944* (Cardiff: Western Mail and Echo, 1944), pp. 6 and 19.

<sup>59</sup> Lewis, D. A., *The History of the Parish of Treherbert* (typescript, 1959), (D/D CW/L 1/105 in GRO), p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> *St Stephen's Church Ystrad Rhondda, Minute Book May 1896 – June 1918* (still in the possession of the parish), unpaginated.

Unfortunately no response to this letter is recorded. This same parish also had problems from time to time with their nearby mission room - no doubt also the result of subsidence, though the fact that both buildings are situated on steeply rising ground may not have helped.

Subsidence must, unless the collieries concerned accepted full responsibility, have caused a considerable drain on the finances of churches affected by it at a time when they were struggling anyway.

***(b) Mining Disasters***

Heavy though the financial cost to churches of subsidence was it was as nothing compared to the cost in human lives of mining disasters, mainly through explosions, that occurred in some collieries. Robert Pope states that between 1902 and 1909 in the Swansea and Cardiff districts of the coalfield there were 1,935 fatalities.<sup>61</sup> The Rhondda collieries were particularly affected in this way, as the following table<sup>62</sup> demonstrates:

*Table 2:1 Mining Disasters in Rhondda Collieries 1856 – 1905*

Year	Place	Number killed
1856	Porth	114
1867	Ferndale	178
1869	Ferndale	53
1871	Pentre	38
1879	Dinas	63
1880	Penygraig	101
1885	Maerdy	81
1896	Tylorstown	57
1905	Wattstown	119
1905	Clydach Vale	33

<sup>61</sup> Pope, R., 'Pilgrims Through a Barren Land: Nonconformists and Socialists in Wales 1906 – 1914' in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* 2000, new series 17 (2001), p. 152.

<sup>62</sup> May, J., *Rhondda*, pp. 65 – 66.



These figures do not include tragedies involving low numbers of which there were many. The ministers of all denominations must therefore have experienced considerable pastoral problems as a result of these tragedies. In the disaster at Wattstown in 1905, of the 119 people killed, 55, nearly half the total, were under the age of 20 and 14 of these were aged 14 or under. Some families sustained multi-bereavements; for example one woman Mrs Gibson lost her father, brother and son, only her husband surviving the tragedy.<sup>63</sup> A report on this disaster in *The British Weekly* stated 'The various social and religious organisations in the neighbourhood have lost heavily. Carmel Independent Church, the membership of which was greatly increased by the revival has lost eleven members. Many of the dead were children of the revival'.<sup>64</sup> Hopefully the assurance of heaven was so great at that time of religious revival that it helped to cushion the effects of the tragedy somewhat.

In Nottinghamshire / Derbyshire no major mining disasters took place in the period that this study explores, though fourteen were killed at Bilsthorpe in 1927.<sup>65</sup> Additionally there were numerous individual fatal accidents. Alan Beales, an ex-miner, has recently investigated fatalities in Nottinghamshire pits and states that in 'the first half of the twentieth century pit deaths in Nottinghamshire were running at around five every

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<sup>63</sup> See reports in *The Rhondda Leader* for 15 July 1905, p. 5, col. 3; and 22 July 1905, p. 5, col. 1.

<sup>64</sup> *British Weekly*, 20 July 1905, p. 359, col. 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Accidents and Disasters in UK Coal Mines* (a list dated 1979 in the Library of the National Coalmining Museum in Overton, Wakefield); this list is not comprehensive.

month with 1929 topping the list with sixty-four men killed'.<sup>66</sup> Thus many ministers and clergymen in Nottinghamshire would also have experienced pastoral and theological problems.

Unfortunately there seems to be little evidence from either of these coalfields concerning what clergy and ministers actually said to the bereaved. The account of the mass funerals in the *Rhondda Leader* in 1905 made no mention of funeral orations. Robert Lee, however, in his examination of the Durham coalfield (where, between 1810 and 1910, 1866 men and boys were killed in colliery disasters) was critical of the church's handling of mining disasters. The clergy, though sympathetic to the bereaved, tended, he claimed, to focus on the spiritual aspect of death and said nothing about any possible deficiency in contemporary health and safety measures. He commented too that the response of the church to disasters 'was often a kind of agonised helplessness'.<sup>67</sup> But was that an inadequate response or simply a sign of the clergy's common humanity and shared grief? If so that may have helped rather than hindered bonding between clergy and people. Arguably too, since earthly life in mining communities held so much danger and suffering, the prospect of a better life beyond death may have been a factor inclining many miners and their families towards religion.

### ***(c) Difficult working conditions leading to industrial strife***

The disasters and accidents recorded above point to the obvious fact that working conditions in coalmines could be difficult. Not only were there

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<sup>66</sup> *Nottingham Post*, 23 September 2010, p. 16, col. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 256.

the possibility of explosions, lethal amounts of gas polluting the atmosphere and ever-present coal dust for miners to inhale; there could also be faults in the coal seams, increasing the difficulty and time taken to get the coal and transport it to the surface. Since miners were then paid according to the amount of coal they raised this led inevitably to industrial disputes, of which there were many.

These industrial disputes which sometimes led to lengthy strikes in the coal industry as in 1893, 1898, 1910 – 1911 in South Wales only, 1912, 1921 and 1926, clearly would impact on institutional religion, especially in areas where mining was the sole industry and where there were no wealthy people in the locality to assist the churches financially. The financial impact on churches of the major strikes in the coal industry in 1921 and 1926 will be looked at in chapter seven.

But apart from the financial implications of industrial strife there was also the pastoral aspect. How was the clergyman/ minister to understand the position from the miners' point of view and offer them support whilst at the same time being very aware of the effects of these strikes on other workers? In some cases too the managers of the coalmines or the coal owners would attend the same church as the workers which would add to the pastoral problem. Clergymen's/ ministers' attitudes to the strikes of the 1920s will be examined in chapter seven. However during an earlier strike in 1893 Bishop Ridding of Southwell was very concerned about the effect of the miners' strike on relationships within the hundred mining parishes of his Diocese, so he sent out a confidential questionnaire to the

incumbents of these parishes asking them whether the miners' dispute had affected the morale of the parishes and the relations of the miners to the church. Many parishes indicated that there had been no major problems and that relationships had not been adversely affected, but some had experienced problems. The incumbent of Ripley in Derbyshire for example stated that 'the chapels have mostly identified themselves with the men, and as the coal owners attend the church, the church is regarded as taking sides with the masters. The miners of my Bible class have had to stand fire, for having anything to do with the church'.<sup>68</sup> The incumbent of the parish of Eastwood in Nottinghamshire gave a very alarmist reply to Ridding's question. He wrote 'It has done much harm in widening the breach between masters and men, and has stirred up a bitter spirit against the upper classes and is paving the way for a revolution'.<sup>69</sup> Being a clergyman/ minister in mining areas could not have been easy either in times of disaster or in times of prolonged unrest in the mining industry.

***(d) Unpredictable development, viability and duration of coalmines***

Clearly the success or otherwise of all industrial and business enterprises is unpredictable so the coal industry is not unique in this respect. However, due to the very large numbers that were engaged in the mining industry and given the fact that coalmines were often sunk in very rural areas, the unpredictable development, viability and duration of a coalmine could cause considerable problems. A good example of this was

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<sup>68</sup> Ridding papers (a manuscript collection), Southwell Minster Library.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

at Blidworth in Nottinghamshire where in 1925 a mission church was planned for it was anticipated that when the village to house the new mining population was complete it would have a population of between six and seven thousand. The mine opened in 1926. The Nottinghamshire Church Extension society (North Notts Coal Area) in January 1927 made a grant of £100 towards this proposed mission church and in April 1927 the Newstead Coal Company gave a site and £50. By 1928 the existing parish of Blidworth had raised £136 towards the building of this church; further grants totalling £150 were also obtained. Then in the minutes of the Church Extension Society for 7 December 1928 it was recorded that the colliery had closed, therefore grants already given were withdrawn to be used elsewhere.<sup>70</sup> The reason for this closure was that an unexpected fault had been discovered in the mine. All the miners were laid off, with no sure prospects of the mine re-opening leaving the new village deserted. The mine was in fact reopened in 1932. Thankfully, from the point of view of the Anglican church, no new church had actually been built, nor was one ever built. Presumably by then it was decided that the existing village church was not too distant anyway.

In South Wales in the vast parish of Ystradyfodwg it would have been helpful to the Anglican church to have known where and when coalmining development in the valleys would take place. In the early stages of development it looked as though Treherbert at the top end of the Rhondda Fawr would be the main focus of development. St John's church,

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<sup>70</sup> Nottinghamshire Church Extension Society: North Notts Coal Area Committee, *Minutes* (DR3/1/9/1 in NA), unpaginated.

the parish church, lower down the Rhondda, was in a poor state of repair and at that stage had relatively few people living near to it. So William Morgan, the then incumbent, planned to transfer the parish church to Treherbert where the Bute trustees had built a spacious church, but before his plans had come to fruition the focus of development had shifted back to the Pentre area where St John's was situated. In any case the new church at Treherbert could not have been used as the parish church because the Marquess of Bute, having converted to Roman Catholicism, refused to convey the church to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.<sup>71</sup> Often development was taking place simultaneously at different places in the two valleys. For example in 1870 mines were sunk at Fernhill, Cwmparc and Gelli and in 1876 at Maerdy, Pentre, Ynyshir and Llwynypia.<sup>72</sup> Admittedly in many large towns at this period of urbanisation in Britain there would have been a similar situation of uncertain development, which no doubt did cause problems for the churches, but few if any of the town parishes would have encompassed such a large and mountainous territory as did the parish of Ystradyfodwg. Furthermore when all this development was taking place in the Rhondda it would have been inconceivable that within a relatively short time, by the 1920s and 1930s, the coal industry there would go into rapid decline. Chapter seven will consider how the churches coped with this.

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<sup>71</sup> Prichard, T. J., *Representative Bodies*, p. 118.

<sup>72</sup> May, J., *Rhondda*, pp. 20, 21 and 22.

***(e) High migration rates of miners***

Rev. James Gilchrist, a parish priest from the Durham diocese, speaking at a church congress in 1881, said ‘The miners, generally speaking, are very migratory. They do not remain long in one place, so that any good work done is apt to be destroyed’.<sup>73</sup>

Robert Lee, again referring to the Durham diocese, argued ‘Migration that was at once on a massive scale and continuous may have been an economic necessity but it did terrible damage to the church’s project for spreading spiritual calm’.<sup>74</sup> But was this migratory tendency a feature of the two coalfields examined here? If so, what were the reasons for it? And most important, for the purposes of this study, was it such a major problem for the churches as Gilchrist and Lee claimed?

The following table, based on the 1881 census for Hucknall, certainly indicates a migratory tendency.

*Table 2:2 Selected streets in Hucknall showing proportion of miners born locally*

	Numbers of miners	Born in Hucknall
Allen Street	91	30
Brook Street	23	2
Eastwell Street	38	2
George Street	99	14
Hankin Street	111	30
James Street	98	2
Spring Street	20	3
Washdyke Lane	54	8
Whyburn Street	77	5

<sup>73</sup> Swaby, W. (ed.), *The Official Report of the Church Congress Newcastle-on-Tyne, 4 – 7 October 1881* (London: John Hodges, 1882), p. 137.

<sup>74</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 192.

Many of these immigrants came from older coalmining districts in Leicestershire, South East Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire. Even ten years later the 1891 census records that in the Butler's Hill area of Hucknall there were 446 heads of mining households, but of these only just over a quarter were actually born in Nottinghamshire. Sixty-eight families came from Staffordshire, 57 came from Leicestershire, 46 from Derbyshire, and 45 from Warwickshire. Of the remainder some came from non-mining areas such as Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire, but the larger portion came from other older mining areas.<sup>75</sup> Hucknall was not unique in this respect. The 1881 census of Annesley reveals that only 10 miners were born in Annesley, 59 were born nearby and 205 were from a distance; 75 of them came, like the mine owners themselves, from Leicestershire. A study on migration into Newstead in the late nineteenth century found that on average most miners had made two moves before reaching Newstead and some who were born locally moved out of the region then returned later. It also stated that in Newstead 'only 35% of the coalminers present in 1881 were still there in 1891'.<sup>76</sup>

This migratory tendency continued when new mines were sunk in the 1920s. Admittedly, as R. J. Waller rightly states, high migratory tendencies were not unique to mining communities at this time. They were also a

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<sup>75</sup> Newton, M., 'Hucknall Pits and People' in *Hucknall Torkard Times*, 5 (December 1997), sponsored by Ashfield District Council, unpaginated but statistics quoted from the article are on the 4<sup>th</sup> page of the periodical.

<sup>76</sup> Jones, P. E., 'Migration in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield: A Study of Newstead in the Late Nineteenth Century' in *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 102 (1998), p. 128.



feature of other contemporary garden villages and company towns. Even so his research has shown the turnover in workers in the mines sunk in the Dukeries was very great. For example at Thoresby colliery (where many of the miners lived in Edwinstowe) the workforce was 1,464 and in 1931 when 670 men were taken on 607 left. In 1932, out of a workforce of 1,538, 421 signed on but 348 left.<sup>77</sup> Since the colliery only dated from the late 1920s there were clearly many miners who did not stay very long. In fact the same was true for other collieries – Bilsthorpe, Harworth and Ollerton all had between 54% and 62% leaving within five years.<sup>78</sup>

This study has not included such detailed research for the Rhondda valleys, due to the enormity of the task, given the numbers involved and the relatively narrow range of Welsh surnames. However, according to E. D. Lewis many of the miners in the 1860s and 1870s came to the Rhondda from nearby Aberdare and Merthyr (thus moving from older to newer pits or from the ironworks there which between 1874 – 1879 experienced intense depression) but there were also many miners who came from the rural, non-coalmining areas of Carmarthenshire, Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire.<sup>79</sup> In the late 1860s a considerable number came from Llandinam, Caersws and Llanidloes in Montgomeryshire following David Davies a mine owner. At the beginning of the twentieth century there were many immigrants to the Rhondda from the lead mining districts of Anglesey and the depressed slate quarrying district of Caernarvonshire.

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<sup>77</sup> Waller, R. J., *The Dukeries Transformed*, table 11, p. 29.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, table 17, p. 33.

<sup>79</sup> Lewis, E. D., *The Rhondda Valleys*, p. 219.

Later an increasing number of immigrant miners came from England, mainly from the south-western counties and Gloucestershire.<sup>80</sup>

All the above indicates how migratory miners tended to be. There are several possible reasons for this. Firstly the unpredictable nature of coalmining, referred to above; if one mine was clearly undergoing problems, as for example at Blidworth (see above), miners would need to look for work elsewhere. Secondly, many of the miners who moved around a lot were unmarried and therefore had no family ties. Thirdly, as Robert Moore pointed out, in the coalmining industry inevitably profits dropped when the easier seams had been worked out.<sup>81</sup> Almost certainly when this happened conditions of obtaining the coal would be more difficult and wages would drop too. This would certainly have been the reason miners from older pits moved to Hucknall. Eric Horriben stated that in 1871 (soon after the Hucknall mines opened) Nottinghamshire miners averaged 4s.9d. to 5s.3d. a day for a nine hour shift, as against 3s.4d. to 4s.0d. for an eight hour shift in Warwickshire and Staffordshire; whilst those miners who came to Nottinghamshire from South Derbyshire and Leicestershire did so because they feared closure of their former pits.<sup>82</sup> Fourthly, according to Horriben, whilst clerical staff and labourers were recruited locally for new coalmines, the coal companies gave preference to migrant miners because they were already trained and had

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>81</sup> Moore, R., *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Cambridge: University Press, 1974), p. 89.

<sup>82</sup> Horriben, E., 'Hucknall Collieries: An Example of Nineteenth Century Migration and the Effect on a Village Community', in *Nottinghamshire Historian*, 34 (1985), p. 8.

the physique and discipline they required.<sup>83</sup> Finally some who moved would become homesick and therefore move back to their former mining communities again.

But was this migratory tendency among miners the problem for churches that Gilchrist and Lee claimed? Bishop Edwyn Hoskyns of Southwell, like Gilchrist, seemed to regard this high migratory rate in mining communities as something of a problem since concerning the incoming miners he writes of the need 'to absorb and shape a new population, which is pouring in on all sides. There are no old associations; very few ancient customs. All is new; all is fluid. The tide rises but the individuals are ever changing'.<sup>84</sup> There is certainly evidence from the Baptist church in Hucknall of this changing, in the 1870s new members from older mining communities brought with them their letters of recommendation from their former churches whereas in the early decades of the twentieth century it was Hucknall Baptist church which had to send letters of recommendation to other churches on behalf of their members who were leaving them for work in the newer mining communities of North Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire.<sup>85</sup>

This coming and going of miners could lead to a certain lack of stability in churches which is often viewed as a disadvantage since in a stable community the people are more likely to feel an affinity with a particular

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8 – 9.

<sup>84</sup> Austin, M., *Under the Heavy Clouds*, p. 76.

<sup>85</sup> Arnold, A. S., *Built upon the Foundation: Being the History of the General Baptist Church at Hucknall Nottinghamshire 1849 – 1949* (Hucknall: Notts Newspapers, 1948), pp. 25, 28 – 29.

church because their ancestors have worshipped there and they themselves will have been baptised and married there and possibly attended an occasional service. Thus they would acquire a sense of belonging to a particular church and have therefore some desire to support it – financially at least.

On the other hand the fact that new people were forever moving into the area would give each church a greater opportunity for exogenous growth. A stable community would inevitably include many people who had already rejected what the churches had to offer them; therefore unless such people experienced a change of heart, growth in institutional religion there would have to be largely endogenous. This was expected to come mainly through the Sunday schools and youth organisations attached to each church and through trying to move the adherents of the church to the fuller commitment of membership, even though this would not increase attendance at church services. Churches in fact put much of their resources into Sunday schools and youth organisations, but, as chapter seven will show, in the inter-war years there was disappointingly little transfer from junior to adult membership.

Robert Currie et al have argued that to achieve a net increase in membership a church must recruit from outside its existing families. They argued too that rapid expansion in this way invariably leads to loss as well, since whenever there is a wide constituency some of those recruited will not stay; they nevertheless will have absorbed some of the ethos of institutional religion and may then disseminate it in the community and in

fact may well be drawn back into commitment themselves.<sup>86</sup> Callum Brown also argued that a migratory population was an asset to the churches because it provided them with 'the new blood to sustain church recruitment'.<sup>87</sup> In fact, as already stated, Brown argued that it was the stagnation of industrial growth that led to the decline in adherence to religion.<sup>88</sup> On balance then the mining communities, with their rapid increase and rapid turnover of population provided a great opportunity for institutional religion to grow.

### **Conclusion**

In summary this chapter has shown that whilst mining communities were very different from each other due to their locations and eras of development, they had much in common, in that the majority of the male population of these communities were employed in, or dependent on, the coal industry with all the challenges that the very nature of coalmining presented for institutional religion. The difficulties of building and maintaining churches in the mining communities have been highlighted, as have the weaknesses inherent in certain denominational systems.

Although this chapter may appear to have contributed little to the debates examined in chapter one on secularisation and religion and the working class, arguably it has done so indirectly in that there was fairly

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<sup>86</sup> Currie, R., Gilbert, A. and Horsley, L., *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 119.

<sup>87</sup> Brown, C. in Bruce, S. (ed.), *Religion and Modernisation: Sociologists Debate the Secularisation Thesis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 53.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

general agreement on the need for increased spiritual provision in the developing mining communities. This fact alone is indicative of the value that contemporary society placed on institutional religion for as Currie et al have argued, 'a church's very existence is a product of demand for it, however unconsciously and incoherently expressed, by a part of a population'.<sup>89</sup> This is an argument that possibly has not been given sufficient weight by those who regarded the working class as largely indifferent to religion and who see secularisation as the key theme in the history of institutional religion in the modern age. Subsequent chapters will show the degree of demand for, and participation in, institutional religion by the working people themselves together with the contribution that the churches made to life in the mining communities.

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<sup>89</sup> Currie, R., Gilbert, A. and Horsley, L., *Churches and Churchgoers*, p. 119.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Strength of Nonconformity in the Two Coalfields Prior to 1914**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter two has detailed the many challenges that the rapidly mushrooming mining communities and the nature of the coalmining industry itself presented to all the churches who sought to provide for the spiritual welfare of miners and their families. This chapter will argue that in the period prior to the First World War Nonconformity formed an important element in the life of mining communities. It will be demonstrated that Nonconformity achieved a highly visible presence in the communities. The large number of churches and the 'sittings' they contained demonstrated confidence in the future of Nonconformity and in the continuing growth of the coalmining industry. It will be argued too that some of the miners and their families were not simply passive recipients of services provided for them but were actively involved in such provision. Thus not only did Nonconformity have an impact on mining communities but miners made an impact on Nonconformity. There was certainly little evidence therefore of working class alienation from religion. Denominational membership statistics will be examined in order to see the relative numerical strength of each 'cause' and for South Wales the conduct of, and the influence of, the 1904-5 revival will be examined. Most importantly, the extensive range of Nonconformist activities will be discussed in order to show the significant contribution that Nonconformity made to the quality of life in the mining communities.

**The visible presence of Protestant Nonconformity and the role of miners  
within their churches**

***(a) South Wales area***

Snell has rightly argued that the number of 'sittings' churches contain do not necessarily provide a very accurate guide to denominational strength.<sup>1</sup>

However numbers of churches and numbers of 'sittings' do provide some guide to the self-perception of denominational strength and confidence in a particular area, at least in the era when the buildings were erected.

To illustrate the enormous expansion of Nonconformity in the Rhondda one has only to compare the statistical information in *The Religious Census* of 1851 for the parish of Ystradyfodwg with the statistical information on Nonconformity in the Rhondda presented in volume six of *The Royal Commission on the Church of England and Other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* (published 1910-11 but with its statistics relating to 1905-06). In 1851 the total population of the parish of Ystradyfodwg (not exactly a match to the later Rhondda Urban District, but fairly close) was only 1,998. Only three Nonconformist churches with 'sittings' of 523 were then in existence there.<sup>2</sup> But in 1905, by which time the population of the Rhondda was somewhere between 113,735 and 152,781 (the population figures recorded by the Censuses of 1901 and

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<sup>1</sup> Snell, K. D. M., *Church and Chapel in the North Midlands: Religious Observance in the Nineteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, I. G. and Williams, D. (eds.), *The Religious Census of 1851: A Calendar of the Returns Relating to Wales*, vol. 1: *South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), pp. 189 – 190.



1911 respectively),<sup>3</sup> there were 151 Nonconformist churches with a total of 85,105 'sittings' (and this excludes Salvation Army, Unitarian and any Free Gospel halls, because their statistics were not recorded by the Royal Commission).<sup>4</sup> Certainly church building had kept pace with population expansion. The advent of coalmining had a similar effect on the religious scene in other valleys too; in the Cynon Valley, or the Aberdare Valley as it is sometimes called, in 1837 (a date that marked the ending of the iron-works and the beginning of the coalmining era) there were nine Nonconformist churches but by 1897 there were eighty-nine.<sup>5</sup>

As indicated in chapter two, Nonconformity in the South Wales valleys, as elsewhere, succumbed in a few cases to the weakness of congregational splits and arguably therefore some overbuilding of churches, but the main reason for the prolific growth in numbers of Nonconformist churches from the mid 1850s until well after the turn of the century was the zeal of the members of all denominations for building, rebuilding, enlarging and above all church planting.

This trend can be illustrated by looking at church building and church planting by the Congregationalists in the mid-Rhondda Fawr area, which consisted of four communities that merged into each other – Ystrad and Pentre on one side of the river and Ton Pentre and Gelli on the other.

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<sup>3</sup> It is a safe assumption that population increase was continuous throughout this period and therefore that the 1906 figure would have been higher than that for 1901.

<sup>4</sup> *Royal Commission on the Church of England and Other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire*, vol. 6: *Appendices to Minutes of Evidence* (London: HMSO, 1910), p. 292.

<sup>5</sup> *Chapels in the Valley: A Study in the Sociology of Welsh Nonconformity* (Merseyside: Ffynnon Press, 1975), p. 69.

These four communities comprised the Anglican parish of Ystradyfodwg as it was in 1901. Bodringallt colliery was sunk in the mid 1850s in Ystrad and as the immigrant population moved into the area a group of them founded a Welsh Congregational cause there, initially holding services in a wooden shed and later in a house. Finally in 1861 the members took the decision to build Bodringallt church, and despite the fact that many of the congregation were out of work for eight months owing to a stoppage at the colliery, the church opened in 1862. It was enlarged in 1878 and again in 1896 by which time it could accommodate 900 people. But in addition to enlarging their own church a couple of times the members of Bodringallt were responsible for several church plants. Thus a few members left in 1865 to establish a cause at Treorchy which in due course led to the building of Bethania. Bodringallt members were also largely responsible for founding Ebenezer in Tonypany. These last two churches were in other areas of the Valley, but in the parish of Ystradyfodwg itself the Congregationalists were equally active. Thus in 1867, when their own area was developing as more mines were sunk, the members decided to hold a Sunday school, week-night services and prayer meetings in a barn at Pentre and by 1869 Siloh church was built. Siloh also went through a considerable rebuilding programme. In 1877 a new, larger church was built on a different site; this was renovated in 1897. Then in 1903 classrooms were added to the old church and a mission room was built; by this time Siloh could accommodate 1,140 in total. Siloh also claimed some responsibility for establishing Congregational churches in other

parts of the valley, namely Hermon in Treorchy and Soar in Cwmparc. In its own area Siloh helped to establish an English cause in Ton Pentre in 1870, and jointly with Bodringallt it established Bethesda in Ton Pentre. This latter establishment owed its foundation to sixteen Bodringallt and twenty-one Siloh members leaving their respective churches to constitute a cause in Ton Pentre which led to the building and opening of Bethesda in 1876. Later, in 1893, as Gelli was growing, owing again to the expansion of the coalmining industry, members from Bodringallt and Bethesda organised prayer meetings, a Sunday school and house to house visiting in Gelli, a cause was established in 1895 and Bryn Seion was built and opened in 1898.<sup>6</sup>

A similar story of church planting by dismissing members of one church in order to plant the same denominational cause nearby is told by a Baptist witness to the Royal Commission.<sup>7</sup> The Appendix (pp 337 – 376) clearly shows that each Nonconformist denomination usually had several churches in each parish. Thus in the parish of Ystradyfodwg in addition to the six Congregational churches there were four Welsh Baptist churches, three English Baptist churches, four Welsh Calvinistic Methodist churches, one English Calvinistic Methodist church, two Welsh Wesleyan and two English Wesleyan churches and two Primitive Methodist churches.<sup>8</sup> There

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<sup>6</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, pp. 313 – 316.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 289, qs. 9211 – 13.

<sup>8</sup> All Primitive Methodist churches were English.

were also two Salvation Army corps, one at Gelli and one at Pentre,<sup>9</sup> making a total of twenty-six Nonconformist churches. Admittedly the Anglican church of Ystradyfodwg also had five churches and five mission rooms. It would appear therefore that the spiritual needs of this parish of between 21,000 and 26,000 inhabitants were well catered for, as was the case in the Rhondda generally. This rapid growth in church building in the late nineteenth century indicates continuing confidence in religion in this predominantly working class area.

Some of this prolific church building and church planting may have been driven by denominational competition rather than purely by zeal for the gospel. Motivation however is difficult to ascribe with any degree of certainty, and in any case is not particularly relevant here since it is the involvement of the working class in institutional religion not their motivation that is being examined.

The key questions here then are: was it miners and their families who attended these churches? and if so were they involved in their building, maintenance and leadership roles? Since the whole of the Rhondda was a predominantly working class area, with coalmining the only major industry and Nonconformist attendance reputedly high, clearly most congregations must have consisted mainly of miners and their families. The extent to which miners were involved in leadership roles and provided the finances for chapel building etc is more debatable.

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<sup>9</sup> For details of Salvation Army activity in the Rhondda see Transcript of the interview of a former miner, Trevor Davies of Ferndale, by Hywel Francis, 3 July 1970 (AUD 165 in SWML), p. 14.

E. T. Davies argued that in areas like the Rhondda, unlike the older 'iron belt' area, Nonconformist leadership was predominantly middle class (see pages 44 – 45 for details of his argument). Some enterprising miners worked themselves up the scale to colliery managers and the role of deacon in their respective churches was much coveted by them and indeed frequently accompanied that of colliery manager. Davies claimed therefore that it was no longer the working class who took the responsibility for building churches as they had done earlier in the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Similar arguments are advanced in *Chapels in the Valley* in which it is asserted that many colliery owners were 'devout Nonconformists and helped in the building of the new chapels.'<sup>11</sup> This work also claimed that some of the more intelligent, hardworking miners advanced not only in their positions in mining but also in Nonconformity. 'Thus arose an influential figure in industrial Nonconformity – the Colliery-Manager Chapel-Deacon or Elder.'<sup>12</sup>

However T. M. Bassett, writing on the Baptist church, argued that 'It was the ordinary workman who filled the seats of the new chapels, who sang in the choirs and maintained the weeknight meetings and Sunday schools ... from their ranks were enlisted the preachers ... and it was from this class that ministers of the second half of the' (nineteenth) 'century were drawn for the most part.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Davies, E. T., *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1965), pp. 147 – 149.

<sup>11</sup> *Chapels in the Valley*, p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> Bassett, T. M., *The Welsh Baptists* (Swansea: Ilston House, 1977), p. 313.

Certainly contemporary oral evidence tends to support Bassett's argument. Thus Edgar Rees Jones, a schoolmaster of Wattstown in the Rhondda, claimed that 'The communicants and congregations, with the exception of a very small percentage of other classes, consist of working miners and their families.... The trustees and officers of the churches are also mainly working miners, as are most of the young men raised to the ministry, and educated in the denominational colleges to which all the churches annually contribute.'<sup>14</sup> Rev J. T. Rhys, Chairman and Secretary of the East Glamorgan English Congregational Association, stated that the majority of ministerial students were drawn from the industrial classes and 'a very large number of them have been colliers.'<sup>15</sup> This assertion was true also of the Baptist church, since in submitting information to the Royal Commission (1910) the Principal of the Baptist Theological College in Cardiff stated that the social classes from which its students were drawn were 'various; many are from the scholastic class, such as pupil teachers, many have been engaged in business; *many are from the coal pits*' (my italics) 'and a goodly number are from agricultural districts'.<sup>16</sup> A Bible Training School was established in Porth c1919-20 by R. B. Jones, a fundamentalist Baptist minister, and, as one would expect from its location, many of its students were working miners.<sup>17</sup> In fact Rees Howells, the founder of the Bible College of Wales in Swansea (opened

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<sup>14</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 4, p. 176, q. 39284

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 338, q. 43948

<sup>16</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 7, Appendix xxi, p. 109.

<sup>17</sup> See Jones, B. P., *The King's Champions: Revival and Reaction 1905 – 1935* (Glascoed: author, 1968), pp. 215 – 230.

1924) had been a miner for many years.<sup>18</sup> Clearly therefore a good number of miners were not only highly committed Christians but were also intelligent, educated and ambitious for themselves and for their sons. Rhys Samuel Griffiths, an architect from Tonypany in the Rhondda and Deacon at Libanus Calvinistic Methodist Church in Blaenclydach, stated to the Royal Commission that out of that church's membership of 348 all but 30 were miners. Furthermore most of the money that the church required to clear its debt and meet its other requirements had come from the miners themselves. No large donations had come from colliery owners.<sup>19</sup> William Evans Thomas, from Siloh Congregational church (mentioned above) claimed that 'the chapels have been chiefly built by the colliers' coppers and the widow's mite.'<sup>20</sup> He also claimed that all the colliery owners in the Rhondda were Nonconformists and very generous, but their generosity was shown in projects benefiting the whole community, not in building churches for their particular denominations; they did not live in the Rhondda and thus their contribution to church funds was small.<sup>21</sup> This claim appears to contradict the view advanced in *Chapels in the Valley* (see above), but no doubt there are examples of Nonconformist churches founded mainly by mine owners, whilst other mine owners preferred to benefit the whole community.

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<sup>18</sup> For details of his life see Grubb, N., *Rees Howells, Intercessor* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1952).

<sup>19</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 331, qs. 10570 – 10579.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 320, q. 10136.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 326, qs. 10368 – 10373.

There is certainly oral evidence confirming the predominance of religion in the mining communities (during the period under review here) from former miners and miners' wives, as the following questions and their answers show:

From the interview of Mrs Maria Williams (born 1910) -

'Was Maerdy a particularly religious village in your childhood?'

'Well yes, I should say so, because- I mean - oh well- the chapels there was (sic), one, two, three, four fair sized chapels and they were all full I can remember...' And when asked if her father (a miner) was a religious man, she replied 'Yes, oh yes. I can remember him sitting in his big chair, you know in the corner reading his Bible'<sup>22</sup>

From the interview of Watkin Gittins (born 1903)

'Are you from a religious background?'

'Oh, yes, yes, brought up religious, yes. My sister and I had to go to Chapel...and to Sunday school'

'How many chapels in Bedlinog at that time?'

(He lists five) 'And all would be full on Sundays would they?'

'Yes, oh yes many years ago.'<sup>23</sup>

From the interview of Haydn Thomas (born 1896)

'Had your upbringing been religious as a boy?'

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<sup>22</sup> Transcript of interview of Maria Williams, interviewed by Hywel Francis, 1 July 1973 (AUD 183 in SWML), pp. 13 and 19.

<sup>23</sup> Transcript of interview of Watkin Gittins, interviewed by Alun Morgan, 15 February 1973 (AUD 230 in SWML), pp. 1 – 2. Bedlinog was a mining village in the Merthyr area.



'Oh yes, we always had to go to Sunday school, father was a Deacon see. He was a precentor, a precentor for about fourteen or fifteen years.'

'Did you keep up your religion?'

'Oh yes, well I was a precentor there (Moriah Congregational, Bedlinog) for seventeen years.' (He later became a Deacon also).<sup>24</sup>

Nearly all of twenty transcripts examined indicate a religious upbringing even though quite a few of the interviewees later abandoned religion and became socialists. However not everyone who became socialists abandoned religion; David Smith cites three men, all from the Rhondda, all colliers and members of the South Wales Miners' Federation, who were involved not only in local government but also in their own Nonconformist churches, two of them as deacons.<sup>25</sup>

Thus contemporary evidence would seem to suggest that not only did many miners have a strongly religious background and were largely responsible for financing their own churches but that at least some of them certainly had leadership roles, though in all probability many of those who became deacons or elders had also climbed the ladder in the coalmining industry. As stated in chapter one Robert Moore, referring to the miners of the Deerness valley in County Durham, argued that it was the elite piece-workers who mainly occupied leadership roles in Methodism; Hugh McLeod and other researchers on religion and the working class argued that it was the skilled rather than the unskilled

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<sup>24</sup> Transcript of interview of Haydn Thomas, interviewed by Alun Morgan, April 1974 (AUD 224 in SWML), p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, D., 'Leaders and Led' in Hopkins, K. S., *Rhondda Past and Future* (Ferndale: Rhondda Borough Council, no date but probably 1976/77), p. 48.

among the working class who were church members (see page 43). It is highly probable then that it was the face workers rather than the labourers who were the more committed to religion in the two coalfields examined here, though there is no evidence either way.

**(b) East Midlands**

Nonconformity also had a strong visible presence in the coalmining communities of the East Midlands, though Nonconformist churches were not as prolific in these communities as they were in the Rhondda, as the following comparisons indicate. In 1901 Hucknall (Nottinghamshire) had a population of 15,250 and Nonconformist provision consisted in total of twelve churches; whereas in the parish of Cwmparc and Treorchy (Rhondda) with a population in 1901 of 10,440 there were eighteen Nonconformist churches and Ferndale (Rhondda) with a population in 1901 of 15,351 had seventeen Nonconformist churches. Even Treherbert (Rhondda) with a much smaller population (8,826 in 1901) had sixteen Nonconformist churches.<sup>26</sup> However when comparing the Nonconformist provision in the East Midlands with that in South Wales two factors need to be born in mind: firstly the religious institutions of South Wales had to cater for two different language cultures whereas the East Midlands had only English speakers to provide for, and secondly, owing to the physical

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<sup>26</sup> For Hucknall's population in 1901 see *Census of England and Wales – County of Nottinghamshire* ; for details of the 12 Nonconformist churches see pp. 112 – 118. For population of Rhondda parishes see *Royal Commission (1910)*, vol. 5 *Appendices to Minutes of Evidence – Church of England*, Appendix 2, table D, p. 57; the number of churches in parishes mentioned are calculated from *Royal Commission*, vol. 6, *Appendices to Minutes of Evidence – Nonconformist County Statistics*, pp. 278 – 291.

nature of the area, housing development in the South Wales valleys had to be mainly linear whereas that of the East Midlands was mainly centrifugal. Bearing in mind these two factors, Hucknall with its twelve Nonconformist churches (in addition to its three Anglican churches and one Roman Catholic church) was well provided for spiritually. Clearly Nonconformity had a strong visible presence there, as it had in most of the industrial villages and small towns of the East Midlands.

A closer examination of Hucknall and Shirebrook with brief references to a few other mining communities and churches will illustrate the impact of coalmining on the local religious scene and the role of some of the miners in that development. Arguably this examination will also suggest that Hugh McLeod's statement that 'a clear downward trend in urban church going set in sometime between 1881 and 1902'<sup>27</sup> was less applicable to the small coalmining towns and villages since the number of Nonconformist churches there continued to grow and (as will be shown later) their maximum membership figures were not reached until the first or second decade of the twentieth century.

In 1861, prior to the sinking of its two coalmines, Hucknall, which had a population of 2,836, was an industrial village whose main industry was framework knitting. Nonconformity already had a fairly strong visible presence in the parish with the Baptist, Methodist New Connexion, Primitive Methodist and Wesleyan Methodist denominations each having one church there. The Church of England likewise had one church in

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<sup>27</sup> McLeod, H., *Religion and Society in England, 1850 – 1914* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 172.

Hucknall. By 1901 the population had risen to 15,250 and the number of Nonconformist churches (as stated above) was twelve. The Baptists still had only one church, but that one church had been rebuilt in a more prominent position and was very much larger and grander. The Wesleyans likewise still had only one church but re-sited in the same major thoroughfare as the new Baptist church. The Methodist New Connexion, in addition to enlargements to their original church, had now a daughter church in the Butler's Hill area of Hucknall. The Primitive Methodists too had greatly expanded their original church and had likewise planted a daughter church on Butler's Hill. The Congregationalists, who only arrived in Hucknall after the sinking of the mines, had by 1901 two churches and the United Methodist Free Church, the Church of Christ, the Salvation Army and its breakaway Free Gospel Mission each had one church.

In fact between 1872 and 1879 over £15,000 was spent on church building in Hucknall; then from 1884 to 1896 a further £15,000 was spent. This expenditure on church building was far greater than money spent in the same periods on building schools, a Public Hall and a Free Library.<sup>28</sup> In Hucknall, as in the Rhondda, the advent of coalmining led to a zeal for church building, rebuilding and church planting. But how much of this can be attributed to the miners themselves?

Obviously the denominations that antedated coalmining in Hucknall did not owe their existence to immigrant miners, though all largely owed their expanding membership to them. A. S. Arnold, referring to the Baptist

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<sup>28</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 1 September 1938, p. 6, col. 3.

church, stated that 'much of the development took place after the opening of the collieries.'<sup>29</sup> However, with regard to the denominations that came into Hucknall after the sinking of the mines, some owed their existence to immigrant mining families and some did not. Thus the Congregational church did not come into existence as a result of Congregationalist miners migrating to the area, as seemed to be the case in the parish of Ystradyfodwg (described above), but was planted as a result of efforts by two pastors and a number of students from the Congregational Institute in Nottingham. In 1867, within a year of coalmining coming to Hucknall, they conducted a house to house mission on Butler's Hill estate and held services initially in a disused framesmith's shop; they built a tin tabernacle before erecting their permanent church in 1879. Many of the residents of Butler's Hill were coalmining families but they were not the initiators of Congregationalism in their area. Indeed the historian of Congregationalism in Hucknall refers to the miners as a 'motley crew' and praises the early church workers for their efforts to 'transform into good citizens the rougher element among the immigrants to Hucknall.'<sup>30</sup> This remark certainly indicates that a degree of class prejudice existed in Hucknall in 1917, though there is no available evidence of the social composition of Hucknall Congregational church.

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<sup>29</sup> Arnold, A. S., *Built Upon the Foundation: Being the History of the General Baptist Church at Hucknall, Nottinghamshire 1849 – 1949* (Hucknall: Notts Newspapers, 1948), p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> Brecknock, A., *History of the Hucknall Congregational Church 1867 – 1917* (Hucknall: Haywood & Davenport, 1917), p. 15.

However, in Eastwood, a nearby mining town, the Congregational church was 'sponsored by employers' and its congregation (according to oral evidence) consisted largely of 'white waistcoats and officials of the colliery' unlike the Baptist church there which was 'a product of working class self-help.'<sup>31</sup> The situation in Eastwood was not necessarily typical of all mining communities in the East Midlands; in Hucknall, for example, there is little evidence of ordinary miners holding leading positions in the Baptist church but William Joynes, who came to Hucknall from Tamworth in 1880 and was Secretary of the Hucknall Collieries Officials' Association, held the offices of local preacher, Sunday School superintendent, deacon, elder, trustee and church secretary.<sup>32</sup> Other officials at this church were in the main leading hosiers and tradesmen of the town. By contrast in Ashfield (that is Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield) the Baptists were predominantly working class, many of them miners. One of the deacons who was also a Sunday School teacher for many years was a miner, and another of the deacons who held office from 1899-1914 was a Colliery labourer.<sup>33</sup> He must have been an exception to the general argument that it was the skilled, not the unskilled, working class who were church members or held leadership positions in the churches.

In complete contrast to the position in the Congregational and the Baptist churches in Hucknall, the United Methodist Free Church was formed by

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<sup>31</sup> McLeod, H., 'New Perspectives on Victorian Working Class Religion' in *Oral History Journal*, 14/1 (1986), p. 39.

<sup>32</sup> Arnold, A. S., *Built Upon the Foundation*, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> Breckles, R., 'The Social History of Ashfield 1880 – 1930 with special reference to the role and influence of organised religion' (unpublished M. Phil. thesis, University of Nottingham, 1993), pp. 302 – 303.

immigrant mining families from Staffordshire. They began with open-air evangelism in the neighbourhood, then in 1876 they rented a public building for their services before venturing to build their own church by taking it in turns to dig out the foundations. Their church was opened the following year and by 1901 they added an upper storey since there was no room on the site for ground floor extension.<sup>34</sup> Mr John Coxon, the first secretary of this church, came to Hucknall from Kimberley (a nearby mining village) and originally had a cobbler's shop on Butler's Hill but later worked at one of the collieries.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly the Church of Christ in Hucknall owed its existence to coalmining families moving into Hucknall from neighbouring Bulwell. The initial attempts of these families to found a church by renting two rooms on the Butler's Hill estate failed but, nothing daunted, a year or two later they hired the Public Hall in Hucknall before eventually building their own church in 1896.<sup>36</sup>

The Free Gospel Mission Church, which later became the Wesleyan Reform Church, was not formed by immigrating miners but by a group of men, mostly miners, who broke away from the Salvation Army corps in Hucknall which had been planted by the Bulwell corps. The Free Gospel missionaries broke away because they disagreed with the centralising policies of the Salvation Army. They believed that money collected in Hucknall should be spent on Hucknall. They initially held meetings in the

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<sup>34</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 28 October 1937, p. 5, col. 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 October 1937, p. 5, col. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Newton, M., *One More Step: a Look at Ten Hucknall Churches* (Hucknall: Author, 1997), p. 21.

open-air, then in 1880 held weeknight services in an old barn and Sunday evening services in the former Baptist chapel; in 1882 they purchased the former Wesleyan church then finally in 1906, having outgrown this accommodation, they built a new church on a town centre site.<sup>37</sup> This church had become a Wesleyan Reform church in 1902. There seems to have been strong resistance to employing a minister for it was not until the Second World War that they had one. However William Fowkes, a miner and one of their early members, acted as a minister not only in leading services and preaching but also in conducting funerals.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the above churches founded by coalminers, many miners were involved in Primitive Methodism in Hucknall. Thus in 1890, of the eighteen trustees of Bourne Primitive Methodist Church, two were colliery deputies, eight were miners, one was a banksman (who presumably was a surface worker at the colliery) and one was labourer.<sup>39</sup> The congregation of their daughter church on Butler's Hill must certainly have been mainly miners and their families, since an examination of their baptism registers from 1891 onwards reveals that of the 117 children baptised there all but ten of them were miners' children.<sup>40</sup> At the Primitive Methodist church in Beauvale (a few miles west of Hucknall) miners certainly predominated and held positions of responsibility. Thus a trustee list for 1887 shows that

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Morley, H., 'The Religious Life of Hucknall' in *Hucknall Dispatch*, 13 January 1961, p. 3, cols. 5 and 6.

<sup>39</sup> Bourne Primitive Methodist Church – Trustees listed in the catalogue entry (NC/MR 7/172 in NA).

<sup>40</sup> Transcript of the Baptism Register for Cavendish Street Primitive Methodist Church, Butler's Hill, 1891 – 1930 (NC/MR7/338 in NA). NB. There is a gap in this transcript from 1911 to 1923.



eight out of the ten trustees were miners, and a list of trustees for 1889 indicates that six out of seven trustees were miners. Furthermore one of them was a local preacher, class leader and Sunday School superintendent, another of them was Society Steward, class leader and Sunday School teacher, and yet another was Choirmaster.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand at the Primitive Methodist church in Stanton Hill (a mining area on the outskirts of Sutton-in-Ashfield), only five out of twelve trustees were miners, but of these five one was also treasurer, another was a Society steward, and two were local preachers.<sup>42</sup>

The fact that some miners did hold significant leadership positions in their respective churches is evidenced supremely at the Primitive Methodist church in Newstead Colliery Village. Here John Geary, a miner and resident at one of the pit houses in the village, was a local preacher for fifty-four years, Sunday school superintendent for forty-nine years, a class leader for forty-six years, Society steward for thirty-five years, trust treasurer for thirty-seven years and caretaker for seventeen years.<sup>43</sup>

Shirebrook (Derbyshire), where the colmine was not sunk until 1896, presents a similar story in terms of the impact of coalmining on the local religious scene. The population in 1891 was 596 (some of whom were miners in coalmines nearby). Then there were just two places of worship, the parish church, built in 1843, and a small Primitive Methodist church,

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<sup>41</sup> Bronson, J., *'Beauvale Prims': Beauvale Primitive Methodists 1818 – 1889* (Ilkeston: Morley's Print and Publishing, 2000), pp. 61 – 85.

<sup>42</sup> Minutes, 23 Sept 1875, in *Minute Book of the Primitive Methodist Society Stanton Hill 1875 – 1896* (NC/MR 13/34 /1 in NA).

<sup>43</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 20 July 1944, p. 3, col. 4.

built in 1849. By 1901 the population of Shirebrook was 6,641. With the advent of mining in Shirebrook itself no less than five additional Nonconformist denominations established churches there and the Primitive Methodists rebuilt their church, and all this church planting and building took place in a relatively short time.

The Wesleyan Methodists started to worship in a disused barn in 1896 and had opened their church by 1899. The United Methodist Free Church started in a local school building before building its own church 'Zion' in 1901. The Salvation Army established itself in Shirebrook in 1899. The Primitive Methodists (who antedated the sinking of the coalmine in Shirebrook) obviously expanded their membership since in 1901 they opened their new church.<sup>44</sup> Also in 1901 the Baptists established their first church in a makeshift wooden hut in the Model Village; this was replaced by a more substantial building in 1914.<sup>45</sup> Despite their move to a new building the adult membership of this church was very small, never higher than fifty-two and down to twelve by 1914. The Sunday school however was considerably larger, reaching its peak of 192 in 1913.<sup>46</sup> It has not been possible to trace who was responsible for establishing these churches or what role miners held within them.

In the case of the Congregationalists however it was, as in Hucknall, a denominational church plant. In 1901 the Derbyshire Congregational

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<sup>44</sup> Skirrey, T. P., *A History of Shirebrook* (Shirebrook: published by author, 1988), pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>45</sup> Sadler, G., *Shirebrook in Old Picture Post Cards* (Netherlands: 1993 ), pp. 34 – 35.

<sup>46</sup> Statistics taken from the *Baptist Church Handbook* (relevant years); by 1920 Shirebrook no longer appears in the *Baptist Church Handbook*.

Union decided to open a room in Shirebrook in which to hold services. They made themselves responsible for the financial commitment and the Nottinghamshire Congregational Union 'donated £20 towards the furnishing of the room.'<sup>47</sup> A student pastor from the Congregational Institute in Nottingham was delegated to commence the work. Sunday and weeknight services were started and a Sunday school formed. Since steady progress was made and none of the other Free Churches in Shirebrook had a resident minister the Chesterfield District of the Derbyshire Congregational Union decided in 1902 to appoint a resident minister. In July 1904 (by which time the membership was twenty-seven, the average attendance was about one hundred adults and the Sunday school attracted attendances of about one hundred) the foundation stone of a permanent church was laid. This church was opened in February 1905.<sup>48</sup> It was erected in the Model Village area of Shirebrook. Roberts and Sadler claim 'There was a feeling by some miners in the early days that the best means of advancement at work was to join the Congregational church.'<sup>49</sup> This remark perhaps implies that Arnold Lupton, the managing director of the colliery and the person responsible for the building of the Model Village, was a Congregationalist. He does not appear however to have been a member of Shirebrook Congregational Church since he is not listed as a deacon, nor as a founder member. In fact the social constitution of the membership is difficult to determine. From

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<sup>47</sup> 'Congregational Church Records: Shirebrook' (D5049/3 in DRO), unpaginated.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Roberts, E. I. and Sadler, G. *Shirebrook: Birth of a Colliery* (Shirebrook and District History Group, 1991), p. 16.

*Kelly's Directory of Derbyshire* 1908 it has been possible to trace two of the four deacons as being shopkeepers and one of the founder members as being a shopkeeper. The fact that none of the other names are mentioned in *Kelly's* possibly suggests that they were not of managerial status, but they could have been ambitious miners as the remark by Roberts and Sadler also implies.

This examination of Hucknall and Shirebrook indicates that the sinking of collieries in a village certainly led to the planting of more Nonconformist denominations and the re-building of existing Nonconformist churches in the area, both of which considerably increased the visible presence of Nonconformity in those places. This was so in all coalmining communities in both South Wales and the East Midlands though the role played by the miners themselves in building, planting and leadership seems to have varied. In the East Midlands it seems to have been the Primitive Methodists and the United Methodist Free Churches and possibly Gospel Mission churches in which miners were more likely to have leadership roles.

### **Some problems relating to statistical information**

The above sections have shown that the provision made by the Nonconformists for the spiritual welfare of the ever-growing population in the two mining areas was certainly adequate, but was it not in fact excessive? It is not possible to answer this question without looking first at statistics concerning usage and then at the activities which the

Nonconformist churches provided. Ideally one would need to examine attendance figures but these are not readily available or accurately kept, as the Royal Commissioners examining the state of the churches in Wales in c1906 found. Thus Canon W. Lewis (Vicar of the parish of Ystradyfodwg), when asked to estimate the proportion of people who attended places of worship in the Rhondda, claimed that a very large proportion of the population did not attend places of worship. He estimated this proportion to be between 30% and 40% and further claimed that of the 65% who did attend many only did so occasionally.<sup>50</sup> When R. S. Griffiths (Deacon and Secretary of Libanus Calvinistic Methodist Church, Blaenclydach) was asked the same question he claimed that there were very few who did not attend any place of worship and estimated attendance as 85%. He stated that the non-attenders were in the main 'monoglot Englishmen'.<sup>51</sup> Understandably therefore the authors of the Report concluded that 'no statistical calculations can be safely based upon estimates of so vague and varying a character'.<sup>52</sup> Membership statistics however are a much more reliable source for determining the strength of churches since these were recorded and published and membership of a Nonconformist church indicated a fairly high degree of commitment both financially and in attendance. Membership lists were

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<sup>50</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, pp. 195 – 196, qs. 5914 and 5968.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 333 – 334, qs. 10669 – 10670 and 10694.

<sup>52</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 1, p. 55, lines 33 – 34.

still revised regularly and there is plenty of evidence of this in both the Royal Commission 1910 and in the minutes of individual churches.<sup>53</sup>

However Nonconformist membership statistics are one area where it is not easy to make a comparison between the two coalfields. This is due to two factors: firstly only Baptist, Congregationalist, and for South Wales, Calvinistic Methodist churches have systematically recorded membership statistics for each specific church (all the other branches of Methodism have recorded their statistics at Circuit level only) and whereas in South Wales the Baptists, Congregationalists and Calvinistic Methodists were the major denominations, and Primitive Methodism was only a minor denomination, in the East Midlands it was the various branches of Methodism that predominated in the coalfield (even the smallest mining village had its Primitive Methodist church).

Secondly, for Wales only there was a Royal Commission on the state of the churches, the statistical information for which was gathered and recorded at the very time that the Nonconformists, as a result of the great revival of 1904/5, were generally at their maximum strength. This revival, which will be examined below, inevitably affected the pattern of growth and decline in South Wales. However, from the statistics that are available one obvious fact emerges, namely that Nonconformity was overall generally much stronger numerically in South Wales than in the East Midlands. In the East Midlands however a greater proportion of the coalfield was in small, often isolated, villages, whereas in the intensively-

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<sup>53</sup> For examples of this see: *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 285, qs. 8982 – 8989 and 8996; and *Baptist Church Hucknall Minute Book 1874 – 1900* (NC/BP 25/2 in NA), p. 117.

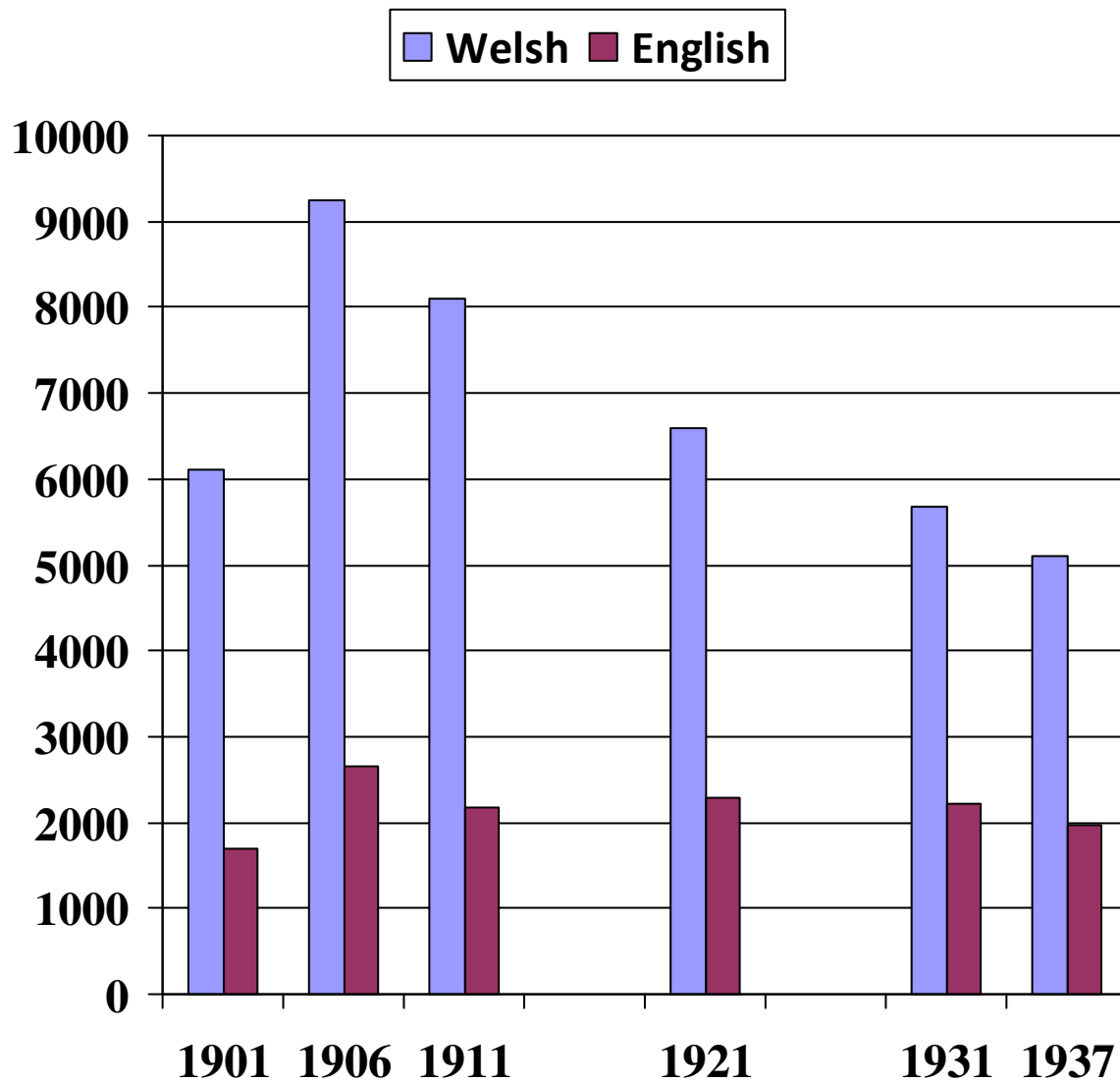
mined Rhondda the whole of the two valleys formed one large Urban District.

### **Nonconformist membership statistics**

#### ***Rhondda Valleys***

Detailed statistics of each individual church are given in the Appendix (pp 334 – 373). The overall position of adult membership in the three major denominations is shown in *graphs 3:1, 3:2, and 3:3* on the following pages.

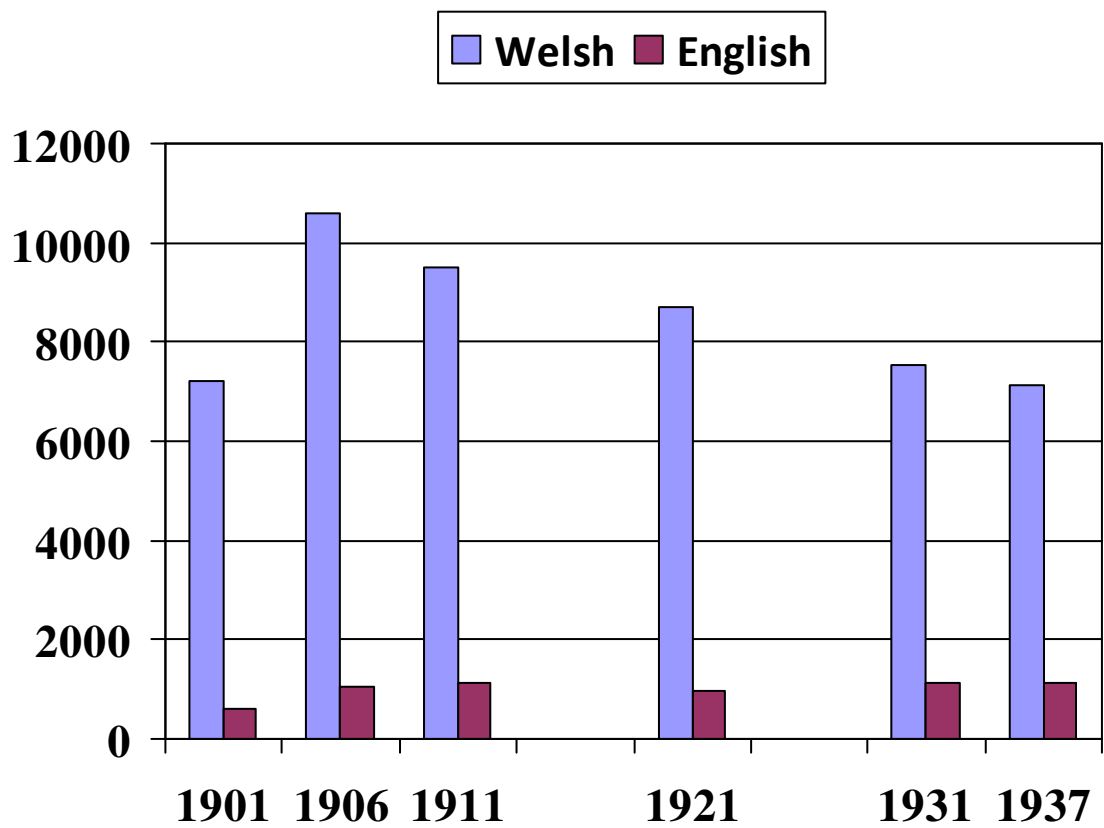
**Graph 3.1**  
**Baptist Membership - Rhondda**



Sources: for 1906 – Royal Commission  
 Other years – Baptist Handbooks for relevant years

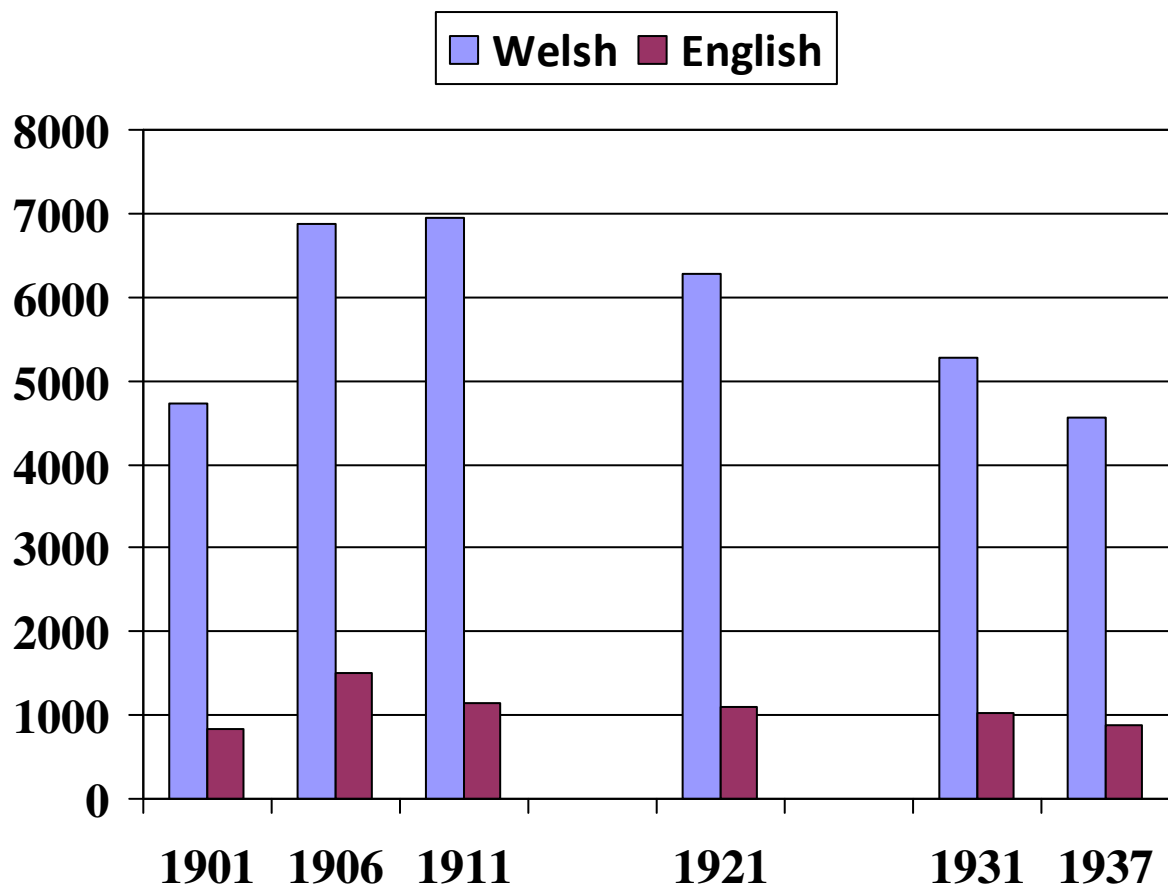


**Graph 3.2**  
**Congregational Membership -**  
**Rhondda**



Sources: for 1906 – Royal Commission (1910)  
Other years – Congregational Yearbooks for relevant years

**Graph 3.3**  
**Calvinistic Methodist Membership -**  
**Rhondda**



Sources: for 1906 – Royal Commission (1910)  
 Other years – Calvinistic Methodist Yearbooks for relevant years

The graphs for Welsh Baptist and Welsh Congregationalist churches reveal a very steep rise in membership between 1901 and 1905, indicating the profound effect the Welsh Revival had on membership of their respective churches. In both cases this peak membership was followed by unbroken decline, but the decline was less steep than the growth had been and membership remained, for the Welsh Congregational church, above the pre-Revival level even in 1937. In the case of the Baptist church, membership remained above the pre-Revival figure until sometime in the 1920s. It is noticeable that the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church was less numerically strong than the other two denominations referred to above and did not reach its peak membership until 1911. Then like the others it declined but less dramatically than it had increased. Predictably, membership of the English churches of all three denominations was much lower than that of the Welsh churches, and their pattern of growth and decline was more fluctuating. The English Baptist church is the only one of the English denominations that reached its peak membership in 1905; the English Calvinistic Methodists reached their peak in 1911, but the English Congregationalists did not reach their peak until 1937. All three denominations remained above their pre-Revival levels, which is hardly surprising since the number of English speakers in the Rhondda would be increasing in the twentieth century.

### 1904-1905 The Welsh revival

Since the 1904-1905 revival considerably increased Nonconformist membership it will be examined briefly by looking at local contemporary press reports, near contemporary comments and more recent analysis, so that its impact on the mining communities and on institutional religion might be assessed.

On Saturday 26 November 1904, near the beginning of the revival, the *Rhondda Leader* announced that 'Mr Evan Roberts, the outstanding figure in the present upheaval of religious feelings ... is visiting the Rhondda next week ... great things are expected from his visit to this locality'.<sup>54</sup> However, it is obvious from the rest of the report, and indeed from previous editions of the paper, that the revival in the Rhondda did not begin with the visit of Evan Roberts. A mid-Rhondda mission was already taking place in Llwynypia<sup>55</sup> and there was also considerable spiritual activity in many different places throughout the Rhondda in various Nonconformist churches, both Welsh and English; for example Rev. James Oatey, from London, it was reported, 'continues his mission at the English Wesleyan chapel in Llwynypia, where already about two hundred converts have been made' and Mrs Askew was 'labouring with the Primitive Methodist Mission Hall, Tyntyla Rd. Here too the Spirit of God is mightily working'.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Rhondda Leader*, 26 November 1904, p. 7, col. 1.

<sup>55</sup> For an account of this see *Rhondda Leader*, 29 October 1904, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> *Rhondda Leader*, 26 November 1904, p. 7, col. 1.

Furthermore, at Noddfa chapel in Treorchy, where there had been very large crowds, the form that the worship took was typical of the revival as a whole. The *Rhondda Leader* reported 'There was no order or method to go by; the Spirit led, and there were remarkable outbursts of emotional feeling evoked by the unquenchable devotions and spontaneous pleadings of those who prayed, innumerable in number ... fifty-three conversions were reported up to 10.45pm [after which time] the big crowd wended its way up the street, singing along the route and ultimately halting on the Cardiff Arms Square where another impromptu meeting was held'.<sup>57</sup> In the Rhondda Fach too there were accounts of similar style revival meetings. Thus at Seion Welsh Baptist church in Maerdy 'though disorder reigned, there was no confusion. Truly a wonderful meeting ... [and at Penuel Welsh Calvinistic Methodist church Ferndale] here again there was an entire absence of preaching ... and truly wonderful were the results, men and women who had never hitherto taken public part in worship spoke fluently and with power ... and at the Great Western Colliery [Hafod in the Lower Rhondda] for over a week past, the men have been holding prayer meetings underground'.<sup>58</sup>

Clearly then the revival in the Rhondda was not inaugurated by Evan Roberts since it began before he visited the area. An account of Evan Roberts's visit to Treorchy stated 'the visit of Mr Evan Roberts did not and was not expected to raise the fervour and enthusiasm to a higher pitch.

And we are afraid that the audience at Bethania Chapel on Tuesday

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<sup>57</sup> *Rhondda Leader*, 26 November 1904, p. 7, col. 1.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 November 1904, p. 7, col. 2.

contained a big percentage of curious onlookers; people who wanted to be fascinated by the external appearance of a man instead of being imbued with the Spirit'.<sup>59</sup> Clearly many who attended these revival meetings were miners, since W. T. Stead<sup>60</sup> reporting on services he had attended in Maerdy stated 'the majority of the congregation were stalwart young miners'.<sup>61</sup>

The reports from the *Rhondda Leader* (quoted above) indicate some of the major features of the revival: organisation, theology, liturgy and ecclesiology were certainly not its strong points; even preaching and scripture were not key elements in the revival; hymn singing, extempore prayer and strong emotional response were dominant throughout the revival and these effects were not limited to the actual services, for as H. E. Lewis (writing in 1906) stated the revival 'penetrated everywhere and pervaded everything. It was talked of in every railway train, and many a railway compartment became a place of united prayer ... coalmines had their sanctuaries where prayer meetings were regularly held. And these meetings had their tale of conversions'.<sup>62</sup> One could say then that during the revival there was a sacralisation of the secular – a most unusual phenomenon.

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<sup>59</sup> *Rhondda Leader*, 3 December 1904, p. 5, col. 3.

<sup>60</sup> W. T. Stead was the son of a Congregational Minister, but was best known as a prolific, sometimes controversial, journalist. He was the editor of *The Review of Reviews* and *Masterpiece Library* (see *Who Was Who*, vol. 1, 1897 – 1915, p. 672).

<sup>61</sup> Stead, W. T., *The Revival in the West: A Narrative of Facts* (London: The Review of Reviews Publishing Office, 1904), p. 37.

<sup>62</sup> Lewis, H. E., *With Christ Among the Miners: Incidents and Impressions of the Welsh Revival* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), p. 99.

Furthermore, the conversion of many miners had its effects in the mines and on the mining communities, for in addition to the prayer meetings 'the horses underground were sensible of the difference which these days made. They were obliged to learn the meaning of a new and milder language than they had been accustomed to'.<sup>63</sup> Reports on converts in the *Rhondda Leader* stated 'some of the most notorious drunkards, pugilists and gamblers have been converted ... a large number have signed the pledge of total abstinence'. One convert 'a noted pugilist, and winner of many prizes ... burnt all the silver cups to ashes'. Another convert, a rugby player from Treorchy, 'has intimated that he intends to give up football and did not don the jersey last Saturday'.<sup>64</sup> Temporarily therefore crime rates fell, pubs lost many customers and some rugby clubs closed. Arguably it was the over-reaction of many of the converts that ensured the temporary nature of the revival.

Not surprisingly, the revival attracted considerable attention, not just in Christian circles but also in the secular press. The *Western Mail* for example gave extensive coverage to the revival. As E. J. Gitre argues, modern communications and technology (especially the extensive rail network in the South Wales coalfield), far from diminishing the social significance of religion, aided the spread of the revival and drew thousands of visitors to the area.<sup>65</sup> Gitre's comment on the great number of visitors the revival attracted to the mining valleys is no exaggeration for

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>64</sup> *Rhondda Leader*, 7 January 1905, p. 3, cols. 2, 3 and 5.

<sup>65</sup> See Gitre, E. J., 'The 1904 – 05 Welsh Revival: Modernisation, Technologies, and Techniques of the Self' in *Church History*, 73/ 4 (December 2004), pp. 792 – 827.

H. E. Lewis, drawing on his own experience there, wrote 'the miners themselves were almost ousted from their own chapels by the crowd of strangers, from many lands, which day after day, poured into these narrow, winding valleys';<sup>66</sup> though whether this widespread interest and the attraction of so many visitors were assets to the revival or not is debatable. Gitre clearly considers that they were, but the report from the *Rhondda Leader* 3 December (quoted above) is mildly critical as it referred to 'curious onlookers' who were fascinated by Evan Roberts rather than being 'imbued with the Spirit'. And a contemporary critic of the revival, J. Vyrnwy Morgan, complained that the visitors who only made flying visits and spoke to Evan Roberts got no true impression of what was happening, yet it was their reports that were accepted as truth by the world.<sup>67</sup> Morgan tended to accept the views of Peter Price from Dowlais, a virulent critic of Evan Roberts, who argued that there were two revivals, the genuine one led by the Holy Spirit and the false one led by Evan Roberts, who far from being led by the Holy Spirit tried to control the Spirit.<sup>68</sup> Price claimed that there had been far more converts in his own chapel before Evan Roberts and all the visitors had arrived.<sup>69</sup>

Critical opinion of the revival and its impact has varied. H. E. Lewis, writing in 1906, rather prematurely commented that 'the entire history of Wales

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<sup>66</sup> Lewis, H. E., *With Christ Among the Miners*, p. 85.

<sup>67</sup> Morgan, J. V., *The Welsh Religious Revival 1904 – 5: A Retrospect and a Criticism* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1909), p. 71.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.



has been reshaped by it'.<sup>70</sup> He also envisaged global consequences of the revival – 'through the length and breadth of Christendom the joy of Wales was heard, awaking echoes on the veldt, among the Andes, beneath the Southern Cross ... The story of the revival among the Welsh colony of Patagonia is as wonderful as anything in the homeland; and the effect of that on portions of South America is not yet concluded'.<sup>71</sup> Others have been less sanguine. Overall, Morgan admitted that many souls had been changed for the better by the revival and that the revival itself showed the existence of a rich spiritual world but 'there has not sprung up in its [the revival's] tracks anything of a general and permanent character ... vital religion has not been made more effective in our industrial centres, agricultural districts or coal regions'.<sup>72</sup>

Some later scholars made similar comments and have possibly been too dismissive of the revival. E. T. Davies for example stated that 'within two years the decline set in' and 'workers were more and more listening to the socialist gospel'.<sup>73</sup> Up to a point this was true but he failed to acknowledge any positive aspects of the revival. T. M. Bassett too is somewhat dismissive of the revival for he stated that whilst some remained faithful, on the whole 'the new recruits disappeared as quickly as they had come in'.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, Robert Pope, who has written extensively on the

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<sup>70</sup> Lewis, H. E., *With Christ Among the Miners*, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>72</sup> Morgan, J. V., *The Welsh Religious Revival*, p. 254.

<sup>73</sup> Davies, E. T., *Religion in an Industrial Society*, p. 171.

<sup>74</sup> Bassett, T. M., *The Welsh Baptists*, p. 378.

revival,<sup>75</sup> presents a much more positive view of it. He claimed that ‘in the popular religious mind, the revival was remembered as being a means of persuading a considerable number of people that they were loved, valued and forgiven and their lives were never the same again’.<sup>76</sup> He admitted that post-revival denominational decline did set in fairly quickly but the vast majority who were touched by the revival remained faithful, having experienced a renewal that deeply affected their lives. ‘Their failure came in transferring that to the next generation’.<sup>77</sup> But transferring personal experience, unlike passing on doctrine, is difficult; although arguably lives that have been transformed by religion should witness at a subliminal level to others.

The comments of Davies, Bassett and Pope (quoted above) focus only on the long-term effect on religion in Wales. Gitre, on the other hand, looks at the effects of the revival in a more global perspective. He argues that although the revival itself was ephemeral and ‘it ended as quickly as it began’, nevertheless ‘the consequences were immense, as evidenced by the global rise of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity’.<sup>78</sup> In one of Pope’s articles on the Welsh revival, he too affirms this link with Pentecostalism by stating that both George Jeffreys (who later founded the Elim Four Square Gospel Alliance) and Daniel Powell Williams (who

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<sup>75</sup> See for example Pope, R., ‘The Welsh Religious Revival, 1904 – 5’ in *Merthyr Historian*, 17 (2004), pp. 41 – 63; Pope, R., ‘Evan Roberts in Theological Context’ in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion 2004*, new series 11 (2005), pp. 144 – 169; Pope, R., ‘Demythologising the Evan Roberts Revival 1904 – 1905’ in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 57/3 (2006), pp. 515 – 534.

<sup>76</sup> Pope, R., ‘The Welsh Religious Revival 1904 – 5’ in *Merthyr Historian*, 17 (2004), p. 41.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>78</sup> Gitre, E. J., ‘The 1904 – 05 Welsh Revival’ in *Church History*, 73 (2004), p. 826.

later founded the Apostolic Church) were converted during the Welsh revival. The rise of Pentecostalism was therefore ‘perhaps the revival’s most enduring legacy’.<sup>79</sup> So although generally the local effects of the revival proved to be very temporary, arguably it halted for a short while the rising tide of secularisation and it had a life transforming effect on a considerable number of individuals. Furthermore globally it helped to give birth to modern Pentecostalism, so it did leave its mark on institutional religion.

#### **Comments on the statistics of individual churches in the Rhondda**

When one looks at the membership statistics for individual Nonconformist churches in the Rhondda (see Appendix pp 337 – 376), even in 1911 many of them remain impressive, a considerable number being in excess of 300 members and some considerably more and in most parishes, as already observed, there was more than one Nonconformist church of each denomination. Denis Morgan’s claim that ‘Between the turn of the century and the onset of the Great War Wales remained a remarkably Christian country’<sup>80</sup> seems well justified so far as the Rhondda valleys are concerned.

Interestingly, the statistics of the individual churches do not necessarily conform to the overall pattern. Thus whilst overall Nonconformity

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<sup>79</sup> Pope, R., ‘Evan Roberts in Theological Context’ in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 2004, p. 166.

<sup>80</sup> Morgan, D. D., ‘“The Essence of Welshness”: Some Aspects of Faith and National Identity in Wales, c 1900 – 2000’, in Pope, R. (ed.), *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland c 1700 – 2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. 140.

reached its maximum numerical strength in 1905/6, on an individual church basis this 1905 peak applied to only fifty out of eighty-six Welsh Nonconformist churches (looking only at the three major denominations) in the Rhondda and to only sixteen out of thirty-three English Nonconformist churches. This could be because some areas of the Rhondda were still rapidly developing; Ynyshir, for example, almost doubled its population between 1901 and 1911. Not surprisingly therefore in Ynyshir all three major Nonconformist denominations reached their maximum numbers in 1911. Or it could be that some churches had a more charismatic minister at a later date. Tabernacle, the English Baptist church in Porth, is a good example of the latter. They had experienced a significant rise in membership in 1905 – 1906 but had rapidly declined to almost their pre-revival levels by 1911. In 1919 Rev. R. B. Jones, one of the leading evangelists of the revival period, accepted the pastorate of Tabernacle. He was a fundamentalist, totally against modern liberal theology (see pp 316 – 318) and during his pastorate of Tabernacle membership increased again rapidly to well in excess of the 1905 – 1906 levels, only to decline again after he left. It is possible that as the newer, more liberal, theology gained ground those who in his time opposed it gravitated to Tabernacle.

The English Congregational Church in Porth was also a maverick church for this church reached its maximum membership (at least in the years recorded here) in 1937, though interestingly the two Welsh Congregational churches in Porth reached their lowest membership levels

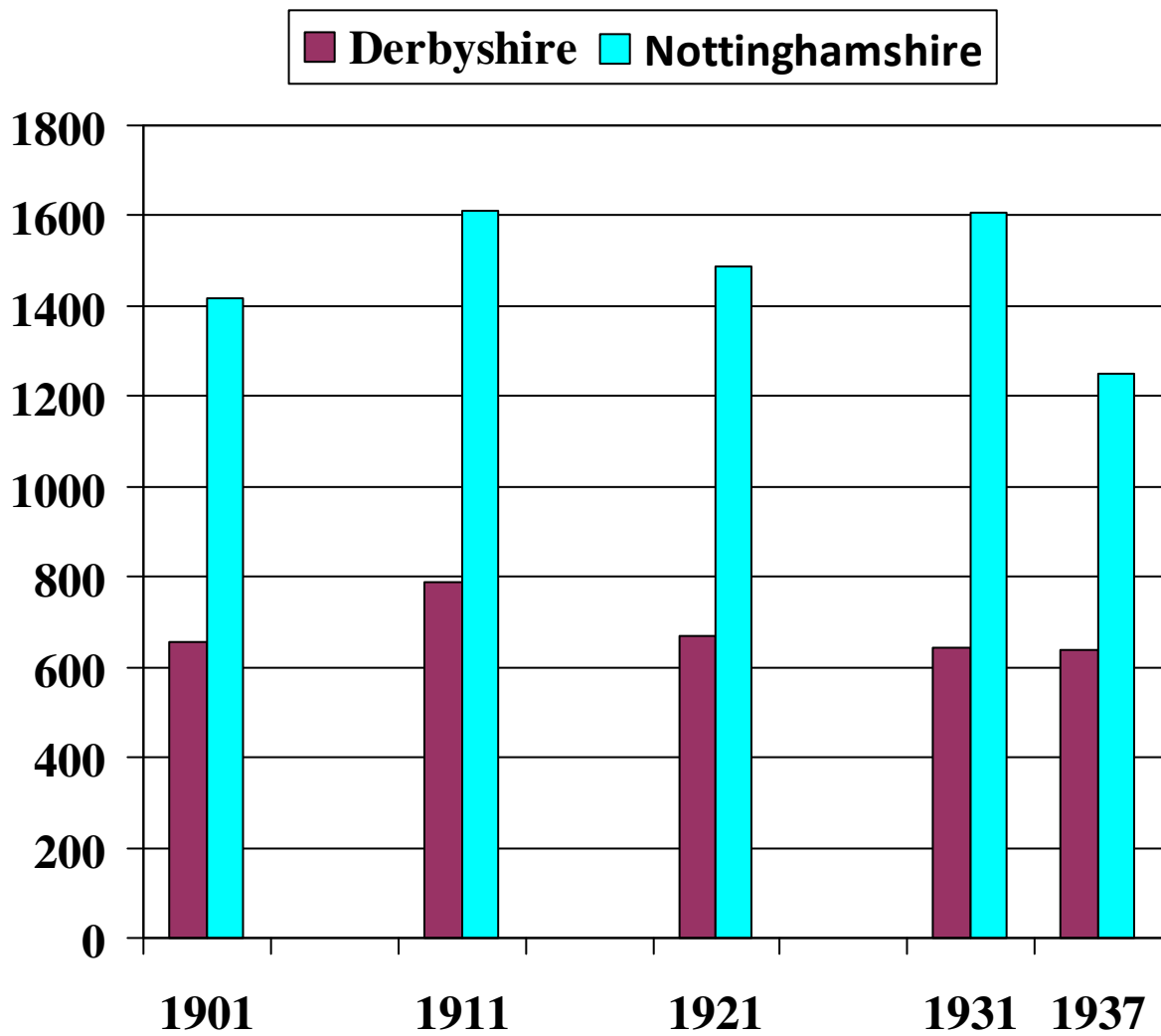
in that year. It is very probable that this was due to the ever-increasing Anglicisation of the Rhondda and the corresponding decline in numbers of Welsh speakers. Thus the layman's perception of church growth or decline is likely to depend more on individual experience than on overall statistics. This may explain the divergent estimates of Canon Lewis and Mr Griffiths for levels of non-attendance in the Rhondda (see above).

### **Nonconformist membership statistics**

#### ***(a) East Midlands***

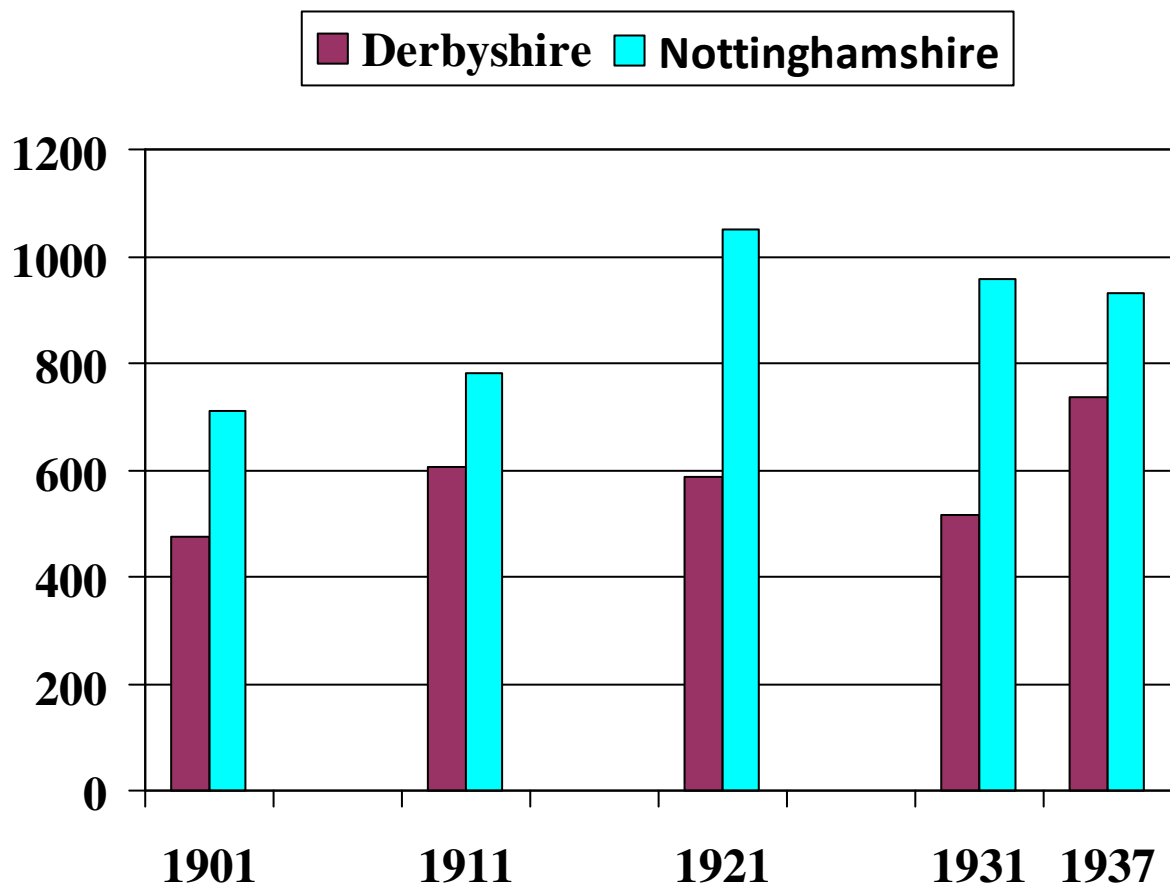
As noted above in the introductory section on membership statistics, the numbers of Baptists and Congregationalists in mining districts of Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire on the whole appear pathetically small in comparison to those of the Rhondda Valleys (as Graphs 3:4 and 3:5 below indicate). Unlike the Rhondda area, it is not easy to trace overall membership trends. Possibly the fortunes of each individual church in Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire (see *Tables 3:1, 3:2, 3:3, 3:4* on pp. 141 – 146 below) relate as much to growth or decline of population in its particular area as they do to general trends in religious institutional growth or decline.

### Graph 3.4 Baptist Membership - East Midlands



Sources: Baptist Handbooks for relevant years

### Graph 3.5 Congregationalist Membership - East Midlands



Source: Congregational Yearbooks for relevant years

Table 3:1 Baptists – Nottinghamshire

Members

<b>Town/ Village</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1937</b>
Bulwell	172	108	274	253	198	220	-
Eastwood	90	50	25	31	42	51	51
Hucknall	☆320	239	311	362	318	286	262
Kimberley	-	33	13	25	15	20	26
Kirkby in Ashfield	77	61	43	59	48	63	55
Kirkby, East	74	132	134	255	255	228	*250
Kirkby Woodhouse	74	99	85	84	83	75	38
Newthorpe	41	38	24	31	31	31	31
Old Basford	290	276	224	205	163	*313	*194
Ollerton	-	-	-	-	-	26	12
Radford	250	127	62	47	-	-	-
Stanton Hill	52	No entry	39	47	70	58	65
Sutton in Ashfield#	145	115	183	210	264	234	267
<b>Total</b>	<b>1585</b>	<b>1278</b>	<b>1417</b>	<b>1609</b>	<b>1487</b>	<b>1605</b>	<b>1251</b>

Sunday Scholars

<b>Town/ Village</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1937</b>
Bulwell	351	310	544	492	349	243	-
Eastwood	200	260	108	147	90	218	100
Hucknall	428	500	550	598	237	285	200
Kimberley	-	88	70	46	50	30	50
Kirkby in Ashfield	120	66	144	177	116	89	93
Kirkby, East	130	287	317	508	456	390	*206
Kirkby Woodhouse	98	112	111	92	63	49	40
Newthorpe	120	120	103	169	103	103	103
Old Basford	609	-	320	250	210	*522	*330
Ollerton	-	-	-	-	-	162	60
Radford	115	200	130	87	-	-	235
Stanton Hill	110	87	109	122	147	133	100
Sutton in Ashfield#	497	360	466	565	522	356	300
<b>Total</b>	<b>2778</b>	<b>2390</b>	<b>2972</b>	<b>3253</b>	<b>2343</b>	<b>2580</b>	<b>1817</b>

☆This figure is, I think, a misprint in the Baptist Handbook since other sources indicate steady growth until 1914

# 2 chapels in this place throughout

\* 2 chapels in this place at dates indicated



Populations

<b>Place</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Eastwood	4815	4692	
Hucknall	15250	15870	
Kimberley	5129	6446	
Kirkby-in-Ashfield	10318	15379	Includes Kirkby, East
Ollerton	690	711	These dates antedate coalmining and building of New Ollerton
Sutton-in-Ashfield	14862	21708	

Note: There are no separate population figures for Bulwell, Old Basford and Radford, which are parts of the City of Nottingham. Kirkby Woodhouse, Newthorpe and Stanton Hill are all parts of larger parishes

Table 3:2 Baptists - Derbyshire

**Members**

Town/ Village	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1937
Clay Cross	80	50	48	84	60	44	54
Heanor	69	82	109	108	98	70	84
Ilkeston#	113	154	140	220	144	147	150
Langley Mill	93	69	69	81	87	72	36
Loscoe	41	No entry	102	101	103	129	110
Riddings	102	73	57	75	41	34	36
Ripley	155	147	131	118	134	147	168
Total	653	575	656	787	667	643	638

Sunday scholars

Town/ Village	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1937
Clay Cross	350	144	170	233	98	223	190
Heanor	-	320	340	290	395	221	198
Ilkeston#	230	330	500	547	407	229	206
Langley Mill	213	200	260	163	205	163	148
Loscoe	165	No entry	262	338	350	254	180
Riddings	150	97	105	111	120	67	77
Ripley	438	482	417	248	195	260	203
Total	1546	1573	2054	1930	1770	1417	1202

# 2 chapels in this place throughout

Populations:

Place	1901	1911	Remarks
Clay Cross	8358	8365	
Heanor	6181	7630	
Ilkeston	20889	?	
Langley Mill	3709	4169	
Loscoe	3831	4562	Both figures include Codnor
Riddings	4435	4507	
Ripley	10111	10533	

Table 3:3 Congregationalists – Nottinghamshire

Members

<b>Town/ Village</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1937</b>
Eastwood	111	140	169	143	123
Hucknall#	155	168	186	139	112
Mansfield	123	147	139	161	218
Moor Green	46	41	40	61	58
Sutton in Ashfield	95	*127	*190	*212	*174
Selston and Westwood#	56	45	64	86	73
Worksop	125	75	211	156	153
<b>Total</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>783</b>	<b>1051</b>	<b>958</b>	<b>931</b>

Sunday scholars

<b>Town/ Village</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1937</b>
Eastwood	210	190	216	158	127
Hucknall#	400	313	?	259	215
Mansfield	200	218	183	120	155
Moor Green	75	77	52	58	48
Sutton in Ashfield	420	*590	*557	*478	*490
Selston and Westwood#	153	160	255	230	205
Worksop	196	90	341	185	212
<b>Total</b>	<b>1654</b>	<b>1758</b>	<b>1726</b>	<b>1488</b>	<b>1522</b>

# 2 chapels in this place throughout

\* 2 chapels in this place at dates indicated

Populations:

<b>Place</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>
Eastwood	4815	4692
Hucknall	15250	15870
Mansfield	21554	36888
Sutton in Ashfield	14862	21708
Selston	7071	8982
Worksop	16112	20387

Note: Moor Green is part of a larger parish

Table 3:4 Congregationalists – Derbyshire

Members

<b>Town/ Village</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1937</b>
Bolsover	56	*92	*71	*74	*74
Brimington	36	44	44	34	40
Calow	45	80	65	77	94
Killamarsh	79	131	130	46	48
Marlpool	65	73	62	75	-
Riddings/ Pentrich#	180	140	141	143	330
Ripley	14	9	18	14	82
Shirebrook	-	38	56	52	67
<b>Total</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>607</b>	<b>587</b>	<b>515</b>	<b>735</b>

Sunday scholars

<b>Town/ Village</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1937</b>
Bolsover	180	*245	*261	*105	*243
Brimington	108	175	180	82	100
Calow	118	168	184	120	119
Killamarsh	126	142	95	95	55
Marlpool	206	180	192	300	-
Riddings/ Pentrich#	401	330	225	150	140
Ripley	-	82	96	50	55
Shirebrook	-	230	230	286	213
<b>Total</b>		<b>1552</b>	<b>1463</b>	<b>1188</b>	<b>925</b>

# 2 chapels in this place throughout

\* 2 chapels in this place at dates indicated

Populations:

<b>Place</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>
Bolsover**	6844	11214
Brimington	4569	5299
Calow	1060	1166
Killamarsh	3644	4544
Marlpool	2528	3490
Riddings/ Pentrich	4435	4507
Ripley	10111	10533
Shirebrook**	6641	11116

\*\* The 1911 census attributes large growth specifically to colliery development in these areas

Table 3:5 Adult Membership Statistics (Methodists)

<b>Wesleyan Circuits</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>
Belper	255	339	412	370	499
Chesterfield	860	1122	1408	1459	1442
Ilkeston	881	890	990	971	990
Mansfield	1113	1330	1354	1461	1322
Ripley	568	566	645	687	702
Worksop	548	590	814	882	1021

<b>Methodist New Connexion</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>
Hucknall	568	675	1000	*8592	761

\* Nottingham District

<b>Primitive Methodists</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>
Alfreton	365	461	464	488	440
Belper	310	251	253	163	189
Bolsover		255	300	286	254
Clay Cross	444	545	520	542	524
Hucknall			365	392	397
Ilkeston	322	340	348	410	415
Kimberley	366	400	360	286	263
Mansfield	691	820	470	600	690
Ripley	418	412	412	400	420
Staveley	412	328	330	373	381
Sutton & Kirkby			585	670	650
Worksop			165	164	227

Source – Conference Reports of the Wesleyan, Methodist New Connexion and Primitive Methodists respectively

The published statistics of the various branches of Methodism relate at best to circuit level and most circuits listed would include non-mining areas. They are therefore of limited value. For the Wesleyans only a few areas have been recorded above in Table 3:5, and one can see that in

absolute terms the general tendency was an increase in membership at least until 1911. Only the Hucknall circuit of the Methodist New Connexion has been shown here since the other circuits mentioned either do not feature prominently in this study or are part of much larger town circuits such as Mansfield or Sheffield South. Hucknall, with its two Methodist New Connexion churches, would certainly have been the largest branch in its circuit and again the trend is upward until 1911. The published statistics for 1921 unfortunately relate to district level only in order to save paper. By 1931 the Hucknall Circuit had fallen quite a bit below its 1911 level.

For the Primitive Methodist Church more places have been shown because these areas are known to have been predominantly mining areas. The membership statistics fluctuate to such an extent it is difficult to see any overall trends. For Primitive Methodism in Hucknall the trend is slightly upwards.

Although there is a considerable amount of archive material for most of the Nonconformist churches in Hucknall not much statistical detail is given. However, many potted church histories refer to membership statistics for a particular year, often when their church membership was at its peak. Statistics for the Baptists and Congregationalists have already been given (see tables 3:1 and 3:3 above), of the other churches in Hucknall the following information has been gleaned from archival sources. Trinity Methodist New Connexion had, in 1908, an adult membership of 303 and 575 Sunday scholars. Their daughter church,

Bethesda, on Butler's Hill, in 1907 had 94 adult members and 300 Sunday scholars; by 1926 its adult membership remained the same but its Sunday scholars had dropped to 164. The Wesleyan Methodist Church had an adult membership in 1907 of 110; unfortunately no figure is given for Sunday scholars. Bourne Primitive Methodist Church had, in 1895, 99 adult members and 337 Sunday scholars. Cavendish Street Primitive Methodist Church on Butler's Hill in 1910 had an adult membership of 70 with over 300 children in its Sunday school. In 1909 Peveril Street United Methodist Free Church had 72 adult members and 200 Sunday scholars. The Wesleyan Reform Church (originally the Free Gospel church) had by 1908 an adult membership of 180 with 300 Sunday scholars. By 1941 the membership of the Salvation Army in Hucknall was 100. No figure is given for its Sunday school. The Church of Christ had in 1919 an adult membership of 67. Its peak membership was in 1932 when it had 81 adult members.<sup>81</sup>

From this statistical information it is clear that despite the considerable number of Nonconformist churches in Hucknall not many of them were as numerically strong as the Nonconformist churches in the Rhondda. All the Nonconformist churches in Hucknall had a Sunday School membership far larger than their adult membership, though doubtless adult attendance was considerably higher than membership numbers. For those churches

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<sup>81</sup> Sources for these statistics are (in the order that the churches are named) the following documents in NA: DD1702/2/84/1 – 24; DD 1702/2/100/1 – 6; DD 1702/2/89/1 – 14; NC MR 7/1; DD 1702/2/105/1 – 7; DD 1702/2/85/1 – 9; DD 1702/2/99/1 – 4. The last two are in: Newton, M., *Steadily Forward March!: A Brief History of Hucknall Salvation Army*, p. 13, and Newton M., *One More Step*, p. 23.

where more than one year's membership figures are given they appear, in absolute terms, to have a steadily increasing membership well into the twentieth century. Thus even in the mining districts of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, where there was no great religious revival in the early twentieth century and membership numbers were not always very great, many ordinary working class people would have been brought within the orbit of the churches, and those who were committed members would have had opportunities for fellowship, service and personal, educational and spiritual development, as the following section will endeavour to show.

## **Activities**

### ***Introduction***

One would obviously expect all churches to provide some opportunities on Sundays for local people to worship God. In fact in the two coalmining areas examined here and for the period under review all Nonconformist churches provided much more, since they not only engaged in spiritual and evangelistic activities on weekdays as well as Sundays but also made ample provision for the moral, educational, cultural and social development of all who chose to participate in the multifarious activities that Nonconformist churches provided for the community. As for the committed members (especially of the predominantly working class, lay-oriented churches like the Primitive Methodists, much favoured by the miners in the East Midlands), G. M. Morris claimed 'the multifarious duties



and privileges afforded to the member ... such as preaching, stewardship, administrative and pastoral oversight helped to soothe the class and social grievances of the working class and gave them new purpose and zest in life'.<sup>82</sup> Even for the less religiously committed, when the coalmining communities were being developed the Nonconformist churches were often the sole providers of civilising activities, since the only alternative leisure facilities at that time would have been the public houses, whose very existence was anathema to Nonconformists. The role and influence of institutional religion on working-class communities should not therefore be underestimated. The argument of Wilson, Bruce and Wallis that religion in modern industrial society did not have social significance (see chapter one) was not true of coalmining communities.

***(a) South Wales***

An examination of the activities of three churches, each of a different Nonconformist denomination, reveals two important facts. Firstly that the activities were very similar in each case and secondly that most of them were intense – there was very little time on a Sunday unaccounted for, nor were there many spaces during the weekday evenings when there was no church or church-connected activity, much of which seems to have been of a spiritual or evangelistic nature. The three churches (all in the Rhondda) whose activities are examined here are Libanus Calvinistic Methodist Church (Blaenclydach), Siloh Congregational Church (Pentre)

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<sup>82</sup> Morris, G. M., 'Primitive Methodism in Nottinghamshire 1815 – 1932' in *Transactions of the Thorton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 72 (1968), p. 91.

and Noddfa Baptist Church (Treorchy). The Sunday timetable for Libanus was:

9.30am	Young people's Prayer Meeting
10.30am	Preaching Service
2pm	Sunday School
5pm	Prayer Meeting
6pm	Preaching Service
7pm	Band of Hope <sup>83</sup>

The timetable for Siloh is very similar except that the morning activities are at slightly different times and instead of the prayer meeting at 5pm they had an adult Bible class. In addition Siloh had a 'Society' meeting after the 6pm service and a singing practice at 8pm.<sup>84</sup> Noddfa did not specify the times of their services but they too had prayer meetings, Sunday school in which they prepared candidates for oral and written examinations and no less than three adult Bible classes.<sup>85</sup> Nor was the intense spiritual activity at these churches limited to Sunday. Thus Libanus held a prayer meeting on Monday evening and a women's prayer meeting every alternate Tuesday, and on Saturday evening there was a prayer meeting especially for night workmen.<sup>86</sup> On Thursday evening a Society meeting was held.<sup>87</sup> Siloh also held a prayer meeting on Monday evening and a 'Society' meeting on Thursday evening followed by five scripture classes. On Friday evening there was an adult Bible class. The content of the Bible class is not defined but a later witness representing all the

<sup>83</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 331, q. 10579.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 317, q. 10089.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 287, qs. 9120 – 9126.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 331, q. 10581.

<sup>87</sup> A witness to the Commission defined a 'Society' meeting as 'a typically Welsh service in which the rank and file of the members participate in the discussion of religious topics and experiences' (*Royal Commission*, vol. 4, p. 179, q. 39363).

Nonconformist churches in the Rhondda, speaking about Bible classes for young people, stated that they included ‘the study of the Holy Scriptures, historically, critically, doctrinally and exegetically’.<sup>88</sup> What he meant by ‘critically’ may not have been ‘critical scholarship’ as an academic would understand the term, but even so it is clear that Bible study for working class laymen was taken very seriously. Saturday evenings were given over to instruction of converts.<sup>89</sup> At Noddfa no timetable is given but prayer meetings of various kinds also took place including a ‘fortnight’s special prayer meetings, before all special preaching services held quarterly’.<sup>90</sup> Prayer meetings at Noddfa and probably elsewhere lasted for between one and one and a half hours and included singing, Bible reading and a word from the Pastor. The meetings were open to all and at each meeting about six people would pray publicly.<sup>91</sup> The object of all church meetings at Noddfa was spiritual: ‘We never conduct a meeting of any kind without prayer and praise and the tone of the whole is spiritual’.<sup>92</sup> Rev W. Morris stated too that special meetings were held for ‘young members to practise speaking and to begin to conduct prayer in public’; such training, he argued, ‘occupies their mind and contributes to their culture, and they become better men and women in every way’.<sup>93</sup> This is an interesting statement, implying that even young *women* were

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<sup>88</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 4, p. 335, q. 43891.

<sup>89</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 318, q. 10109.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 287, q. 9125.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 296, q. 9468.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 296, q. 9446.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 296, q. 9455 – 9459.

considered worthy of the opportunity to acquire the art of public speaking.

It is, of course, highly probable that the intensity of all the spiritual activity had been stimulated by and was a continuation of the great revival of 1904 – 1905. As indicated above, during and for a while after the revival the miners themselves regularly held prayer meetings at the pit bottom as the following statements by miners who witnessed them show:

‘they’d go down perhaps they’d get into their work where we were going and they’d decide to have a prayer meeting. And the over man we had at the time being a chapel man, as long as you was singing hymns and praying and anything like that, well he didn’t mind if you were a couple of hours, he wouldn’t interfere’.<sup>94</sup>

‘you’d go down the pit, prayer meetings everywhere before you started work in the morning’.<sup>95</sup>

‘before they’d start work. Singing and praying when they’d finished. It didn’t last long, no.’<sup>96</sup>

Such all-pervasive spiritual activity clearly died away fairly soon but there is clear evidence from miners born in the early twentieth century that prayer meetings, as well as Bands of Hope and other temperance movements, were still continuing in the Nonconformist churches in the 1920s.<sup>97</sup> And certainly the Sunday itinerary of the Salvation Army Corps in Maerdy (Rhondda Fach) was very intense, beginning with ‘knee drill’ (prayer) at 7.30am and continuing after breakfast with ‘open air’ that is going round the streets at 10am, then back into the Army hall for Morning

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<sup>94</sup> Transcript of interview of Ernest Lewis, by Alun Morgan, 2 October 1972 (AUD 313 in SWML), p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Transcript of second interview of Abel Morgan, by David Egan and Merfyn Jones, 19 October 1972 (AUD 311 in SWML), p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> Transcript of interview of Bert Huntley, by David Egan (AUD 324 in SWML), p. 5.

<sup>97</sup> For examples see transcripts of AUDs: 230, 183, 191 in SWML.

Service. Then in the afternoon there was a choice of more 'open air' and Sunday school. This was followed by a praise meeting at 3pm (testimonies and singing). After tea was another 'open air', then a service at 6pm and finally a 'free and easy' which consisted of more testimonies and singing. 'We didn't have much spare time to think about anything else' was the under-statement of a former miner.<sup>98</sup>

All Nonconformist churches not only catered for the spiritual and pastoral needs of their congregations but contributed too to the educational and cultural needs of their communities. The Commissioners comment very favourably on the high quality of Sunday school provision of all denominations.<sup>99</sup> Since many who later left the churches had attended Sunday school as children and young people, a fairly high proportion of the population would have had contact with institutional religion. All the spiritual activity and the Sunday schools would also have provided ample opportunity for very ordinary working-class people to be involved in leading and teaching. Even the Primitive Methodist church (which was one of the smaller denominations in Wales) had 1,396 Sunday school teachers in South Wales as well as 306 local preachers and 332 class leaders.<sup>100</sup>

Some of the Welsh Nonconformist churches, for example Libanus and Noddfa, offered classes in Welsh grammar.<sup>101</sup> One of the motives for offering these courses may well have been preservation of their own

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<sup>98</sup> Transcript of interview of Trevor Davies by Hywel Francis, 3 July 1970 (AUD 165 in SWML), pp. 21 – 22.

<sup>99</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 1, p. 68.

<sup>100</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 406, q. 13423.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 287, q. 9135, and vol. 2, p. 332, q. 10618.

denomination in an increasingly Anglicised Rhondda since many Welshmen held the view that the Welsh language and religion were inextricable; as one of them put it 'When the Welsh language expires the spirituality and sacredness of religion will expire at the same time'.<sup>102</sup> Other educational activities that many churches provided, especially for young people, were lectures and debates on remarkably serious subjects some of which were secular. Lectures at Noddfa for example included 'The Pyramids' as well as 'The Revival in Patagonia',<sup>103</sup> and one of their debates was entitled 'Are the Denominations an advantage or a disadvantage to religion?'<sup>104</sup> – an indication that some were already seeking a greater unity between the denominations. Libanus listed under its 'Mutual Improvement' heading 'literary meetings, when papers are read; debating classes, when various subjects are discussed and competitive meetings'.<sup>105</sup>

The predominance of choral music in the life of Welsh Nonconformity is such common knowledge that it seems almost unnecessary to mention it, but the standards expected of amateur choral and orchestral societies, mostly linked to Nonconformist churches, were amazingly high and their musical productions were of classical works not popular music. For example in January 1904 the *Rhondda Leader* contained a detailed criticism of the performance of Haydn's *Creation* performed at Salem

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<sup>102</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 4, p. 342, q. 44104.

<sup>103</sup> This is likely to have been an offshoot of the 1904 – 05 revival since many Welsh Nonconformist church people had emigrated to Patagonia between 1865 and 1914 (*Insight Guide: Argentina* c2002).

<sup>104</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, pp. 288 – 289, qs. 9183 – 9184.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 331, q. 10579.

Welsh Baptist church (Porth) in which on the whole the performance was praised but it had comments such as 'the sopranos worked hard but they were not up to the high standard of the tenors' and 'the altos were the weakest part'.<sup>106</sup> Salem was not the only church whose standards of production were high. Capel y Cymer (Porth), in addition to rendering choral works, by 1907 possessed 'an orchestra capable of tackling Mozart, Handel, Mendelssohn and Elgar'.<sup>107</sup> Presumably the practice of holding large scale concerts and eisteddfodau in Nonconformist churches, the performers or competitors in which would in the main be drawn from their own congregations, would be one justification for building churches where the accommodation far exceeded the membership.

Some of the brass bands that were a feature of most mining districts were 'formed by musicians from the Salvation Army and various chapel sources throughout the upper valley'.<sup>108</sup> By 1917 there were even 'Singing Festivals' inaugurated by the English Nonconformist churches.<sup>109</sup> Indeed it was not until Nonconformist membership was declining in the late 1920s that secular activities including choirs, drama groups and sports organised by many Nonconformist churches in the Rhondda were at their peak.<sup>110</sup>

Undoubtedly therefore the Nonconformist churches made a highly significant contribution to the cultural life of the Rhondda. These cultural

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<sup>106</sup> *Rhondda Leader*, 2 January 1904, p. 5.

<sup>107</sup> Lewis, E. D. and Jones, I. G., 'Capel y Cymer' in *Morgannwg*, 25 (1981), (Glamorgan History Society), p. 152.

<sup>108</sup> Fair, E. G., *Hymns and Hard Work; The Story of Treherbert and the Wesleyans* (Treherbert, c 1990), p. 7.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

activities together with the innumerable temperance organisations associated with the churches helped to transform what might have been rather wild and uninviting little 'frontier towns' into highly civilised and closely-knit communities.

**(b) East Midlands**

In the East Midlands, unlike South Wales, there had been no great religious revival to stimulate evangelistic and spiritual activity, nor had there been a Royal Commission to force the denominations to give an account of themselves. Nevertheless there is plenty of evidence to indicate that fairly intense spiritual and evangelistic activity continued to be a prominent feature of the Nonconformist churches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus at the Hucknall Baptist Church an evangelistic campaign on Moody and Sankey lines was held in 1888 and later in that year another, week-long evangelistic campaign was arranged, preceded by a week of prayer meetings. Later, in the 1890s, 'a Mr Bradlaugh conducted a week's campaign that was well prepared for spiritually and well advertised'<sup>111</sup>. In 1898 mission services were held, 'the Choir supporting the work of the Missioner'<sup>112</sup>. The first week in January 1904 was organised as a week of special prayer<sup>113</sup> and in 1905 longer missions were organised, both early in the year (28 January to 11

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<sup>111</sup> Arnold, A. S., *Built Upon the Foundation*, p. 20; for details of organisation see *Baptist Church Hucknall Minute Book 1874 – 1900* (NC/BP 25/2 in NA), p. 209.

<sup>112</sup> Arnold, A. S., *Built Upon the Foundation*, p. 20.

<sup>113</sup> *Baptist Church Hucknall Minute Book 1874 – 1900*, p. 217.



February) and later (7 to 29 October).<sup>114</sup> These missions may well have been inspired by the Welsh revival.

The first student pastor of the Congregational cause on Butler's Hill in 1867 'spared no effort to get the people to attend the little "Bethel". Not only did he visit the homes of the people, but he often followed the men into the public houses and spoke to them there' and late on Sunday mornings 'He would stand outside the "Yew Tree Hotel" and invite the men as they left it to go with him to the afternoon service'.<sup>115</sup> Thirty years later the Congregational Church still conducted open air services and cottage meetings and had formed a Christian Endeavour Society and Young Men's Bible Classes. In addition a 'Monthly News' magazine was produced and issued to every family in the neighbourhood.<sup>116</sup>

Likewise, when Trinity Methodist New Connexion in Hucknall was missioning Butler's Hill in the 1870s, in addition to house to house visiting their typical Sunday timetable was:

7 am	Prayer meeting
10 am	Reading of Scripture and prayer
11 am, 2.30 pm and 5.15 pm	Open air services
- concluding with a return to the mission room at Mr Jones's home for address and prayer meeting to close the day. <sup>117</sup>	

At a leaders' meeting in 1887 it was decided to 'recommend to the Teachers' Meeting that some special effort be made at the present time to induce the scholars of our Sunday School to give their hearts to

<sup>114</sup> *Baptist Church Hucknall Minute Book 1901 – 1910* (NC/BP 25/3 in NA), pp. 87 – 88.

<sup>115</sup> Brecknock, A., *History of the Hucknall Congregational Church 1867 – 1917*, p. 9.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>117</sup> Trinity Methodist New Connexion Church, Hucknall (DD 1702/2/84/174 in NA).

Christ'<sup>118</sup>. At the meeting on 11 November 1898 it was recommended to the teachers 'that two Sunday afternoons be devoted to Evangelistic Services during the mission'.<sup>119</sup>

At New Cross Primitive Methodist Church (in the Sutton and Kirkby Primitive Methodist Circuit), in the early years of the twentieth century, in addition to the Sunday services (and the 'really live prayer meetings' that followed the Sunday evening services, and at which 'conversions were registered'<sup>120</sup>) class meetings were held on Mondays and Tuesdays and the Tuesday evening class became the Christian Endeavour Society in 1913. Yet the actual membership of this church in 1905 was only forty-nine.<sup>121</sup>

Judging by the difference in Nonconformist numerical strength between the South Wales and East Midlands areas, it would seem that the latter worked as intensely but with rather less encouraging results. Yet for those involved in all this evangelistic and spiritual activity at their little 'Bethels', it would doubtless give meaning and purpose to their lives.

As indicated above, looking at the Hucknall churches showed that all the Nonconformist churches had good numbers in their Sunday schools in comparison to their adult membership. The Sunday school at the Hucknall Wesleyan Reform Church included sixty young men and women over the age of sixteen. The Band of Hope at some date around 1890 had one

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<sup>118</sup> *Hucknall Trinity Methodist Church Minutes 1877 – 1896* (NC/MR7/177 in NA), recto side of sheet 6.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, verso side of sheet 19.

<sup>120</sup> Smith, J. B., *A History of Methodism in Sutton-in-Ashfield* (typescript, c 1979), p. 64.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

hundred members and their Christian Endeavour Society fifty. In addition to assisting their spiritual development the latter proved to be a good training ground for those aspiring to become preachers or church officials<sup>122</sup>. One would presume therefore that this was the case in all the other churches which had Christian Endeavour Societies and the skills of preaching and leadership are readily transferable to more secular areas of life such as business, trades unionism and politics. It is hardly surprising therefore that many trade union leaders in the mining industry were from Nonconformist backgrounds. The Baptists of Hucknall, like their Welsh counterparts, clearly believed in the educational value of lectures for they arranged lectures on innumerable subjects ranging from 'Gordon, Garfield and Grant'<sup>123</sup> to 'Old Age Pensions and the Poor Law'.<sup>124</sup>

Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire may not be as noted for their musical tradition as was South Wales but nevertheless some of the Nonconformist churches did develop a strong musical tradition. Even the Hucknall Wesleyan Reform Church, which arguably was one of the most plebeian and certainly one of the most lay-dominated churches, claimed to have a series of competent organists and a choir capable of rendering 'many well loved oratorios and cantatas'.<sup>125</sup>

Bourne Primitive Methodist Church, again a predominantly working-class church, seems to have developed a musical tradition, though not until the

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<sup>122</sup> *Wesleyan Reform Church, Hucknall, Centenary 1880 – 1980*, typescript (DD 1702/2/101-9 in NA), p. 10.

<sup>123</sup> Presumably the lecture was on General Gordon, James Abram Garfield and Ulysses Simpson Grant, contemporary British or American military heroes.

<sup>124</sup> Arnold, A. S., *Built Upon the Foundation*, pp. 21 – 22.

<sup>125</sup> *Wesleyan Reform Church, Hucknall, Centenary 1880 – 1980*, p. 12.

1920s, having then got an 'excellent choirmaster' under whose leadership the choir 'rendered some of the famous oratorios with outstanding success'.<sup>126</sup> The choir of Hucknall Baptist Church, on the other hand, seems to have focussed its work on Sunday services and on assisting evangelistic missions and fund-raising efforts. Membership of this choir was rigidly controlled – only actual church members could belong.<sup>127</sup>

The Congregationalists in Hucknall also had a strong musical tradition. Even in their 'iron church' they offered musical and solfa classes; from 1911 they were holding musical festivals and performing works such as Gounod's 'Messe Solennelle'; and in 1916 Brahms's 'Requiem' was performed with full orchestra and organ. Some regarded this as their 'crowning effort'.<sup>128</sup> Its performance at that time would surely have been particularly poignant.

As in South Wales, virtually every little 'Bethel' in the East Midlands had its Sunday school, youth group (or groups) and Bible classes. Each too had its 'Band of Hope' and possibly an adult temperance society. Some also had Christian Endeavour Societies from about the 1890s. It would seem then that Nonconformity in the coalmining communities, especially in the larger places like Hucknall, contributed greatly to the spiritual, moral, educational and cultural development of those who came within their orbits.

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<sup>126</sup> Bourne Primitive Methodist Church, Hucknall (DD 1702/2/2/101 – 109 in NA).

<sup>127</sup> Arnold, A. S., *Built Upon the Foundation*, pp. 23 – 24.

<sup>128</sup> Brecknock, A., *A History of the Hucknall Congregational Church 1867 – 1917*, pp. 51 – 53.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated that, despite financial problems and denominational weaknesses highlighted in chapter two, all Nonconformist denominations catered well for the spiritual and social needs of all who cared to join them. There was clearly little difference in the activities of the Nonconformist churches in the East Midlands and those in South Wales. The latter certainly received a great boost during the revival years 1904-1905 and the effects on the communities were temporarily quite dramatic. During those years the sacred quite definitely invaded the secular world. Arguably in the long term the revival did no more than delay secularisation locally but since some converts were founder members of the Pentecostal movement it had an influence on Christianity globally.

On the question, posed earlier, of whether Nonconformist provision in terms of accommodation was excessive, the answer would depend on whether one judges purely in terms of actual membership, in which case the answer would clearly be 'yes'; or whether one judges in terms of use of buildings. Since all of the churches would have many occasions when great numbers would be gathered one could well argue that accommodation (when protestant Nonconformity was at its peak) was not excessive but enabled communities to enjoy and benefit from great festivals of praise.

Cumulatively the evidence presented in this chapter points to the conclusion that up to 1914 Nonconformity remained strong in terms of its visible presence and its contribution to the spiritual, moral, educational and cultural welfare of the mining communities it served, even if, as in the East Midlands, actual membership was not particularly high. The fact that Sunday School membership was high, evangelistic outreach continued and the churches provided many social and cultural activities in the community clearly indicates that religion was socially significant in mining areas. In addition, to those ordinary mining families who were committed members of their respective churches the practice of their religion arguably gave a quality and value to their daily lives which their status in secular society denied them. This seems to be an aspect that can be overlooked in studies that focus almost exclusively on religion in terms of secularisation. This chapter indicates too that many working class people were actively involved in their respective Nonconformist churches; religion in the nineteenth century was certainly not just a predominantly middle-class phenomenon as E. R. Wickham argued.

## Chapter 4

### The Anglican Church in the Mining Communities

#### Introduction

Chapter two has demonstrated the great challenges that faced the Anglican Church, especially in South Wales, and chapter three has revealed the considerable strength of Nonconformity in these two areas. It would seem likely therefore that the Anglican Church in mining communities was not in a strong position. In fact Robert Lee, writing on the mission to the mining communities by the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Durham, argued that the mission was a failure (see page 56) partly because the miners were already committed to Nonconformity and partly because there was a general lack of bonding between clergy and people. A major question to be addressed in this chapter therefore is: was the Anglican mission to mining communities in South Wales and the East Midlands likewise a failure? In seeking an answer to that question this chapter will look first at the degree of progress made by Anglicanism in the two coalmining areas. In order to assess this it will focus particularly on two major parishes in the Diocese of Llandaff in South Wales – Aberdare and Ystradyfodwg - and two parishes in the Diocese of Southwell in the East Midlands – Hucknall and Shirebrook. Then the following questions will be addressed, since they too could have a bearing on the success or failure of Anglicanism: Was paternalism in the Anglican Church helpful to its progress or was it a barrier in attracting the working class? What was the social/educational background of the clergy in the mining parishes? and did a difference in social background between clergy and people adversely affect

their relationship? Finally, and most importantly, what role, if any, did the mining and working class families have in the Anglican church? Could the Anglican church be described as a church *of* the people, which many Nonconformist churches were, or was it only a church *for* the people?

### **Progress in South Wales**

Frances Knight stated that the period from 1850-1920 was a time of ‘renewal and reinvention of the Anglican Church in Wales’.<sup>1</sup> This fact was nowhere more apparent than in the Diocese of Llandaff, within which most of the rapidly and continually growing coalmining communities were situated. The Religious Census of 1851, which ante-dated much, though not all, of the great coal rush, revealed that the Anglican church in this area was then at a very low ebb. In the parish of Ystradyfodwg (the large extent of which was described on page 67) there was just one small Anglican church that held one service on Census Sunday that was attended by ten people. Admittedly the population of the parish was only 1,998 and there were already three Nonconformist churches in the parish whose congregations in total were 402.<sup>2</sup> This was clearly not a particularly large number but even so good in comparison to Anglican numbers. However considering that for South Wales attendance on Census Sunday was ‘equivalent to 83.4% of the population’<sup>3</sup> Ystradyfodwg in the pre-mining era was well below average overall. The very

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<sup>1</sup> Knight F. in Williams, G., Jacob, W., Yates, N., and Knight, F., *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603 – 1920* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 309.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, I. G., and Williams, D. (eds.) *The Religious Census of 1851: A Calendar of the Returns relating to Wales*, vol. 1, *South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), pp. 189 – 90.

<sup>3</sup> Knight, F. in *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment*, p. 312.



low Anglican attendance was no doubt partly due to the vast geographical extent of the parish, for as Callum Brown argued the sheer size of some rural parishes militated against high attendance rates (see page 21).

The parish of Aberdare (covering 16,310 acres and extending from Hirwaun in the north down the Cynon Valley to Mountain Ash) had, like Ystradyfodwg, only one small parish church. This was full at both services on Census Sunday, though since the church only accommodated 176 people this was no great number. Admittedly the parish also had two mission rooms but the numbers attending these were not recorded. Unlike Ystradyfodwg, Aberdare was already in the process of industrialisation with both the iron and the coal industries and had a population of 14,999.<sup>4</sup> Although Anglican provision at that point in time was totally inadequate there were already sixteen Nonconformist churches in the parish with total congregations of 4,500.<sup>5</sup> Thus in 1851 the Anglican church whether in pre-mining parishes like Ystradyfodwg or already industrialised parishes like Aberdare compared unfavourably with Nonconformity.

The Anglican church in Aberdare was however in the process of improving its position for within a decade three large new churches and three national schools licensed for worship were completed, and the incumbent of the parish gained the help of five assistant curates.<sup>6</sup> In 1864 an additional town

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<sup>4</sup> Jones, I. G. and Williams, D., *The Religious Census*, p. 184.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 185 – 188.

<sup>6</sup> Wills, W., 'The Rev. John Griffith and the Revival of the Established Church in Glamorgan' in *Morgannwg: Transactions of the Glamorgan History Society*, 13 (1969), p. 85.

centre church was built for the holding of Welsh services.<sup>7</sup> During the ensuing decades the very large parish of Aberdare was sub-divided and the resulting smaller parish of Aberdare (covering 3,213 acres) had a population by 1901 of 20,232. By then this smaller parish, whose Vicar at this date was Charles Green (later Archbishop of Wales), had six churches and three mission rooms with total accommodation for 2,822.<sup>8</sup> Considerable progress had been made therefore since 1851. In fact Anglican provision in Aberdare by the beginning of the twentieth century compared very favourably, as will be seen later in this chapter, with that in mining parishes in the East Midlands, although naturally the East Midlands parishes did not have to provide for the needs of two language cultures. But despite Aberdare's progress the proportion of Anglican communicants to population remained fairly low at 6.2%<sup>9</sup> and only 'twice during Green's long incumbency (1893-1914) at Aberdare did the total number of Easter communicants exceed a thousand'.<sup>10</sup>

Green and his team of six assistant curates ministered very conscientiously: for example, in 1898 before a parish mission 'Green and his colleagues visited every person in the parish to find out what the need of each might be and what help could be offered.'<sup>11</sup> In addition to Sunday services, weeknight services were held each week at St Elvan's and Christian education in the

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<sup>7</sup> Turner, C. B., 'Ritualism, Railwaymen and the Poor: the Ministry of Canon J. D. Jenkins, Vicar of Aberdare 1870 – 76', in Jenkins, G. H. and Smith, J. B. (eds.), *Politics and Society in Wales 1840 – 1922: Essays in Honour of Ieuan Gwynedd Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> *Royal Commission on the Church of England and Other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire*, vol. 2 (London: HMSO, 1910), pp. 248 – 249, qs. 7902 – 7903 and 7909 – 7927.

<sup>9</sup> Knight, F. in *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment*, p. 357.

<sup>10</sup> Edwards, A. J., *Archbishop Green: His Life and Opinions* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

parish was promoted through Sunday schools, which at their peak in 1898 attracted 1,471 children, and through guilds, clubs and Bible classes. At the height of the revival in May 1905 Green organised 'a week of Quiet Evenings with meditations on some operations of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>12</sup> This latter activity must have provided a very marked contrast to what was concurrently taking place in many of the Nonconformist churches. However although Anglican spiritual activities possibly took a different form to those of the Nonconformists it is clear that Anglicans also had many opportunities for Christian education and spiritual development, and since Aberdare was a predominantly working class community one can assume that many of the people who attended the six Anglican churches and availed themselves of the opportunities were working class.

The progress of the Anglican church in the parish of Ystradyfodwg occurred somewhat later than in Aberdare since mining of steam coal began later in the Rhondda valleys than in Aberdare and the Cynon valley; but when it began its development was equally impressive, as the following statistics for the Rhondda deanery<sup>13</sup> show:

*Table 4:1 Progress in the Rhondda Deanery*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Parishes</b>	<b>Churches (including Mission rooms)</b>	<b>Clergy</b>	<b>Number of Services</b>
1869	3	5	10	10 English, 6 Welsh
1906	12	51	46	82 English, 25 Welsh

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 184, qs. 5293 – 5306.

Admittedly the proportion of Welsh services to English services was lower in 1906 than in 1869. However the fact that the number of English people migrating to the Rhondda had increased considerably by 1906 could account for this.

By 1906 the parish of Ystradyfodwg was considerably smaller than it had been in 1851. It now comprised only four communities in the mid-Rhondda Fawr area, namely Ystrad, Pentre, Ton Pentre and Gelli. The population of the parish in 1901 was 21,964. Since this was the area looked at in some detail in chapter three, this is the area that will be looked at more closely here with regard to Anglican progress. By the end of the nineteenth century this parish had five Anglican churches and five mission rooms, altogether providing accommodation for 2,370 people. The church of St Peter in Pentre was the largest (accommodating 800), the rebuilt ancient parish church of St John the Baptist, now used for Welsh services, accommodated 420, St David's Ton Pentre accommodated 550, St Stephen's Ystrad 400 and St Mark's Gelli 200.<sup>14</sup> The total number of communicants was 1,153,<sup>15</sup> equating to 5.25% of the population. The proportion was not quite as high as that of Aberdare therefore but was obviously a great advance on the attendance in 1851. There were 912 children in total attending the Anglican Sunday schools in the parish and 564 adults or over-fifteens in the Sunday schools.<sup>16</sup> The number of children attending Sunday school in Ystradyfodwg, though not as high as for Aberdare, was actually higher than for either the Congregational or Calvinistic

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, p. 184, qs. 5307 – 5322.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, p. 185, q. 5330.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, p. 185, qs. 5337 – 5338.

Methodist churches in Ystradyfodwg, whose figures were 876 and 732 respectively. Thus the Anglican church Sunday school attendance of children was second only to the Baptists who had 1,033 on roll. Admittedly all three major Nonconformist denominations in the parish had considerably more adults who attended Sunday school (Baptists 866, Congregationalists 1,114, Calvinistic Methodists 1,277) but almost certainly their very high figures reflect the enthusiasm generated by the recent revival of 1904-5, since it was mainly young adults who were most responsive to the revival that swept through the mining valleys.

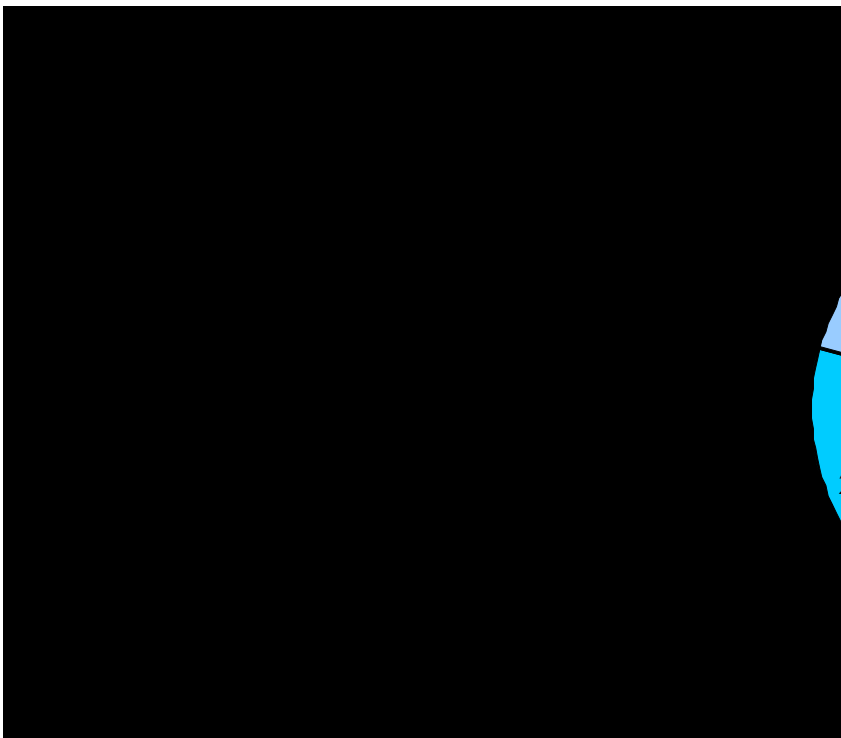
Each of the Anglican churches held one mid-week service and sermon each week in addition to their Sunday worship, as well as holding mid-week devotional/prayer meetings or Bible classes.<sup>17</sup> Mid-week religious activity in the Rhondda, as in Aberdare, was not limited therefore to the Nonconformist churches. It would seem then that industrialisation and urbanisation in the mining valleys certainly did not alienate the working classes from religion. However, despite the very considerable progress made by the Anglican church in the parish of Ystradyfodwg, Anglican communicant membership still fell short of those of the major Nonconformist denominations in the area (see pie-charts below which show comparative denominational strength based on figures given in *Report of Royal Commission 1910*).

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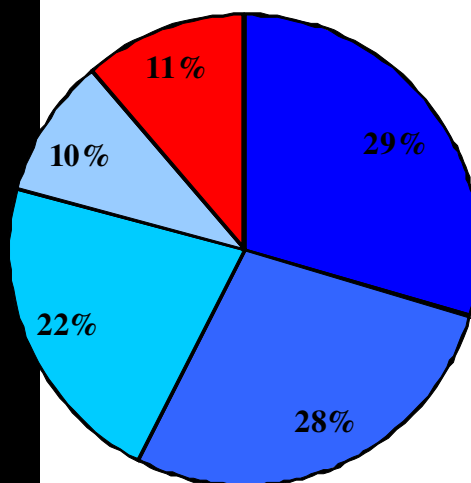
<sup>17</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 185, qs. 5339 – 5345.

## Proportion of denominational membership in parishes in the Rhondda c.1906

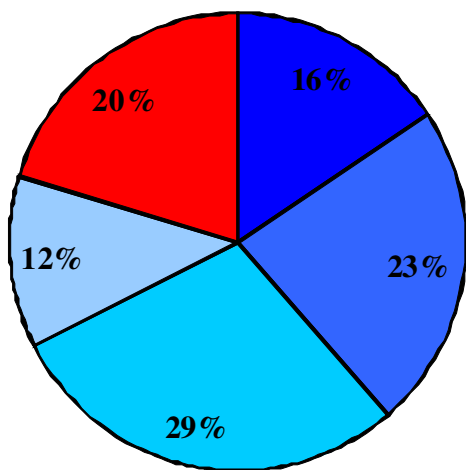
- Baptists
  - Calvinistic Methodists
  - Other (Nonconformist)
- Congregationalists
  - Anglicans



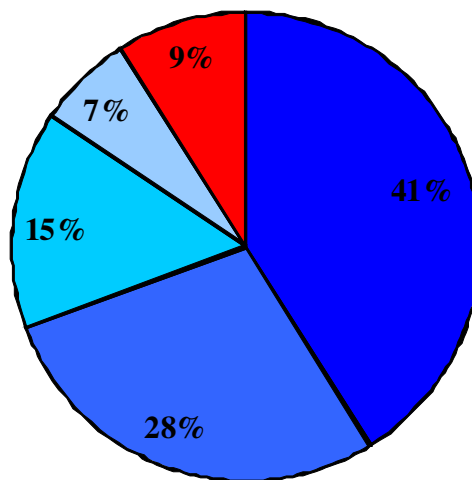
**Graph 4.2**  
**Llwynypia**



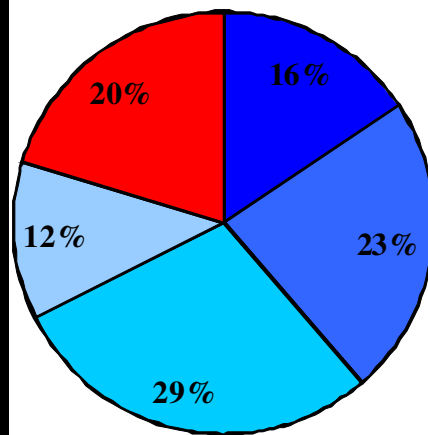
**Graph 4.3**  
**Cymmer and Porth**



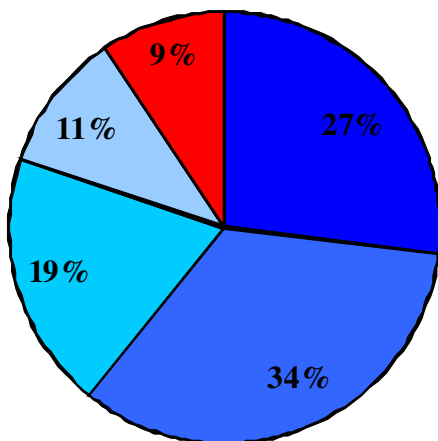
**Graph 4.4**  
**Treherbert**



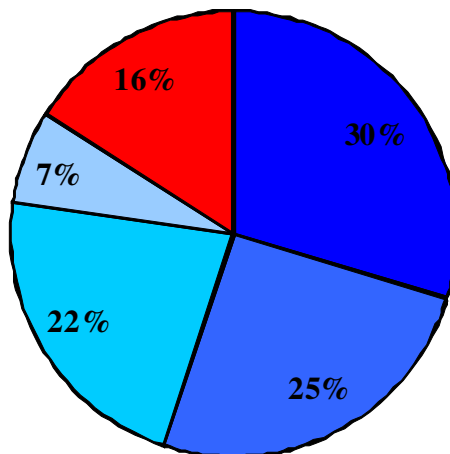
**Graph 4.6**  
**Dinas and Penygraig**



**Graph 4.7**  
**Ferndale**



**Graph**  
**Ystradyfodwg**



Frances Knight claimed that by the time of the Royal Commission the Anglican Church was the 'largest single religious body in Wales accounting for no less than 25.9% of the church going population'.<sup>18</sup> This was certainly not the case in the Rhondda valleys, for, as the above pie charts show, in none of the parishes here was the Anglican church the largest denomination; only two of the parishes, namely Ynyshir and Wattstown, and Dinas and Penygraig had more than 20% of the total church membership, and even in these two parishes the Anglicans were only the second largest denomination. Certainly at the time of the Royal Commission the Nonconformist churches would still be feeling the benefit of the boost in membership which the revival gave them so that most of them were at peak membership and this fact largely accounted for their success. Arguably though the fact that the Anglicans generally made a slower start in church planting than did the Nonconformist churches also still affected the situation in 1906. The Congregationalists in Ystradyfodwg, for example (as was shown in chapter three), had built churches in Ystrad, Pentre and Ton Pentre before 1870, whereas the earliest Anglican church to be built (St David's Ton Pentre) was not built until 1881<sup>19</sup> and St Peter's and St Stephen's were not built until 1890 and 1896 respectively.<sup>20</sup> Admittedly they used schoolrooms for Anglican worship before those dates but the Nonconformist denominations also used available rooms before their churches were built. Only in Gelli did the Anglicans have a church building earlier than the Congregationalists (1896 and 1898 respectively).

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<sup>18</sup> Knight, F. in *The Welsh Church from Reformation and Disestablishment*, pp. 319 – 320.

<sup>19</sup> Evans, M., *History of St David's, Ton Pentre*, (D/D CW/L in GRO), p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, pp. 188 – 189 qs. 5490 and 5529.



Finally in this section, to illustrate the fact that progress in Anglicanism in the South Wales coalfield was on-going and steady over many years the following table drawn from the *Visitations* of Bishop Richard Lewis is presented<sup>21</sup>:

*Table 4:2 Llandaff Diocesan Statistics 1883 – 1896*

<b>Date</b>	<b>New Churches</b>	<b>Deacons Ordained</b>	<b>Confirmations</b>
1883 – 85	22	37	(a) 7,479
1885 – 87	25	75	10,357
1888 – 90	25	74	12,247
1891 – 93	35	96	12,300
1894 – 96	40	98	12,776

(a) relates to 1882 – 84

These figures are naturally for the diocese of Llandaff as a whole, but most of the new churches and the 170 churches or mission rooms that had been built in Bishop Alfred Ollivant's episcopate<sup>22</sup> (1849 – 1883) were in the coalmining valleys. Therefore a high proportion of the deacons ordained would serve in the coalmining communities and many of the candidates confirmed would live there. The building of new churches in the mining valleys and the increase in clergy numbers to serve them looked set to continue into the twentieth century, since Bishop Joshua Pritchard Hughes, in his *Primary Visitation* in 1907, felt 'compelled to appeal to the Diocese for further funds to enable the

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, Richard, *Visitations* for 1885, 1888, 1894 (1890 not seen, but data deduced from his 1894 *Visitation*) and 1897, at NLW.

<sup>22</sup> Lewis, Richard, *Primary Visitation 1885*, pp. 4 – 5.

work of the church to be maintained' because 'fifty new churches and mission rooms are wanted immediately and the men to serve them'.<sup>23</sup>

On the South Wales coalfield therefore the Anglican Church succeeded in making great progress despite all the difficulties outlined in chapter two. Furthermore it succeeded in making progress in the Rhondda without the benefit of having numerous National Schools, a benefit that most of the Nottinghamshire coalmining communities had (see below). Admittedly in 1859 a National School had been established in Cymmer 'for the express purpose of teaching the doctrines of the Church of England',<sup>24</sup> as well as the usual subjects, and by 1875 National schools had also been established at Pentre, Tonypany and Treorchy, but even at that date there were also eight British Schools (Nonconformist establishments), two Colliery schools and two Board schools.<sup>25</sup> Although in subsequent years the number of elementary schools increased, the only remaining National school was that at Cymmer. Undoubtedly the strength of Nonconformity in the Rhondda prevented strong support for National schools there. Despite this lack of National schools the Anglican church in the Rhondda had, by the beginning of the twentieth century, a very viable presence in all the mining communities.

### **Progress in the East Midlands**

To assess progress in this area the Anglican church in two East Midlands parishes will be looked at in detail; then for a wider perspective some key

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<sup>23</sup> Hughes, Joshua Pritchard, *Primary Visitation*, 1907, at NLW, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, E. D., *The Rhondda Valleys: A Study in Industrial Development 1800 to the Present Day* (London: Phoenix House, 1959), p. 192.

<sup>25</sup> Worrill's *Directory of South Wales, Newport and Monmouthshire 1875*, p. 337.

statistics of more mining parishes in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, taken from the *Southwell Diocesan Calendars* between 1885 and 1921, will be presented. The parishes selected for a more detailed examination are Hucknall and Shirebrook, since it was in these two parishes that the strength of Nonconformity was examined in some detail.

On the whole Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire were already better provided with churches than was the case on the South Wales coalfield, probably because the terrain in the East Midlands was generally more hospitable to human settlement than was the high hill country of Glamorgan before it was intensively mined; and Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire had a greater number of resident aristocratic land owners than had South Wales. In South Wales it was mainly the new industrialists that had land and wealth. The Religious Census of 1851 showed that the Anglican church in the parish of Hucknall (which had a population of 2,970 and covered an area of 3,720 acres) accommodated 250 people. On Census Sunday its largest congregation was 135, and its Sunday scholars numbered 143. There were already three Nonconformist churches in the parish and two Nonconformist preaching rooms (one Primitive Methodist and the other Original Methodist)<sup>26</sup> and a Mormon congregation. The total number of adult Nonconformists worshipping that day was 654 and there were 630 Sunday scholars. The Anglican congregation was the second largest in the parish, though their numbers were well below those of the Methodist New Connexion church

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<sup>26</sup> Original Methodists were a mainly local (Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire), fairly short-lived (c1838 – c1849) breakaway group from the Primitive Methodists. A large group from Hucknall joined them. See *Proceedings of the Wesleyan Historical Society*, 35 (September 1965), pp. 57 – 63 for details.

which mustered 350 adults and 320 Sunday scholars.<sup>27</sup> Thus in pre-mining Hucknall the Anglican Church was not numerically the strongest, although clearly it fared better than Ystradyfodwg in the pre-mining period.

In 1913, by which time the population of Hucknall had risen to 15,870, Anglican provision in Hucknall consisted of the parish church, which had been enlarged twice, and two daughter churches; so the Anglican accommodation in Hucknall was now 1,300. This increase sounds impressive but surprisingly the ratio of accommodation to population was marginally higher in 1851 when it was 8.42% than in 1913 when it was 8.19%. However the Anglican Church in Hucknall had progressed in other ways, not least in the number of children that by 1913 it was attracting to its Sunday Schools. Thus the parish church of St Mary Magdalene had 890 children on roll, St John's had 255 and St Peter's (the smallest of the three churches) had 306, a total of 1,451 which equated to 9.14% of the population, whereas the percentage of Anglican Sunday school children to population in 1851 was only 4.81.<sup>28</sup> The Anglican Church in Hucknall was in fact attracting more children to its Sunday schools than even the Baptist churches in Ystradyfodwg were. Perhaps the fact that Hucknall had a National School with 730 children attending would have helped their success. There were no British schools or Colliery schools established in Hucknall, although three Board schools were eventually established in addition to the National School.

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<sup>27</sup> Watts, M. (ed.) *Religion in Victorian Nottinghamshire*, vol. 1 (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1988), pp. 143 – 145.

<sup>28</sup> The statistics of population, church accommodation and Sunday school numbers taken from Austin, M. (ed. and intro.), *'Under the Heavy Clouds: The Church of England in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire 1911 – 1915'* (Cardiff: Merton, 2004), p. 218.

The number of Easter communicants was only published in the *Southwell Diocesan Calendar* for the years 1893 – 1910, but an examination of the Calendars for the years 1893, 1901, 1902, 1905 and 1910 reveals that the number of Easter communicants rose from 252 in 1893 to 669 in 1910. Some progress in this area too therefore took place over the years, though here Hucknall probably compares unfavourably with both Ystradyfodwg and Aberdare, since Hucknall's figure only comprises 4.22% of the population, whereas those for the two South Wales parishes were 5.25% and 6.2% respectively. In the case of the Welsh parishes however it was communicant membership that was recorded not Easter communicants, so the statistics do not equate exactly. However, judged on its own merits rather than in comparison to South Wales parishes, both Hucknall's Sunday school attendance and communicants made it by 1913 the largest single denomination in the town, though Nonconformity as a whole certainly had a greater visible presence in Hucknall by the sheer number of its buildings and the great variety of denominations (see chapter three).

The progress of Anglicanism in Hucknall was certainly stimulated by the advent of coalmining in the town and the consequent desire of the church to provide for the spiritual needs of the mining families. The parish church itself was restored in 1874 and enlarged in 1887.<sup>29</sup> In 1876 the daughter church of St John's was built on the Butler's Hill estate about one and a half miles distant from the parish church. A schoolroom was built in the grounds of St John's church a few years later and the church itself was extended in 1895. So

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<sup>29</sup> *Kelly's Directory of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire 1916*, pp. 86 – 87.

although (as related in chapter three) several of the other denominations had already established themselves on Butler's Hill the Anglican Church must also have made satisfactory progress there.

In 1892, on the west side of the parish, the daughter church of St Peter's was built. The Duke of Portland, when he laid the foundation stone of this church, referred to this area as 'an outlying district' and as being 'remote from either of the present churches'.<sup>30</sup> This was not a very accurate description since it was in fact less than one mile distant from the parish church and situated on a main road on which stood also the Wesleyan church, the Baptist church, and the larger of the two Primitive Methodist churches. However its presence as a mission church was probably justified in that it attracted over 300 children to its Sunday school, and it may well have attracted working class adults in the area who would prefer to worship with their own social class rather than at the more distant parish church where arguably the social mix would have been greater.

With regard to worship and spiritual activity, judging by information given in the *Parish Magazine* for 1909, Anglicans in Hucknall had plenty of opportunities for worship and spiritual development. All three churches offered three services each Sunday and two Sunday schools, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The parish church had also on a Sunday two Bible classes for young people and a Bible class for men on Sunday afternoon. St John's also had a men's Bible class on Sunday afternoon while St Peter's had a men's service on Sunday afternoon. Weekday activities in the

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<sup>30</sup> *Hucknall Morning Star and Advertiser*, 29 April 1892, p. 5, cols. 3 – 4.

parish church included Matins daily at 8.45am and Evensong and sermon on Thursdays. In addition there were meetings of the Boys' Brigade and the Band of Hope, a Mothers' Meeting weekly and a District Visitors' Meeting monthly. St John's and St Peter's each held a women's Bible class weekly on Thursdays and St Peter's had a prayer meeting on Thursday evenings. All three churches had weekly choir practices. Other activities, though not listed in the regular weekly schedule, included a Communicants' Guild that was well attended – for example, in January 1909 there were 'nearly sixty present at the usual monthly service, clearly proving how much these meetings are appreciated'.<sup>31</sup> There was also a Church of England's Men's Society that met monthly and held a quarterly service in church. It seems that the monthly meetings were better attended than the quarterly service, since the magazine article says of the service held on 17 January 1909 'we regret to say that many of our members were not present. We sincerely hope that all members will make a special effort to attend when we have our next Service'.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately indications of how many people availed themselves of all these opportunities for worship, Bible study, prayer etc are only patchy; nor is it known if many mining families took part in these activities, though one presumes there would have been some that did. The church at least was clearly providing and encouraging participation in spiritual and educational development.

To turn now to Shirebrook, in 1881 the population of this parish, which covered 1,440 acres (smaller therefore than Hucknall and very small compared with the original parishes of Aberdare and Ystradyfodwg), was a

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<sup>31</sup> *Hucknall Parish Magazine*, February 1909, unpaginated.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, unpaginated.

mere 450. It had however its own Anglican church since 1843/44 (prior to which Shirebrook had been part of the parish of Pleasley). The Anglican Sunday school in Shirebrook had in 1884 thirty-six children on roll. The following table<sup>33</sup> indicates the sudden leap in numbers after Shirebrook colliery was sunk in 1896. In 1896 itself the population was estimated at 1,500; by 1901 it had risen to 9,000 and by 1911 to 11,116.<sup>34</sup>

*Table 4:3 The Anglican Church in Shirebrook 1885 - 1921*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Sunday School</b>	<b>Baptisms</b>	<b>Confirmations</b>	<b>Easter Communicants</b>
1885	36	14	0	not recorded
1893	(a) 88	19	0	62
1902	300	168	27	98
1905	500	178	20	54
1910	300	243	16	102
1914	300	274	27	not recorded
1921	300	319	36	not recorded

(a) in addition there was a Bible class attended by 70

There are one or two unusual features of these statistics: from 1902 onwards the Sunday school numbers must only be very approximate, since they are all exact hundreds; it is unlikely that the Sunday school numbers remained completely static from 1910 until at least 1921, which the above statistics indicate; the drop in Easter communicant numbers in 1905 is also unusual but possibly indicates particularly inclement weather on that Sunday. In view of the continual growth in numbers being baptised, one would have expected a rather larger Sunday school, since even at its peak in 1905 the number compares very unfavourably with Hucknall's number for the same year (995).

<sup>33</sup> All the figures in the table are taken from the *Southwell Diocesan Calendar* for the years indicated.

<sup>34</sup> Population statistics taken from the *Southwell Diocesan Calendar* for that year.



However, whereas in Hucknall there were usually three curates as well as the incumbent in Shirebrook there were none. Thus Shirebrook church was at a great disadvantage. It has not been possible to trace details of parish life and activities in Shirebrook but one would assume these must of necessity have been somewhat limited for the lone incumbent could not possibly have engaged in house to house visiting, parish missions and many week day activities when he had so many baptisms, and doubtless also weddings and funerals, to conduct. However many people in Shirebrook clearly brought their children for baptism in the Anglican church and a reasonable number sent their children to the Anglican Sunday school. It is almost certain that opportunities for Holy Communion would have been frequent since the vicar, Rev. M. Braddon, was very high church and controversially introduced ritualistic practices into the parish.<sup>35</sup> It is likely therefore that activities in the parish would have included a Communicants' Guild.

To take now a brief general view of the coalfield communities, most of the larger working class and mainly mining communities were like Hucknall in that as their population increased they opened mission churches in other parts of their parishes; examples of such communities are Bulwell, Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield in Nottinghamshire and Bolsover in Derbyshire. Like Hucknall, all these parishes had the benefit of having a curate for each mission church which would facilitate missioning of a new area in the parish that was rapidly growing. Many of the mining communities however were only villages, but clearly the presence of a coalmine in a parish had an impact

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<sup>35</sup> See photograph and accompanying text in Sadler, G., *Shirebrook in Old Picture Postcards* (Netherlands: 1993), p. 10.

on the existing Anglican church. It is not possible to demonstrate this by 'before' and 'after' statistics since most of the collieries (Creswell being an exception) were sunk before 1884 when Southwell became a diocese and published a Diocesan Calendar. It is however possible to indicate the on-going influence of the Anglican church especially on children. It will be obvious, from the tables below, that most of the mining parishes, even a really small one like Annesley, had a church school and all of them had (in proportion to their population) a fairly well attended Sunday school. During the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century therefore institutional religion still had a significant place in these mining communities.

*Table 4:4 Anglican Statistics for some of the Mining Villages in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire<sup>36</sup>*

Annesley, Notts (population: 1881: 1442, 1891: 1420, 1901: 1375, 1911: 1215, 1921: 1061) colliery sunk 1865

<b>Activities</b>	<b>1886</b>	<b>1896</b>	<b>1906</b>	<b>1916</b>
Church Day School	365	394	336	221
Sunday School	*182	125	120	230
Baptisms	23	15	8	34
Confirmations	25	16	0	26
Easter Communicants	not rec	93	73	not rec

\* plus a Bible class of 55

<sup>36</sup> All statistics in table 4:4 taken from *Southwell Diocesan Calendars* for years indicated.

Eastwood, Notts (population: 1881: 3565, 1891: 4388, 1901: 4363, 1911: 4692 1921: 5069) colliery sunk in 1850s, also collieries at nearby Kimberley and Brinsley.

<b>Activities</b>	<b>1886</b>	<b>1896</b>	<b>1906</b>	<b>1916</b>
Church Day School	450	700	639	-
Sunday School	250	250	250	404
Baptisms		82	73	85
Confirmations		3	29	27
Easter Communicants	not rec	65	128	not rec

Skegby, Notts (included Stanton Hill until 1893 and for baptism statistics etc until 1902) Population statistics include Stanton Hill: 1881: 2401, 1891: 3120, 1901: 3867, 1911: 5057, 1921: 6231

<b>Activities</b>	<b>1886</b>	<b>1896</b>	<b>1906</b>	<b>1916</b>
Church Day School	240	230	293	346
Sunday School	128	110	140	212
Baptisms	58	115	107	173
Confirmations	1	1	7	22
Easter Communicants	not rec	48	82	not rec

Stanton Hill, Notts (Village built for miners at two nearby collieries, sunk in 1868 and 1875)

<b>Activities</b>	<b>1886</b>	<b>1896</b>	<b>1906</b>	<b>1916</b>
Church Day School	510	743	720	883
Sunday School	164	240	299	611
Baptisms				
Confirmations			3	15
Easter Communicants		44	88	not rec

Elmton with Creswell, Derbyshire (Elmton a very small non-mining community). A coalmine was sunk at Creswell in 1896 and a model village built there; baptisms and confirmations took place at Elmton until 1915. The Church Day school was at Creswell. Population figures for whole parish 1881: 518, 1891:673, 1901: 4000 1911: 5361

Elmton (1886 and 1896 include Creswell)

Activities	1886	1896	1906	1916
Sunday School	85	130	40	37
Baptisms	13	27	112	4
Confirmations		28	29	3
Easter Communicants	not rec	36	58	not rec

Creswell

Activities	1886	1896	1906	1916
Church Day School	63	145	800	1032
Sunday School			280	538
Baptisms				80
Confirmations			38	14
Easter Communicants			102	not rec

Killamarsh, Derbyshire, was a very old mining village (pre 1800) (population 1881: 2841, 1891: 3202, 1901: 3600, 1911: 4849)

Activities	1886	1896	1906	1916
Church Day School	120	180	200	240
Sunday School	100	*420	447	265
Baptisms		97	127	77
Confirmations	86	41	30	39
Easter Communicants	not rec	160	398	not rec

\* plus a Bible class of 238

It is noticeable that Killamarsh has exceptionally high numbers during the incumbency of Rev F. J. Metcalfe. (For details of Metcalfe see p 197)

Two further observations can be made from the available statistics: not all mining villages show a steady increase in population; Annesley's population was decreasing during the period looked at, possibly reflecting the fortune of

the local colliery or it may be that some of Annesley's population moved to one of the nearby urban districts like Hucknall and Kirkby-in-Ashfield, for obviously all miners did not live in their pit villages. Most of the villages have relatively high baptism figures and reasonable numbers confirmed. This is a further indication of the continuing role of institutional religion in mining communities. One would certainly not write off the Anglican mission to mining communities in the dioceses of Llandaff and Southwell as a failure, which, as already stated, Lee considered to be the case in the Durham Diocese.

#### **Paternalism: A help or a hindrance in working class parishes?**

Robert Lee also argued that the 'church's mission (in Durham) could not succeed without the money and the backing of the coal interest'.<sup>37</sup> This was true also of South Wales and the East Midlands. A considerable amount of the money required to build and staff the new Anglican churches in the coalmining areas examined here came from the social elite, whether local landowner or wealthy industrialist. Without this money the Anglican church would undoubtedly have struggled to make the progress it did. Many examples of this kind of paternalism can be found in both South Wales and the East Midlands. Of the Anglican churches in the parish of Ystradyfodwg, St David's Ton Pentre was built by the Crawshay Bailey family<sup>38</sup> (wealthy industrialists) who also gave the site and contributed financially towards the

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<sup>37</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield, 1810 – 1926* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), p. 109.

<sup>38</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 187, q. 5441.

erection of St Stephen's Ystrad.<sup>39</sup> St Peter's Pentre owed its existence to Mr and Mrs Griffith Llewellyn<sup>40</sup> (landowners at Baglan). Other examples of churches in the Rhondda that were built either entirely or substantially by the elite were St Mary the Virgin Treherbert, All Saints Penrenglyn,<sup>41</sup> St George's Cwmparc and St Thomas's Clydach Vale.<sup>42</sup> In addition, and of particular benefit to the Church in Wales as a whole, was the very generous contribution by Olive Emma Talbot, a member of a wealthy industrialist family, towards the building of St Michael's Theological College Aberdare.<sup>43</sup> As noted in chapter two, there were a few problems with some of the above churches which owed their existence to the largesse of wealthy landowners or industrialists, but without their beneficence it may not have been possible to build them.

In the East Midlands also, many of the landed families were very generous to the Anglican church. For example, the Duke of Portland, along with others, gave a substantial donation towards the cost of building St Peter's Church Hucknall and he also promised to contribute fifty pounds per annum towards the salary of the curate of that church.<sup>44</sup> The Duke of Portland had in 1870 given the site for St John's Church on Butler's Hill in Hucknall<sup>45</sup>. At Creswell in Derbyshire the schools were provided jointly by the Portland family and the

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 189, qs. 5524 – 5527.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 187, qs. 5442 – 5443.

<sup>41</sup> Penrenglyn was in the Treherbert parish.

<sup>42</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 190, qs. 5604 – 5623.

<sup>43</sup> For details of her contribution to St Michael's College see Knight, F. in *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment*, p. 350.

<sup>44</sup> *Hucknall Morning Star and Advertiser*, 29 April 1892, p. 5, cols. 3 – 4.

<sup>45</sup> Newton, M., *One More Step: A Look at Ten Hucknall Churches* (Hucknall: Author, 1997), p. 13.

colliery company, but the church was erected by the Duke.<sup>46</sup> In 1911 the Duke also built the Creswell Church Institute.<sup>47</sup> The Countess of Carnarvon gave a substantial donation towards the building of All Saints' Church Stanton Hill,<sup>48</sup> and she along with other benefactors helped to finance the curacy at Huthwaite, whilst the Duke of Portland gave five hundred pounds towards the cost of building the church.<sup>49</sup> Finally in this list of benefactions by the elite, when a new church was built at Annesley for the benefit of the mining families, the land was donated and money given by the local Squire, John Musters. Large donations were also given by the colliery proprietors and the Vicar, C. H. Prance and his family; the Vicar also paid for a spire to be added to the church.<sup>50</sup>

The generosity of these and other benefactors of the Anglican church was clearly very beneficial to the church. But did this paternalism help or hinder the church's mission in these mining areas? Robert Lee, writing about the Diocese of Durham, argued that this close association between the church and the elite 'must have been counter-productive as far as connecting with the working class was concerned'.<sup>51</sup> He conceded that the church could not have accomplished her mission to the mining communities 'without an injection of cash from the local elites' but argued 'that the heavy involvement of elites made churches less attractive to working people and operated to the

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<sup>46</sup> Griffin, A. R., *The British Coalmining Industry: Retrospect and Prospect* (Buxton: Moorland Publishing Company, 1977), p. 166.

<sup>47</sup> *Notts Free Press*, 13 January 1911, p. 5, col. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Clay-Dove, W., *The Story of Skegby and Stanton Hill* (published by author, c1984), p. 40.

<sup>49</sup> Lindley, L., *History of Sutton-in-Ashfield* (published by author, 1907; republished [with an introduction by P. J. Naylor], Derby: J. H. Hall, 1983), p. 14.

<sup>50</sup> Pearson, D. R., *Annesley Through the Ages* (published by author, 1995), pp. 193 – 194.

<sup>51</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 114.

overall detriment of the mission'.<sup>52</sup> Lee's reason for this claim is that such benefactors gained too much power and influence in church location, design, liturgy and appointment of clergy.<sup>53</sup> So was this the case in South Wales and the East Midlands?

In respect of South Wales chapter two mentioned some of the negative effects of paternalism – churches provided by a donor could cause problems later which the donor's family were reluctant to pay for. In the East Midlands where so many landed persons were patrons of livings they obviously could have an influence on appointment of clergy, but this practice had been there for centuries. When problems did arise it was mainly through the paternalism of the large mining companies like Butterleys. Thus Butterleys, who were always keen to promote sport and at their Ollerton colliery had very successful soccer and cricket teams, and were even known to 'give men jobs on the strength of their talents on the sportsfield',<sup>54</sup> insisted that the Vicar to be appointed to the church they had built be a sportsman.<sup>55</sup> Whether this actually caused problems for the church is not stated. However relations between church and colliery owners could become strained, especially if a clergyman supported and encouraged the formation of a local branch of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Union, as did the Vicar of Bilsthorpe in 1929.<sup>56</sup> Clearly then there could be problems for the church hierarchy arising from

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>54</sup> Waller, R. J., 'A Company Village in the New Dukeries Coalfield: New Ollerton 1918 – 39' in *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 83 (1979). p. 74.

<sup>55</sup> Waller, R. J., *The Dukeries Transformed: The Social and Political Development of a Twentieth Century Coalfield* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 181.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 183.



paternalism but whether this actually detracted from the mission of the church in the mining communities is doubtful.

There is certainly evidence to indicate that relations between the working people and the landed gentry were cordial. In Creswell the Duchess of Portland 'personally visited the sick and injured in their village'.<sup>57</sup> In Hucknall when the Duke and Duchess of Portland arrived for the stone laying of St Peter's Church they were received like royalty. The streets were decorated with streamers, bunting and banners, the latter bearing slogans such as 'Long live the Duke and Duchess of Portland', and thousands lined the streets.<sup>58</sup> Clearly the crowd enjoyed the festivities. Each year too the Duke and Duchess paid for a special post-Christmas dinner for the elderly in the parish of Hucknall and telegrams were exchanged between the Portlands and the recipients of their benevolence, each wishing the other well.<sup>59</sup> On two occasions (1910 and 1912) the Duke actually came to this event, in 1912 being accompanied by the Duchess.<sup>60</sup> Lee would certainly not have approved of this kind of paternalism. He referred to treats for older people and children as the 'dark side of charity' and 'paternalistic condescension'.<sup>61</sup> It is probable however, that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century the treats provided by the elite and the personal interest shown in the welfare of these mining communities were welcomed by the miners and their families rather

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<sup>57</sup> *Notts Free Press*, 13 January 1911, p. 5, col. 1.

<sup>58</sup> *Hucknall Morning Star and Advertiser*, 29 April 1892, p. 5, cols. 3 – 4.

<sup>59</sup> *Hucknall Parish Church Magazine*, January 1909 (PR29,037 in NA), unpaginated.

<sup>60</sup> Ellis, M., *The Duke and Duchess of Portland Remembered*, Local Interest Series, no 10 (a privately-published, undated pamphlet in Local History Collection at Nottingham City Library), p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 152.

than despised as 'paternalistic condescension'. Admittedly, due to changing economic and political circumstances (which will be examined in chapter seven) by the 1920s and 1930s paternalism had, as Lee argued, 'fallen into some disrepute with givers and receivers'.<sup>62</sup> However, this does not appear to have been the case in Nottinghamshire, because Mavis Ellis related many continuing instances of kindness and benevolent provision by the Duke and Duchess of Portland for mining families in distress. She stated that the Duchess won the hearts of the mining population to such an extent that in 1935 the Nottinghamshire Miners' Welfare Association, on behalf of the miners, their wives and children, petitioned King George V, on the occasion of his Silver Jubilee, that some honour might be conferred upon 'that angel, our beloved Duchess'.<sup>63</sup> One would argue that paternalism in Nottinghamshire was therefore no barrier to attracting the working class to Anglicanism, though most probably it did nothing one way or the other to affect church attendance since mining communities were not closed villages.

### **Clergy: academic and social backgrounds**

Traditionally the clergy have exercised a very dominant role within the Anglican church, so to have clergy who relate well to their congregations is obviously an advantage to the church's mission. It might seem therefore that in order to relate well to the mining communities it was necessary to appoint clergy from a more working class background rather than from the higher

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>63</sup> Ellis, M., *The Duke and Duchess of Portland Remembered* (quotation from p. 20, many instances of kindness *passim*).

social classes from which many clergy have traditionally come. This was the thinking that lay behind the decision in 1860 of the Diocese of Durham to appoint the clergy for their mining parishes from a lower social class than was customary.<sup>64</sup> No one was keener than Bishop Ollivant of Llandaff Diocese to establish a missionary agency to promote the spiritual welfare of the mining population in his Diocese, yet his standards for clergy were extremely high. He wanted men of 'true piety, competent learning', ability to speak two languages (presumably English and Welsh) 'fervid eloquence and sound churchmanship'.<sup>65</sup> Ollivant's standards form a marked contrast with those of Bishop Baring of Durham who stated 'what Chevington' (a mining community in his Diocese) 'wants is a man of no great refinement, but who will put himself wholly to the work of preaching to, and visiting from house to house, a rough pit population'.<sup>66</sup> Ollivant does not even mention the ability to empathise with an immigrant working class population which was constantly increasing. However R. L. Brown claimed that in fact a good number of valley curates were already church planting in these valleys and that 'those who have become assistant curates in these valley parishes were often of the same background as the colliers they served and frequently were indistinguishable from Nonconformist ministers'.<sup>67</sup> Such men would hardly have been up to Ollivant's standards therefore. Many of these men were so-

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<sup>64</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> Ollivant, A., *Establishing a Missionary Agency in the Diocese of Llandaff*, c1860 (D/D L/DC D47 in GRO), p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> Brown, R. L., *Reclaiming the Wilderness; Some Aspects of the Parochial Life and Achievements of the Diocese of Llandaff during the Nineteenth Century* (Welshpool: author, 2001), p. 29.

called 'literate', that is men without an academic background and little theological training. The quality of these men was variable.

One of them certainly proved his worth, namely Rev William Lewis, Vicar of Ystradyfodwg 1869-1922. He was born into a mining family in Sirhowy (Tredegar); his father later became a haulier contractor and Lewis in his youth helped in his father's business. Lewis's theological and academic training was limited to tuition from a neighbouring incumbent and the Divinity School at Abergavenny.<sup>68</sup> Ollivant obviously recognised Lewis's potential since he priested him after only one year, whereas many 'literate' had to wait for five or even seven years before they were ordained to the priesthood. After several curacies in mining parishes Lewis became Vicar of Ystradyfodwg in 1869. As the details of the progress in that parish show (see above) Lewis was instrumental in bringing about great progress in Anglicanism in the Rhondda valleys.

On the other hand some of the literates were of a 'very inferior stamp'.<sup>69</sup> Indeed Lewis himself complained that some of these 'literate' were 'not up to the mark'.<sup>70</sup> Other incumbents however were more positive in their remarks. John Griffith (Vicar of Aberdare 1847 – 1859 and Merthyr Tydfil 1859 – 1885) approved of these assistant curates that 'were mainly drawn from the "gwerin" (common people) class of clergy, evangelical in tone and at one with

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<sup>68</sup> Prichard, T. J. *Representative Bodies: Glimpses of Periods in the History of Upland Glamorgan with the Aid of Contemporary Personalities* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1988), p. 134.

<sup>69</sup> Brown, R. L., *The Welsh Evangelicals* (Cardiff: Tair Eglwys Press, 1986), p. 104.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

the people they served'.<sup>71</sup> R. L. Brown argues that these men of the people were able to win the support of the people and thus 'kept the despised church as a living option in the valley parishes of South Wales'.<sup>72</sup> Not all clergy in the mining communities however were from the '*gwerin*'; a list of incumbents of the parish of Aberdare between 1846 – 1914 shows that all seven of these men possessed the degree of MA or DD and thus were almost certainly Oxbridge men.<sup>73</sup> Yet Aberdare, like Ystradyfodwg, progressed considerably (see progress above). So perhaps it was not just the '*gwerin*' clergy that 'kept the despised church as a living option in the valley parishes'. Frances Knight argues that on the whole the Welsh clergy were a 'more socially and educationally diverse body' than their English counterparts<sup>74</sup> since in Wales only 25% of the clergy were Oxbridge educated as compared with 78% for the province of Canterbury as a whole and 46% for that of York.<sup>75</sup> These observations of Frances Knight relating to the whole of Wales certainly seem to hold true of the South Wales coalmining areas as compared with the East Midland coalmining areas. Thus a list of curates who, between 1856 – 1896, served at Christ Church Cinderhill (near Nottingham), a church built especially for the miners of a nearby colliery, reveals that of the fourteen men listed (of whom one served two curacies there at different periods and

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>73</sup> For list of incumbents and qualifications see Evans, G., *A History of St John's Church Aberdare* (Aberdare: Friends of St John's, 1982), p. 82.

<sup>74</sup> Knight, F. in *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment*, p. 341.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 341 – 342.

one could not be traced in *Crockford's*) only one had no academic qualifications whilst the rest were all Oxbridge men<sup>76</sup>

Then from a later date, the 1930s (by which time opportunities for clergy training had widened considerably), the academic and theological qualifications of nineteen clergymen from the mining parishes of Annesley, Blidworth, Forest Town, Hucknall, Huthwaite, Newstead, Skegby and Stanton Hill, and Sutton-in-Ashfield were traced. Nine of them were Oxbridge men, three had degrees from other universities and the remaining seven had been only to theological colleges.<sup>77</sup> It would seem likely therefore that at least half of these clergymen came from a higher social background than the majority of their parishioners.

Another group of nineteen clergymen serving in the Rhondda valleys between the 1880s and the 1920s were similarly traced.<sup>78</sup> In this group only two were Oxbridge men, though eight had degrees from St David's College Lampeter, three had degrees from other universities and the remaining six were licentiates, three of them from St David's College. The predominance of Lampeter men in this random sample is confirmed by William Price who states that in '1922 fifty-four of the eighty-four clergy' serving in the coalmining areas of Aberdare, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda had been trained

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<sup>76</sup> For the list of curates see *Christ Church Cinderhill: the Story of a Church Past and Present but also a Church with a Future* (a souvenir booklet produced by the Church to celebrate its one hundred and fiftieth anniversary, 2006), p. 7.

<sup>77</sup> Details traced in *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, 1933.

<sup>78</sup> *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, various years between 1880 and the 1920s.

'in whole or in part at Lampeter' and in 1928 Lampeter provided thirteen of the twenty-five incumbents in the rural deanery of Rhondda.<sup>79</sup>

These Lampeter statistics have been given here because they are indicative of the likely social class of the men concerned, since an examination of William Price's analysis of the social background of the Lampeter men reveals that the students were overwhelmingly from working class or non-professional backgrounds, predominantly rural and agricultural; from the intakes of 1887, 1897, 1907, 1917 and 1927 there were only sixteen whose fathers were miners and another five whose fathers had other manual work in the mines. There were also three whose fathers had managerial or engineering positions in the coalmines.<sup>80</sup> The predominance of men from agricultural and rural backgrounds probably reflects the nature of the Diocese of St David's in which Lampeter is situated.

The important question however is not so much which social class the clergy came from but whether this made any difference to their success in working class parishes. Hugh McLeod's study of parishes in the East End of London seems to indicate that it did, since he found that relations between clergy and the working class could be difficult because 70% of the Anglican clergy were Oxbridge graduates who 'spoke and dressed in ways that set them apart'.<sup>81</sup>

However, there is evidence from both Nottinghamshire and South Wales that difference in social class between priest and people was not necessarily a

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<sup>79</sup> Price, D. T. W., 'The Contribution of St David's College Lampeter to the Church in Wales 1920 – 71' in *Journal of Welsh Ecclesiastical History*, 1 (1984), p. 66.

<sup>80</sup> Price, D. T. W., *A History of St David's College Lampeter* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1977), vol. 1, pp. 209 – 210 and vol. 2, pp. 245 – 247.

<sup>81</sup> McLeod, H., *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian England* (Bangor: Headstart History Series, 1993), p. 21.

barrier to bonding or an indicator of failure of the mission of the Anglican church. C. H. Prance, Vicar of Annesley from 1871 to 1890, was obviously a wealthy man from a wealthy family; it was he who paid for a spire to be added to Annesley Church (see page 188). He was educated at Harrow and Cambridge and after some time travelling abroad he was ordained to a curacy in Halesowen where he developed 'a great sympathy with working men which gave him such power in winning their hearts'.<sup>82</sup> In Annesley he was so loved by his parishioners that when he returned to the parish after a break caused by ill health 'the whole parish went to meet him and gave him a most hearty welcome home'.<sup>83</sup> Small wonder he was so popular because when there was an outbreak of smallpox in the parish Prance 'spent hours at the bedsides of those poor plague stricken people'.<sup>84</sup>

The Vicar of Killamarsh (Derbyshire) 1897 – 1912, F. J. Metcalfe, was another incumbent who was loved by his people, despite being a somewhat eccentric character and a ritualist priest. He was born in Suffolk, the son of a clergyman and theologian, and was certainly from a different social background to his parishioners. Yet he remained for the whole of his working life among colliers in Derbyshire. He understood the miners, knew how to communicate with them, was not backward in reproofing what he regarded as their sinful ways (swearing and the like) but cared for them like a father; though it is doubtful if his kind of intimate ministry would have been acceptable at a later period. In

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<sup>82</sup> Pearson, D. R., *Annesley Through the Ages* (published by the author, 1995), p. 198.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.



Clay Cross where he was a curate he had built up a large and active communicants' guild, and in Killamarsh he certainly succeeded in building a strong Sunday school (see statistical tables 4:4 p 185).<sup>85</sup>

From South Wales too there are examples of priests from different social and academic backgrounds to the majority of their congregations who seem to have related very well to the mining population. John Daniel James, Vicar of Llwynypia 1893 – 1900, was an Oxbridge man who came from the peace of a Monmouthshire country parish to Llwynypia which at that time was struggling with poverty, debt and indifference. Yet he made great progress and within six months of his arrival in the parish 143 people were confirmed, and by 1896 six Sunday schools had been built with an attendance of over 1,000.<sup>86</sup>

Another priest who endeared himself to the ordinary working folk was Canon John David Jenkins, an Oxbridge man and Vicar of Aberdare 1870 – 1876. Like Metcalfe at Killamarsh, Jenkins was a ritualist whose efforts for the working class in supporting their friendly societies and mediating in strikes were so appreciated by the Nonconformist ministers that they presented him with a 'testimonial in recognition of his services' and the colliers themselves 'appointed him as an arbitrator to preside over negotiations with the employers'.<sup>87</sup> C. B. Turner states however that 'there is no firm evidence that

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<sup>85</sup> For details of this rather unusual priest see his autobiography: Metcalfe, F. J., *Colliers and I, or Thirty Years Work among Derbyshire Colliers* (Manchester: Ashworth and Co., 1903).

<sup>86</sup> Rees, W. H., *A Short History of St Andrew's Llwynypia 1878 – 1948* (D/D CW/L 1/54 in GRO), p. 25.

<sup>87</sup> Turner, C. B., 'Ritualism, Railwaymen and the Poor: The Ministry of Canon J. D. Jenkins', pp. 71 – 72.

Canon Jenkins increased to any extent the numbers of working class communicants in his parish'.<sup>88</sup>

It would seem then from the above evidence that the clergyman's social and academic background was not necessarily a factor in determining his relationship with his parishioners. The ability to empathise with the miners and other working class people was the quality most required (a quality not mentioned by Bishop Ollivant in his list of requirements); though empathy did not necessarily guarantee an increase in church membership it would undoubtedly have helped the mission of the church to the community as a whole.

### **The working class laity and their role in Anglicanism**

All the foregoing discussion has centred on the elite and the clergy, but what of the working class laity in the mining communities? What role, if any, did they have in the Anglican church? Chapter three demonstrated that in the Nonconformist churches on the two coalfields the ordinary working people were very much involved. Bishop Ollivant certainly wanted the working people to be brought within the orbit of the church, hence his desire to increase the number of clergy to minister to the miners. He also saw the desirability, indeed the necessity, for more lay involvement in the affairs of the church, and thus recommended the clergy to set up in their parishes associations of lay helpers to forward the church's work. He was however looking primarily to the middle classes for this help since he said that the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

church 'had not yet dug into the deep mine of the hearts and affections of the middle classes as we might'.<sup>89</sup> There were however some who clearly felt that working men should be encouraged to be more involved in lay ministry; thus at the first diocesan conference in 1884 the Vicar of Aberdare stated 'the cooperation of the so-called working class is neither solicited nor obtained. Our Nonconformist brethren are far ahead of us in this matter'.<sup>90</sup> At this conference the subject of lay help was fully discussed and resulted in the setting up of a 'Diocesan Lay Helpers' Association' for 'uniting together all communicants of the Church of England male and female who were willing to devote themselves to any branch of church work'.<sup>91</sup> By 1885 this Association had been formed in a considerable number of parishes, and by 1888 had 1,092 members throughout the Diocese.<sup>92</sup> One suspects that the members were drawn predominantly from the middle or lower middle classes.

One obvious field in which lay workers would be involved was that of teaching in Sunday schools, but here again Bishop Lewis (who succeeded Ollivant) seems to be targeting the middle class, since he urged his clergy to recruit Sunday school teachers from 'the best educated and most cultured classes of your parishioners'.<sup>93</sup> He believed that doing this would improve 'the whole moral tone and character of our Sunday schools and would assist in restoring the happy relations that once existed everywhere between the upper and lower classes, but which recent events have contributed so largely to render

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<sup>89</sup> Davies, E. T., *Religion in the Industrial Revolution of South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1965), p. 125 (but quoted from Ollivant's 1881 Visitation Charge).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>91</sup> Lewis, R., Bishop of Llandaff, *Primary Visitation Charge to the Diocese*, 1885, p. 23.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, *Second Visitation Charge*, 1888, p. 19.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, *Fourth Visitation Charge*, 1894, p. 20.

less cordial'.<sup>94</sup> It would be interesting to know whether this recommendation was put into practice and if so whether it achieved its objective. Considering however the fairly large number of children attending Sunday schools in the large parishes and the number of teachers that they would require<sup>95</sup> it is highly probable that at least some teachers would have been drawn from the working class, since the numbers of the cultured elite in mining parishes would be relatively small.

Another area in which some lay people would play an important role in the church's mission was that of lay reader. Indeed in the rapidly growing mining parishes the church would have struggled to manage without them. In some cases lay readers were paid for their ministry, but since this included (for the Diocesan lay reader based in Aberdare at least) 'visiting the careless, the intemperate, and the degraded, inducing them to attend church, holding open air services and cooperating with the parochial church wardens in deepening the interest of all classes in the mission services and addresses'<sup>96</sup> the work of a lay reader was no sinecure. This particular reader had led missions at Wattstown and Cymmer and Porth in the Rhondda and other places in the Diocese. Lodwick points out though that the Diocesan reader (licensed to go anywhere in the Diocese with the incumbent's permission) 'tended to be middle class, well educated and articulate whilst the parochial reader tended to be less well educated (though not necessarily less

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 20 (The 'recent events' would be the miners' strike of 1893).

<sup>95</sup> The parish of Ystradyfodwg, for example, had 89 teachers; see *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 185, q. 5358.

<sup>96</sup> Lodwick, B. M., *Readers in the Diocese of Llandaff 1870 – 2002* (Bridgend: Llandaff Association of Readers, 2002, at NLW), p. 11.

intelligent)'.<sup>97</sup> There were certainly many parochial readers in the Rhondda parishes since between 1890 and 1932 ninety-one readers were licensed to serve there.<sup>98</sup> But how many of these were working men is not indicated. After Bishop Lewis had held a Quiet Day for lay readers in the early 1890s he reported that fifty lay readers had attended, the majority of them being working men.<sup>99</sup> However Frances Knight states that in a sample of one hundred readers only one could positively be identified as being a miner.<sup>100</sup> After 1868 all churches had to have two churchwardens elected from within the church and not by the parish rate payers (as had formerly been the case), though one suspects that most of the wardens would have been drawn from the upper or middle classes; thus in mining parishes it was sometimes colliery officials who performed that duty.<sup>101</sup> In at least one mining parish in the East Midlands there was a churchwarden who was also a miner.<sup>102</sup> In his research on the Ashfield area of Nottinghamshire Robert Breckles found that from the 1920s onwards more churchwardens, even in the more middle class churches, were drawn from the working classes.<sup>103</sup> In predominantly working class churches such as St Thomas's Kirkby-in-Ashfield and its daughter church St

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49 – 64.

<sup>99</sup> Lewis, R., Bishop of Llandaff, *Fourth Visitation Charge*, 1894, p. 14.

<sup>100</sup> Knight, F. in *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment*, p. 382.

<sup>101</sup> Examples being Henry Lewis, colliery manager at Annesley, and Archibald Hood, mine owner at Llwynypia.

<sup>102</sup> Selwyn, E. G., 'Sir Edwyn Hoskyns Priest and Bishop' in *Theology*, 12 (March 1926), p. 157. This miner/ churchwarden was in the habit of keeping the church collection in an old stocking at his house!

<sup>103</sup> Breckles, R. 'The Social History of Sutton-in-Ashfield 1880 – 1930' (M.Phil. thesis, University of Nottingham, 1993); see tables between pp. 273 – 274, and p. 293.

Andrew's there were cases where wardens were colliery workers, as sidesmen had often been from an earlier date.<sup>104</sup>

In addition to wardens and sidesmen most churches had some form of parochial church council. From 1919 this was a legal requirement in England, but many parishes in both England and Wales had some form of parochial church council earlier than this. In the parish of Ystradyfodwg this council consisted not only of clergy, lay readers, churchwardens and sidesmen but also of representatives of church activities and organisations; thus Sunday school teachers and leaders of Band of Hope etc would be represented.<sup>105</sup>

From 1919 when elected parochial church councils were formed the number of lay members was generous; for example at the first Easter meeting of the newly formed Conventional District<sup>106</sup> of St Cynon's, Ynyscynon (Rhondda) on 24 April 1922, seventeen men and five women were elected to serve on the parochial church council. The number of sidesmen (now not automatically on a church council) was eleven.<sup>107</sup> Almost certainly in a mining parish such as Ynyscynon some of this number would have been miners and probably many of the members would have been working class.

Most churches had choirs to lead the congregational singing, so here too it is highly likely that working class men and boys would be well represented. The Nonconformists were not the only ones with a strong musical tradition. St

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 295 – 296.

<sup>105</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 185, qs. 5347 – 5349.

<sup>106</sup> A conventional district is a part of an existing parish that is intended to become an independent parish but has not yet achieved that status. It is allowed to have its own parochial church council.

<sup>107</sup> St Cynon's Ynyscynon, *Minutes*, Easter Meeting 24 April 1922 (book held by the Church), pp. 7 and 9.

Andrew's Llwynypia, for example, was well known for its good choral and congregational singing.<sup>108</sup> In two of the churches in the parish of Aberdare, St Elvan's and St Mary's, choir practices are listed as regular weeknight activities.<sup>109</sup> This latter church, Green told the commissioners, was 'constantly having a concert' and their choir 'always joins the Llandaff Choral Festival'.<sup>110</sup> In addition, under the auspices of the Aberdare Deanery Sunday School Association, a large Eisteddfod was held from time to time for their Sunday school scholars.<sup>111</sup> Ystradyfodwg parish also held children's concerts.<sup>112</sup>

In addition to having choirs the ritualist churches would have had servers. This was definitely the case at Shirebrook,<sup>113</sup> and at Killamarsh Metcalfe was accused by the memorialists of the parish of, among other things, 'using the services of an acolyte robed in a scarlet cassock and cotta at Holy Communion'.<sup>114</sup> It is highly probable that servers were also a feature of Aberdare parish. Again one assumes that in these predominantly mining parishes the servers/ acolytes were working class.

Apart from the above mentioned church officers and liturgical functionaries the laity could, and many would, have been involved in the multifarious church activities and societies, both religious and secular. At St Michael's Sutton-in-Ashfield, for example, church activities and societies included Men's Institute, Mothers' Meeting, Guild Meeting, Band of Hope and Boys Brigade.

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<sup>108</sup> Rees, W. H., *St Andrew Llwynypia 1878 – 1948*, p. 43.

<sup>109</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 250, q. 7963.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 259, q. 8268.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 253, q. 8014.

<sup>112</sup> Evans, M., *St David's Ton Pentre*, p. 33.

<sup>113</sup> Sadler, G., *Shirebrook in Old Picture Postcards*, photo on p. 10.

<sup>114</sup> Metcalfe, F. J., *Colliers and I*, p. 138.

Huthwaite church had a Men's Institute with about fifty members who met for debating theology, politics etc and in addition they had cricket and recreational clubs attached. At St Thomas's Kirkby-in-Ashfield there was a highly successful Bible Class for young men that at its peak had one hundred members, with a regular attendance of sixty. Their meetings were sometimes addressed by speakers of national reputation. At this church too there was a branch of the Church of England Men's Society.<sup>115</sup> Parochial organisations in the Parish of Aberdare included Mothers' Union, Girls' Friendly Society, Church of England Men's Society, Church Defence League and Church of England Temperance Benefit Society.<sup>116</sup> Activities in the parish of Ystradyfodwg included Band of Hope, Penny Readings, Girls' Friendly Society, Men's Bible group and Church Lads' Brigade.<sup>117</sup> There were also Church Lads' Brigades at Cymmer and Porth, Dinas and Penygraig, Llwynypia and Ferndale. The members of the Church Lads' Brigades throughout the Diocese of Llandaff 'had to attend either weekly Sunday school or Bible class'.<sup>118</sup>

The above examples are sufficient to show that the Church of England, like the Nonconformist churches, offered people an amazing variety of activities, religious and secular, for ordinary people to become engaged in, and arguably therefore these activities contributed considerably to the quality of life of those who participated. Naturally all these activities and organisations would require leaders, though doubtless in the Church of England specifically religious activities would have been clergy led, but the less specifically

<sup>115</sup> Breckles, R., 'The Social History of Sutton-in-Ashfield', pp. 247 – 248.

<sup>116</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 250, q. 7963.

<sup>117</sup> Evans, M., *St David's Ton Pentre*, p. 33.

<sup>118</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 4, p. 518, q. 48059.



religious organisations would have had lay leaders, some of whom would be working class – probably miners.

What is more these organisations would have been involved in fund raising and other practical work for their respective churches, since few, if any, of the churches were totally dependent on money donated by the elite. The Vicar of Tylorstown, for example, stated that in order to build the church of All Saints, Maerdy, he and the members had ‘a hard struggle by tea parties, entertainments, concerts, bazaars and so on to get the money together’.<sup>119</sup>

All of this would have involved hours of hard work. One church society at Tylorstown, namely the Women’s Altar Guild, combined the religious element with practical help. Thus the Vicar related ‘they meet sometimes and discuss religious matters and may sing a hymn but they have a fund and their chief work is renovating the chancel and communion table, cleaning the altar cloths etc, supplying flowers etc. They spend money to improve the interior of the church in various ways’.<sup>120</sup>

In the parish of Ystradyfodwg annual tea meetings were held which were very popular and for which 1,000 tickets were printed. The money raised was divided between the churches of St David’s and St John’s.<sup>121</sup> In St Stephen’s at Ystrad social teas took place once or twice a year in addition to annual choir suppers.<sup>122</sup> The preparation and serving of these teas must have involved many people and much effort, and the results must have been

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<sup>119</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, pp. 211 – 212, q. 6567.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 216, q. 6755.

<sup>121</sup> Evans, M., *St David’s, Ton Pentre*, pp. 23 – 24.

<sup>122</sup> *St Stephen’s Church Ystrad Rhondda Minute Book May 1896 – June 1918* (held by the Church), unpaginated but see meetings held on 29 October 1900, 15 November 1901, 6 June 1902 and 11 December 1903.

enjoyed by many more. William Lewis (Vicar of Ystradyfodwg) acknowledged the help of so many ordinary people when he told the Royal Commissioners that the local people themselves had done their part in supporting the church and have often 'denied themselves a great deal to contribute towards the erection of these buildings'.<sup>123</sup>

Occasionally it seems that it was the people themselves who were urging more church planting, since Rev. John Rees stated that soon after he came to take charge of the Anglican church in Ferndale his people there asked him 'to extend the cause of the church down to the village of Tylorstown about a mile away'.<sup>124</sup>

#### **The Anglican church – a church 'for' the people or a church 'of' the people ?**

All the fund raising, practical activities and zeal of the ordinary people to support their local churches and even plant more churches did more than provide those involved with purposeful activity, for arguably it would also give them a great sense of belonging to and ownership of their respective churches. If this was so it would tend to modify Robert Lee's argument that only the Primitive Methodist church was 'a true church *of* the people, not simply a middle class church *for* the people'.<sup>125</sup> Admittedly the Anglican laity could not set up their own Anglican church and run it themselves as could the Primitive Methodists (and indeed other independent Nonconformist churches), and certainly the Anglican church in the coalmining communities

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<sup>123</sup> *Royal Commission*, vol. 2, p. 190, q. 5626.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 211, q. 6544.

<sup>125</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 136.

would have struggled to make progress without the paternalism of the elite; but clearly many ordinary working people by their very practical contributions and their love for their local church made it *their* church rather than simply a church *for them*. Hugh McLeod rightly argued 'It was in the local religious community that the individual found or failed to find a form of Christianity that gave his life more meaning and the actions of denominational hierarchies did not necessarily have much bearing on the matter'.<sup>126</sup>

### **Conclusion**

From all the above it is clear that given the poor starting position of the Anglican church, especially in South Wales, very good overall progress was made in the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth century. H. W. J. Edwards, writing on the Church in Wales in the 1930s, claimed that for Wales the disestablishment of the Church of England in the Province had brought 'a new vigour into the church's work' and thus Anglicanism in Wales was not simply maintaining its position but 'actually gaining an immense amount of ground' though he also admitted that 'Dissent is still overwhelmingly powerful'.<sup>127</sup>

The position of institutional religion in the East Midlands coalfield was perhaps rather less vibrant than in South Wales, but arguably the churches in the mining communities were no less vibrant than those in non mining areas.

The overall picture that this chapter gives of the Anglican church in the coalfields is that it was reasonably successful in its mission, given its poor and

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<sup>126</sup> McLeod, H., *Class and Religion*, pp. 181 – 182.

<sup>127</sup> Edwards, H. W. J., *The Good Patch* (London: Cape, 1938), p. 132.

rather belated starting position and the many problems it faced as outlined in chapter two. From the evidence examined above one would not consider the Anglican mission to the coalfields of the East Midlands and South Wales as a failure, as Lee claimed was the case in the Durham Diocese. Admittedly there seems less positive evidence of miners taking leading roles within their respective churches than was the case for many of the Nonconformist churches; nevertheless for all those working people who responded to all that Anglicanism had to offer in terms of spiritual, cultural and social activities it added to the quality of their lives and they succeeded in making a church that was essentially a church *for* them, *their* church.

## Chapter 5

### The Roman Catholic Church

#### Introduction

Chapters three and four have examined the growth and progress up to 1914 of Nonconformity and Anglicanism in the two coalmining regions as well as looking at many of the activities, both spiritual and social, that these denominations engaged in. They have demonstrated the strength and influence of institutional religion and the considerable degree of involvement by at least some of the miners themselves in leadership roles within their respective churches. The number of miners who were Roman Catholics would, in most communities, be relatively small compared with the number of miners who were Nonconformists or Anglicans. Nevertheless within their own churches Catholic miners and their families would almost certainly have been in the majority, since it was their arrival in the coalfields that led to the establishing of Catholic missions there, as this chapter will demonstrate. The proportion of Catholics to total population would naturally vary from place to place and over time. In the Catholic Diocese of Nottingham, for example, in the 1850s Catholics represented only two percent of the population and although their actual numbers increased from c20,000 in 1850 to c40,000 in 1915 the proportion remained the same.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Foster, G., 'Middle England Diocese, Middle England Catholicism: The development of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nottingham 1850 – 1915' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2004), p. 168.

This chapter will look at the Roman Catholic church in the two coalfields in order to trace its origins, growth and activities and to assess its significance since the Catholic church, unlike Nonconformity, and to a lesser extent Anglicanism, continued to grow numerically throughout the inter-war period; because of this Catholicism will be examined as a whole and not split into pre- and post-1914 periods as the other denominations are.

### **South Wales**

It was 'the coming of the Irish' to the Merthyr Tydfil area, where the iron industry and its accompanying collieries developed in the early part of the nineteenth century, 'that resurrected Catholicism there'.<sup>2</sup> A Catholic mission to Merthyr and Dowlais was begun c1839 by Father Carroll. He had under his charge about 700 poor Irish employed in the local iron and coal industry. He had no chapel but said Mass in a granary situated above the local slaughter house. From this unpromising beginning a strong Catholic Church developed in Merthyr and Dowlais. It was not until much later in the century that the Irish came seeking work in the Rhondda, many of them coming from the Merthyr area. Thus prior to 1886, when the Catholic parish of SS Gabriel and Raphael was founded in Tonypany by Father Joseph Thomas Bray, 'a priest would travel up from Treforest (near Pontypridd) to celebrate Mass in the Red Lion Public House in Dinas ... The school, too, was founded in the late

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<sup>2</sup> *St Mary's Parish Magazine Merthyr*, 11/4 (June 1934), ( D/DX 392/8/3/3 in GRO), loose sheet number 4.

1880s'.<sup>3</sup> In 1910 another Catholic mission was begun in Ferndale and in 1912 the church, Our Lady of Penrhys (seating capacity 400), was built there. In his speech, as he laid the foundation stone of this church, Bishop Hedley<sup>4</sup> declared that Catholics 'were few, and poor and scattered, but ... they must have a church of their own where the full and true religion of Christ would be adequately taught and practised ... he trusted the good example of the flock would do something towards bringing the old faith back'.<sup>5</sup> The 'flock' might have been relatively poor, but they were able to have a church because it was 'financed by Miss M. Davies of Llantrisant following refurbishment of the shrine at Penrhys some 3.2 kilometers distant'.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, the Catholic Church, no less than the other denominations, benefitted from the support of the wealthy. In 1915 the church of the Immaculate Conception was established in Treorchy. Clearly then Catholicism was only growing slowly in the Rhondda. H. W. J. Edwards, writing in 1938, claimed that whilst there were many Roman Catholics in the valleys of Glamorgan, especially in the Merthyr Tydfil area, in the Rhondda valleys Catholicism had a hard struggle to gain any ground because the Protestant tradition was very strong there.<sup>7</sup> This was not surprising, for although up to the mid-1920s the population of Rhondda continued to grow, the proportion who were born in Wales was,

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<sup>3</sup> Details taken from *Outline History of SS Gabriel and Raphael Roman Catholic Church Tonypany* (a typescript held in the Archives of the Church at Tonypany), unpaginated.

<sup>4</sup> John Cuthbert Hedley was Bishop of Newport; his Diocese included Glamorgan but it did not become the Archdiocese of Cardiff until 1916, after Hedley's death.

<sup>5</sup> Details quoted from a typescript in the Archives of SS Gabriel and Raphael, Tonypany, unpaginated, but typescript compiled from an article in the *Tablet*, 120 (31 August 1912), p. 339.

<sup>6</sup> Typescript describing details of the church in the Archives of SS Gabriel and Raphael, unpaginated.

<sup>7</sup> Edwards, H. W. J., *The Good Patch* (London: Cape, 1938), pp. 144 – 145.

even at the 1921 Census, overwhelming. This Census revealed that 134,443 residents in the Rhondda had been born in Wales; 25,727 had been born in England and only 862 had been born in Ireland.<sup>8</sup> Even so, as already stated (page 65), there were also by 1911 over 900 immigrants from Ireland. However the strength of Nonconformity, even though past its peak, was considerable.

Some leakage of Catholics due to inter-marriage with non-Catholics occurred since *The Tablet* reported in 1924 'Today one can meet, in the Rhondda Valley and elsewhere in South Wales, with many bearers of old Irish and Catholic names who are not Catholics but Nonconformists'.<sup>9</sup> One would presume too that equally there were converts to Catholicism from Nonconformity as a result of inter-marriage. Indeed, T. O. Hughes argues that the considerable growth of Catholicism in Wales in the first half of the twentieth century was due mainly to both continuing immigration of Irish, English and European Catholics and intermarriage with the native population. The latter, he argues, tended to be conversion for convenience rather than by conviction and therefore led to considerable lapsing at a later date.<sup>10</sup> Arguably though many converts 'for convenience' would have complied with the instructions of the Catholic hierarchy and brought up their children as Catholics which would have certainly increased Catholic numbers.

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<sup>8</sup> Census of England and Wales 1921, *County of Glamorgan* (London: HMSO, 1923), p. 75, table 21.

<sup>9</sup> Hughes, T. O., *Winds of Change: The Roman Catholic Church and Society in Wales 1916 – 1962* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 22 – 23.

<sup>10</sup> Hughes, T. O., 'Anti-Catholicism in Wales, 1900 – 1960' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53/2 (April 2002), p. 317.



For the immigrants from Ireland or from continental Europe their religion formed a major part of their national identity; thus, as David Martin argued (see chapter one), this would strengthen their adherence to their churches, at a time when, amongst many protestants, such adherence was declining. Furthermore, as is well documented elsewhere, at this period of great uncertainty the well-defined, authoritarian Catholic faith would have appealed to some and inclined them to convert to Catholicism. T. O. Hughes argues that 'In an age of religious uncertainty, increasing indifferentism and secularisation, the notion of infallibility and the authoritarian temper of the (Catholic) Church certainly helped draw many to its fold'.<sup>11</sup>

Not surprisingly therefore, the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Cardiff (comprising Glamorgan, Monmouthshire and Herefordshire) grew dramatically in the inter-war period. The number of churches increased from eighty-one in 1921 to a hundred and sixteen in 1939 (only one of the new ones being in the Rhondda – St Mary Magdalene at Ynysir, founded in 1929); the number of secular priests rose from forty-five to one hundred and fifteen in the same period and fifteen new Catholic schools were built. The great growth period in terms of Catholic population (that is, all those who were baptised Catholics) was between 1921 and 1931 when numbers in the Archdiocese increased from 50,640 to 87,111. Obviously only a relatively small percentage of this vast increase occurred in the Rhondda; one presumes that Cardiff, Newport and possibly Merthyr attracted the vast majority.

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<sup>11</sup> Hughes, T. O., *Winds of Change*, p. 39.

Numbers then remained stable up to 1939 despite the great decrease in the population of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire.<sup>12</sup>

The great increase in the Catholic population, not surprisingly, led to a growth in Anti-Catholicism from Nonconformity. Hughes claims 'In press and on platform, the chapels continually derided the Roman Catholic church as idolatrous, persecutory and as posing a critical threat to Welsh society'.<sup>13</sup>

Hughes quotes H. W. J. Edwards who, writing in 1938, claimed 'The Irish or Italian Roman Catholic is regarded as a quite ordinary and respectable person, but it is another matter for the Rhondda Welshman or woman to embrace "the old faith"'.<sup>14</sup> Such converts were considered not only to have committed apostasy but also to have betrayed their country. Unsurprisingly therefore they often faced a degree of rejection by home communities.

The fact that only one more church was founded in the Rhondda would certainly indicate that Catholic growth here was not as great as it was in other parts of the Archdiocese. This may perhaps have been due to the fact that it was during the 1920s that the mining industry in the Rhondda began to decline and therefore immigration would virtually cease. Furthermore the Roman Catholic Church, which was the last of the major denominations to arrive in the Rhondda, was generally more cautious than the other denominations, especially the Nonconformists, in the number of churches they built. It is noticeable in the statistics quoted by T. O. Hughes (see above) that it was the number of extra secular priests in the Archdiocese that had

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 7 – 8.

<sup>13</sup> Hughes, T. O., 'Anti-Catholicism in Wales', p. 317.

<sup>14</sup> Hughes, T. O., *Winds of Change*, p. 81.

increased dramatically, rather than the number of churches. This would also reflect the very different priorities of Catholicism and Nonconformity. The latter started building a church for their cause when their numbers were small and resources were few and though having their own minister was desirable it was not their first priority; they could exist without one. For the Catholic Church, on the other hand, the hierarchy's first step was to send a mission priest to an area where Catholics were known to live, to try and establish a Catholic presence (as is indicated above and will be seen also in the discussion below on the East Midlands coalfield). The building of a permanent church would only be done when resources were available, and if there was a choice between building a school or building a church they would usually choose the former.

Over the years however, perhaps because of their moderately increasing numbers, Catholics in the Rhondda, as elsewhere, generally grew more confident in proclaiming their faith. In fact 'in the early years of the twentieth century a Corpus Christi Procession and a St Patrick's Day Parade were introduced. Parishioners walked for about three miles through the Parish'.<sup>15</sup> Edwards also stated that a poem 'Our Lady of Penrhys' had been published in *Rhondda Outlook* which was a sign that the Catholics in the Rhondda were remembering that once the whole of the Rhondda was Catholic.<sup>16</sup> Edwards argued too that whilst generally 'organised religion in the Rhondda had fallen away' it had not done so in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>17</sup> This fact may also

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<sup>15</sup> Typescript in parish Archives, unpaginated.

<sup>16</sup> Edwards, H. W. J., *The Good Patch*, p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

have increased Catholic confidence and encouraged them in actively seeking converts. Indeed, for the first half of the twentieth century the Catholic press, the Catholic hierarchy and the Catholic intelligentsia actually cherished the hope of reclaiming Wales for the Catholic faith.<sup>18</sup> Maybe these hopes were expressed mainly to encourage the faithful since given the relative strength, even at this period, of Nonconformity it seems unlikely that all but the most optimistic Catholics would really envisage this as a reality. Even so, given the numerical growth of the Catholic Church and its increasing confidence and air of triumphalism it is hardly surprising that it received, as mentioned above, some vitriolic criticism from Nonconformist ministers, who would feel threatened by Catholic growth at the very time when their own churches were declining.<sup>19</sup>

Arguably though the position of the Catholic church was not quite as rosy as the Nonconformist ministers feared, since T. O. Hughes states that 'While the number of Catholics in Wales was rising, those who regularly attended Mass were increasingly in the minority. The calls for regular Mass attendance were largely, then, falling on deaf ears'.<sup>20</sup> An article in *St Mary's Parish Magazine, Merthyr* in 1934 stated 'We feel somewhat anxious about the spiritual welfare of those children who have left the elementary school. Some of them we never see at Mass or at the sacraments, and very few attend the Guild services with the Children of Mary'.<sup>21</sup> As will be seen in chapter seven this falling off in actual attendance was also one of the complaints of Anglican and

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<sup>18</sup> Hughes, T. O., 'Anti Catholicism in Wales', p. 317.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 313 – 315.

<sup>20</sup> Hughes, T. O., *Winds of Change*, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> *St Mary's Parish Magazine Merthyr*, 11/4 (June 1934), unpaginated.

Nonconformist ministers in the inter-war years. It seems too that there were some who turned away from the Catholic Church at this time. Thus a priest from the South Wales valleys complained in 1936 'There is a rising tide of paganism ... the people are drifting away'.<sup>22</sup> Even the Catholic hierarchy in the 1930s were concerned about the faithfulness of their own flock. Bishop Vaughan (Menevia Diocese) argued in 1936 that 'Catholics in modern society were more likely to lose their faith than at almost any other time ... the atmosphere of modern Wales was characterised by indifference, sensual sin and lack of prayer. Worldliness was bound to devour those Catholics whose faith was weak'.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, these two remarks were very much in the same vein as those of the Anglicans, Bishop Timothy Rees and Canon Barber, which will be quoted in the introduction to chapter seven.

Obviously, like all the other denominations in the 1920s and 1930s, the Catholic Church would have faced the challenge of the great rise in Marxist socialism. Unlike most of the other churches though the Roman Catholic Church actively attempted to combat Marxist doctrine, promoting instead Catholic social teaching. Thus, in the Rhondda 'the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* were circulated as well as Catholic tracts against communism'.<sup>24</sup> H. W. J. Edwards argued that the Catholics were in fact the chief enemies of Marxism.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hughes, T. O., *Winds of Change*, p. 17 (but quoted from *The Tablet*, 28 November 1936, p. 735).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> Edwards, H. W. J., *The Good Patch*, p. 145. *Rerum Novarum* was issued by Leo XIII in 1891. It upheld trade unionism and the ideal of a just wage but it proclaimed private property as a natural right and condemned Socialism. *Quadragesimo Anno* was issued in May 1931 by Pius XI. It confirmed and elaborated the earlier encyclical of Leo XIII and emphasised the

The overall picture of Catholicism in the Rhondda in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century is that of a minority church that was growing steadily in both numbers and confidence even when other denominations were declining. It is clear though that the church hierarchy were nevertheless worried about declining commitment and fearful that their flock might succumb either to the growing indifference to religion in society or to the lure of Marxist Socialism.

### **East Midlands**

As in South Wales, the number of Roman Catholic churches established in the mining areas of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire was relatively few compared with the number established by the other denominations. This is hardly surprising since in 1850, when the Catholic hierarchy was restored, in the whole of Nottinghamshire there were only three Catholic churches (Nottingham, Newark and Worksop) and one chapel of ease. Derbyshire had a slightly greater Catholic presence with six churches (five of which were in the north of the County) and a few mass centres and private chapels.<sup>26</sup>

In the early years of the Nottingham Diocese (up to 1874) progress was fairly slow. Churches were only built in areas where there were wealthy Catholic patrons. In the Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire coalfield no development occurred. In the period 1874 – 1901 (the episcopate of Edward Gilpin

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incompatibility of Marxist Socialism with Catholicism. See *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (OUP, 1997), pp. 1354 and 1385 for details.

<sup>25</sup> Edwards, H. W. J., *The Good Patch*, p. 145.

<sup>26</sup> Sweeney, G. D., *Centenary Book: A Short History of the Diocese of Nottingham* (Newport: R. H. Johns Ltd, 1950), p. 32 – map.

Bagshawe) the pace of development quickened considerably and forty-three Catholic missions were established. Bagshawe was one who had a great concern for the poor, so drawing on the help of various religious orders he 'set to work to provide his Diocese with a structure of social services from the resources of the Church'.<sup>27</sup> Unsurprisingly, given Bagshawe's concern for the poor, the main foci for mission were the large towns and the industrial parishes in the coalfield. Thus missions began in Mansfield (1876), Hucknall (1879), Eastwood (1880), Bulwell (1882), Long Eaton (1883) and Radford (1897).<sup>28</sup> The priests sent out on mission celebrated mass 'anywhere – in private houses, schools, warehouses and factories, with a tin chapel often as the crowning achievement'.<sup>29</sup> Some of the above missions were great successes, others less so.

In Hucknall, where two coalmines were sunk in the 1860s, many of the migrant sinkers and miners from the Whitwick area in Leicestershire were Catholics.<sup>30</sup> So Bishop Bagshawe decided that there was an 'urgent need for a mission for people of the Catholic faith'.<sup>31</sup> Thus Father Cantwell, a member of the staff of Nottingham Cathedral,<sup>32</sup> was commissioned to attempt to found a Catholic church in Hucknall. Like other denominations earlier, the Catholic church focussed its efforts on Butler's Hill. They leased a room in that area

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<sup>27</sup> Sweeney, G. D., *A History of the Diocese of Nottingham in the Episcopate of Bishop Bagshawe (1874 - 1901)*, typescript compiled 1961 (in East Midlands Collection of the University of Nottingham), pp. 55ff.

<sup>28</sup> Sweeney, G. D., *Centenary Book*, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>31</sup> Newton, M., 'Holy Cross Church' in *Hucknall Torkard Times*, issue 2, March 1997 (sponsored by Ashfield District Council, 1997), unpaginated.

<sup>32</sup> The Catholic Cathedral in Nottingham had been designed by Pugin and built as an ordinary church; it had been designated as the Cathedral in 1850, when the Catholic hierarchy was restored.

which later was used as a school for Catholic children. However in 1885 Mr and Mrs Hanlon, a wealthy Irish Catholic couple, came to live in Hucknall and they donated to the church, from land that they had inherited, sufficient space to accommodate church, school and presbytery. They also gave £1,000 towards the erection of the church. The remainder of the money required - £500 – was donated by the Worsley-Worswick family (owners of the colliery in nearby Annesley). The Hanlons also loaned £300 to the church so that a presbytery could be built. The Worsley-Worswick family gave a further £500 to build a new school adjacent to the church, since by this time the small room in Whyburn Street was inadequate as a school. The church was opened in 1887 and the school in 1888.

The Catholic population in Hucknall increased, possibly due to the hard work of two long-serving priests; namely Father Macdonnell, who served the parish for over twenty years until his death in 1902, and Father Michael O'Reilly, who arrived in 1905 and served the parish for thirty-one years until his death in 1936. During the 1880s Father Macdonnell had, in addition to Hucknall, to serve the Catholic centre in Bulwell – where both Mass attendances and offertories tended to be lower than at Hucknall. Thus at Hucknall the average attendance at Sunday Mass was ninety; at Bulwell it was sixty.<sup>33</sup>

The Hucknall mission then was clearly a success story, as was the mission to Eastwood (1880), which acquired its own priest in 1889 and where finally in 1897, through the generosity of Lord Walter and Lady Amabel Kerr a church

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<sup>33</sup> The most comprehensive source of information on Holy Cross Catholic Church, Hucknall, is *Holy Cross Church Hucknall 1879 – 1979 Parish Centenary Souvenir* (Sutton-in-Ashfield: Holy Cross Church, 1979).



was built. Not all early attempts to establish Catholic centres were so successful. Thus in Bulwell, where a colmine had been sunk in 1867, there had been several attempts to form a mission. The Catholic working population petitioned Bishop Bagshawe for a Mass centre and one was opened in 1881. This was followed five years later by an improvised chapel but the 'mission struggled in dire poverty until 1911 when Bishop Brindle suddenly closed it'.<sup>34</sup> Yet, as stated above, this mission had, in the 1880s, been served by the priest from Hucknall and its average attendance at Mass had been sixty. This would seem to be an adequate number for success; many of the Nonconformist churches, as already shown, survived and even thrived on a much smaller membership. Arguably because of the great dependence on priests in the Roman Catholic Church, a totally working class population would lack the money, influence and initiative to succeed. The mission in Radford, a very working class area in Nottingham, which would have included miners amongst its population, followed a similar pattern to Bulwell – early struggle, followed by closure. The main reason for these mission closures was financial. Robert Brindle, the Bishop of the Nottingham Diocese from 1901-1915, was faced with many financial problems due largely, Foster claims, to his predecessor's ineptitude in financial matters.<sup>35</sup> Both of these missions were however revived in the 1920s,<sup>36</sup> by which time Roman Catholicism was increasing considerably. Unlike Hucknall and Eastwood both Bulwell and Radford lacked wealthy Catholic benefactors, and, as Foster argues, a

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<sup>34</sup> Sweeney, G. D., *Centenary Book*, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> Foster, G., 'Middle England Diocese', pp. 147 – 149.

<sup>36</sup> For details of these missions see Sweeney, G. D., *Centenary Book*, p. 34.

mission's success or failure depended on the presence or absence of a Catholic middle class.<sup>37</sup> The middle classes had the additional value of helping 'to move Catholicism from its marginal position in the 1850s to a more mainstream location by Edwardian times'.<sup>38</sup>

In Shirebrook (Derbyshire) where the population had grown from 573 in 1891 to over 6,641 in 1901 due to the sinking of Shirebrook colliery in 1895, Mass was first said in 1900 in an old barn. Later, in 1904 Father Froes, who had already established a Catholic centre in neighbouring Bolsover, moved to Shirebrook to establish a mission there. He rented a building which had been intended for an isolation hospital but had been condemned as unfit for this purpose. He used part of it for his own accommodation and part of it as a Mass centre. In 1905-1906 he purchased from the Duke of Devonshire sufficient land on which to build a church and the foundation stone was laid on 5 October 1907. Fr. Froes served Shirebrook until 1928. After his departure the fortunes of the church declined, to the extent that on 6 September 1933, when Fr. Cummins became parish priest, there were only forty-five people present to hear Mass, and the church itself was in desperate need of repair. Many, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, thought that the church, St Joseph's, was finished. However by 1936 there were, according to Sweeney, 800 Catholics in the parish of whom 141 were practising their faith.<sup>39</sup> This Catholic population figure is possibly somewhat exaggerated since the Catholic Diocesan Yearbook for 1937 gives the Catholic population as 654 and Easter

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<sup>37</sup> Foster, G., 'Middle England Diocese', p. 190.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

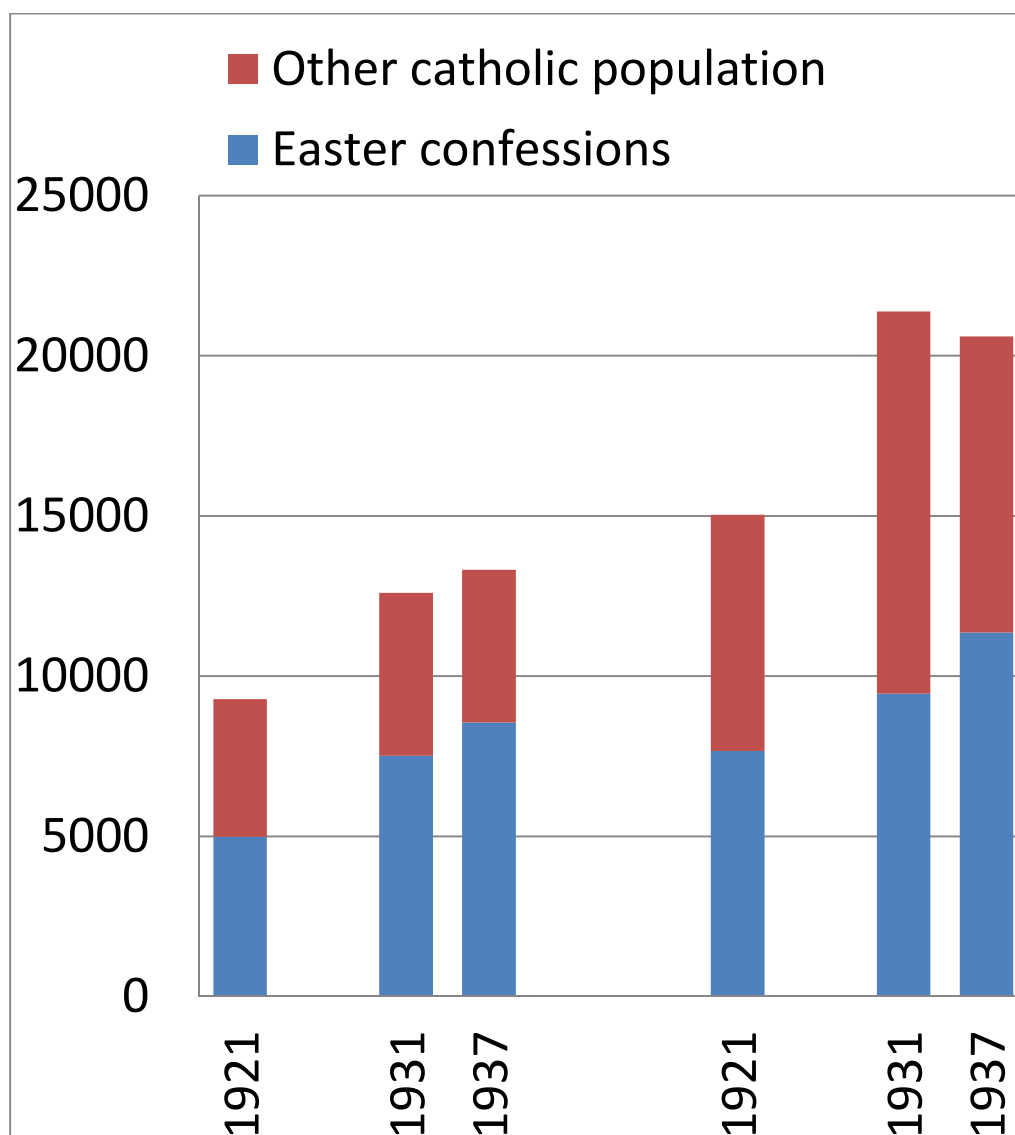
<sup>39</sup> Most of this information has been taken from the website of the Catholic Parishes of Bolsover and Shirebrook (February 2011) <http://www.stjoseph-shirebrook.org.uk>

Confessions as 141. Sweeney described the whole area of Shirebrook as ‘one of spiritual destitution, relieved but not solved by the erection of a church (St Joseph’s) in 1907’.<sup>40</sup> Clearly he was referring only to lack of Catholic provision, since, as chapters four and five have shown, Shirebrook already possessed one Anglican Church as well as six Nonconformist churches – Congregational, Primitive Methodist, Wesleyan, United Methodist Free church, Salvation Army and Baptist. But, as is evidenced from the information above and in *Graph 5:1* and *Table 5:1* below, Catholic commitment was considerably less than Catholic population. Clearly then from a solely Catholic viewpoint Shirebrook would appear spiritually destitute.

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<sup>40</sup> Sweeney, G. D., *Centenary Book*, p. 37.

Graph 5:1. Roman Catholic Membership in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire



It is obvious from the above graph that In the Diocese of Nottingham, as in South Wales, the Catholic population increased considerably during the inter-war years. The total number of Catholics in Nottinghamshire increased from 9,287 in 1921 to 13,319 by 1937. In Derbyshire the pattern was less regular – increasing from 15,036 to 21,388 between 1921 and 1931 but falling slightly to 20,603 by 1937. The percentage of Catholics fulfilling their mandatory Easter duties of going to confession and receiving communion (a greater measure of religious commitment than baptism alone) was, as graph 5:1

shows, variable. In Nottinghamshire it was 53.63% in 1921, 59.67% in 1931 and 64.25% in 1937 – a steady increase. In Derbyshire, on the other hand, the percentage was lower: 50.99% in 1921 dropping to 44.2% in 1931 then increasing to 55.14% in 1937.<sup>41</sup> In 1931 therefore the considerable Catholic population increase in Derbyshire seemed not to be matched by an increase in religious zeal.

During the 1920s and early 1930s in the Diocese of Nottingham twenty-one new missions were founded, three defunct missions revived and twenty-five permanent churches and three temporary churches built.<sup>42</sup> In the Nottinghamshire coalfield area a Catholic Church was built in Kirkby-in-Ashfield in 1923 and a Mass centre established at Sutton-in-Ashfield. In these two large urban districts where coalmining had been a major industry for many years there had previously been no centres for Catholic worship. On the other hand, the Catholic population of the new coalmining communities at Ollerton and Harworth were soon provided for. The coalmines at Ollerton and Harworth were only sunk in the mid-1920s yet a mission was opened for Ollerton in 1927 and a church built in 1929 and at Harworth a mass centre was opened in 1929 and soon after it had its own priest and a temporary church.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> All the statistics quoted here are taken from the *Nottingham Diocesan Year Books* for 1921, 1931 and 1937. The percentages have been worked out from them.

<sup>42</sup> Sweeney, G. D., *Centenary Book*, p. 63.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

To turn now to a closer look at inter-war development at Hucknall and Shirebrook, the table below<sup>44</sup> will give some idea of their relative fortunes in the inter-war period.

*Table 5:1 Roman Catholic Statistics, Hucknall and Shirebrook*

		<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1937</b>
Hucknall	Catholic Population	300	537	506
	Easter Confessions	208	250	226
Shirebrook	Catholic Population	340	360	654
	Easter Confessions	97	151	157
Easter confessions as percentage of Catholic population	Hucknall	69.3	46.5	44.7
	Shirebrook	28.5	41.9	24.0

These statistics of the Hucknall and Shirebrook Catholic Churches reveal considerable growth in Catholic population, though for Hucknall there was a small decline between 1931 and 1937. For Shirebrook however the major growth period was in the 1930s, when the Catholic population increased from 360 in 1931 to 654 in 1937. This might indicate either an influx of Irish immigrants during the period or a large number of children being born to Catholic parents. Interestingly, for Shirebrook, the Easter confessions as a percentage of the Catholic population fell dramatically between 1931 and 1937 (from 41.9% to 24%). This would of course be explicable if the rise in the Catholic population was due to a sudden surge in the birth rate. For Hucknall too Easter confessions as a percentage of Catholic population fell

<sup>44</sup> *Nottingham Diocesan Year Books* (relevant years).

considerably between 1921 and 1931 (69.3% to 46.5%) then marginally between 1931 and 1937 (46.5% to 44.7%). Thus, although the picture remains unclear, there seems to be some indication that for those two churches growth in actual numbers did not necessarily mean growth in religious commitment.

In the East Midlands as in South Wales the growth of socialism was a worrying development for the Catholic hierarchy. The church's response to it was varied; Bagshawe wholeheartedly condemned it and at least one priest refused absolution for anyone who showed support for socialist ideas, whereas Fr. McNabb OP, Prior of Holy Cross, Leicester gave it theological approval; middle class Catholics at this church debated the issue whilst the working class English and Irish Catholics of the towns generally supported socialism.<sup>45</sup> However, as chapter seven will indicate, socialism, especially of the Marxist variety, was never such a big issue in the East Midlands coalfield as it was in South Wales. Even so the hierarchy clearly aimed to lessen its impact, for the whole purpose of continuing Catholic education for adults was to maintain Catholic orthodoxy in the face of doctrinal attacks from within, for example from modernism, and from without from Darwinism, rationalism and socialism.<sup>46</sup>

### **Activities - Archdiocese of Cardiff**

T. O. Hughes argued that the objectives of the activities, whether spiritual or social, of the Catholic Church (in South Wales at any rate) were to 'stem

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<sup>45</sup> Foster, G., 'Middle England Diocese', p. 268.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

leakage', 'fight slackness and make spiritual progress' and 'foster community spirit and social life within the parish'.<sup>47</sup> To achieve the spiritual aim branches of the 'Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament' were formed in each parish 'as a way of ensuring that Catholics regularly attended mass'.<sup>48</sup> Later other guilds and groups were added, such as the Catholic Young Men's Society, St Anne's Guild, the Children of Mary, the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Catholic Institute. These societies would fulfil different aspects of the Church's mission; the St Vincent de Paul Society for example would engage in pastoral ministry to those in need, whereas the Catholic Institute would provide social facilities for church members, possibly to prevent Catholics looking to secular or non-Catholic clubs for leisure. The Catholic hierarchy 'continually encouraged every Catholic adult to belong to one or more group, so as both to keep community spirit alive and to ensure that there was a means of taking organised action be it political, financial or social when the occasion demanded'.<sup>49</sup> One can imagine therefore that in the Rhondda Roman Catholic miners were encouraged to take an active part in their local branch of the South Wales Miners' Federation in order to oppose Marxist ideas. Certainly, as indicated above, all the spiritual, educational and social needs of Catholic miners and their families would be catered for in order to deter their flock from looking elsewhere for fellowship and marriage.

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<sup>47</sup> Hughes, T. O., *Winds of Change*, p. 28.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.



### Activities – Diocese of Nottingham

In the Catholic Diocese of Nottingham Graham Foster claims that lay Catholics became 'more and more involved in running various committees, for example bazaar committees, they organised rallies, ensured door to door collections were maintained and provided the continuity in maintaining the mid-week activities'<sup>50</sup> though whether this was so in very working class parishes is debatable, since one suspects that success in these activities as in the area of finance depended largely on having middle class families available to take the initiative. Hugh McLeod argues that 'the strength of a working class Catholic parish ... depended on clerical initiative, and the willingness of Irish immigrants and their descendants to respond to these initiatives.'<sup>51</sup> Certainly the priests in the Nottingham Diocese were very dominant, indeed were expected to be, for Foster states that the priest in Bagshawe's time was expected to 'create, organise and supervise an increasing number of mid-week socio-religious activities, while monitoring the roles played by his lay Catholics in local secular activities'.<sup>52</sup> No doubt the priests in the mining towns especially would be anxious to keep an eye on the political activities of their flocks. Bagshawe's legacy to the laity, Foster argues, was one of being expected to be controlled and directed and to know their place.<sup>53</sup> Thus on leaving school, children were expected to participate in church-sponsored youth activities, for example the 'Confraternity of Mary'. Then as adults they

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<sup>50</sup> Foster, G., 'Middle England Diocese', p. 295.

<sup>51</sup> McLeod, H., *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789 – 1989* (Oxford: University Press, 1997), p. 130.

<sup>52</sup> Foster, G., 'Middle England Diocese', p. 142.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

were encouraged to join activities such as those offered by the 'Society of St Vincent de Paul', so that they would learn to care for the vulnerable. Not surprisingly, frequent attendance at Mass was also expected of them. As was the case in South Wales 'The Confraternities offered a broad mixture of spiritual, educational and recreational activities, both within the church and in secular society'.<sup>54</sup>

At Holy Cross Church in Hucknall 'The Guild of the Blessed Sacrament' was established in 1920. This stimulated the spiritual life of the parish and brought parishioners together. One of the functions of this Guild was to supply 'beautiful vestments and all that was necessary for the worthy service of the Blessed Sacrament'.<sup>55</sup> By 1924 this Guild had 114 adult members plus a junior section of 47 members. The Guild also organised social activities for its members. By the late 1930s Holy Cross Church also had a Women's Guild. As in Wales therefore Catholic mining families would have all their spiritual, educational and social needs catered for from the cradle to the grave, albeit within an authoritarian, priestly-dominated church.

By the mid-1930s the Catholics in Hucknall, as in the Rhondda, were clearly gaining confidence in themselves, since on the Feast of Corpus Christi they carried the Blessed Sacrament in procession round the streets in Hucknall.<sup>56</sup> This had only become legal a few years earlier. No opposition to this activity is mentioned, so presumably there was none, whereas back in the 1890s, it was recorded, Father Macdonnell had to work hard to 'overcome a great deal of

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>55</sup> *Holy Cross Church Hucknall 1879 – 1979*, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

bigotry'<sup>57</sup> against Roman Catholicism. Interestingly in the first Year Book of the Hucknall Urban District Council in 1908, all the churches in Hucknall are listed, beginning with the Anglican churches; the Roman Catholic church is at the very end of the list, after Christadelphians, Spiritualists and Latter Day Saints. Arguably its position in the list reflects, if not outright prejudice, the lack of prestige accorded to Catholicism even at that date. For its own members though the Catholic Church would have been highly significant in their lives, forming in fact a major part of their identity.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the Catholic population in the mining communities examined here was relatively small but the Catholic Church continued to grow numerically when other churches were declining. The fact that Roman Catholicism in Wales in the twentieth century was subject to considerable verbal abuse from Nonconformist ministers indicates that they considered Catholic growth a threat; to them therefore Catholicism was religiously and socially significant. Arguably too, for many Catholic Church members the authoritarian, priestly nature of their church, with its all-embracing provision for their needs, gave them a strong sense of security in a difficult and increasingly secular world because their religion still formed the major part of their identity. Despite some signs of secularisation like the lessening of commitment to attend Mass and the occasional expressions of gloom by the hierarchy, such as that of Bishop Vaughan (see above), the problems of decline which, as chapter seven

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

will demonstrate, the other churches had to grapple with in the inter-war years do not seem to have impacted strongly on the Roman Catholic church until after the period covered by this study.

## Chapter 6

### 1914 – 1918: The Watershed Years?

#### Introduction

As chapters three and four have shown, in the mining communities examined here institutional religion up to 1914 was still in a fairly healthy state. However most churches, with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church, experienced considerable decline during the inter-war years (as chapter seven will show). Denis Morgan regards 1914-1918 as an 'historical divide between a religious and a post-religious phase in the development of modern Wales'.<sup>1</sup> Morgan's view could perhaps equally be applied to England, although it has been strongly challenged by Michael Snape, who argues that both World Wars were fought 'against a backdrop of religious decline particularly in terms of formal religious practice in civilian life'.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will examine the effect that the First World War had on both church and society in order to consider whether it might have contributed to the decline of institutional religion.

Surprisingly, however, few writers on 'secularisation' and 'religion and the working class' pay much attention to the Great War, perhaps because they consider the issues raised by the War too complex. Thus there is a tendency for religious historians to either end a particular study in 1914 or start their

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<sup>1</sup> Morgan, D. D., *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales 1914 – 2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Snape, M., *God and the British Soldier: Religion in the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 241.

study in 1920.<sup>3</sup> Even among those whose work spans the Great War period, Robert Lee does not mention it nor does Callum Brown in his *Death of Christian Britain* (2001) and Hugh McLeod in his recent work *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (2007) reviews successive stages in the decline of Christendom but does not mention the First World War.<sup>4</sup> However it would be surprising if the horrors of trench warfare in a conflict that claimed the lives of about 723,000 British servicemen<sup>5</sup>, and was fought mainly between nations claiming to be Christian, did not have some effect on attitudes to religion that would have important post-war implications. This chapter will look at the following: the attitudes of church leaders to the outbreak of war and their active encouragement of recruitment; the response of miners to military recruitment; changing attitudes as the war progressed; and the Anglican Church's attempt in 1916 to draw the nation back to God through the National Mission of Repentance and Hope. The question 'was this Mission a success?' will be considered and a few statistics indicative of religious adherence during the war years will be examined. All this evidence taken together should enable an assessment to be made as to whether the war years really were 'watershed years' in institutional religion.

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<sup>3</sup> For example: McLeod, H., *Religion and Society in England 1850 – 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1996), and Hastings, A., *A History of English Christianity 1920 - 2000* (London: SCM Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> McLeod, H., *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Ferguson, N., *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), p. 295, Table 32.

### **Attitudes of church leaders to the declaration of war and their encouragement of military recruitment**

When war against Germany was declared in August 1914 most Christian denominations, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, the Free Churches and the Salvation Army, supported it, as also did the Chief Rabbi, speaking on behalf of Judaism;<sup>6</sup> only the Quakers, as pacifists, demurred. However, despite their denomination's inclination to pacifism, 'two hundred young Quakers enlisted promptly, and by the end of the war one third of all male Friends of military age served'.<sup>7</sup> Many Christian ministers helped promote recruitment to the services to the extent that D. D. Morgan argues 'institutional Christianity appeared to have become a function of the imperial cause'.<sup>8</sup> Archbishop Randall Davidson wrote in December 1914 'No household or home will be acting worthily if, in timidity or self love, it keeps back any of those who can loyally bear a man's part in the enterprise on the part of the land we love'.<sup>9</sup> Young Geoffrey Fisher (then Headmaster of Repton) in his first sermon to the boys said that Britain 'was fighting for God's cause against the devil's'.<sup>10</sup>

This patriotism, the certainty that England's cause and God's cause were identical, and encouragement to enlist were very evident too at the local level. Thus J. P. Hughes, Bishop of Llandaff, wrote 'We can not ... see the weak

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<sup>6</sup> Wilkinson, A., *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SPCK, 1978), p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> Robbins, K., *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church 1900 – 2000* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Morgan, D. D., *The Span of the Cross*, p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> Wilkinson, A., *The Church of England and the First World War*, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Robbins, K., *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales*, p. 112.

trampled upon, robbed and outraged by a cruel and relentless horde ... and once again in our Island History the call goes forth that "England expects every man to do his duty".<sup>11</sup> Bishop Hoskyns of Southwell Diocese in September 1914 wrote 'Now is the moment to appeal in strong terms to the young mankind of our parishes. Call them to service and help them to realise the place of sacrifice whether it be for Church or King'.<sup>12</sup> The Curate at St Peter's Church in Hucknall wrote 'The call to arms in defence of a weaker brother ... is a call to the church to play the part of Moses on the mountain and plead the cause of Israel against the Amalekites'.<sup>13</sup> Obviously this Curate believed that the readers of the magazine would be sufficiently well versed in scripture to appreciate the relevance of the biblical allusion.<sup>14</sup> Prominent churchmen like the Duke of Portland, a great benefactor of the churches in Nottinghamshire (as chapter four has shown), also urged men to come forward and join the colours.<sup>15</sup> When John Houfton, Director of Bolsover Colliery Company, engaged in recruiting campaigns in the mining villages of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, the Vicar of Forest Town assured the miners who volunteered that 'Forest Town would never forget them'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Llandaff Diocesan Magazine*, 8/7 (October 1914), p. 173 (as the Bishop wrote this to Welsh people it is ironic that he used this quotation).

<sup>12</sup> *Southwell Diocesan Magazine*, vol. 27, no 318, September 1914 (DR/1/1/12/14/27 in NA), p. 124.

<sup>13</sup> *Hucknall Parish Church Magazine*, September 1914 (PR29,042 in NA), unpaginated.

<sup>14</sup> See Exodus 17:11.

<sup>15</sup> Marples, P., *Forest Town: The Village that Grew out of Coal* (Mansfield: Forest Town Heritage Group, 2005), p. 112.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.



### **The response of miners to military recruitment campaigns**

Recruitment amongst miners in the early part of the war was very successful. '115,000 members of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain enlisted in the early weeks ... By the summer of the following year 230,000 miners, or about 25% of the workforce in that industry were in the army'.<sup>17</sup> By the end of March 1916 nationally some 282,000 miners had volunteered.<sup>18</sup>

From the Rhondda Valleys within eight weeks of the outbreak of the war over 2,000 miners had enlisted in the army. The weekly *Rhondda Leader* from 15 August through to the end of November 1914 contained an account of the progress of the recruitment campaign. Undoubtedly there was strong pressure to enlist. At one of the many public meetings that were held for this purpose T. Pascoe Jenkins, JP gave a well crafted speech clearly designed for a mining audience. He emphasised the cruelty meted out to Belgian miners 'At Mons they (the Germans) have stopped up all shafts of the collieries without thinking of all the awful agony caused to the miners below, who suffered a lingering death'. He spoke of the cowardice of not enlisting, 'those who stay at home in this hour of national danger ... are unpardonable cowards and traitors to their country's cause'. He then promised a very bright future after the war for those who had responded; they would 'receive the everlasting gratitude of their King and country, and be entitled to preferential claims as rewards for bravery' and finally stated that they needed 'a million British

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<sup>17</sup> Simkins, P., *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies 1914 – 1916* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 1988), p. 110.

<sup>18</sup> Griffin, A. R., *Mining in the East Midlands* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1971), p. 171.

troops' and 'it would be a disgrace if we failed to get a million volunteers out of a population of forty million'.<sup>19</sup> With such pressure being applied it was little wonder that in addition to the 2,000 volunteers mentioned above, and due mainly to the efforts of Dai Morgan, the Rhondda miners' agent, by 14 November two Rhondda Battalions, each consisting of a thousand men, mainly miners and mining officials, had already been recruited and they were hopeful of recruiting two more battalions so that they would be able to form a Welsh Miners' Brigade. Mr Clem. Edwards, MP encouraged this by telling the potential recruits that 'miners had three qualifications which made them an ideal body of men. They were fearless, particularly skilled in using the trench tool, and expert in tunnelling work'.<sup>20</sup> Nearly all the big recruitment meetings were held in different Nonconformist churches throughout the Valleys and it was often the local minister who was presiding at these meetings. The Vicar of Llwynypia is also mentioned among the officials at one such meeting. The churches in the Rhondda therefore were obviously encouraging such pressurised recruiting.

In Derbyshire John Houfton claimed that from four recruitment meetings 750 men, mainly miners, had volunteered. By 11 September 1914, 168 miners from Mansfield Colliery at Forest Town had already enlisted and many more volunteered as a result of Houfton's efforts in their village.<sup>21</sup> By 1915 no less than 650 men of the Shirebrook Colliery (Derbyshire) had enlisted and by the end of the war this had risen to 829 which was more than half the total

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<sup>19</sup> *Rhondda Leader*, 5 September 1914, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 November 1914, p. 8, col. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Marples, P., *Forest Town*, pp. 112 – 113.

workforce of the colliery (though admittedly 138 of them returned to the colliery before the end of the war).<sup>22</sup>

The *Hucknall Dispatch* reported on 27 August that recruitment officers had gone around the villages and at Newstead seven men at the pit bank had volunteered simultaneously.<sup>23</sup> On 3 September the same newspaper reported that as a result of recruiting in Hucknall 250 men had joined the colours and that 'naturally the recruits are chiefly drawn from the mining class'.<sup>24</sup> By the following week the number of volunteers had risen to 500; this included some men from the nearby villages, but excluded Hucknall men who had enlisted in Nottingham.<sup>25</sup> By the end of the war over 1,700 from Hucknall had served in the armed forces.<sup>26</sup> All these Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire recruits served in many different regiments but, as might be expected, a fairly high proportion served in the Sherwood Foresters.<sup>27</sup>

One of the factors which may have helped recruitment was that many of the very young volunteers would have belonged to the rather militaristic church organisations such as the Boys' Brigade and the Anglican Church Lads' Brigade and branches of these organisations certainly existed in both the Rhondda and the East Midlands (as chapters three and four have indicated). The Church Lads' Brigade nationally took a very active role in recruiting for the

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<sup>22</sup> Skirrey, T., *Brave Sons of Shirebrook* (Matlock: Derbyshire County Council, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 27 August 1914, p. 5, col. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 September 1914, p. 5, col. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 September 1914, p. 4, col. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Grundy, J., 'Small Town: Great War' in *Hucknall Torkard Times*, issue 9, December 1998, unpaginated.

<sup>27</sup> For example, of the 324 soldiers from Shirebrook for whom Skirrey gives brief details, just over 100 served with the Sherwood Foresters; the rest were divided between 45 to 50 other regiments (Skirrey, T., *Brave Sons of Shirebrook*, pp. 3 – 48).

Services. A letter published in the *Rhondda Leader* (and doubtless in many other newspapers too) from Field Marshall Grenfell, Governor and Commandant of the organisation, stated that upwards of 5,000 members of the Church Lads' Brigade had already joined the Colours. He pointed out that though the prime object of the organisation was religious 'its excellent military method is proving a national asset today, and the lessons of religion and patriotism so unselfishly taught for twenty-three years by clergy and executive officers, are now bearing valuable fruit'.<sup>28</sup> Grenfell's words, like those of the clergymen quoted above, are a clear indication of the close identification of institutional religion with patriotism at this time.

Doubtless miners, swayed by powerful recruitment campaigns, like those mentioned above, and well used to living with danger and death, would have found the opportunity to travel abroad and to be regarded as heroes very appealing.

Interestingly, at both national and local level, the churches temporarily experienced a revival of interest in church going.<sup>29</sup> In the Southwell Diocese Bishop Hoskyns believed that in this emergency the people 'are more prepared to look for the presence of Christ in our midst'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> From a letter to the *Rhondda Leader*, 26 September 1914, p. 3, col. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Wilkinson, A., *The Church of England and the First World War*, p. 71.

<sup>30</sup> *Southwell Diocesan Magazine*, 27 (September 1914), (DR/1/1/12/14/27 in NA), p. 123.

### Changing attitudes as the war progressed and the Anglican initiative of 1916

Both the eagerness for volunteering for military service and the people's greater interest in religion were short lived. Even by 15 October 1914 the *Hucknall Dispatch* was reporting on the hardships being experienced on the front and regretting that 'there is far too much levity in our midst in this dark hour. It is lamentable to hear that the congregations at the places of worship are even worse than before the war'.<sup>31</sup> By May of the following year Canon Barber was contrasting churchgoing in France with that in England. He had learned from a Hucknall lady resident in France that 'the French churches are daily packed', whereas in England, Barber argued, 'apathy, indifference, utter Godlessness still abounds everywhere'.<sup>32</sup> Possibly the fact that the actual fighting was not taking place in our land, as it was in France, accounted for this difference in churchgoing.

By the beginning of 1916, due to the high casualty rate, a lessening in the numbers volunteering for military service and the lack of any significant progress, the Government found it necessary to resort to conscription. Meanwhile, the Church of England attempted to 'respond to the spiritual needs of the nation in wartime ... (and to) discharge its sense of vocation to act as the conscience of the nation'<sup>33</sup> by planning a National Mission of Repentance and Hope. Unfortunately the execution of this mission coincided with the battle of the Somme, one of the bloodiest campaigns of the war,

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<sup>31</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 15 October 1914, p. 5, col. 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Hucknall Parish Magazine*, May 1915 (PR29,043 in NA), unpaginated.

<sup>33</sup> Wilkinson, A., *The Church of England and the First World War*, p. 70.

which lasted from 1 July until mid November 1916 and claimed the lives of 140,000 British soldiers.<sup>34</sup> At least seventy-five of them were Hucknall men<sup>35</sup> and thirty-nine Shirebrook men were listed on the Thiepval (Somme) memorial.<sup>36</sup> This memorial lists only those who have no graves, thus the actual number could be higher. At this very time that these heavy losses were occurring the National Mission had been enthusiastically and carefully planned at all levels and was carried out not only on the home front but among the armed forces serving abroad. Most, though not all, church leaders strongly supported it even if they did not always share exactly the same objectives.<sup>37</sup>

Certainly in the Diocese of Southwell the National Mission was promoted with much enthusiasm by Bishop Hoskyns, who gave it considerable publicity and engaged the clergy in much careful preparation from April 1916 onwards.<sup>38</sup> Thanks to the survival of virtually the entire run of Hucknall Parish Magazines, one is able to follow the planning and conduct of this mission in one large mining parish. The pastoral letters of Canon Barber in the *Hucknall Parish Magazine* from April to December 1916 indicate his great enthusiasm and high expectations of the mission, the object of which, he claimed, was 'to re-instate God in the heart of the nation'.<sup>39</sup> In the June edition of the *Magazine*

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<sup>34</sup> Brown, C., *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Pearson-Longman, 2006), p. 93.

<sup>35</sup> Grundy, J., 'Small Town: Great War', unpaginated.

<sup>36</sup> Skirrey, T., *Brave Sons of Shirebrook*, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup> Wilkinson, A., *The Church of England and the First World War*, pp. 76 – 78.

<sup>38</sup> See *Southwell Diocesan Magazines*, 29 (April to December 1916); each monthly edition gave fairly extensive coverage of all aspects of the Mission (DR/1/1/12/14/29 in NA).

<sup>39</sup> Canon Barber's pastoral letter in *Hucknall Parish Church Magazine*, April 1916 (PR29,044 in NA), unpaginated.

he wrote 'We are being called to a united advance and a desperate offensive against sin and forgetfulness of God'; continuing with similar military imagery, in September he wrote that when the Bishop's messengers were sent to the parish and gave the command "Charge" 'Then over the parapets we must go. We shall find a network of trenches and strongly fortified places before us, but we must push on'.<sup>40</sup>

Canon Barber's rhetoric sounds rather tasteless now but is probably indicative of the degree to which the Great War had permeated the consciousness of the people. However, despite or because of such rhetoric, the Anglican Church in Hucknall had certainly prepared well. In the run up to the Mission, scheduled for the end of October onwards, in addition to clergy retreats, quiet days and Bible study circles, in Hucknall itself cottage meetings, chains of prayer involving all the parish organisations, the encouragement of people to use the church for private prayer and a day of corporate repentance 'as a reparation for the past'<sup>41</sup> had taken place. Additionally more than one hundred church members from Hucknall had agreed to deliver the message of repentance and hope to all the houses in the parish, and by mid-November nearly 1,000 houses in the parish had received the message, though whether in verbal or printed form is not clear. The Mission, though solely an Anglican one, received the prayer support of the Nonconformist churches in the town.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., June and September 1916.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., September 1916.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., December 1916.

The Mission continued in 1917, the focus moving then to the St John's area of the parish (Butler's Hill). Canon Barber reported that 'The Mission services at St John's were well attended considering the inclement weather and were characterised by a spirit of earnestness'.<sup>43</sup> The Mission to adults was followed in May 1917 by a Mission to children, which likewise received several months of preparation. Canon Barber insisted that 'England's future depended on the result of this great spiritual mission'.<sup>44</sup>

Bishop Hoskyns clearly expected great results from the Mission for he wrote that in years to come people would look back on this time as that which 'began a mighty stirring of the dry bones in church and nation, a change of outlook which will help to make all things new'.<sup>45</sup>

The Diocese of Llandaff, like Southwell, organised and prepared well for the Mission. The Bishop himself visited every deanery to explain everything about the Mission to his clergy.<sup>46</sup> He too clearly had very high expectations of the Mission, for he wrote 'I hope that we shall none of us forget the goal we have in view, which is nothing less than the regeneration of our nation, and through it of the world'.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., February 1917 (PR29,045 in NA).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., February 1917.

<sup>45</sup> *Southwell Diocesan Magazine*, 29 (December 1916), (DR/1/1/12/14/29 in NA), p. 165.

<sup>46</sup> *Llandaff Diocesan Magazine*, 9/6 (July 1916), (in NLW), p. 124.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 9/7 (October 1916), p. 142.



### **How successful was this Anglican initiative?**

Undoubtedly then the National Mission was pursued with great vigour in Hucknall and almost certainly in many other parishes in the Dioceses of Southwell and Llandaff but did the Mission achieve its high objective of bringing the nation back to God? In the Llandaff Diocese a follow up meeting of the Bishop's messengers took place in January 1917. An anonymous letter in the Diocesan Magazine for April indicates that opinions on its likely success differed. A few messengers gave very encouraging reports but many others were very pessimistic. The writer of the letter, himself a messenger, stated that in his experience 'where the parish had been properly prepared the Mission was a success' but 'where the messenger was looked upon as an unavoidable inconvenience, the message was no more than a special preacher's sermon'.<sup>48</sup>

In Hucknall too feedback on the mission was rather mixed. In June 1917 Canon Barber was fairly positive. He stated that the visit of the lady missionaries who led the Mission to the children had been very much appreciated and that attendance at the meetings had been very encouraging. In July he stated that the attendance at his own follow up meetings after the National Mission had been very good; some seventy people had attended. On the other hand the report in June 1917 from St John's Church in Hucknall acknowledged that much hard work had gone into the Mission but 'with all our efforts there remains still an appalling amount of indifference in this

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 10/1 (April 1917), (in NLW), p. 11.

district, and the way in which the people neglect Sunday, and refuse to acknowledge, as shown in their lives, the claims of God upon them, is a sad spectacle'.<sup>49</sup> These two rather contrasting reports seem to indicate that response to the Mission was greater in the rather more affluent areas of the parish. In September 1917, the 'Notes and News' section of the *Hucknall Parish Magazine* commented 'There is still no sign of the nation as a nation declaring its faith in God and seeking His help'.<sup>50</sup>

This comment accords with academic opinion on the National Mission. Thus Thompson states that the National Mission of Repentance and Hope 'has not been regarded as one of the more successful episodes in the history of the Church of England'.<sup>51</sup> Snape argues that the National Mission 'was variously understood, poorly executed and widely criticised and though its supporters claimed that it strengthened the call for reform in the post-war Church of England the non-church going population remained largely unmoved by it'.<sup>52</sup> Morgan argues that the Mission was not a success and he blames its failure on the insensitivity of the church calling the people to repentance at the very time when so many were actually laying down their lives for their country. Furthermore, the list of sins that the Church claimed needed to be repented of related entirely to personal morality and did not include social and political

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<sup>49</sup> *Hucknall Parish Magazine*, June 1917 (PR29,045 in NA), unpaginated.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, September 1917.

<sup>51</sup> Thompson, D. M., 'War, the Nation and the Kingdom of God: the Origins of the National Mission of Repentance and Hope, 1915 – 1916' in Shiels, W. J. (ed.), *The Church and War* (London: Blackwell, 1983), p. 337.

<sup>52</sup> Snape, M. (ed.), 'Archbishop Davidson's Visit to the Western Front, May 1916' in Barber, M. et al (eds.) *From the Reformation to the Permissive Society* (Woodbridge: Church of England Record Society, 2010), p. 463.

sins of the nation.<sup>53</sup> Wilkinson claimed that 'the National Mission failed to make much appreciable difference in church attendance' though he also pointed out its positive effects: 'in many places spiritual life had been quickened, parochial isolation broken down, priests given a new stimulus, and a desire for church reform and its greater involvement in social questions strengthened'.<sup>54</sup>

Arguably it was the very high and unrealistic expectation that the Mission would draw the whole nation back to God that doomed it to failure, since most missions succeed only in revitalising existing religious adherence.

The National Mission itself may not have been a great success, despite all the effort it engendered. However for religion the war had just a few positive offshoots. The volunteer army of 1914-15 had brought together professional and working class men<sup>55</sup> which helped to bring down the barriers of social class. The war had drawn clergy into closer relationship with their people, partly through shared suffering and shared patriotism. Additionally, as part of the war effort, the clergy of all parishes were encouraged to engage in chaplaincy stints in the forces or work on the home front in some essential industries, like mining and munitions. Thus in Hucknall in 1917 the curate of St Peter's church (who had already done four months in Army chaplaincy work in France) worked three days a week in a local colliery. An assistant curate at the parish church was also called to chaplaincy work, and the curate

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<sup>53</sup> Morgan, D. D., *The Span of the Cross*, p. 67.

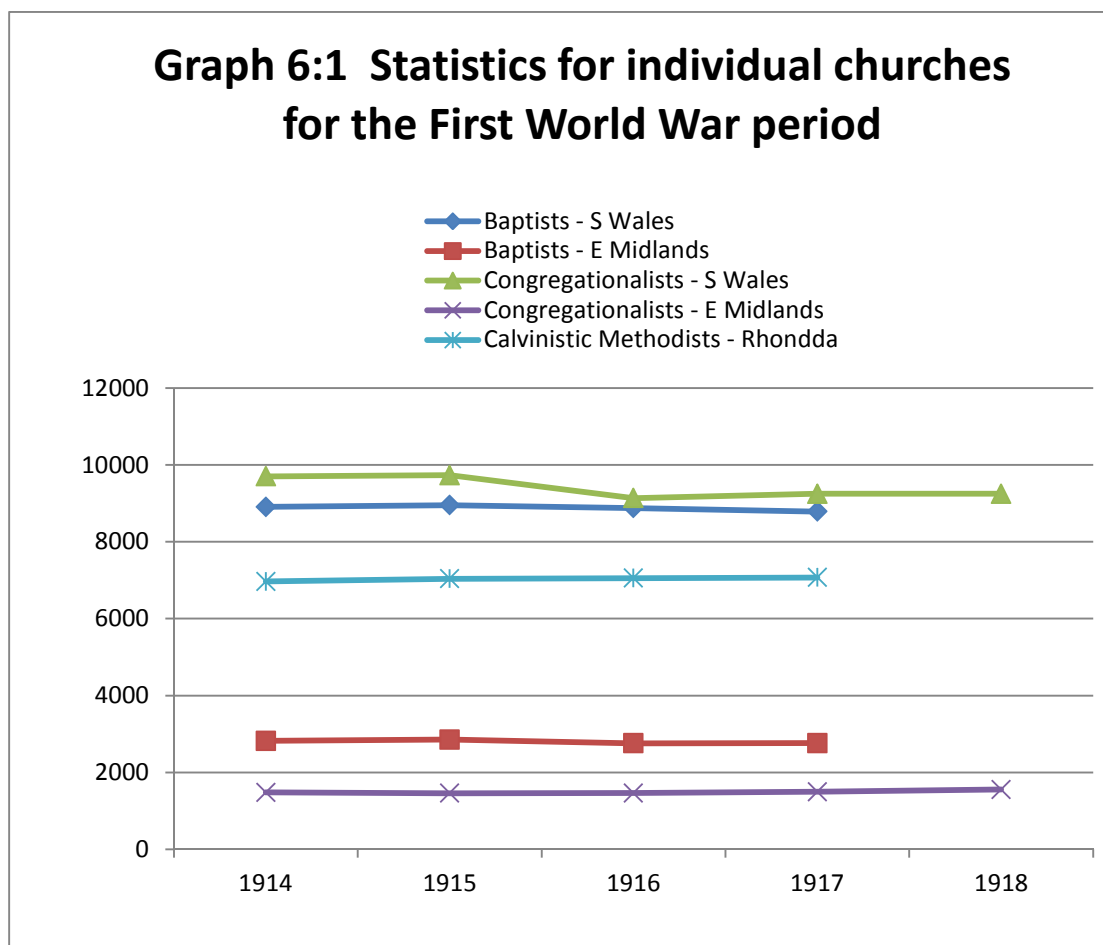
<sup>54</sup> Wilkinson, A., *The Church of England and the First World War*, p. 79.

<sup>55</sup> Snape, M., *God and the British Soldier*, p. 154.

at St John’s knew he was likely to be called to work in a munitions factory.<sup>56</sup>

All of this would arguably have served to give them a greater understanding of the working man.

**Statistical Information**



<sup>56</sup> Hucknall Parish Magazine, June 1917, unpaginated.

Table 6:1 Statistics of Individual Churches – First World War Period

**Calvinistic Methodists – Communicants**

Name/ Place of Chapel	1914	1915	1916	1917
<b>Upper Rhondda</b>				
Bethel (Ystrad)	207	205	194	195
Bethlehem (Treorchy)	498	532	535	552
Blaenrhondda	121	124	119	130
Cwmparc	273	275	274	237
Dyffryn (Ystrad)	150	151	168	159
Gosen (Treorchy)	307	314	326	341
Jerusalem (Ton)	488	485	447	449
Nazareth (Pentre)	452	452	451	437
Treherbert	408	416	408	414
<b>Lower Rhondda</b>				
Bethlehem (Porth)	290	302	294	283
Blaenclydach	351	340	343	340
Cymer (Porth)	140	152	170	173
Dinas	81	78	78	70
Llwynypia	314	330	351	333
Penuel (Pontrhondda)	100	103	83	85
Penygraig	258	249	246	255
Trealaw	274	271	274	281
Trewilliam	211	237	248	255
<b>Rhondda Fach</b>				
Bethania (Mardy)	300	308	322	323
Calfaria (Porth)	257	226	230	229
Carmel (Ferndale)	95	93	80	94
Ebenezer (Mardy)	174	177	183	184
Penuel (Ferndale)	350	359	366	377
Pontygwaith	233	226	217	201
Tylorstown	288	292	300	295
Wattstown	69	67	64	80
Ynyshir	280	276	286	300

Key: The highest membership figure(s) for each chapel highlighted in yellow  
The lowest membership figure(s) for each chapel highlighted in grey

Sources: The figures are taken from the denominational yearbooks for the years indicated. Some denominations did not publish the statistics in 1918 due to national paper shortage.

**Congregationalists – Members (South Wales)**

<b>Name/ Place of Chapel</b>	<b>1914</b>	<b>1915</b>	<b>1916</b>	<b>1917</b>	<b>1918</b>
<b>Clydach Vale</b>					
Gosen	319	319	267	267	267
Saron	100	100	100	40	40
Soar	352	352	368	388	388
<b>Cwmparc and Treorchy</b>					
Bethania	509	509	441	425	425
Hermon	370	370	330	377	377
Ramah	301	301	296	296	296
Soar	224	224	207	212	212
English	69	69	69	69	45
<b>Cymmer and Porth</b>					
Cymmer	453	453	345	345	345
Porth	390	390	408	399	399
Porth (English)	248	248	248	307	304
<b>Dinas and Penygraig</b>					
Bethania, Dinas	133	133	135	123	123
Saron, Trewilliam	303	303	290	301	301
<b>Ferndale</b>					
Siloa, Maerdy	404	404	369	382	382
Tabernacle, Ferndale	474	474	459	482	482
Trerhondda, Ferndale	477	477	443	441	441
English, Ferndale	81	81	81	91	93
<b>Lwynypia, Tonypany and Trealaw</b>					
Lwynypia	323	323	293	287	287
Tonypany	458	458	377	345	345
Trealaw	90	90	113	133	133
English, Tonypany	110	110	110	85	85
<b>Treherbert with Tynewydd, Blaenrhondda and Blaencwm</b>					
Ebenezer, Tynewydd	313	313	310	324	324
Treherbert	355	355	268	299	299
English, Treherbert	131	131	131	159	185
<b>Tylorstown, Stanleytown and Pontygwaith</b>					
Ebenezer, Tylorstown	439	439	416	405	405
Soar, Pontygwaith	164	164	154	153	153
English, Pontygwaith	27	27	27	32	23
English, Tylorstown	81	81	81	79	96
<b>Ynyshir and Wattstown</b>					
Carmel, Wattstown	42	42	42	42	42
Saron, Ynyshir	424	424	385	374	374
<b>Ystradyfodwg</b>					
Bethesda, Ton Pentre	358	358	405	424	424
Bodringallt, Ystrad	358	387	402	424	421
Bryn Seion, Gelli	160	160	160	160	160
Siloah, Pentre	483	483	427	413	413
English, Ton Pentre	180	180	180	167	163

**Congregationalists – Members (East Midlands)**

<b>Name/ Place of Chapel</b>	<b>1914</b>	<b>1915</b>	<b>1916</b>	<b>1917</b>	<b>1918</b>
<b>Derbyshire</b>					
Bolsover	101	75	75	75	75
Brimington	44	44	44	44	44
Calow	60	77	60	60	60
Killamarsh	130	130	130	130	130
Marlpool	70	73	62	62	62
Riddings/ Pentrich	169	154	146	146	146
Ripley	14	14	14	14	14
Shirebrook	40	60	60	60	60
<b>Nottinghamshire</b>					
Eastwood	131	128	141	151	156
Hucknall (including Hazel Grove)	194	153	168	153	154
Mansfield	105	112	101	111	131
Mansfield Woodhouse	30	30	38	43	50
Moor Green	44	45	44	42	42
Sutton in Ashfield	130	140	160	171	171
Selston and Westwood	90	77	75	82	81
Worksop	125	144	144	153	176

**Baptists – Members (South Wales)**

<b>Name/ Place of Chapel</b>	<b>1914</b>	<b>1915</b>	<b>1916</b>	<b>1917</b>
<b>Clydach Vale</b>				
Calvaria	207	200	186	204
Noddfa, Blaenclydach	313	296	256	247
Bethany English, Blaenclydach	62	71	52	46
<b>Cwmparc and Treorchy</b>				
Ainon, Treorchy	218	200	200	189
Noddfa, Treorchy	591	565	565	505
Salem, Cwmparc	385	397	390	383
Bethel English, Cwmparc	118	110	100	95
Horeb English, Treorchy	129	120	130	133
<b>Cymmer and Porth</b>				
Bethania, Porth	225	255	255	213
Pisgah, Cymmer	117	95	114	114
Salem, Porth	431	417	407	404
Seion, Porth	250	250	250	111
Tabernacle English, Porth	262	319	318	311
<b>Dinas and Penygraig</b>				
Soar, Penygraig	215	220	212	180
Zion, Penrhiwfer	29	27	29	31
<b>Ferndale</b>				
Nazareth, Blaenllechau	202	208	208	198
Salem Newydd, Ferndale	306	321	318	353
Seion, Maerdy	245	222	236	225
Bethel English, Ferndale	105	121	123	110
Carmel English, Maerdy	128	116	121	151
<b>Llwynypia, Tonypany and Trealaw</b>				
Ainon, Trealaw	63	100	100	97
Bethlehem, Trealaw	98	98	95	109
Beulah, Tyntyla	40	52	63	65
Caersalem	199	208	201	166
Jerusalem, Llwynypia	175	181	181	181
Moriah, Tonypany	215	215	225	225
Bethel English, Tonypany	107	102	101	188
Carmel English, Trealaw	67	61	96	115
<b>Treherbert, Tynewydd, Blaenrhondda and Blaencwm</b>				
Blaenrhondda	129	145	134	137
Blaencwm	273	298	287	296
Libanus, Treherbert	365	373	395	399
Soar, Blaencwm	94	92	101	92
Bethany English, Treherbert	394	423	425	429
Hope English, Treherbert	55	60	?	80
<b>Tylorstown, Stanleytown and Pontygwaith</b>				
Hermon, Pontygwaith	199	197	197	195
Horeb, Tylorstown	183	183	167	160
Beulah English, Tylorstown	63	54	54	55



**Baptists – Members (South Wales) - continued**

Name/ Place of Chapel	1914	1915	1916	1917
<b>Ynyshir and Wattstown</b>				
Ainon, Ynyshir	164	164	193	231
Calfaria, Wattstown	140	140	143	143
Bethany English, Ynyshir	101	97	111	115
<b>Ystradyfodwg</b>				
Hebron, Ton Pentre	371	371	371	342
Moriah, Pentre	255	225	225	222
Nebo, Ystrad	246	231	231	230
Siloam, Gelli	179	179	148	170
Zion English, Pentre	196	176	168	143

**Baptists – Members (East Midlands)**

Name/ Place of Chapel	1914	1915	1916	1917
<b>Derbyshire</b>				
Clay Cross	67	64	60	59
Heanor	108	108	100	100
Ilkeston	222	230	218	221
Langley Mill	86	91	91	91
Loscoe	100	100	111	113
Riddings	68	62	54	54
Ripley	109	100	97	117
Shirebrook	12	12	12	12
<b>Nottinghamshire</b>				
Bulwell	275	276	276	270
Eastwood	43	40	37	37
Hucknall	345	352	354	343
Kimberley	24	24	20	18
Kirkby-in-Ashfield	47	49	59	59
Kirkby East	271	287	224	218
Kirkby Woodhouse	86	86	86	87
Newthorpe	31	31	31	31
Old Basford	160	162	170	170
Queensberry Street, Basford	243	237	217	213
Stanton Hill	59	69	70	70
Sutton in Ashfield	252	262	259	266
Tabernacle, Radford	211	211	211	211

**Nottinghamshire Mining Parishes – Anglican Sunday School Pupils**

<b>Parish</b>	<b>1913</b>	<b>1914</b>	<b>1915</b>	<b>1916</b>	<b>1917</b>	<b>1918</b>	<b>1919*</b>	<b>1920</b>
Annesley	107	115	105	230	130	110		112
Cinder Hill	277	305	323	171	171	160		146
East Kirkby	375	400	420	420	420	420		462
Eastwood	350	350	380	365	380	330		340
Forest Town	300	290	350	290	260	230		230
Hucknall	890	1190	1419	892	892	1083		817
Huthwaite	560	560	560	560	560	560		560
Newstead Colliery	-	-	120	120	120	60		130
St George, Nottingham	450	300	300	330	330	330		330
Sutton in Ashfield	2310	2349	2535	2685	2758	2698		2098
Selston with Underwood and Westwood	1036	860	882	860	870	870		835
Stanton Hill	512	600	590	611	579	579		579

\* 1919 statistics missing

It is unclear whether the membership statistics included members who were serving in the armed forces.

One might assume that an examination of statistical information relating to Church membership in the mining parishes in World War I would give an indication of some change in the strength of institutional religion at this period. However, from the graph and tables above no overall trend is discernible. Some churches show a definite downward trend during the war years, others show an upward trend while the remainder either fluctuate or remain so stable that the probability is that these churches did not do an annual update of membership or Sunday school numbers.

## Conclusion

As has been shown above, statistically there was no significant sign of religious decline in World War 1, but equally there was no real sign of religious revival despite the enormous efforts of the Anglican Church with its National Mission of Repentance and Hope. Doubtless there were many who lost their faith as a result of the trauma of the trenches or tragic loss of family and friends. In Hucknall alone 'more than 370 (servicemen) did not return or did so only to die of their wounds';<sup>57</sup> and in Shirebrook, from the colliery alone, ninety-one servicemen were killed in the war.<sup>58</sup> Even in the small pit village of Newstead sixteen service men, most of them miners, lost their lives.<sup>59</sup> Possibly, in the face of such losses, many people felt bitter towards the Church because, as indicated above, many of its leaders had so eagerly promoted recruitment to the armed forces. Furthermore these leaders had claimed that God was on England's side; yet, if this had been the case some might have asked 'Why then did England suffer such heavy losses?'

On the other hand there were also many whose faith sustained them during the trauma of the war years and who continued faithful churchgoers for the remainder of their lives. Michael Snape's grandfather was one such person. Snape's *God and the British Soldier* (published 2005) strongly challenges the widely held assumption that the two World Wars were great secularising influences. In fact he concludes that during the two World Wars 'Britain's

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<sup>57</sup> Grundy, J., 'Small Town: Great War' unpaginated

<sup>58</sup> Skirrey, T., *Brave Sons of Shirebrook*, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Foster, P., *Memorials of the Great War: Nottinghamshire Cemeteries – Hucknall and Newstead* (no publication details given, but a very recent publication, in Nottingham City Library), p. 23.

historic Christian identity continued to console and support the nation' and that 'Christianity continued to exert a powerful and even defining influence on national and individual life'.<sup>60</sup> Snape's views would therefore tend to modify Denis Morgan's argument (quoted in the introduction to this chapter) that the First World War marked 'an historical divide between a religious and a post-religious phase in the development of modern Wales' and would suggest that 1914-1918 were not watershed years for institutional religion.

It could be argued though that certain factors arising from these years did have considerable influence on the future. Thus in the mining communities, especially those of South Wales, the Russian Revolution of 1917 (arguably triggered by the privations endured by the Russian army in the Great War) was particularly influential in determining both the political and religious landscape of the inter-war years because it strengthened the cause of socialism in Britain, which, as chapter seven will show, was one of the factors that tended, in the coalmining regions, to weaken the numerical strength and influence of institutional religion in the inter-war years.

Arguably too there was an expectation among the working class that as a result of their sacrifices for their country they would be rewarded by a new and better post-war world. Indeed in 1914 a Rhondda recruitment campaign speech by T. Pascoe Jenkins had virtually promised this (see page 238 – 239). In the church too there was an increasing recognition, especially by many of the Anglican hierarchy, that industrial and social problems needed to be

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<sup>60</sup> Snape, M., *God and the British Soldier*, p. 242.

addressed. One of the Committees set up after the National Mission dealt with 'Christianity and Industrial Relations'.<sup>61</sup> Sadly such expectations of a better post-war world did not materialise despite the good intentions of church and society, because at the end of the conflict the nation lacked money and other resources, as well as inevitably suffering from physical and emotional exhaustion. Trevor Skirrey, writing about Shirebrook, states that as a result of the Great War over 131 children of the village were fatherless and the village itself 'was left numbed and paralysed';<sup>62</sup> and in Hucknall, James Grundy reports that the town suffered a further great loss from the influenza epidemic. In November 1918 alone 130 residents died. 'In just four weeks, the flu killed more Hucknall people than the Somme had done in four months'.<sup>63</sup> If these two communities were typical of the country as a whole, the post-war world did not get off to a promising start.

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<sup>61</sup> For the reports of these Committees see *The National Mission of Repentance and Hope: Reports of the Archbishops' Committees of Inquiry* (London: SPCK, 1919).

<sup>62</sup> Skirrey, T., *Brave Sons of Shirebrook*, p. 98.

<sup>63</sup> Grundy, J., 'Small Town: Great War', unpaginated.

## Chapter 7

### The Inter-War Years and the Problems of Decline

#### Introduction

Until 1914 in the coalmining communities there was little evidence of working class alienation from religion, as some research based on large cities, for example that on London and other European cities by Hugh McLeod (see chapter one), had found. Indeed industrialisation in the form of coalmining had, if anything, tended to increase the social significance of religion, rather than decrease it as Wilson, Wallis and Bruce had claimed (see chapter one). Institutional religion in coalmining areas had given many working class people the opportunity to develop spiritually, educationally, socially and culturally as well as providing a good number of them with leadership skills.

The effect, on church and society, of the First World War was, as shown in chapter six, profound; but arguably the period was too short to yield any significant statistical changes in church membership. By the mid 1930s however most denominations had experienced some decline in membership. The Roman Catholic Church was the notable exception; though even here, as chapter five indicates, there were signs that religious commitment did not match numerical growth. Furthermore, indifference to, or even turning away from, religion was noted by some clergy; for example Canon Barber wrote 'I question whether in the whole history of the church there has been such an apostasy as there is at the present

time'.<sup>1</sup> The Rt. Rev. Timothy Rees (Bishop of Llandaff) remarked 'The greatest obstacle that they' (the clergy he had spoken to) 'have to contend with in their work for the kingdom is not active or flagrant vice, but the dead weight of sheer indifference'.<sup>2</sup>

But was the overall picture as gloomy as was painted by these two clergymen? What situations may have contributed to decline and did the church itself inadvertently contribute to its own decline? These are questions that this chapter will seek to address. First the evidence for overall decline in church membership and Sunday school numbers, together with comments made by or about specific churches, will be examined. Then some of the major factors – industrial, political and economic - that were particularly relevant to mining communities and which may have contributed to decline in institutional religion will be considered, together with the attitude of the churches to them. Finally theologies that prevailed at this period in the mining communities will be looked at in order to assess the degree to which they engaged with the contemporary situation. In the light of all this material the strengths and weaknesses of institutional religion in this inter-war period will be assessed.

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<sup>1</sup> Canon T. G. Barber's Pastoral Letter in *Hucknall Parish Magazine*, July 1935 (PR 29,063 in NA), unpaginated.

<sup>2</sup> *A Charge Delivered by the Rt. Rev. Timothy Rees, Lord Bishop of Llandaff, at his Primary Visitation 1934* (XBX 5034 R32 in NLW), p. 8.

### **Evidence of decline drawn from published statistics**

Statistics of the Welsh speaking churches of the three main Nonconformist denominations in the Rhondda, as the graphs in chapter three reveal, show a decline in membership between 1921 and 1937. The Welsh Baptists declined by 1,501, from 6,601 in 1921 to 5,100 (22.74%); Welsh Congregationalists declined by 1,573, from 8,711 to 7,138 (18.06%); and Welsh Calvinistic Methodists declined by 1,702, from 6,272 to 4,570 (27.14%). The English speaking churches in the Rhondda of these same denominations and for the same period present a more varied picture. The Congregationalists actually had a 15.27% increase in membership from 976 to 1,125. The other two denominations, though declining, fared better than their Welsh counterparts. The Baptist decrease was 14.16% (from 2,288 to 1,964) and the Calvinistic Methodist decrease was 20.9% (from 1,105 to 874). The overall decline is probably not surprising given the fact that the population of the Rhondda also declined dramatically from 162,717 in 1921 to an estimated 122,500 in 1938.<sup>3</sup> Nor is it surprising that the English churches fared proportionally better than the Welsh since Welsh speaking, especially amongst the young, was declining in the Rhondda, no doubt due to the great increase in English speaking immigrants in the early years of the twentieth century. Statistics for Baptist and Congregational churches in some mining areas in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire present a varied picture. A good many churches did show some decline in membership during this period, but on

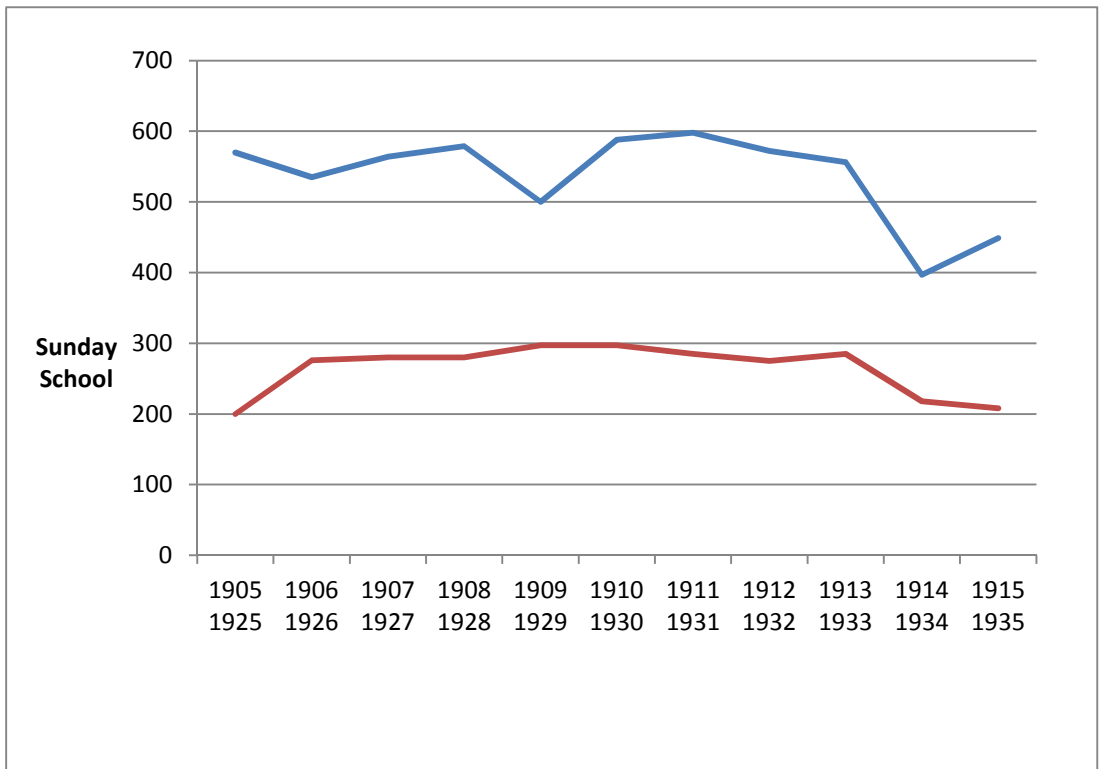
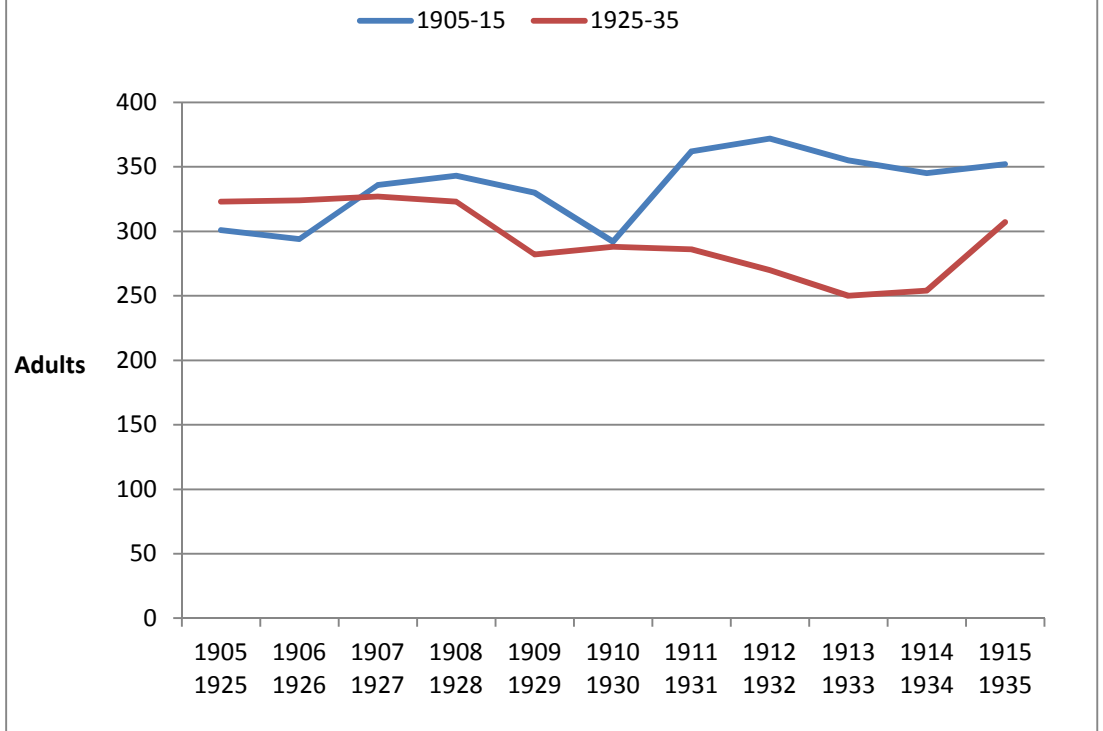
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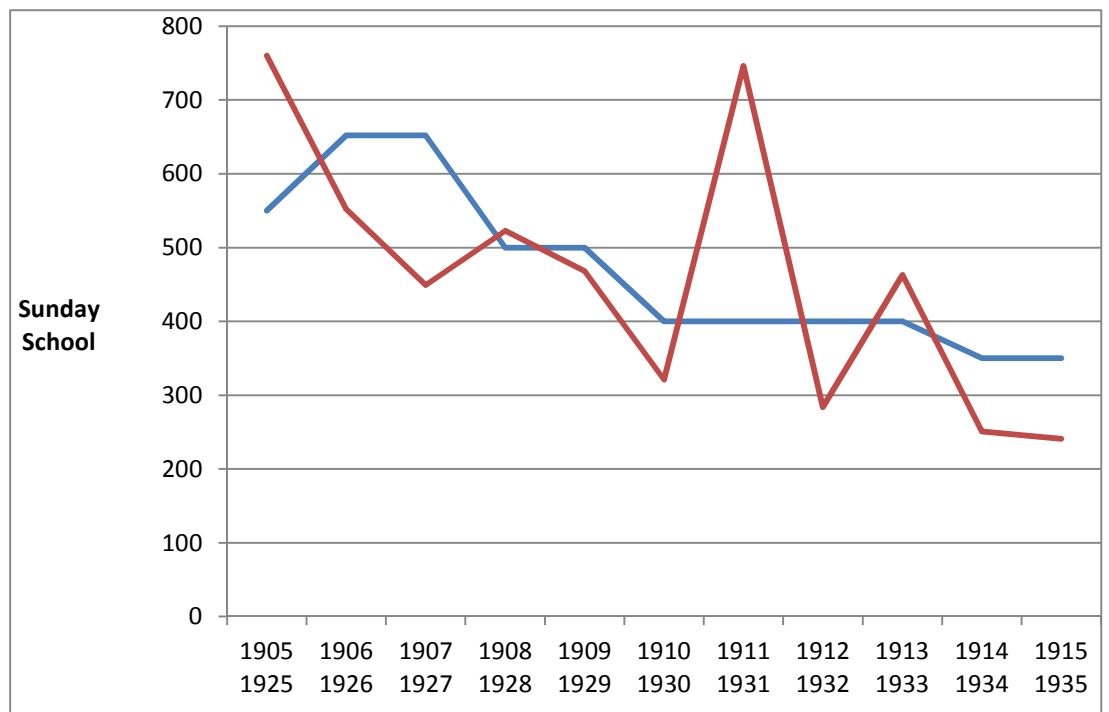
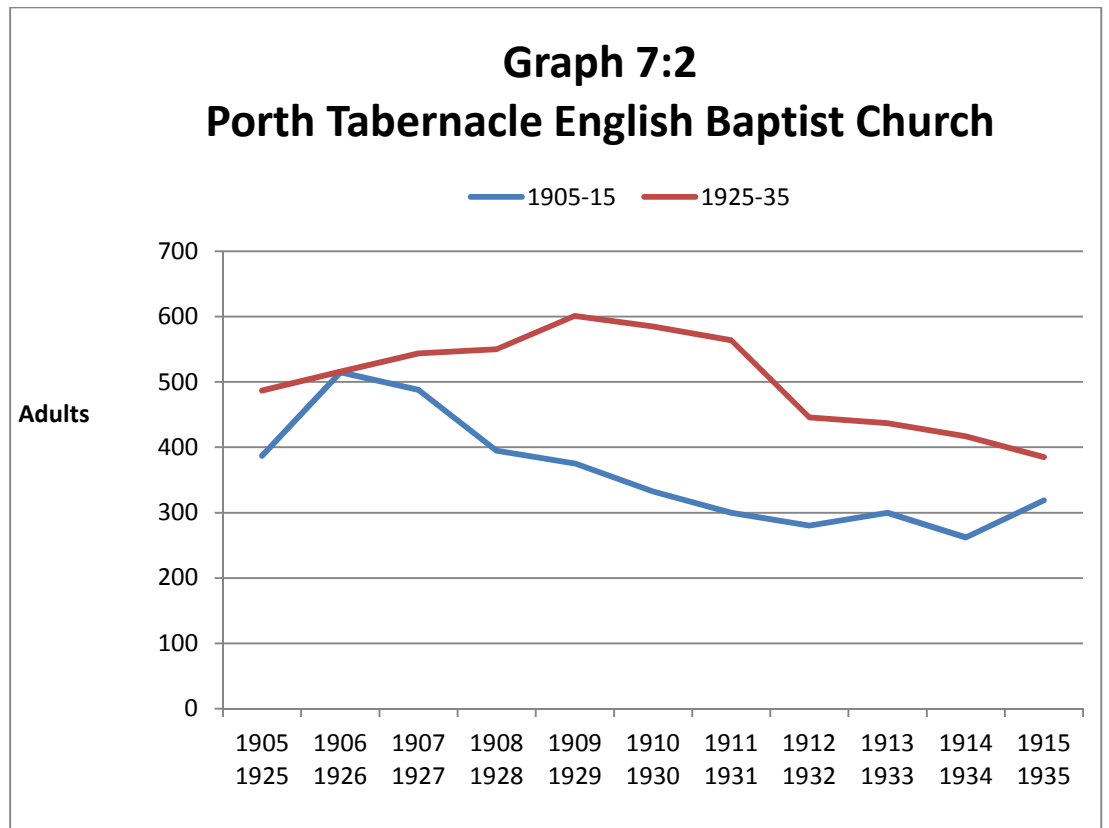
<sup>3</sup> May, J., *Rhondda 1203 – 2003: The Story of the Two Valleys* (Cardiff: Castle Publications, 2003), pp. 39 and 47.



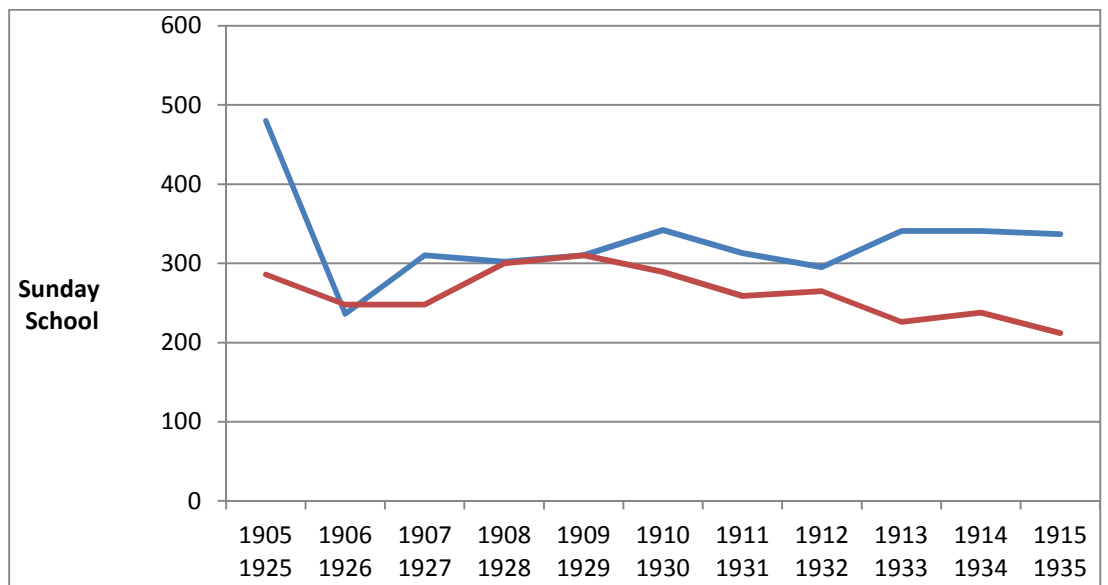
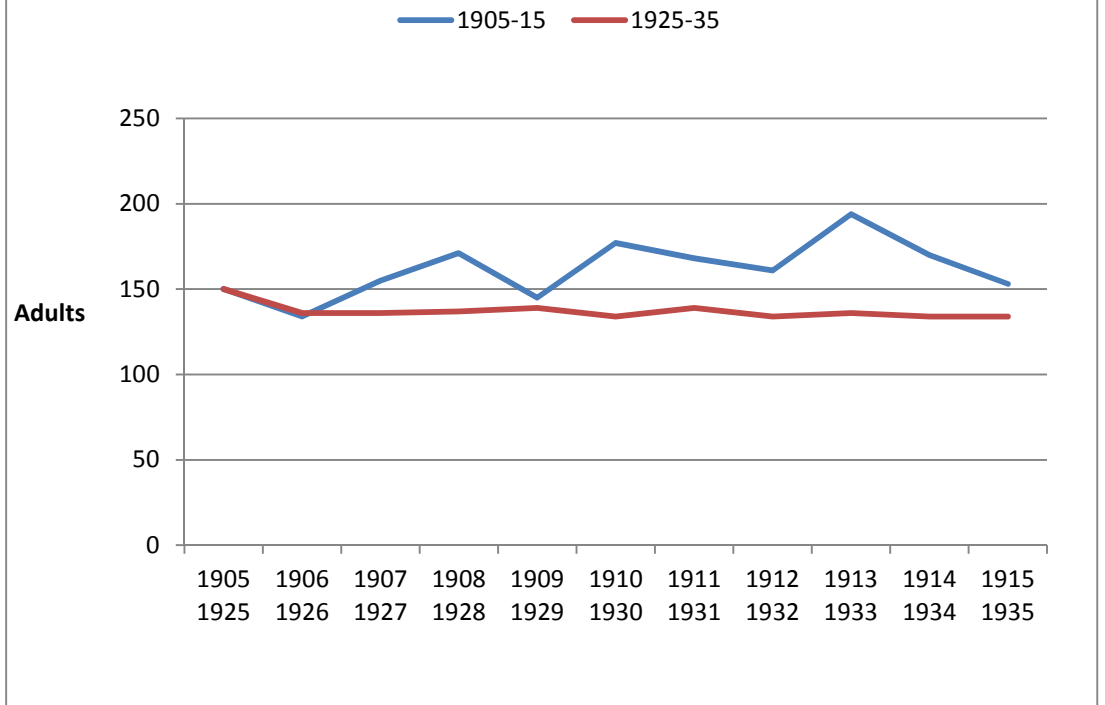
the other hand some showed increases. In any case the membership numbers in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire are on the whole so small compared with those in South Wales that they hardly form a valid comparison. In addition to this general picture, annual statistics from 1925 to 1935, for a few churches that have featured fairly prominently in this study, have been recorded and plotted on graphs together with their statistics for 1905 to 1915, so that for each church the two periods can be compared (see graphs: 7:1,7:2, 7:3, 7:4, 7:5, 7:6, 7:7 below).

### Graph 7:1 Hucknall Baptist Church

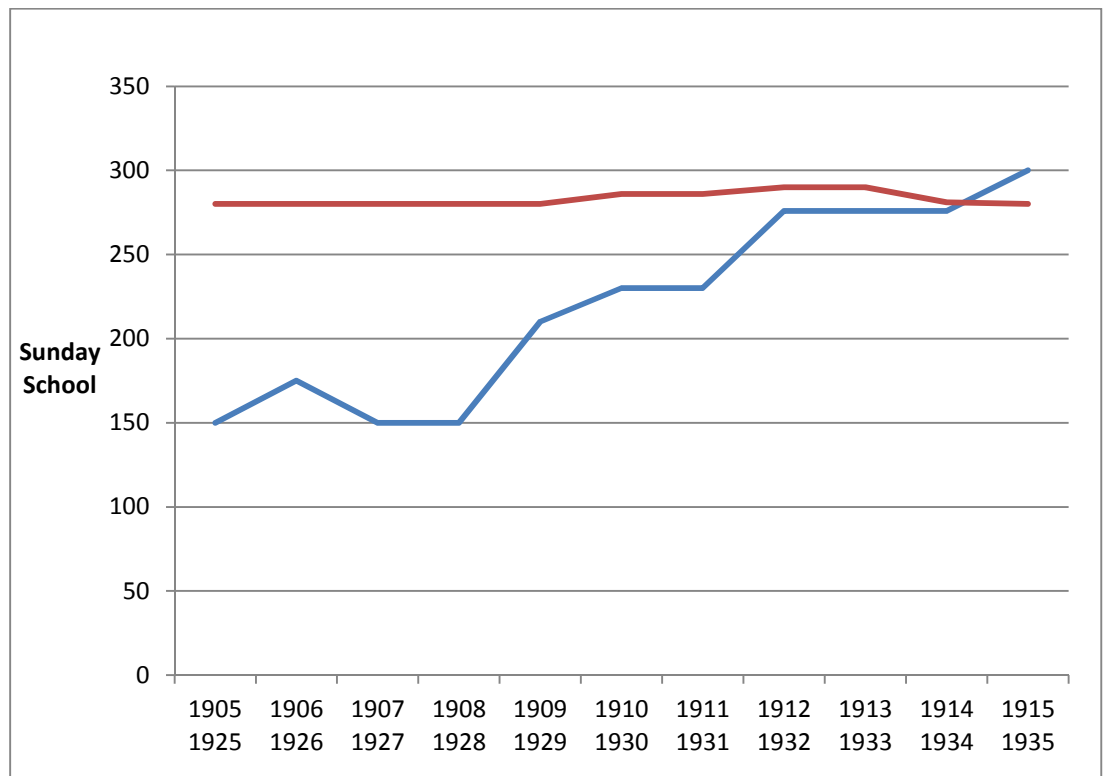
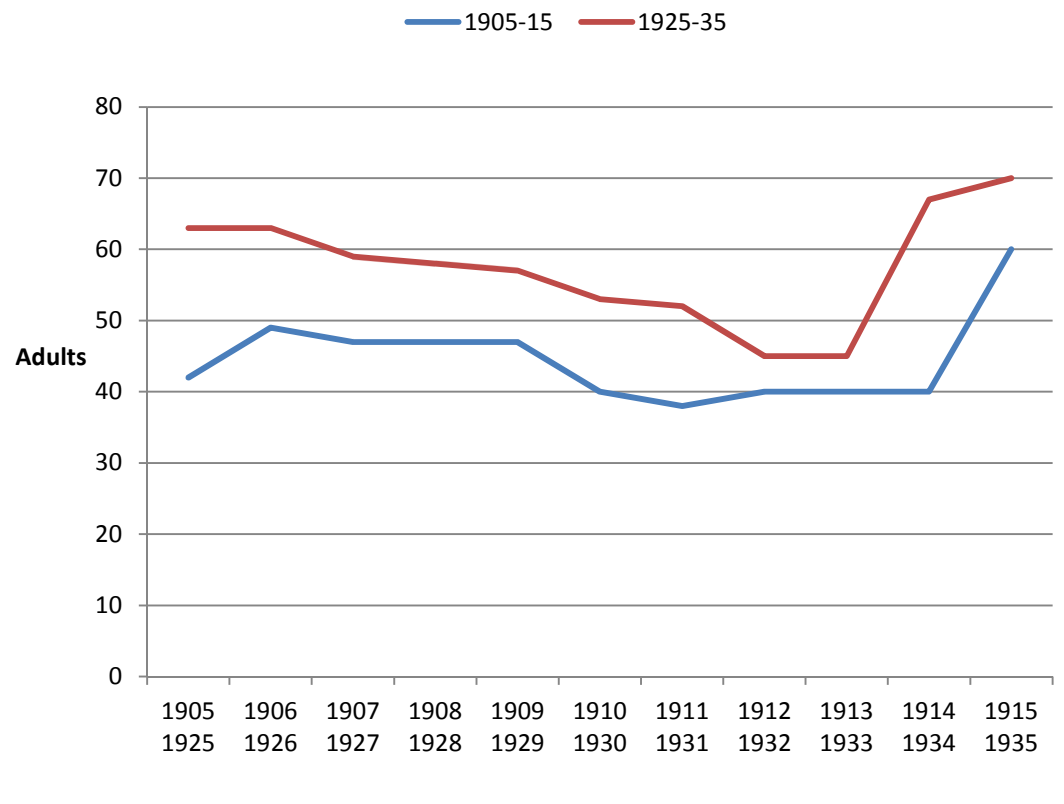


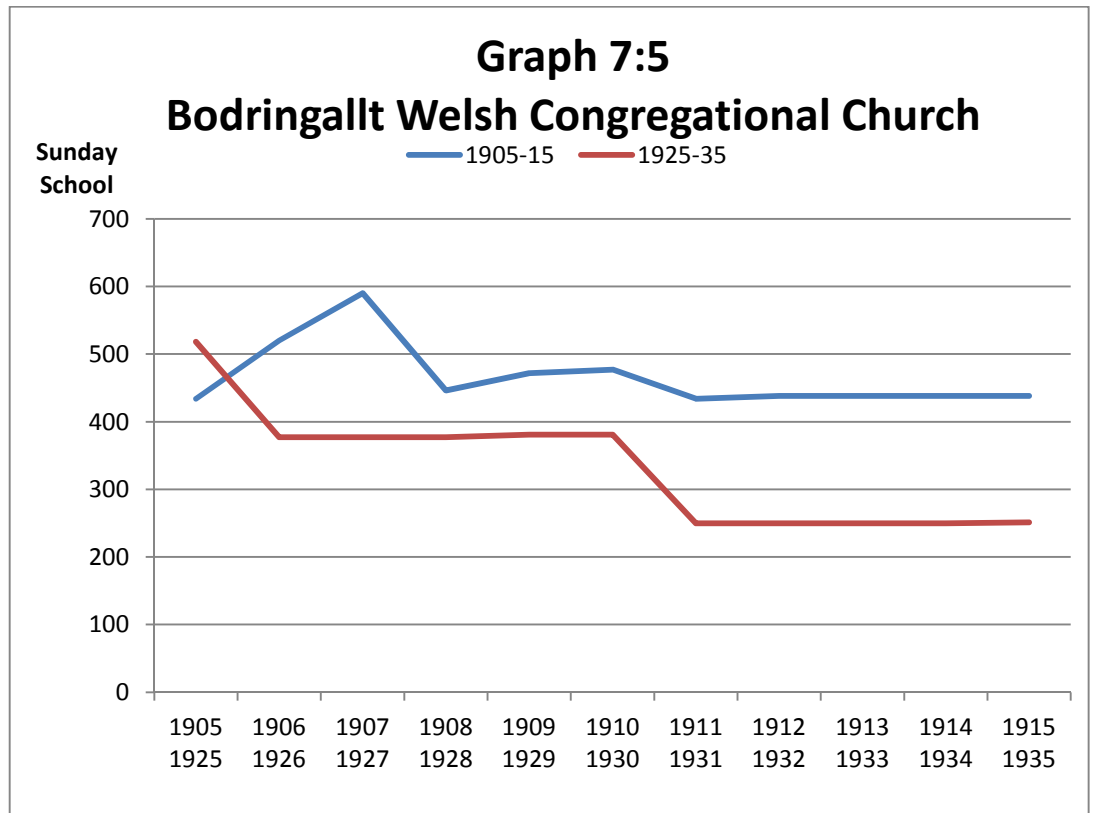
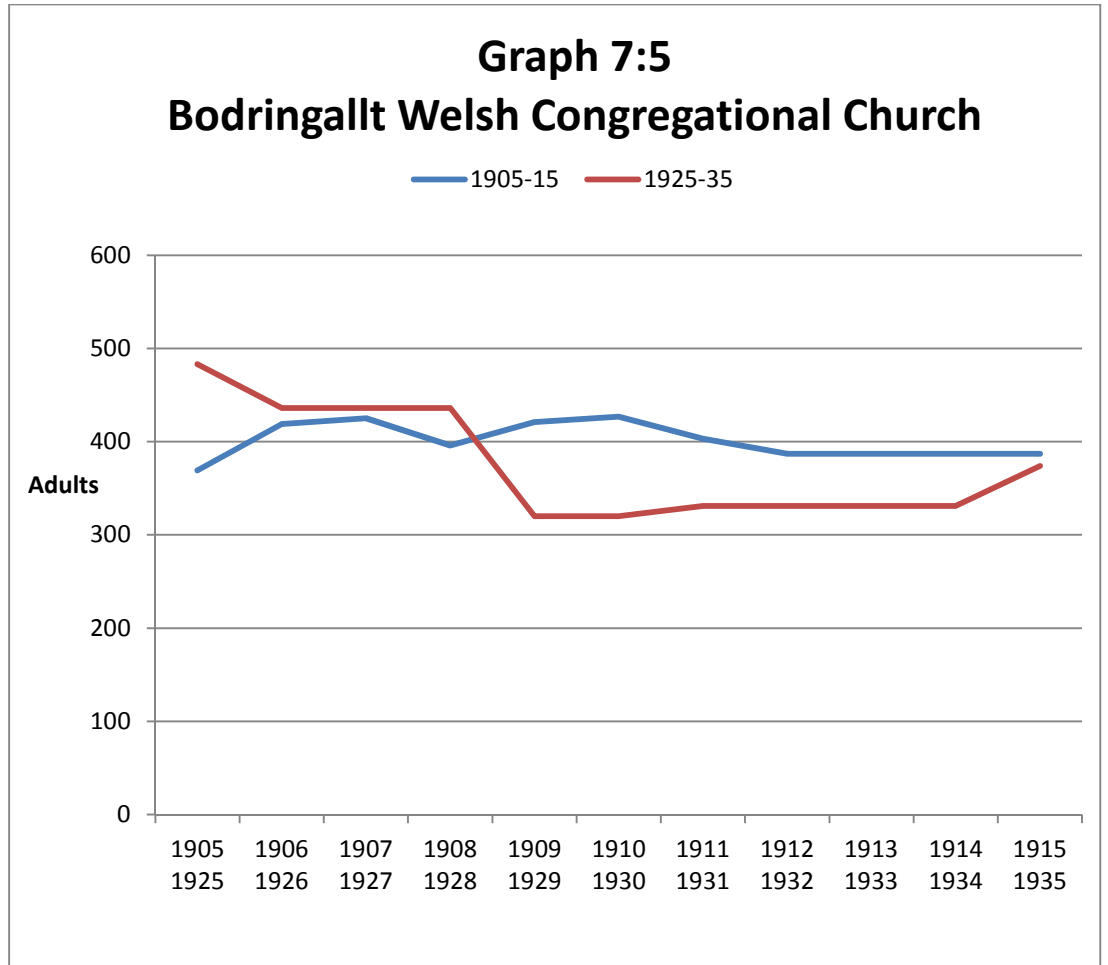


### Graph 7:3 Hucknall Congregational Church

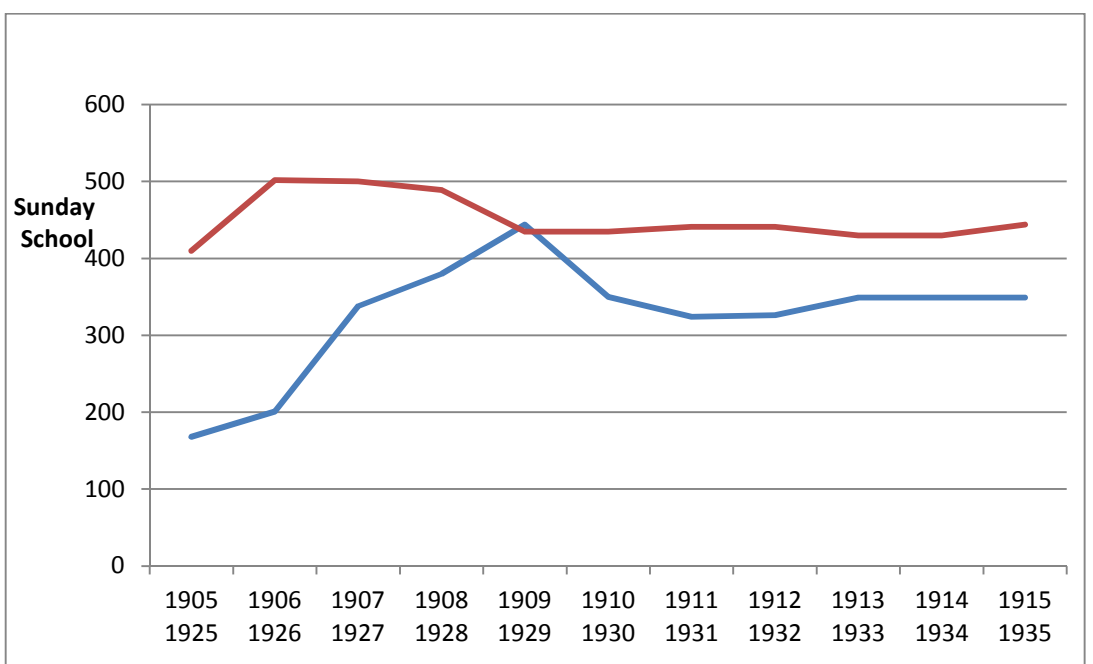
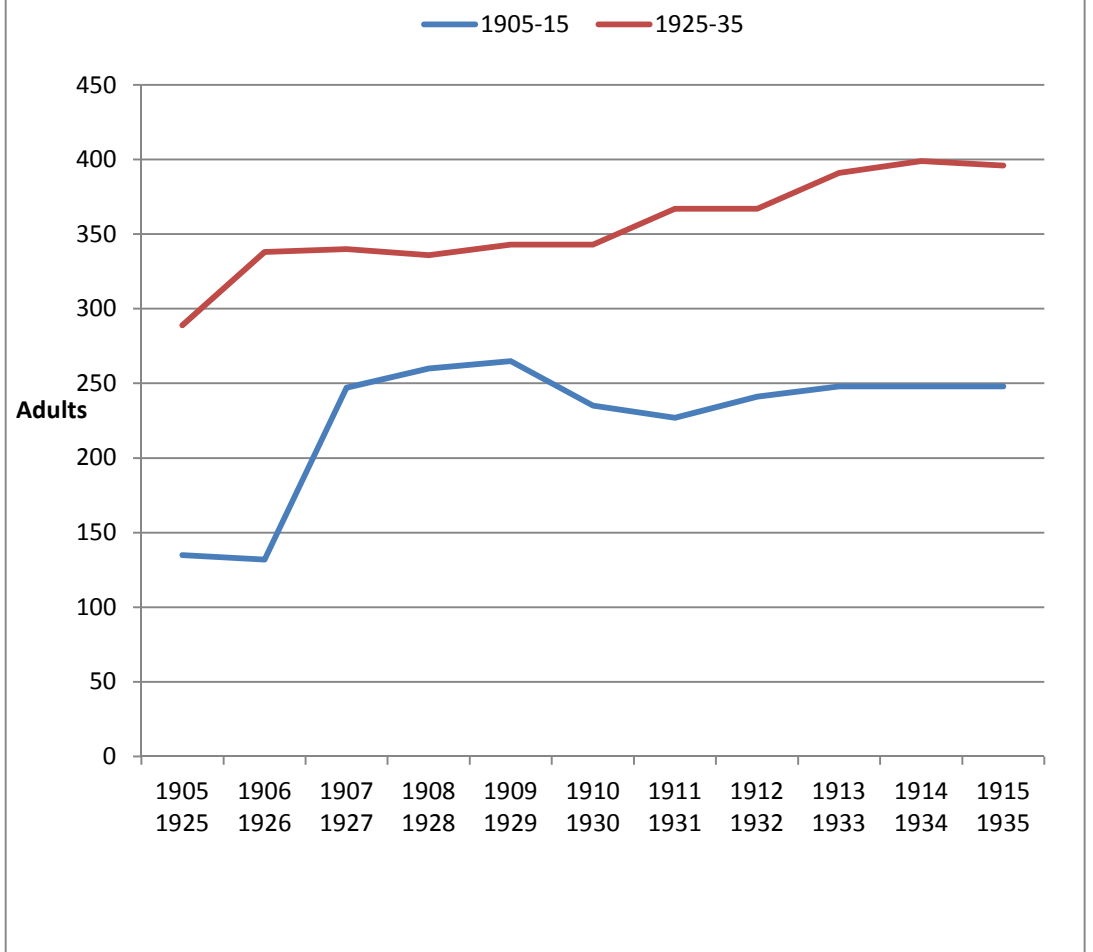


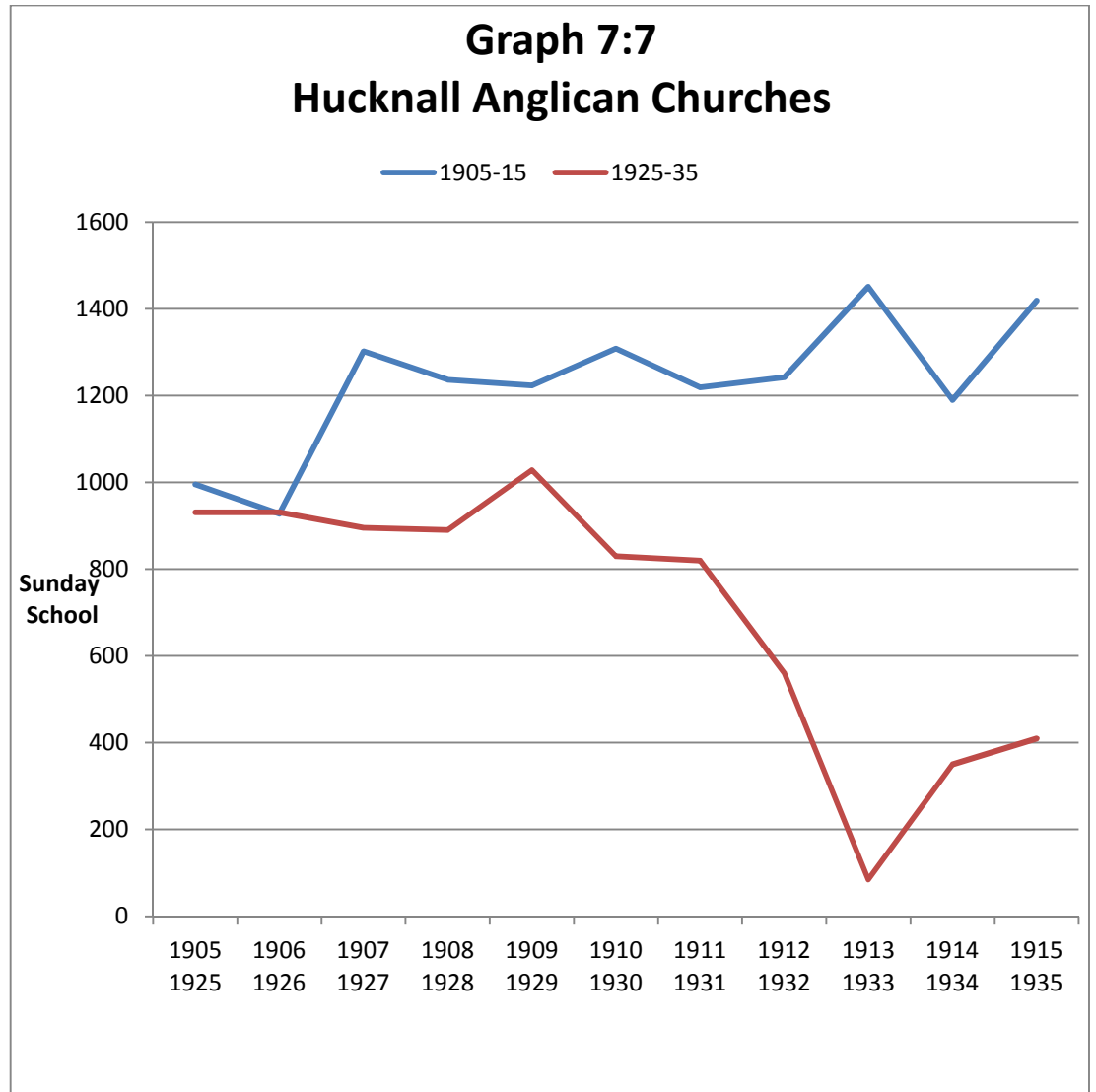
### Graph 7:4 Shirebrook Congregational Church





**Graph 7:6**  
**Porth English Congregational Church**







For Hucknall Baptist church<sup>4</sup> (Graph 7:1) it is clear that the period 1905-1915 was generally a more prosperous one, in terms of adult membership, than the period from 1925 onwards. The most remarkable difference however in the two periods is seen in the numbers of children in the Sunday school; here the numbers from 1925 to 1935 are much lower than they were from 1905 to 1915. In this church therefore there is clear evidence of numerical decline. For Tabernacle English Baptist church in Porth<sup>5</sup> (Graph 7:2) the picture is less clear; in fact the Sunday school numbers show such dramatic swings from year to year in both periods that it is difficult to see any pattern at all. With regard to the adult membership of 'Tabernacle', the period from 1905 to 1915 had a lower membership than that from 1925 to 1935; even so, after almost continuous increase from 1925 to 1928 there is continuous decline from 1928 to 1935. This is interesting because it shows that decline began while the church's most distinguished minister, Rev. R. B. Jones<sup>6</sup> (Minister 1919 – 1933), was still in post. Could this be due to the declining fortunes of fundamentalism or solely to population decline in Porth?

The Hucknall Congregational church,<sup>7</sup> (Graph 7:3) like the Hucknall Baptist church, had a rather higher membership between 1905 and 1915 than between 1925 and 1935, though there is so little change in membership during this latter period that one wonders whether its records were ever revised. The Sunday school also attracted more children in the early

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<sup>4</sup> For earlier reference to this church see pp. 115 and table 3:1, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., see p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> For details of R. B. Jones and his views see p. 137 and pp. 316 – 318.

<sup>7</sup> For earlier reference to this church see pp. 114 and table 3:3, p. 144.

period whereas during the 1930s it was in almost continuous decline. In Hucknall therefore both Baptists and Congregationalists show signs of decline. Shirebrook Congregational church<sup>8</sup> (Graph 7:4) shows such little movement in adult membership and Sunday school numbers in the period from 1925 to 1935 that it is almost certain that little attempt was made to keep records up to date; arguably this in itself reflects a lack of zeal for the cause.

Bodringallt Welsh Congregational church<sup>9</sup> (Graph 7:5) likewise went through periods when its numbers apparently did not change and one again suspects faulty record keeping. Clearly though their Sunday school numbers were considerably higher in the earlier period than in the 1920s and 1930s. The English Congregational church in Porth<sup>10</sup> (Graph 7:6) bucked the downward trend since both adult membership and Sunday school numbers are higher for the 1925-1935 period than they were for the earlier period. This could be due to the increase in English speaking in the later period, especially since the two Welsh Congregational churches in the area (Cymmer and Porth) both show a decline in numbers.

For the Anglican churches in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire communicant figures were not published for the 1920s and 1930s but the Sunday school numbers for Hucknall (Graph 7:7), though fluctuating, are very much lower in the 1925-1935 period than in the period from 1905 to

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<sup>8</sup> For earlier reference to this church see pp. 119 – 121.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., see pp. 103 – 104.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., see p. 137.

1915. In fact the period from 1929 to 1934 shows a steep decline before a smaller increase in 1935.

### **Evidence of decline drawn from other sources**

Even in 1920 and 1921 some clergymen were noticing the adverse effect on religion and morals of the First World War. The Vicar of the parish church in Sutton-in-Ashfield (Nottinghamshire) stated at the annual meeting of that church 'Sometimes I get downhearted and depressed at what appears to me the growing godlessness that we are suffering from. I don't know what can be done to arrest it; there seems to me a steady decline in religion ...There is no doubt that the war has left a terrible curse upon us with regard to our religious and moral life'.<sup>11</sup> In June 1921 the Bishop of Southwell was reported as stating 'The saddest thing in Diocesan work was the drop in Confirmations. The war had upset the minds of many young people and they had not yet got back to a normal state'.<sup>12</sup> These two clerics do not seem to appreciate the inevitability of this state of affairs given the horror of trench warfare and the magnitude of suffering and bereavement that was the legacy of the First World War. The Baptist church in Hucknall was clearly worried not only about actual decline in membership but that many members attended less frequently than in the past, as the following reports from the annual general meetings of that church indicate: January 1926, the report referred to 'the small attendance of male members at our Sunday morning services';

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<sup>11</sup> *Notts Free Press*, 16 April 1920, p. 2, col. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Southwell Diocesan Magazine*, 34 (1921), p. 55.

January 1930, the report referred to 'the non-attendance of many members' and in January 1934 the report referred to the 'large numbers who rarely attended'.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps of even more concern was the fact that the transfer from Sunday school membership to adult membership was decreasing. Thus in 1924 it was reported that 'no senior scholars had come from the school for two or three years'<sup>14</sup> and in 1934 it was reported that 'only sixteen males had joined the church in ten years and seven of those were no longer active members'.<sup>15</sup>

Irregular attendance at communion services was a frequent complaint of the clergy of the Anglican churches in Hucknall. For example, the curate of St John's church was pleased that just over seventy people had made their communion on Easter Day 1927, but as only a few of these were regular communicants he asked 'Where are the other fifty or sixty on an ordinary Sunday?'<sup>16</sup> Canon Barber wrote 'There are some I know who have become very slack about their Communion'.<sup>17</sup>

From the Rhondda too there is evidence from some churches, both Nonconformist and Anglican, that decline was a feature of the inter-war period. E. D. Lewis and I. G. Jones in their history of Capel y Cymer Welsh Congregational Church not only showed that its membership declined from 363 in 1920 to 187 in 1940 and its Sunday school numbers declined

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<sup>13</sup> *Baptist Church Minute Book Hucknall, January 18 1911 to June 23 1929*, (NC/BP 25/4 in NA), p. 187; and *Baptist Church Minute Book Hucknall, October 16 1929 – April 1938*, (NC/BP 25/5 in NA), pp. 10 and 89.

<sup>14</sup> *Baptist Church Minute Book Hucknall, 1911 – 1929*, p. 170.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1929 – 1938, p. 87.

<sup>16</sup> *Hucknall Parish Magazine*, May 1927 (PR29,055 in NA), unpaginated.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, April 1928 (PR29,056 in NA).

from 463 to 70 over the same period, but stated that the adherents had dropped to only seven by 1930.<sup>18</sup> A history of the Wesleyan Methodist church in Treherbert mentions that in the early 1920s 'Church leaders were appealing for better attendances at midweek and Sunday services' and commenting on the late 1920s it states 'The aftermath of the strikes and war was now beginning to tell on Church attendances. Although there were still good 'meetings' the peak of the 'revival' years was over'.<sup>19</sup>

Some Anglican churches in the Rhondda also had their problems in the late 1920s and 1930s. A history of St Andrew's Llwynypia for the period 1927-1940 states that the then Vicar had a very difficult time, though he 'persevered in spite of indifference of many church people, emigration of many others, constant debt... and economic depression'.<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein a history of St David's Tonyrefail states that the Rev. Gwilym Isaac (Vicar 1921 – 1940) 'had to face all the problems of Industrial unrest and slump etc ... the strike of 1921 had its effect on the spiritual and financial well being of the church ... it is not easy to bear the torch of faith when men are so weighed down by problems of daily bread and anti-Christian philosophies in the air'.<sup>21</sup>

However E. T. Davies was rather more 'upbeat' about the state of the Anglican church in the Rhondda for he wrote:

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis, E. D., and Jones, I. G., 'Capel y Cymer', in *Morgannwg*, 25 (1981) (Glamorgan History Society, 1982), p. 155.

<sup>19</sup> Fair, E. G., *Hymns and Hard Work: The Story of Treherbert and the Wesleyans* (published locally c1990), pp. 12 – 13.

<sup>20</sup> Rees, W. H., *A Short History of the Church and Parish of St Andrew Llwynypia 1878 – 1948*, (D/D CW/L 1/54 in GRO), p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Mainwaring, M. J., *History of St David's Church Tonyrefail 1903 – 1953* (D/D CW/L 1/103 in GRO), pp. 16 – 17.

'The church did not decrease. The Rhondda was the hardest hit of all our deaneries, and it is interesting to note that in 1929 6,283 presented themselves for Holy Communion on Easter day; ten years later that number had increased to 6,497 ... so in a shrinking and disheartened population the church not only held its own but actually increased its membership'.<sup>22</sup>

D. Denzil Morgan, referring to Anglicanism in the inter-war period, states that Easter communicants in Wales as a whole had increased steadily from 159,957 in 1920 to 193,668 in 1939 and he comments that 'adult membership in the Church in Wales was becoming acceptable among a much wider range of the Welsh population than it had been in the past' and that on Sundays 'parish churches and cathedrals were, if not full, at least comfortably well attended' though he notes that 'Baptisms throughout the province were decreasing steadily'.<sup>23</sup> In the same work, but in a chapter on Nonconformity, he writes 'By the eve of the Second World War institutional Christianity was in obvious decline', the numbers attending Sunday school were falling and adherents were 'in danger of disappearing altogether'.<sup>24</sup>

Clearly then in Wales the picture, though not entirely gloomy, was not very bright either and decline was unquestionably much greater in Nonconformity than in Anglicanism, though, as noted above, some Anglican churches in the Rhondda were also struggling and, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Timothy Rees was by 1935 very

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<sup>22</sup> Davies, E. T., *The Story of the Church in Glamorgan 560 – 1960* (London: SPCK, 1962), p. 97.

<sup>23</sup> Morgan, D. D., *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales 1914 – 2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 93.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

conscious of general indifference to religion. For Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire too there is considerable evidence that the churches themselves were not happy with levels of regular attendance and the Sunday schools seem generally to have been in steep decline in the 1930s.

### **Factors that may have contributed to religious decline**

Most, though not all, of the above points to numerical decline in church membership and increasing indifference to institutional religion. So the obvious question is, what caused this, or at least, contributed to it? The factors examined below were arguably all of particular relevance to mining communities.

#### **(1) Industrial factors, particularly growth in trade unionism**

##### ***(a) South Wales***

The 1890s were not a good time for miners in South Wales because the coal trade was 'sluggish, wages were falling and trade disputes were frequent'.<sup>25</sup> Wages were bound to fall when trade was sluggish because under the Sliding Scale agreement then in force in South Wales wages were linked to the selling price of coal. The greatest dispute of the decade was in 1898 and resulted in a strike affecting some 100,000 miners and lasting from April to September. The strike itself ended in defeat for the miners but it had the effect of uniting the miners throughout the South Wales coalfield so that they formed the South Wales Miners' Federation

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<sup>25</sup> Williams, G. (ed.), *Merthyr Politics: The Making of a Working Class Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966), p. 66.

(SWMF); formerly there had been seven separate district unions.<sup>26</sup> By the 1920s the SWMF (or the Fed as it was often called) had become militant. In 1922, for example, it had proposed that the Miners' Federation of Great Britain should become 'affiliated to the industrial auxiliary of International Communism, the Red International of Labour Unions, which sought the international overthrow of capitalism'.<sup>27</sup> The motion was rejected, only the SWMF voting for it. There was a more moderate wing of the 'Fed' and these moderates in South Wales, as elsewhere, looked for improvement in wages and conditions but were happy to pursue this through the ballot box within the existing capitalist system.

However, whether members were militant or moderate, the SWMF was undoubtedly very influential in the mining communities. James Griffiths<sup>28</sup> states that 'The Federation was not only a trade union; it was an all-embracing institution in the mining community ... caring for the maimed and the bereaved and providing the community with its libraries and bands and hospitals and everything which helped to make life bearable and joyous. In the work and in the life of the community the Federation was the servant of all'.<sup>29</sup> In a similar vein Will Paynter<sup>30</sup> claimed that 'the Fed' was 'a lot more than a trade union; it was a social institution providing through its local leaders an all round service of advice and

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<sup>26</sup> May, J., *Rhondda*, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Griffin, A. R., *Mining in the East Midlands 1550 – 1947* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1971), p. 226.

<sup>28</sup> James Griffiths, born 1890, had been a miner and a miners' agent before becoming Labour MP for Llanelly, 1936 – 1970, and Secretary of State for Wales, 1964 – 1966.

<sup>29</sup> Griffiths, J., *Pages From Memory* (London: Dent, 1969), p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Will Paynter, born 1903, had been a miner living in the Rhondda. He joined the Communist party, served on the executive committee of the SWMF in 1936 and was Secretary of the NUM, 1959 – 1968.



assistance to the mining community on most of the problems that could arise between the cradle and the grave'; the local leaders of 'the Fed' were 'the village elders to whom the people went when in any kind of trouble'.<sup>31</sup>

Possibly based on these and similar statements from those involved with 'the Fed'; Robert Pope argues that 'The SWMF virtually replaced the social function of the chapel in many men's lives'.<sup>32</sup> Likewise David Smith claims 'in village after village, checkweighers and lodge committee men played the role reserved elsewhere for the Roman Catholic priesthood'.<sup>33</sup> Michael Lieven, on the other hand, casts some doubt on the all-powerful appeal of 'the Fed' by pointing out that membership of this trade union 'rarely exceeded 70%' and after the coalminers' strikes of 1921 and 1926 'fell as low as 36%'.<sup>34</sup> At the 1920 annual general meeting of the Ynysybwll colliery lodge 'only about fifty miners were present from a membership of around one thousand'.<sup>35</sup> So Lieven raises the question 'what was engaging the attention of the non-attending majority and the four thousand other villagers who did not attend the meetings of the lodge? ... without knowing this', he argues, 'we cannot begin to weigh up the significance of the lodge itself'.<sup>36</sup> In reply to his own question he suggests that the non-attenders at the lodge and the rest of the community would all be

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<sup>31</sup> Paynter, W., *My Generation* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972), pp. 110 – 111.

<sup>32</sup> Pope, R., *Building Jerusalem: Nonconformity, Labour and the Social Question in Wales 1906 – 1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 92.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, D., 'Leaders and Led', in Hopkins, K. S., *Rhondda Past and Future* (Ferndale: Rhondda Borough Council, undated but c1976/ 77), p. 378.

<sup>34</sup> Lieven, M., 'A Fractured Working-class Consciousness? The Case of the Lady Windsor Colliery Lodge, 1921', in *Welsh History Review*, 21/4 (December 2003), p. 737.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 744.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 744 – 745.

engaged in the multifarious activities available in Ynysybwl, which would include the weekday activities of the eleven churches in that village.

However, whether the SWMF was as 'all-embracing' an institution as Griffiths and Paynter claimed or was only one of the many institutions in the mining communities, as Lieven suggests, it may well have accounted for some lessening in the influence of the churches.

By 1926 the Fed was not the only mining trade union; it had a rival in the avowedly non-political South Wales Miners' Industrial Union (SWMIU).<sup>37</sup> The SWMIU, which began at the new Taff-Merthyr colliery, expanded to other collieries; for example the Ocean Coal Company pits in Treorchy and Cwmparc. Numerically this union was never strong but it caused bad feeling throughout the coalfield, especially as unemployment increased. In South Wales 'between January 1927 and April 1928, fifty-six collieries employing 23,700 men had closed down; many more were due for closure and others were on short-time'.<sup>38</sup> This gave rise to the fear that in the event of a dispute of any kind those 'who took action would be permanently replaced by others from the coalfield's bottomless supply of unemployed labour'.<sup>39</sup> Thus both non-unionism and 'company unionism' (which was what the SWMIU was reputed to be) were suspect to members of 'the Fed' since men from such backgrounds would be favoured by coal owners for employment. This did in fact happen in

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<sup>37</sup> For details of how and why this union was formed see Smith, D., 'The Struggle Against Company Unionism in the South Wales Coalfield 1926 – 39' in *Welsh History Review*, 6 (1972 – 1973), p. 357.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 361 – 362.

Treorchy in the 1930s; 'the Dare Colliery, after a deliberate lock-out, re-employed only Industrial Union men'.<sup>40</sup>

This tension within the mining industry between members of 'the Fed' and members of the Industrial Union had its repercussions in the mining communities and their churches. In Bedlinog, an isolated mining village near the Taff Valley, the Communist party, consisting mainly of unemployed miners, was very active in persuading more and more miners at the Taff-Merthyr and Bedwas pits to join 'the Fed'; the coal owners retaliated by sacking twelve men from Taff-Merthyr and 250 from Bedwas. This action of the coal owners resulted in a strike, but much more devastating than the strike itself was its effect on the community of Bedlinog where 'churches and chapels, football clubs, brass bands and choral parties all split into warring factions' and there was 'a social boycott of almost all those connected with the Industrial Union'.<sup>41</sup>

There is certainly much oral testimony to support this statement. Thus Edgar Evans, a former miner, when interviewed in 1973, stated that he had been a member and a Sunday school teacher at Moriah Congregational Church in Bedlinog in his youth until he was reprimanded by a local preacher for discussing politics with his class. He described Rev Buckley Jones, a minister there in the 1930s, as 'a great guy' since he was a supporter of the Taff-Merthyr strike in 1934 and was one who approved of the social boycott actions that were taking place there, but 'a big section of them (the congregation of Moriah) went against him see and

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

the rest weren't enough to keep him in any case then'.<sup>42</sup> Evans also claimed that attendance at Moriah dropped off 'I would say from the early thirties it went very bad, especially after the Taff-Merthyr strike you know 'cos this divided the village up ... they never forgot the 'scabs' and that you know and people lost, certainly lost interest ... and in the meantime the Party' [the Communist party] 'had decided, well we must take control of these social organisations in the village'.<sup>43</sup>

Another ex-miner, Elwyn Rees, who became a deacon at Moriah in 1939, had actually been one of the sit-in strikers at Taff-Merthyr in 1934 and he commented 'Well there were two sides in the Chapel see and it' [the Taff-Merthyr trouble] 'was causing grievance amongst some of the chapel people' and of the village he said 'it was split very much too, terrible, Oh yes'. When asked if the choir split up he replied 'Oh yes, everything went. There was no feeling for joining anything then'.<sup>44</sup>

Two brothers, Norman Thomas and J. B. Thomas, both from Bedlinog, who became members of the Communist party, when asked about the bitterness in Bedlinog, claimed that the splits in the chapels were 'not so pronounced ... although there was bitterness you know' and most of the pubs were also split - 'there were only a couple that the Industrial Unionists could safely drink in'. J. B. Thomas very cynically added 'It's surprising how many of those that did 'scab' weren't interested in church

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<sup>42</sup> Transcript of interview of Edgar Evans by D. Smith and H. Francis, 14 July 1973 (AUD 210 in SWML), pp. 13 and 16.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25 – 26.

<sup>44</sup> Transcript of Interview of Watkin Gittins, Elwyn Rees and Martha Jones by Alun Morgan, 15 February 1973 (AUD 230 in SWML), p. 12.

or chapel, they were more interested in drinking and boozing, that's what drove them to scab'.<sup>45</sup>

The above remarks certainly indicate something of the depth of feeling that existed in some at least of the South Wales mining communities in the troubled inter-war years. It could not have been easy to minister in the churches of these communities at that period.

***(b) East Midlands***

On the whole the Nottinghamshire Miners' Association (NMA) was not as militant as the SWMF (though it did have a left wing – mainly encouraged by immigrants from other coalfields such as Yorkshire and South Wales). In a ballot held in June 1921 as to whether to 'fight for principle', and therefore continue the national strike that had begun in April, or to accept the Government's and mine owners' terms, the South Wales miners voted 110,616 in favour of continuing with 40,909 voting to accept. For Nottinghamshire the figures were 8,099 in favour of continuing and 6,970 for accepting.<sup>46</sup> These figures for Nottinghamshire are so low because only about a third of the NMA's 46,206 members bothered to vote.<sup>47</sup> However, by accepting the mine owners' terms the South Wales miners would have had a reduction in their wages of 9s.3¼d. per shift, whereas the reduction per shift for Nottinghamshire would have been a mere 9¾d.<sup>48</sup> This one fact alone may well help to explain the difference in militancy between

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<sup>45</sup> Transcript of interview of Norman and J. B. Thomas by Alun Morgan and R. Merfyn Jones, June 1973 (AUD 235 in SWML), pp. 17 – 18.

<sup>46</sup> See Griffin, A. R., *The Miners of Nottinghamshire 1914 – 1944: A History of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Unions* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

the two coalfields. One may well be less inclined to ‘fight for principle’ when one has nothing to gain by so doing.

As in South Wales, the protracted strike of 1926 led to the formation of a breakaway union – the non-political Nottinghamshire Miners’ Industrial Union (NMIU), or the ‘Spencer Union’ as it was sometimes called in honour of its principal negotiator, George Spencer.<sup>49</sup> Since the two unions (NMA and NMIU) were more evenly balanced numerically than their South Wales counterparts and between them they only accounted for just over 50% of the miners there must have been considerable tension in mining communities though, unlike South Wales, there seems to be no evidence either way that this affected the churches.

***(c) Attitudes of clergy to striking miners***

Clearly one cannot directly attribute decline in institutional religion to industrial problems or a zeal for trade union affairs replacing a zeal for religion. However the attitude of some clergy and ministers towards the miners was certainly unsympathetic. Canon Barber stated ‘There must be ways of settling trade disputes other than by strikes ... if masters and men were alike filled with the spirit of Christ, they would not have to appeal to the government to settle their disputes, and strikes would be a thing of the past’.<sup>50</sup> The Bishop of Southwell wrote ‘Into the merits of the points at issue I cannot go ... it is not for me to intervene ... but it is for us as Christians to ask with increasing emphasis “Is a lockout or strike the only

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<sup>49</sup> For details of the NMIU and its aims, progress and relations with the NMA, see Waller, R. J., *The Dukeries Transformed: The Social and Political Development of a Twentieth Century Coalfield* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 109 – 130.

<sup>50</sup> *Hucknall Parish Magazine*, May 1921 (PR29049 in NA), unpaginated.

method whereby such questions can be brought to an issue?" How insane it appears to cry for profits and wages when the whole production of the country is on the brink of ruin!<sup>51</sup>

However it was not just the Anglican clergy who were critical of the miners. The President of the Wesleyan Reform Union, speaking in Mansfield in 1921, argued that 'the church was not founded ... for the purpose of being a political organisation' and he asked 'if the miners refused to work and thereby cause suffering ... was the church bound to support them?'<sup>52</sup> His remarks are possibly more surprising than those of the Anglican clergy since the Wesleyan Reform Church in Hucknall was a predominantly working class church that had been founded by miners. In 1926, at the Wesleyan Church in Hucknall, a preacher at a mission service spoke of England's enemies. He never mentioned social injustice but spoke of the 'huge consumption of drink supplemented with immorality and godlessness'.<sup>53</sup>

These clergy and ministers were not alone in having little sympathy with miners. Bishop Henson of Durham stated categorically 'The strike is wrong ... therefore do not negotiate. To bargain is to bargain with sinners about their sin ... For the sake of the country, for the sake of County Durham ... the government must win'.<sup>54</sup> Henson's attitude was therefore totally different to that of one of his predecessors - Bishop Westcott

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<sup>51</sup> *Southwell Diocesan Magazine*, 39 (January 1921), (DR/1/1/12/14/34 in NA), p. 41.

<sup>52</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 1 September 1921, p. 8, col. 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 21 January 1926, p. 5, col. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield 1810 – 1926: Clergymen, Capitalists and Colliers* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), p 171.

(Bishop of Durham 1890 – 1901) was very sympathetic to the miners and his intervention in the strike of 1892 led to a settlement. However by the 1920s lack of clergy sympathy seems to have been part of a national trend, since Callum Brown claims that the 'mainstream churches developed a near contempt for miners in the inter-war period'.<sup>55</sup>

There seems to be no evidence that the church hierarchy understood and empathised with the dilemma that miners faced during these protracted strikes: should they continue 'to fight for principle' in support of their fellow miners whose conditions were even less favourable than their own, knowing that there was nothing to be gained personally by this, or return to work and be branded 'blacklegs' by their more militant friends? Griffin argues that in areas where miners lived in close-knit mining communities (as in the Rhondda) their wives and the community usually supported their 'fight for principle' stance, but in the more urban areas of Nottinghamshire where miners did not form the overwhelming majority in the community they tended to lack this support, and 'seeing the children go hungry, the furniture and Sunday clothes put into pawn, the insurance policies surrendered for cash, then to be threatened with eviction for non-payment of rent was more than many women could bear without protest'<sup>56</sup> so many persuaded their husbands to return to work. Arguably therefore the generally unsympathetic attitude of the church hierarchy, their lack of understanding of the dilemma that industrial disputes created

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<sup>55</sup> Brown, C., *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Pearson/Longman, 2006), p. 157.

<sup>56</sup> Griffin, A. R., *Mining in the East Midlands 1550 – 1947*, p. 249.



for many miners and their failure to acknowledge social injustice in society while being very critical of personal morality may have been contributory factors to the decline in religious zeal experienced by the churches at this time.

## **(2) Political factors**

### ***(a) South Wales***

The industrial troubles of the 1890s particularly in 1898 when '100,000 were locked out of work for six months in a dispute over methods of payment'<sup>57</sup> led not only to the formation of the militant 'Fed' (the SWMF) but also to the rise of the Labour party. Between 1898 and 1908, eighty-four Independent Labour Party (ILP) branches were established in South Wales.<sup>58</sup> No doubt ILP support was stimulated by the fact that Keir Hardie<sup>59</sup> himself came to the Welsh mining valleys and worked tirelessly there for the cause. Kenneth Morgan attributed Hardie's appeal to the South Wales miners to the fact that he could 'translate socialist ethics into the imagery of popular Nonconformity', by claiming that socialism was 'real religion' unlike the religion the 'pharisaical ministers and their bourgeois congregations of self-satisfied men of property'<sup>60</sup> proclaimed.

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<sup>57</sup> Pope, R., 'Pilgrims Through a Barren Land: Nonconformists and Socialists in Wales 1906 – 1914' in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion 2000*, new series 7 (2001), p. 151.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, footnote on p. 151.

<sup>59</sup> Keir Hardie became the first Independent Labour Party MP (for Merthyr Tydfil).

<sup>60</sup> Morgan, K. O., 'The Merthyr of Keir Hardie' in Williams, G. (ed.), *Merthyr Politics: The Making of a Working Class Tradition* (Cardiff: University Press, 1966), p. 67.

Many miners rallied to the cause, some of them regarding the ILP as ‘a crusade against injustice and humanity’.<sup>61</sup> Some would regard the Labour cause as an outworking of their Christian faith, James Griffiths being a notable example. In his youth Griffiths had witnessed the great religious revival of 1904-5 when, as he wrote, many individual lives had been changed but society had remained the same, and the young working-class people ‘were looking for a religion that would change society’.<sup>62</sup> He and his friends heard Hardie speak and as a result ‘we returned with a new religion to inspire us ... a cause to which we could dedicate our lives’;<sup>63</sup> and that is exactly what James Griffiths did, culminating in serving the constituency of Llanelli as Labour MP from 1936 to 1970.

There were some ministers in all three major Nonconformist denominations who were sympathetic to socialism; for example R. Silyn Roberts (Calvinistic Methodist), T. E. Nicholas (Congregationalist) and Gwili Jenkins and Herbert Morgan (Baptists). They all supported the ILP.<sup>64</sup> Indeed Morgan and Nicholas stood unsuccessfully for Neath and Aberdare respectively in the 1918 General Election, but both were heavily defeated and both later left the ministry to engage in secular careers.<sup>65</sup> However the majority of ministers, Kenneth Morgan claimed, ‘rallied to denounce

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<sup>61</sup> Gwyther, C. E., ‘Sidelights on Religion and Politics in the Rhondda Valley, 1906 – 26’ in *Llafur: The Journal of the Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History*, 3/1(Spring 1980), p. 35.

<sup>62</sup> Griffiths, J., *Pages from Memory*, p. 13.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>64</sup> Pope, R., ‘Facing the Dawn: Socialists, Nonconformists and *Llais Llafur* 1906 – 1914’ in *Llais Llafur: Journal of Welsh Labour History*, 17 (1998 – 99), p. 78.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Hardie's socialist creed as tantamount to atheism and republicanism'.<sup>66</sup> Many ministers did all they could to discourage their members from taking up the Labour cause. Thus at Bodringallt Congregational church at Ystrad in the Rhondda members who attended political meetings on Sundays were threatened with excommunication.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore 'Labour representatives were often refused permission to use chapel vestries (for their meetings) yet Liberals were allowed even after resolutions had been passed to forbid this use of chapel property for political speakers'.<sup>68</sup> Robert Pope claims that as a result of this hostility to the Labour cause by many ministers and deacons a large number of working-class people left the chapels.<sup>69</sup> Ironically though, at the very time when some working men were leaving their chapels either because of Nonconformity's hostility to the Labour cause or for what they regarded as Nonconformity's lack of action in seeking to change an unjust society, Nonconformity had inaugurated in 1911 the Welsh School of Social Service (see also p. 52) in an attempt to understand and tackle social issues. Pope is, however, critical of the churches because they failed 'to translate their theories into practical political action, despite considerable discussion, and despite a lot of good intention'.<sup>70</sup>

Interestingly, Robert Lee in his examination of the Church of England in the mining communities in the Durham Diocese, where, as stated in

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<sup>66</sup> Morgan, K. O., in Williams, G. (ed.), *Merthyr Politics*, p. 69.

<sup>67</sup> Pope, R., *Building Jerusalem*, p. 60.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>70</sup> Pope, R., 'Pilgrims Through a Barren Land', p. 162.

chapter one, a cohort of clergymen in the 1920s were socialist sympathisers, asked the question 'Could a socialist clergyman have any impact upon church attendance and usage?' but concluded that the socialist orientation of the clergyman made little impact on church attendance.<sup>71</sup> In the case of Welsh Nonconformity however the negative attitude of minister and deacons would almost certainly have caused some loss of membership, as Pope claims (see above), because whilst the sympathy of a church's hierarchy to a cause may not necessarily attract, hostility to it is likely to repel. In defence of the attitude of most of the Nonconformist hierarchy however it has to be said that the ILP was selective in its use of the New Testament. It tended to focus on Christ as the champion of the poor rather than as the Divine Saviour. In so doing therefore it was, as Pope argues, seeking to remake the church in its own image.<sup>72</sup>

R. Tudor Jones summed up very neatly the reasons for an almost inevitable conflict between the churches and the Labour movement. 'Problems for the churches with the Labour movement were: materialistic emphasis, humanistic and even atheistic doctrines and the practice of holding meetings on a Sunday. The Labour movement's problems with the churches were: other worldliness of the churches, their perceived respect

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<sup>71</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 177.

<sup>72</sup> Pope, R., *Building Jerusalem*, p. 82.

for the rich, their tendency to teach people to accept an unjust social system quietly rather than seek to change it'.<sup>73</sup>

Despite these conflicting emphases there were many who remained loyal to their churches whilst also becoming members of and even workers for the Labour party (see chapter three p. 110 for examples of miners who were members of the Fed, local labour councillors and deacons at their churches).

On the other hand there were many who, as Pope claims, were indebted to the chapels for their training in democracy and public speaking who turned away from religion and embraced socialism.<sup>74</sup> Pope cites Noah Ablett, A. J. Cook, Frank Hodges, Arthur Horner and Will Paynter (all well known militant trade unionists and socialists) as men who in an earlier generation 'would have pursued a career in the pulpit'.<sup>75</sup> Arthur Horner had been, in his own words, 'a boy preacher'.<sup>76</sup> At the age of seventeen he had obtained a scholarship to a Baptist College in Birmingham, but he had only spent six months there because he became increasingly interested in politics. Pope argues that these men 'abandoned their Christian faith because they saw no way forward within Nonconformity for transforming the social order'.<sup>77</sup> Whether this was the sole reason for their abandonment of Christianity is however a moot point. Horner explained that he tried for a long time 'to wed Christianity to Socialism and only

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<sup>73</sup> Jones, R. T., *Congregationalism in Wales*, edited by Pope, R. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 228.

<sup>74</sup> Pope, R., 'Pilgrims Through a Barren Land', p. 149.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>76</sup> Horner, A., *Incorrigible Rebel* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1960), p. 14.

<sup>77</sup> Pope, R., 'Pilgrims Through a Barren Land', p. 162.

slowly did I reach the point of accepting the materialistic conception of history and the struggle of the working class as the only way to emancipation'.<sup>78</sup> Will Paynter, who came from a very religious family and had himself attended a Welsh Congregational church until he was twenty-four, in an interview in 1969 said 'I reached the conclusion that religion was – didn't explain anything you know. I went to chapel for about two years purely out of a sense of duty to the – well, not prepared to make the break in the family, because of the upset it would cause. So I had to break those shackles really before I became attached to any political organisation'.<sup>79</sup> Similarly Noah Ablett, a former member of a chapel in Ynysgir, abandoned his faith 'not simply as a protest against the negative attitude of the chapels, although he condemned their alleged ineptitude strongly. But his denial of religion was a corollary of his acceptance of Marxism'.<sup>80</sup>

These remarks clearly indicate that all these men developed intellectual doubts about religion and in any case viewed religion as being totally incompatible with socialism. Thus the inability of Nonconformity to transform the social order was not, as Pope suggested, their main reason for abandoning Christianity.

However, it is possible that many working people, who as James Griffiths claimed 'were looking for a religion that would change society' (see above), felt let down by Nonconformity because in their minds, whilst it

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<sup>78</sup> Horner, A., *Incorrigible Rebel*, p. 14.

<sup>79</sup> Transcript of Interview of Will Paynter by H. Francis and David Smith, 18 April 1969 (AUD 446 in SWML), p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> Gwyther, C. E., 'Sidelights on Religion and Politics in the Rhondda Valley', p. 42.

had spent years fighting for disestablishment of the Anglican church in Wales, it had accepted the political status quo and done little to promote social justice. It had always been very vocal in condemning personal sin but did not seem to have a concept of corporate sin.

It is conceivable too that while the older generation of miners would recall with gratitude all that their chapels had done to promote culture and education and give meaning to their humdrum lives, the younger generation had simply entered into these benefits and taken them for granted. What they wanted now was better living conditions and greater prosperity. These were things that the churches were not likely to provide. Furthermore, by the 1920s all the educational, social and cultural activities that had been provided mainly by institutional religion were now provided also by many secular organisations, not least by the mining trade unions. It is probable too that the voices of the young were not heard in Nonconformist churches because, as already indicated, church officials tended to stay in situ for forty years or more. An interview with Anne Thomas from Cwmparc, widow of Lorrie Thomas (1895-1966) a Labour MP for Rhondda West from 1950 until his death, encapsulated the generational difference in belief systems. She said that in their youth on Sunday afternoons Lorrie's father 'would be going down this side of the road with a hymn book and bible or something under his arm, and Lorrie

would be going down the other side of the road with Karl Marx' [presumably his books!] 'to these classes in Park Hall'.<sup>81</sup>

The fact that zeal for socialism was becoming a substitute for religion in the lives of many miners in the South Wales valleys is powerfully symbolised in a painting in 1932 by Evan Walters entitled *The Communist*.<sup>82</sup> In this painting a Communist speaker, dressed in a red jumper, stands on a soapbox with arms outstretched, and below him a crowd of men are gazing up at him (see between pp 291 and 292). The scene has clear overtones of Christ's crucifixion.

### **(b) East Midlands**

There is far less written on politics and religion in the East Midlands than on those subjects in relation to South Wales, possibly because there were few really great names in either field in the East Midlands during the inter-war period. There are also other possible reasons for Nottinghamshire being less politically militant than South Wales. Robert Moore, as already noted, argued that Methodism tended to inhibit the development of class consciousness and Methodism was by far the strongest Nonconformist denomination in most mining communities. This could help to explain the rather late development of socialism in Nottinghamshire as opposed to

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<sup>81</sup> Transcript of interview of Mrs Anne Thomas by Hywel Francis and David Smith, 28 November 1973 (AUD 285 in SWML), p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Evan Walters (1893 – 1951) was one of a group of artists who specialised in painting industrial scenes. See [http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/media/2/1/8/nmc\\_art\\_walters\\_eng.pdf](http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/media/2/1/8/nmc_art_walters_eng.pdf)



**Illustration 7:1**

'The Communist' (c1932) by Evan Walters (1893 – 1951)  
From the website of the National Museum Wales, with thanks

South Wales. Also mining was one of many industries in Nottinghamshire. The lighter industries of lace and hosiery which provided employment for many in Nottinghamshire did not have powerful united unions as did the miners. Their trade unions were fragmented.

Both the old coalfield area and the new 1920s coalfield area in the Dukeries were in the 1920s and 1930s very different politically from South Wales, though after the Second World War both areas became solidly Labour. No branch of the Labour party was formed in the new Dukeries area of the coalfield until the 1940s. As shown in the section on trade unionism (see above), this was also the area where membership of the non-political NMIU began and was strongest and where there were paternalistic mine owners who had built well-designed villages for their mining families and provided many amenities including churches, but who also had the power to 'hire and fire' at will. Not surprisingly therefore in the economic climate of the late 1920s and 1930s not many miners chose to be politically active so no branch of the Labour party was formed and when their management stood in local elections they were virtually unopposed.<sup>83</sup>

Interestingly though, at a meeting of the Nottinghamshire Church Extension Society, which was enquiring into the spiritual needs of the new colliery villages (that is the ones referred to above), the Bishop of Southwell said that 'he knew that Communist propaganda had found its way into the area, and unless we are prepared to combat this, we are

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<sup>83</sup> For details of party politics and local government in this area see Waller, R. J., *The Dukeries Transformed*, pp. 131 – 163.

bound to suffer' and one of the representatives from the coal owners said 'It was to the Company's interest to assist those who will stamp out Communism'.<sup>84</sup> This seems to be a clear indication that the elite of both Church and industry in an apparently non-politically militant Nottinghamshire were certainly worried about the possibility of militant miners.

In the older coalfield area of Nottinghamshire strong Labour party support did not seem to develop so quickly as in South Wales. Thus in 1914 two young miners, both Labour party members (one from Hucknall colliery and one from Newstead colliery), held meetings up and down the County on Sunday mornings, but when they came to Hucknall they 'aroused the opposition of the Nonconformist churches ...and the Hucknall UDC, which was dominated by Liberal Nonconformists, forbade them to use Hucknall market place for Sunday meetings'.<sup>85</sup> It would seem therefore that pre-First World War Hucknall was still a Liberal stronghold.

However, Robert Breckles, writing on the political scene in Ashfield (then comprising the urban districts of Sutton and Kirkby), portrayed a rather similar pattern to that of South Wales in that the appeal of socialism pre-First World War took hold among 'idealistic Christians' and many who were heavily involved with their own churches became members of the ILP. As in Wales, some remained faithful to their churches and others, especially in the 1920s, drifted towards Marxism and away from religion.

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<sup>84</sup> Notts Church Extension Society: North Notts Coal Area Committee *Minutes*, 6 April 1925 (DR3/1/9/1 in NA), unpaginated

<sup>85</sup> Griffin, A. R., *Mining in the East Midlands*, p. 201.

Interestingly some who eventually abandoned religion had been members of the Sutton Adult School (Men's Section) which started in the early years of the twentieth century and had been founded by a member of the Anglican Church. The Adult School flourished until 1914. The meetings were held mostly on Sunday mornings in a secular environment but the proceedings included religious features like singing, prayer and a Bible lesson, which however were followed by a lecture and discussion. This School or pseudo church had 'no sacraments, no creed or formal doctrine'; it aimed 'to teach men and women (women met on a different day) the art of life' and 'to study the Bible frankly and without prejudice'.<sup>86</sup> There was a short report each week of the activities of this School in the local press. Thus from 13 January 1911 to 10 February 1911 lectures were given on 'A Study in Ethics', 'The Law of Social Progress', 'Ancient Egypt' and 'William Morris, Man and Poet'.<sup>87</sup> The school did not survive into the 1920s, for by then Breckles argued the ethical socialism of pre-war days had become more Marxist and less Christian and many members had transferred their loyalties to the Labour clubs and trade unions, and politics were much more controlled by non-Christians than they had been in the past. Even so there were many who were equally committed to religion and to socialism.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Breckles, R., 'The Social History of Ashfield 1880 – 1930 with Special Reference to the Role and Influence of Organised Religion' (M.Phil. thesis, University of Nottingham, 1993), p. 383.

<sup>87</sup> *Notts Free Press*, 13 January 1911, p. 4, col. 3; 27 January 1911, p. 5, col. 3; 3 February 1911, p. 5, col. 4; 10 February 1911, p. 5, cols. 3 – 4.

<sup>88</sup> Breckles, R., 'The Social History of Ashfield', p. 387.

### **(3) Economic factors**

#### ***(a) East Midlands – Nottinghamshire***

François Bedarida states that nationally ‘throughout the entire inter-war period unemployment never fell below one million and in 1932 it reached the record figure of 2,700,000. In that year one third of all miners were unemployed’.<sup>89</sup> To give some idea of how the economic situation was felt in a Nottinghamshire mining locality, below are some brief extracts from the *Hucknall Dispatch*:

At the beginning of January 1921 an editorial in this local newspaper stated that unemployment ‘will have to be tackled if we are to regain our peace of mind, our old prosperity and the respect of other nations’.<sup>90</sup> The following week the *Dispatch* reported that Lloyd George suggested that the unemployed should emigrate.<sup>91</sup> On 20 January, still well before the long strike in the coal industry, the same paper was commenting ‘things are not going smoothly with us at present. We are in debt to ourselves and to other nations ... prices are still absurd compared to our pre-war notions, and even so we have still to do without much that we looked on as necessary to our comfort five or six years ago’.<sup>92</sup> Far worse was to come. On 19 May when the coal strike was in its seventh week the *Dispatch* reported on the devastating effects this strike was having on

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<sup>89</sup> Bedarida, F., *A Social History of Britain 1851 – 1990* (English translation, Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1991), p. 175.

<sup>90</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 6 January 1921, p. 4, col. 5.

<sup>91</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 13 January 1921, p. 7, col. 1.

<sup>92</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 20 January 1921, p. 7, col. 3.

Hucknall: 'Factories have been closed and in other works short time is the rule, so that in all one eighth of a million has been lost in wages'.<sup>93</sup>

The Nottinghamshire miners gained nothing by this strike and the coal trade did not improve. Then in 1926 came another disastrous strike lasting six months. Perhaps this strike was not surprising, since, according to Robert Breckles, by 1924 mining had become almost the worst paid of the major industries, though in Nottinghamshire the miners fared better than in most other coalfields in the United Kingdom.<sup>94</sup> By the 1930s the coalmining industry had stagnated and there was considerable unemployment; many pits were working only four days a week and many were working short shifts. Those who were under-employed as opposed to unemployed got no financial assistance. In 1935 in Hucknall, according to Eric Horriben, some 931 men were unemployed and a further 1,184 were partially employed.<sup>95</sup> In Sutton-in-Ashfield, some miles away, in April 1929 the employment exchange's statistics for the current week showed 1,436 unemployed and a further 8,657 working short time.<sup>96</sup> In January 1932 the Bishop of Southwell wrote 'The year 1932 finds us suffering from financial and economic disorder'.<sup>97</sup> In August of the same year the Bishop, after writing about the benefits of a summer holiday, added 'But there is an enforced holiday from which an ever increasing army of men and women are suffering. That evil condition of society that we describe by

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<sup>93</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 19 May 1921, p. 8, col. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Breckles, R., 'A Social History of Ashfield', pp. 82 – 83.

<sup>95</sup> Horriben, E., *Hucknall: Of Lowly Birth and Iron Fortune* (Nottingham: author, no date but 1970s), p 147.

<sup>96</sup> *Notts Free Press*, 26 April 1929, p. 4, col. 1.

<sup>97</sup> *Southwell Diocesan Magazine*, 5/ new series 1(January 1932), p. 10.

the word UNEMPLOYMENT still confronts us, and there is a real danger lest our familiarity with it should blunt our sense of the misery which it causes, and its disastrous physical, moral and spiritual results'.<sup>98</sup> It seems then that by this time the church hierarchy were more sympathetic in their attitudes to the working class people who were bearing the brunt of the economic depression.

***(b) South Wales***

The economic situation in Nottinghamshire was, as shown above, not good during the inter-war period but in South Wales, apart from a short lived boom in 1923-1924, it was infinitely worse. Between 1921 and 1936 in South Wales 241 coalmines had closed down, the workforce had decreased from 271,161 in 1920 to 126,233 in 1936 (which was not a particularly bad year), and the wages bill was reduced from £65m in 1920 to £14m in 1933. All this 'had the effect of poverty spiralling through South Wales by means of a downward economic multiplier'.<sup>99</sup> Needless to say the Rhondda, being completely economically dependent on coal, was severely affected. In 1931 one family in three there was on the dole; in 1932, the peak year for unemployment in the Rhondda, 53% (presumably of the workforce) 'were registered as out of work. This made Rhondda one of the blackest spots in Britain'.<sup>100</sup> By 1936 there were less than

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<sup>98</sup> *Southwell Diocesan Magazine*, 5/8 (August 1932), p. 128.

<sup>99</sup> Francis, H. and Smith, D., *The Fed: The History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 33.

<sup>100</sup> May, J., *Rhondda*, p. 43.

20,000 miners employed in the Rhondda and some of them were on short time. By comparison, in 1913 there had been 48,000 miners employed.<sup>101</sup>

***(c) Impact of economic factors on churches and attitudes of ministers***

The impact which all this economic depression had on institutional religion is debatable. A. S. Arnold, writing about the Baptist Church in Hucknall, wrote ‘the effect of the economic slump must not be overlooked ... the atmosphere of the years between the wars pervaded the lives of the Hucknall people and sterilised any attempts at evangelism’.<sup>102</sup> This same spirit was clearly experienced in other coalmining areas too; thus Robert Lee, referring to the Durham coalfield, stated that when Bishop Henson in 1928 asked his clergy to assess the impact of unemployment upon spirituality, over two thirds of them reported that it had ‘either a moderately or a severely detrimental effect’. Answers given included ‘it produces an atmosphere of apathy and disheartenment, sullenness and suspicion’ and ‘the people become embittered against institutions particularly against religion’.<sup>103</sup> Robert Moore, also referring to the Durham mining area, quoted a report by a Methodist in 1928 which stated that the great unemployment in the valley ‘makes for spiritual depression’.<sup>104</sup> However a report made to the Pilgrim Trust entitled *Men*

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 35 and 46.

<sup>102</sup> Arnold, A. S., *Built Upon the Foundation: Being the History of the General Baptist Church at Hucknall Nottinghamshire, 1849 – 1949* (Hucknall: Notts Newspapers, 1948), p. 25.

<sup>103</sup> Lee, R., *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield*, p. 243.

<sup>104</sup> Moore, R., *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Cambridge: CUP, 1974), p. 69.



*Without Work* stated that ‘Comparatively few of those who had played a full part in the life of the churches or trade unions had dropped out of them as a result of unemployment’.<sup>105</sup> In the same report a Methodist minister from Cumberland argued that ‘adherents’ to a church were more adversely affected by unemployment than ‘members’; and ‘rank outsiders’ to the church were even more seriously affected by unemployment.<sup>106</sup> These observations would suggest that committed church members who held fast to their religion were better able to cope with unemployment, possibly because belonging to a church gave them a great sense of security. It is doubtful whether their churches would have been able to give them much direct financial support as so many churches were themselves struggling for resources.

Frances Knight has clearly demonstrated that in the nineteenth century church attendance increased during years of economic depression.<sup>107</sup> That by and large this no longer happened could suggest that in this earlier period more people found their sense of security in belonging to a church than was the case later. Furthermore by the 1920s and 1930s the impact of socialism meant that on the whole working people no longer accepted the viewpoint notoriously expressed by the Victorian hymn-writer:

‘The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate  
God made them high or lowly and ordered their estate’<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Men Without Work: A Report made to the Pilgrim Trust* (Cambridge: CUP, 1938; Reprint edition, New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 289.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>107</sup> Knight, F., *The Church in the Nineteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), pp. 130 – 131.

<sup>108</sup> Mrs Alexander, ‘All things bright and beautiful’, Hymn 573 in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, Complete edition, no date.

In fact the cry of the Rhondda miners was said to be 'We don't want your gospel, we want a new social order'.<sup>109</sup>

Obviously institutional religion could not be blamed for the economic problems and the high unemployment figures but there is evidence that Anglican clergy and parochial church councils appeared at times more focussed on the impact that economic depression had on church finances than that which it had on their people. The clergy were throughout all this period making frequent appeals for more people to support the church by direct giving in the weekly envelopes available, when in fact the people themselves seemed to prefer to make enormous efforts each year to raise money by indirect giving through sales of work and the like. The same clergy were also critical of the way people spent such money as they had. In 1920 Canon Barber wrote 'I know that times are difficult ... but I can not blind my eyes to the sinful waste of money on selfish pleasure'.<sup>110</sup> The curate at St Peter's church in Hucknall wrote 'Picture palaces, public houses, cigarettes are not necessities. Many of us have yet to learn what is meant by the word Sacrifice'.<sup>111</sup> Edwyn Hoskyns (Bishop of Southwell), speaking in Hucknall in 1921, said he was 'deeply concerned about the pit lads. They were getting too much money ... a good deal of it was spent in

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<sup>109</sup> Gilbert, A. D., *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularisation of Modern Society* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 90 (quoting from *Methodist Times*, 4 May 1922).

<sup>110</sup> *Hucknall Parish Magazine*, February 1920 (PR 29,048 in NA), unpaginated.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, August 1926 (PR 29,054 in NA), unpaginated.

visiting Nottingham with girls, and he was afraid that there mischief was done'.<sup>112</sup>

All these comments, addressed mainly to working people at such difficult times, seem somewhat insensitive and would have encouraged class warfare rather than religious commitment. However the churches of Hucknall certainly gave practical and financial help to miners' families during the prolonged strike of 1926. Many of the Nonconformist churches held collections at the end of their Sunday evening services for the Hucknall Children's Relief Fund and they continued to do this each Sunday for the duration of the strike. The Anglican Church sent a small donation from the Parochial Church Council. Also many of the soup kitchens which were set up to feed the children were located on the premises of various churches, including the parish church hall. Canon Barber in his pastoral letter of July 1926 thanked all those who have 'so willingly and generously assisted me in organising a feeding centre for our children'.<sup>113</sup>

In South Wales the churches had a very challenging situation to respond to. D. Densil Morgan was somewhat critical of the Church in Wales at this period in that since disestablishment in 1920 it claimed to be the church of the people, yet in reality it was still very aristocratic and hierarchical. In 1925, for example, 'its Governing Body comprised six barons, ten baronets, five knights, eleven titled ladies, three sons of peers, two generals, one vice-admiral, one brigadier-general, sixteen colonels and an

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<sup>112</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 27 January 1921, p. 8, col. 1.

<sup>113</sup> *Hucknall Parish Magazine*, July 1926 (PR 29,054 in NA), unpaginated.

assortment of majors, captains and members of the gentry'.<sup>114</sup> This illustrious Body that year met at Llandrindod where less than 'thirty-five miles to the south, men, women and children in their tens of thousands were afflicted by unemployment, deprivation and considerable hunger. While Wales suffered the church seemed to be concerned only with its internal affairs ... There was virtually no mention by the Governing Body of the burning issues of the day unemployment and social unrest ... On the whole' Morgan argued 'the Church in Wales still stood apart from the concerns of the people'.<sup>115</sup> In defence of the Governing Body and the Church of Wales as a whole one could argue that most organisations tend to stick to what they see as their remit, which in this case would be church buildings, finance and the like. It was probably only those from the higher echelons of society who could afford the luxury of several days spent at a conference in order to discuss such matters. It is the church at grass roots level (that is parish level) that is primarily responsible for the pastoral needs of its community.

Certainly at diocesan level Timothy Rees, Bishop of Llandaff from 1931 until his death in 1939, was a man of the people and he worked tirelessly on their behalf. At his enthronement he said 'My heart goes out in sympathy to the broken lives and the broken hearts that are the result of this depression ... would God that I could do something to help. Would God that I could make some contribution to the solution of this crushing

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<sup>114</sup> Morgan, D. D., *The Span of the Cross*, p. 87.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87 – 88.

problem'.<sup>116</sup> Rees's actions matched his attitudes – 'he opened the Bishop's palace ... to parties of the unemployed'; in order to help needy parishes in their relief work he made available 'a small unit of young unmarried clergymen' to go where most needed; he chaired the Llandaff Industrial Committee and in that capacity 'attempted to put pressure on politicians and industrial leaders to provide work for the people'; and on a national level in 1935 'he led a deputation to Whitehall to plead for government help in the rejuvenation of South Wales'.<sup>117</sup>

Anglicans were not the only denomination that reached out to the people in a practical way during these difficult years. Possibly the largest scale project in the Rhondda was that undertaken by the Quakers,<sup>118</sup> even though prior to this there appears to have been no Quaker congregation in the Rhondda. However the Quakers nationally collected from all over the country gifts of food and clothing and distributed them in the Rhondda in order to relieve the distress there. They established self-help schemes like boot-making and sewing. Then they purchased a large house, Maes-yr-Haf in Trealaw, from which to develop their work of promoting adult education, youth work and cultural activities. Classes were organised throughout the valleys in Miners' Institutes, chapel vestries etc. The Quakers also inaugurated Unemployed Men's clubs. By 1932 there were twenty-three of these. The activities offered were very practical –

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89 – 90.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>118</sup> For a detailed account of all the work undertaken by this denomination see Naylor, B., *Quakers in the Rhondda 1926 – 1986* (Chepstow: Maes-yr-Haf Educational Trust, 1986), pp. 18 – 53.

shoemaking, carpentry, furniture making, metalwork – as well as more cultural and recreational pursuits like discussion groups and drama. No attempt was made to ‘convert’ the considerable number of people who must have benefited from all of this. The Quakers were not without their critics however. A local doctor is reported as saying that the ordinary people ‘hated Maes-yr-Haf ... they hated the people who ran it’ because they (ie the people of the Rhondda) ‘were proud, they did not want to go and seek assistance and it was essentially this spirit of pride that kept them going in the difficult years’.<sup>119</sup> If there was such hostility as this doctor stated it may well have been due to the fact that this help came from an organisation totally outside the Rhondda.

Much good work was also done by the Methodist Church through their Central Hall in Tonypany which opened in 1923. ‘The Hall had “ever open doors” to men and women who were facing hard times ... The Hall became a centre of mutual service for the unemployed. Its facilities included workshops for woodwork and boot mending, a reading room, a printing press, a milk bar and various other forms of enterprise’.<sup>120</sup> R. J. Barker, the Superintendent Minister there from 1924, worked with other organisations to arrange collections and distributions of clothing and food vouchers, making soup, serving meals and establishing a toy making factory for unemployed miners to work in. The church also distributed

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<sup>119</sup> Burge, A., ‘A Subtle Danger? The Voluntary Sector and Coalfield Society in South Wales 1926 – 1939’ in *Llafur*, 7 (1998 – 1999), p. 130.

<sup>120</sup> Gwyther, C. E., ‘The Social Ministry of the Central Hall Through the Years’, in *The Twenty-fifth Anniversary Report of the Tonypany Methodist Central Hall 1923 – 1948*, (D/D Wes/CR 646/1 in GRO), p. 9.

toys for children each Christmas. Under Barker's leadership a community house was established, for employed and unemployed to meet together. It was, in Barker's own words, 'a house of reconciliation in which every member is an avowed follower of Our Lord Jesus Christ ... the chapel is the heart of the house, the symbol of our utter dependence upon God in our life together; for we believe that without Him we can do nothing'.<sup>121</sup> As will be obvious from these words the Hall, unlike Maes-yr-Haf, was openly Christian and evangelistic. As their situation was in the centre of Tonypany, where crowds of unemployed miners gathered, Barker used this as an opportunity to challenge Marxists. 'Who can forget the open-air meetings and the way in which the philosophy of Karl Marx was challenged'?<sup>122</sup> one of the older members of the church reminisced.

The Salvation Army also set up a project in the Rhondda - a small farm - which they used to train many unemployed lads. They too were overtly evangelistic; their aim, apart from practical training in agriculture, was to offer these lads the 'meaning and purpose of successful living under the guidance of Christ'.<sup>123</sup>

In addition to all this practical action by various denominations, T. Alban Davies, a Welsh Congregational Minister from Ton Pentre, stirred up the churches to political action. He was incensed when he discovered that those who owned their own homes did not qualify for financial assistance.

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<sup>121</sup> Barker, R. J., *Christ in the Valley of Unemployment* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936), p. 85.

<sup>122</sup> Buckley, Owen J., 'Memories of Twenty-five Years', in *The Twenty-fifth Anniversary Report of the Tonypany Methodist Central Hall 1923 - 1948*, p. 10.

<sup>123</sup> Gwyther, C. E., *The Valley Shall be Exalted: Light Shines in the Rhondda* (London: Epworth Press, 1949), p. 20.

This meant that hard work and thrift were being penalised. He also 'felt that the churches were silent ...nobody was undertaking responsibility for the human situation'.<sup>124</sup> He persuaded representatives from other denominations to join him in calling to see the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald. It was not a successful visit; the delegation was sent back to the Rhondda to work out some solutions themselves and then return to him. They did this but by that time the government had changed (twice) and Neville Chamberlain was Prime Minister and was even more unresponsive than Ramsay MacDonald.<sup>125</sup>

Not all ministers of religion were willing to make a public stand. Anne Thomas from Cwmparc (mentioned earlier) claimed that when her husband, Iorrie, asked a couple of ministers to join in a united front demonstration against the Means Test in the mid 1930s 'they didn't know what it was all about, and they didn't know what they could say'. She did however praise one Congregational minister, Mr Lloyd 'who would get up on a chair in the square and say "I am here in defence of the bottom dog" and all that. He was a wonderful man'.<sup>126</sup> That the Means Test was iniquitous and something that it was right for the church to protest against is affirmed by Canon E. D. V. Narborough from Bristol who visited the Rhondda and afterwards wrote 'The Means Test is working havoc in

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<sup>124</sup> Davies, T. A., 'Impressions of Life in the Rhondda Valley' in Hopkins, K. S., *Rhondda Past and Future* (Ferndale: Rhondda Borough Council, c1976), pp. 15 – 16.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16 – 18.

<sup>126</sup> Transcript of interview of Mrs Anne Thomas by Hywel Francis and David Smith (AUD 285 in SWML), p. 7.



the homes of these people ... nobody who cares for home life can possibly say a word in its favour ... it is utterly at variance with the love of God'.<sup>127</sup>

No doubt many ordinary church members did what they believed was right in the cause of justice. Trevor Davies of Ferndale was one such person. He was a Salvationist and he explains that though the Salvation Army as an organisation would not join in protest marches and demonstrations individual members were allowed to do so. He was one who did, even joining with Communists in so doing because he said 'It was fighting for the rights of the people, for people to have fair play, and that was what we felt that we should do, everybody should have fair play'.<sup>128</sup>

In the great depression then, churches of all denominations certainly did much to alleviate suffering and some clergy and ministers did side with the ordinary people and tried to make a stand against injustice. Their efforts probably had little positive affect on church attendance for by the 1930s (as has already been shown) membership was declining and adherents were almost non-existent.

### **Theology**

Obviously institutional religion was not responsible for the economic and social factors considered above that arguably contributed to the decline of religion in mining communities during the inter-war period. Nor were the churches responsible for many other factors that contributed to decline

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<sup>127</sup> Ward, S., 'Sit Down to Starve or Stand Up to Live: Community Protest and the Means Test in the Rhondda Valleys 1931 – 1939' in *Llafur*, 9/2 (2005), p. 43.

<sup>128</sup> Transcript of interview of Trevor Davies by Hywel Francis, 3 July 1970 (AUD 165 in SWML), p. 19.

that have not been examined above (increase in mass entertainment especially the cinema, spectator sport, increased Sunday travel by railways, bicycles etc, the growth of clubs of many kinds) because these factors applied to the whole country, rather than being of particular relevance to the mining communities.

Unlike all the factors already considered or mentioned above theology was primarily the province of the churches. So did contemporary theology, or rather theologies, succeed in engaging with the contemporary situation?

In the latter half of the nineteenth century when the South Wales coalfield and much of the Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire coalfield were developing the prevailing Nonconformist theology was evangelicalism, which emphasised: personal salvation through conversion to Jesus Christ the divine Saviour, the Bible as the word of God and therefore supremely authoritative, the duty to convert others to the faith, and acceptance of one's lot in this life because it was merely a preparation for eternal life. As has been argued in chapter three, holding such theological views gave meaning and purpose to many lives. However, by the end of the century, even in Wales, the authority of the Bible was being questioned and liberal critical scholarship was becoming widely accepted; some Christian doctrines such as that of eternal punishment were being considered as morally dubious and, more significantly, the working class people were embracing socialism with its emphasis entirely on this world and on seeking to change the status quo. Arguably the great revival of 1904-1905

slowed down the inevitable decline in institutional religion in Wales (see chapter three) but this could hardly be described as a great revival in doctrine; rather, it was primarily popular and experiential therefore not easy to pass on to subsequent generations who were very much focussed on improving their lot in this world.

Liberal theology attempted to address this changed situation. As stated in the Introduction, Pope's *Seeking God's Kingdom* provides a thorough critique of Liberal theology; the dominant theology of Welsh Nonconformity for the first three decades of the twentieth century. The central emphasis of this theology, Pope rightly argues, was on Jesus as a teacher and perfect exemplar of righteousness rather than on Jesus Christ as the divine Saviour from sin. The focus shifted from the 'future spiritual and eternal existence to the present material and transient world'.<sup>129</sup> Arguably there are both positives and negatives in these theological shifts, especially when seeking to articulate a social gospel, which was the aim. On the positive side it meant that Nonconformity was recognising that even though the prospect of eternal life gives great hope to people they still have to get through this life. The working class, by and large, lived in an unjust society; their conditions, as the Nonconformist hierarchy realised, were abysmal. How could one expect such people to live a high moral and spiritual life when they had to focus mainly on mere survival? The idealistic philosophy which these liberal theologians had embraced emphasised the fact that man was of great value and capable of living a

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<sup>129</sup> Pope, R., *Seeking God's Kingdom: The Nonconformist Social Gospel in Wales 1906 – 1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 31.

high moral life. Arguably this idea was two edged; on the positive side it gave people ideals to aspire to which could generate a very positive attitude to life, and as Pope argues the church's 'stress on moral duty, conscience and the absolute value of the individual person laid the basis for all future campaigns for social reform'.<sup>130</sup> On the other hand the idea that everyone could or would live a life of self sacrifice in the service of others, which these liberal theologians believed, was totally unrealistic. John Morgan Jones, for example, said 'If an individual can live the gospel a whole nation can do so too' and 'the only evangelical principle for commerce was that of "brotherly cooperation"; the gospel could never tolerate the profit motive'.<sup>131</sup> The working man would certainly know that the world did not, and was never likely to, live up to such ideals. Another negative of liberal theology was – if Jesus was not divine he was not unique. Indeed Morgan Jones went so far as to claim that 'it was conceivable that someone other than Jesus could be born who would embody a life of higher and fuller spiritual value'.<sup>132</sup> If this was so what had Christianity to offer to society? As Pope argues, such beliefs 'failed to preserve any status for the church in the world and thus in an indirect way' he claimed 'contributed to the secularisation of society and the loss of Nonconformist influence in Wales'.<sup>133</sup> Whether this was in fact the case is difficult to assess. It certainly would not have helped their cause but arguably it was the apolitical attitude of most of the Nonconformist

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

hierarchy at the very time when the working class were becoming more politically conscious that was a more significant contributory factor.

One liberal theologian was however politically conscious. R. J. Campbell, (then Congregational minister at the prestigious City Temple) in 1907 published *The New Theology*. He argued controversially that God's Spirit was within everyone irrespective of whether they recognised this fact or not. He stated that 'Religion is necessary to mankind, but churches are not'.<sup>134</sup> He maintained 'that the church has nothing to do with preparing man for a world to come'.<sup>135</sup> These two statements clearly downgraded the church, but, more controversially, Campbell disposed of much traditional Christian doctrine, claiming, for example, that 'the Fall, the scriptural basis of revelation, the blood atonement, the meaning of salvation, the punishment of sin, heaven and hell, are not only misleading but unethical'.<sup>136</sup> Like all liberal theologians Campbell emphasised the kingdom of God; indeed, Campbell defined his *New Theology* as 'the gospel of the kingdom of God';<sup>137</sup> but Campbell's interpretation of that kingdom seems to owe more to socialism than to the New Testament. Thus, after saying 'Christianity has for the moment lost its hold' and asking the rhetorical question 'Can it recover?' he continued 'I am sure it can if only because the moral movements of the age, such as the great Labour movement, are in reality the expression of the Christian spirit, and only

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<sup>134</sup> Campbell, R. J., *The New Theology* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1907), p. 12.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

need to recognise themselves as such in order to become irresistible'.<sup>138</sup>

In effect he is saying, forget about the church, join the Labour party and you are *ipso facto* a Christian.

Not surprisingly Campbell 'was vilified by more traditional Nonconformists'.<sup>139</sup> But though severely criticised by many

Nonconformist ministers, he had a following among some of the miners.

James Griffiths, in both his autobiography and an interview in the 1970s,

makes it abundantly clear that Campbell's theology was a formative

influence on his life. In his young days he read two Christian journals, *The*

*Examiner* and *The Christian Commonwealth*, both of which contained a

weekly sermon by Campbell. He and others also heard Campbell speak at

Ystalyfera where Campbell had said that 'unless the Free churches found a

new mission in the application of their principles to the social problems of

the age, they would lose contact with the people and lose their hold on

the democratic forces that were emerging in the Labour and Socialist

movements'.<sup>140</sup> In Griffiths's interview he admitted that his beliefs were

'not orthodox religious beliefs, no the big influence in my life in that field

was R. J. Campbell'. Griffiths acknowledged too that his Nonconformist

background and R. J. Campbell had prevented him from becoming 'a full

blooded Marxist'.<sup>141</sup> It seems highly likely that Campbell's *New Theology*

did more among the working people to promote the Labour movement

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>139</sup> Pope, R., *Seeking God's Kingdom*, p. 13.

<sup>140</sup> Griffiths, J., *Pages From Memory*, p. 13.

<sup>141</sup> Transcript of interview of James Griffiths by Richard Lewis and Hywel Francis, 20 November 1972 (AUD 90 in SWML), p. 7.

than to stem their drift away from the churches, but it may well have prevented some from becoming 'full blooded Marxists'.

Arguably one of the greatest failings of liberal theology was its refusal to acknowledge structural sin, the existence of which made it almost impossible to change society without political action that the Nonconformist hierarchy were determinedly avoiding. Many of the miners therefore would have felt let down by the churches since it would appear to them that their churches were by their relative silence on social issues upholding the status quo.

As one might expect, the rise of liberal theology had the effect of promoting a strong reaction in the form of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism, although very strong in the United States, never made much impact in England but was relatively strong in Wales, not least in the Rhondda where its major exponent was R. B. Jones. Jones had been a minister of several Nonconformist churches in the Rhondda but served most notably at Tabernacle English Baptist church in Porth, where even in the twenty-first century he is still highly regarded.<sup>142</sup> During his ministry there (1919 – 1933) he attracted large congregations. The membership rose from 326 in 1920 to 601 in 1928, though admittedly it declined steadily in the 1930s.<sup>143</sup> R. B. Jones also established a Bible school in Porth for training local men who were aspiring to some form of ministry (see chapter three). As a result of this, fundamentalism would be

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<sup>142</sup> In November 2004 Tabernacle held a special service to commemorate the centenary of the great revival in Wales, but the sermon centred particularly on the evangelistic career of R. B. Jones, and his descendents were invited guests at this occasion.

<sup>143</sup> See Graph 7:2 (p. 264) and comment on p. 270 ; see also p. 137.

promoted and disseminated further afield. No doubt Jones, or 'R. B.' as many called him, would have been loved by the faithful who were inspired by his preaching. However, even his admirers have admitted that he could be over harsh in his denunciations of modernist preachers and writers, and certainly he was vitriolic in his 'orations against social and moral evils such as theatre going, dances, the cinema, professional sport and gambling', describing them collectively as "the most conscienceless, vile, hideous thing in the life of our nation".<sup>144</sup> Yet he never mentioned social injustice and unemployment. Like most fundamentalists Jones was a pre-millennialist not interested in social reform since society was regarded as not worth saving, but giving priority to evangelism since souls needed saving from eternal damnation. No doubt the 'saved' would benefit from the spiritual discipline, activities and fellowship that membership of Tabernacle would have offered them and this must have been a great support to them through those difficult inter-war years. On the other hand, R. B.'s harsh Puritanism and his lack of concern for a more just society may well have contributed to the exodus from Nonconformity for those unable to subscribe to such puritanical standards and struggling to exist in the economic depression. By 1940 the Bible school that Jones had established had virtually folded. 'The last student' (of this establishment) 'was a miner from Nantyglo, who to this day' (1968) 'is an effective preacher of the Word'; but during the years when the school flourished 'more than 200 unyielding bold champions of infallible scripture and high

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<sup>144</sup> Jones, B. P., *The King's Champions: Revival and Reaction 1905 – 1935* (Glascoed: author, 1968; reprinted 1986), p. 133.



spiritual living went out to do great exploits for the Lord Christ'.<sup>145</sup> Since many of these 'bold champions' would have been miners, the certainties of fundamentalism clearly resonated with some.

The contrasting theologies, liberalism and fundamentalism, existing, as they did, within one denomination and even one place, may well have been very confusing to those who in the difficult inter-war years were seeking the consolation of religion.

To turn now from Nonconformist theology in South Wales to Anglicanism in the Diocese of Southwell, it is interesting to note that Bishop Hoskyns of Southwell, like his Nonconformist contemporaries, emphasised the Fatherhood of God and its corollary the brotherhood of man. He wrote 'with assurance then we proclaim the Fatherhood of God ... Christ founded and reigns over His church and thus recognised the oneness and brotherhood of humanity'.<sup>146</sup> It would seem then that liberal theology was certainly the dominant theology in both Nonconformity and Anglicanism in the early twentieth century.

So far as the Anglican Church was concerned the inter-war period was also a time when Anglo-Catholicism was in the ascendant, not least in the coalmining areas of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. In the early days, when coalmining was beginning in South Wales, the Anglican church there tended to be evangelical but as time went on it too seems to have become less so with some churches, examples in the Rhondda being St George's, Cwmparc, and St Stephen's, Ystrad, becoming Anglo-Catholic.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>146</sup> *Southwell Diocesan Magazine*, 34 (January 1921), pp. 1 – 2.

However, liberal theology and decline in evangelicalism did not lead to any decline in religious discipline, as some academics have argued. Callum Brown, for example, argued that 'In many respects, the inter-war years were when British Christianity became like an old sofa – relaxing, unpretentious and less demanding on the user'.<sup>147</sup> A. D. Gilbert, in a similar vein, claimed that 'Anglicanism was the first religious culture to offer the English people what has been called scathingly "cheap grace"'.<sup>148</sup> These comments were certainly not true of Anglicanism in Hucknall, for here extremely high commitment was demanded of its members as the following remarks indicate. Canon Barber wrote in February 1920 'Far too many of our church people are content with evening worship. We feel that with a little effort and perhaps a slight modification of household duties it would be possible to have a church full on Sunday mornings'.<sup>149</sup> One suspects that a remark like that would have been more likely to reduce the numbers at the service that the people themselves wanted to attend than increase the numbers at the service the priests wanted them to attend. The curate at St John's church suggested that even if the men were not going to attend Sunday morning worship they could rise earlier so that their wives could have served breakfast and be able to attend the 10.30 service. There is no excuse, except illness, he said 'for lying in bed after 9 o'clock'.<sup>150</sup> The curate of St Peter's, writing on the Three Hour Good Friday service, commanded 'Do not be content with coming to

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<sup>147</sup> Brown C., *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, p. 139.

<sup>148</sup> Gilbert, A. D., *The Making of Post-Christian Britain*, p. 113.

<sup>149</sup> *Hucknall Parish Magazine*, February 1920 (PR 29,048 in NA), unpaginated.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, November 1926 (PR 29,054 in NA), unpaginated.

church from 2.30 or thereabouts ... if you think more of your mid-day meal than you do of your dying Lord ... your Christianity is a sham and a disgrace to you, and an insult to God'.<sup>151</sup> The same curate also instructed his congregation not to go to second house pictures on Saturday evenings because 'what time or energy have you for making the devotional preparation which is necessary on Saturday night?' and he recommended that they attend the Saturday evensong as a suitable preparation for Sunday.<sup>152</sup>

But would these high spiritual standards demanded by the Anglican clergy in Hucknall have helped to increase church membership of miners and other ordinary working men and their families? Would suggestions that people change their household routines in order to attend worship at the times demanded by the priests have been welcomed or even been practicable? One suspects that the answer to these questions would be 'No'. Those who were less religiously committed and simply enjoyed the sense of acceptance and fellowship that belonging to a church would bring would feel rejected; on the other hand, those who could accept the spiritual discipline demanded by Anglo-Catholicism no doubt found it a great comfort to them in those difficult years. Overall however the somewhat insensitive demands of the Anglican clergy in Hucknall to people going through industrial strife and economic depression are likely to have discouraged, rather than increased, religious zeal.

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, April 1928 (PR 29,056 in NA), unpaginated.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, February 1928, unpaginated.

Undoubtedly the theologies that were dominant in the coalmining communities in the inter-war years, though they succeeded in engaging with some, did not resonate with others. Arguably then, current theologies may have inadvertently contributed to decline in religious observance, though one would suggest to a lesser extent than all the social and political factors considered earlier.

One feature that seems to be common to liberal Nonconformity, the fundamentalism of R. B. Jones and the Anglo-Catholicism of Hucknall is the puritanical element. Hucknall Parish Church, for example, would not allow 'raffles, lotteries and guessing competitions in which no skill was required' since 'these would be morally and legally wrong'.<sup>153</sup> This puritanical outlook would inevitably contrast very strongly with the ethos of contemporary working class society. The contrast in ethos between the church and the Miners' Welfare Association is encapsulated by looking very briefly at the ethos of two, in some ways similar, organisations – the Church Lads' Brigade and Hucknall Collieries' Lads' Club. The object of the former was 'to band lads into a church organisation where by means of military discipline and drill they may be taught the habit of respect, first for others and then as a natural consequence for themselves'. This objective, it was believed, would 'inculcate in the lads the spirit of God-fearing churchmen'.<sup>154</sup> By contrast, a report in the local press gives an account of an event held by the Hucknall Collieries' Lads' Club – a mini fun

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<sup>153</sup> St Mary Magdalene Church, Hucknall *PCC Minute Book 1920 – 1927*, meeting 28 October 1920 (PR 27,048 in NA), unpaginated.

<sup>154</sup> *Southwell Diocesan Calendar*, 1921, p. 198.

fair – at which there were stalls where people were invited to ‘try their luck’; there was a wishing-well and ‘spot the coin’. On the Saturday evening there was a fancy dress display in which the boys were dressed in ‘clothes from the female wardrobe’ and the whole event ended with a Carnival dance. The money raised went to the Boys’ Camp Fund.<sup>155</sup>

The Church Lads’ Brigade also held an annual camp. Which of these two organisations for boys would the mining lad choose? This contrast between the ethos of the church organisation and the ethos of the colliery organisation arguably illustrates the choices that faced ordinary working class young people who were growing up in a much more secular society than that in which the church leaders had grown up and would almost certainly have been a major contributory factor in the decline of religious commitment that was observed by the hierarchies of all denominations in this inter-war period.

### **Conclusion**

Most of the statistical evidence examined earlier points to a decline in institutional religion. But were the churches themselves in any way responsible for their own decline? This question has been addressed throughout the above and it would indeed seem that they may have contributed to the decline through their general lack of sympathy with and understanding of the miners’ industrial problems; their failure to take political action to challenge the economic and social status quo; the

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<sup>155</sup> *Hucknall Dispatch*, 21 January 1926, p. 5, col. 1.

insensitivity of some of the remarks made by Anglican clergy in Nottinghamshire; the concentration of churches on their own internal financial problems; theologies that had unrealistic assumptions about humanity or had unrealistic expectations of their congregations' capacity for spiritual discipline; and the highly puritanical views of clergy and ministers across the theological spectrum. Undoubtedly all these factors point to some weakness in the church itself at this period.

However, as will have been apparent from all the above, the world of the inter-war years in the coalmining communities was very different from that of the mid and late nineteenth century when the South Wales coalfield and much of the Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire coalfield were developing. Industrial disputes were no longer mainly local and of relatively short duration, but national and protracted. Mining trade unionism was now organised on a large federal base and in South Wales was militant. Local trade union officials in South Wales were seen by some to have taken over much of the pastoral role of ministers of religion. In all the coalmining areas of South Wales and in much of the Nottinghamshire coalfield the political landscape had changed from Liberal domination to Labour domination and the zeal for politics had for many miners replaced their former zeal for religion. The coal industry that had been 'king' in South Wales for the second half of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth centuries had stagnated and in South Wales was declining rapidly; its problems caused considerable unemployment in Nottinghamshire and massive unemployment in, and emigration from,

South Wales until just before the Second World War. This period was certainly not an easy one for institutional religion.

Callum Brown's argument that it was not industrialisation and urbanisation that led to decline in institutional religion but the slowing down and the stagnating of industry (see chapter one) certainly applied in the 1920s and 1930s to the two coalfields examined here. It would however be simplistic to cite that argument as the only, or even the main, cause of decline for, as this chapter has shown, there were many contributory causes to religious decline. Indeed all the factors mentioned above, together with changes in society generally (development of the cinema etc), undoubtedly contributed to increasing secularisation in the coalmining communities and led inevitably to decline in both the influence and practice of religion there, since religion was now but one of many institutions that were shaping the lives of miners and their families. Cox's use of the term 'pluralism' (see page 19) to describe the religious scene in Britain is very apt for the coalfield areas in the inter-war years.

The picture here was not however entirely negative for institutional religion, for despite the overall decline in church membership few churches had actually closed so the church still had a powerful visible presence on the coalfields. Furthermore, the many schemes of practical help that were offered by churches of all denominations during the great depression demonstrated that Christian compassion was still very much alive in these areas. This period also marked growth in the churches' realisation that they needed to be involved in issues of justice and social

concern. One could argue that the inter-war years marked a 'transformation' in religion, to use Hornsby-Smith's term (see chapter one), or at least a change of emphasis from being 'other worldly' and focussed on soteriology. In the inter-war years religion tended to become 'this worldly' with an increasing concern for social justice which has tended to remain, and develop into a global concern for justice. Arguably this would count as a significant strength of institutional religion.



## Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, one of the main aims of this study has been to contribute to the debates on 'secularisation' and 'religion and the working class'. This has been done by examining institutional religion in two distinct coalfields (South Wales and the East Midlands). The study has covered the period from c 1860s to 1930s, a period that encompassed the great expansion of coalmining in both areas and its decline in South Wales. Admittedly a few academic studies on religion in coalmining areas have already been done, namely those by: Robert Lee *The Church of England and the Durham Coalfield, 1810-1926* (published 2007); Robert Moore *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics: the Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (published 1974); and E. T. Davies *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (1965). All these works have been referred to in this study. Robert Breckles's thesis<sup>1</sup> has some similarity of subject to this present study and has been referred to where appropriate, but the specific communities he studied are different from those focussed on here. Davies's work, which looked at both Nonconformity and Anglicanism, related to South Wales only and his main focus was on the iron industry in the Merthyr and Aberdare areas. Furthermore, his is not a recent study. This present work can therefore claim to have focussed on areas not previously examined and thus to have contributed by extending the range of existing knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Breckles, R 'The Social History of Ashfield 1880 – 1930 with Special Reference to the Role and Influence of Organised Religion' (M.Phil. thesis, University of Nottingham, 1993).

Additionally one of the distinctive contributions of this study has been to look at religion and society from a rather different perspective to that adopted by many of the sociologists and historians whose work was examined in the literature survey in chapter one. Thus, instead of considering 'the role that fundamental social changes have played in the decline of Christendom',<sup>2</sup> which Hugh McLeod rightly claims gave rise to lively debates in the 1960s and 1970s, this study has endeavoured to focus on the role that institutional religion has played in the lives of those caught up in these changes. It has therefore looked, not only at the progress and numerical strength of the individual denominations, which have been the principal concerns of some earlier studies on religion and the working class, but at the contribution that the churches have made to the general quality of life for their own members and in the lives of the mining communities. It has sought also to look at the contribution that miners themselves have made in their respective churches, though unfortunately there is less extant evidence of this than one had hoped. As far as is possible, and in order to gain greater understanding of the situations being examined, events and problems have been looked at from the point of view of those experiencing them. Thus contemporary local newspapers and parish magazines have been perused. Arguably this approach to the subject has resulted in a more positive view of institutional religion and the working class than that presented by some earlier sociological and historical studies and suggests that many previous studies have tended to underestimate the significance of institutional religion in the lives of the

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in chapter one, p. 29.

working class. Despite the generally positive view of institutional religion that this study presents, decline in religious commitment during the inter-war period is demonstrated. However, unlike many studies, which consider only changes in society and increasing secularisation as the causes of decline in church membership, this study also asks an important question: 'To what extent did the churches inadvertently contribute to their own decline?'

The questions that this work sought to answer and the main arguments and conclusions concerning them are detailed below. On the question 'In what ways did the two coalfield areas differ from each other?' it was argued that in addition to the language and cultural differences between the East Midlands and South Wales, the two coalfields differed from each other in their physical geography and chronology of development. Thus in the East Midlands, where due to the nature of the landscape there was plenty of space for other industries to develop alongside mining, and where new mines were still being sunk in the 1920s, the effects of economic depression in the late 1920s and 1930s were less severe than in the narrow, intensively-mined Rhondda Valleys where there was no room for other industries and mining itself had declined dramatically in the 1920s. Trade Unionism and politics, although following a similar pattern of development, tended to be more militant in the South Wales coalfield than in the East Midlands, almost certainly because mining conditions were more difficult there and the numbers engaged in the same industry, namely coalmining, were higher. The reason for considering differences in the two coalfields was to ascertain if this had any significant

bearing on institutional religion. The conclusion here is that generally it had little, though undoubtedly Nonconformist membership was higher in the mining communities in South Wales than it was in mining communities in the East Midlands, and was boosted by the Welsh religious revival of 1904-1905. However, in terms of the problems faced by institutional religion in seeking to provide for the needs of the rapidly growing mining communities and the problems encountered by the nature of coalmining itself, there was little or no difference. Nor was there any important difference in the activities, spiritual, social, educational and cultural, that were provided by the various churches in both areas. Likewise the response to the First World War by the churches in both areas was the same. Furthermore clergymen and ministers of all denominations and in both coalfields made similar comments on growing indifference to religion in the inter-war period.

Chapter two sought to answer the question 'How did the churches respond to problems arising from the rapid development of their communities and the challenges posed by the nature of the mining industry?' The evidence here demonstrated that all the denominations faced enormous financial problems in building and maintaining the extra churches required to meet the need. The problems were made worse for churches affected by subsidence which was an inevitable feature of mining areas. The Nonconformist denominations were on the whole much quicker in providing church buildings than were the Anglicans and the Roman Catholics, mainly because they were less centrally organised, more democratic and not entirely dependent on having ordained

ministers available before they could establish their cause. Furthermore, as shown in chapter three, when mining families moved into the community they actively sought to establish their own particular denominational cause rather than join one of the existing churches. This passion by Nonconformists to build, extend or re-build meant that numerous churches faced crippling debts for many years. The Anglican Church also faced considerable problems because many of their parishes were extensive and the coalmining communities springing up within them were often at great distances from the parish churches. Also Nonconformity was more popular among miners than was the Established Church, yet Anglican clergy still felt responsible for the entire parish. Financially, especially in the East Midlands, the Anglican Church benefitted from paternalistic aristocrats with whom the miners in Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire enjoyed a good relationship. Chapter five demonstrates that the success of Roman Catholic missions in mining areas depended largely on the presence of upper or middle class benefactors. However the fact that, despite the problems they encountered, all the denominations willingly and successfully undertook the task of providing for the spiritual and social needs of the burgeoning mining communities indicates the value and significance that contemporary society accorded to institutional religion. The sheer number of churches built bears witness to this. Arguably, these facts are not given due consideration by historians and sociologists who view secularisation as the dominant factor in the history of religion in modern times.

In chapters three, four and five the question of the role which miners themselves had in their churches was considered. Not surprisingly, it was especially in the Nonconformist denominations, with their democratic nature, the predominantly lay orientation of their organisation and for some of them, especially some branches of Methodism, the predominantly working class constitution of their membership, that miners had leadership roles. In the Anglican Church there is unfortunately little evidence of the occupations of those who held leadership roles, though it was argued that in predominantly working class mining areas almost certainly some leadership roles, for example in the Sunday Schools, in church organisations and, after their formation, on the Parochial Church Councils, would have been occupied by miners. The Roman Catholic Church, at that time, was so priestly-oriented that it is doubtful if many lay people were involved in leadership, though they would all be encouraged to belong to the guilds and societies that their churches organised, and, as in all denominations, to raise funds for their churches. Involvement in these activities would help to turn what was essentially a church *for* the people into *their* church. There is considerable evidence in this study of many ordinary lay people working very hard in support of their churches. For them religion would certainly have formed part of their identity and therefore been very significant.

The major question examined in chapter six was 'What impact did the First World War have on church and society in the mining areas?' Here there was ample evidence that most clergy of all denominations wholeheartedly

approved the decision to declare war on Germany and firmly believed that God was on Britain's side; consequently they gave their enthusiastic support to the recruitment campaigns in their areas. In fact the evidence suggests that patriotism and Christianity were almost seen as being identical. Many miners volunteered; whether from the pressure of vigorous recruiting or from the hope of adventure and glory is not known. The effect of the war on institutional religion is difficult to judge. There was no great revival, as some had hoped, and the time span of four years is too narrow to reveal any significant change in church membership. The National Mission of Repentance and Hope that in 1916 was the response of the Anglican Church to the continuing hostilities seems to have been unsuccessful, though some of the mining parishes eagerly engaged in it. Interestingly, not many sociologists or historians have yet examined the effect of the First World War on religion, and two who have, Denis Morgan and Michael Snape, have very different opinions. Possibly this is an area that calls for further research.

The final two questions asked in chapter seven of this study can usefully be examined together. 'How did the churches react in the 1920s and 1930s to industrial strife in the mining industry and the economic depression that followed?' and, 'Did the churches inadvertently contribute to their own decline in that difficult period?' Evidence drawn both from statistics of church membership and from the comments of the church hierarchy of all denominations certainly points to a decline in religious commitment during this period. Until then institutional religion had, on the whole, a significant

role in the life of the mining communities. In fact for a while after the religious revival in South Wales the communities experienced a sacralising of the secular. In this study only secularising factors that were peculiar to, or of particular relevance in, coalmining areas were examined since many of the general secularising tendencies in society have already been adequately reviewed by sociologists or religious historians. Industrial strife, the growth of militant federal trade unionism and the development of different forms of socialism, all of which had been developing over a longer period, nevertheless had their most significant effects on institutional religion in mining areas in the inter-war period. Economic depression was a major feature of the late 1920s and early 1930s in both areas, and South Wales was particularly adversely affected by it.

Overall the reaction of the churches and particularly the church's hierarchy to this difficult period was mixed. On the negative side clergy and ministers generally had little sympathy with or understanding of the miners during the two lengthy industrial disputes of 1921 and 1926. Admittedly, there is no concrete evidence that this alienated miners and their families, but it certainly would not have helped relationships. Obviously lengthy strikes in the mining industry and the economic depression of the late 1920s and 1930s made it difficult for the churches to meet all their financial commitments, and raising money to maintain their respective churches seemed to become the predominant interest of clergy and church councils at a time when many members of their congregations could hardly afford to survive. The



insensitivity of this focus together with the determinedly apolitical attitude of most clergy and ministers may have contributed to alienating some working class families. The apolitical attitude of most Nonconformist ministers in the inter-war period would almost certainly have been an alienating factor because in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Nonconformity had been virtually the religious wing of the Liberal party and many ministers were totally opposed to socialism which the majority of miners so wholeheartedly embraced. Robert Pope argues that it was Nonconformity's failure to cope adequately with the rise of the Labour party which led to its decline. Nonconformity became apolitical at the very time when its working-class members were becoming increasingly political and when the problems of society needed political solutions.

Whether religious institutions should or should not take political action or become involved in industrial disputes is a moot point, as is the extent to which the church should embrace contemporary culture. Arguably if the church completely eschews political action it *ipso facto* upholds the status quo, and if it is too closely identified with contemporary culture, as clearly it was in 1914 and as Nonconformity was in its relationship with the Liberal party, it cannot stand back from society to fulfil what it would regard as its prophetic role in that society.

Contemporary theologies may not have helped the position of institutional religion, since the predominant liberal theology which stressed brotherly love, sacrificial service and human perfectability was unrealistic as was the high

expectation that both fundamentalist ministers and some Anglican clergy had of the capacity of their congregations for spiritual discipline.

On the positive side, for miners who could cope with the tension between the demands of church membership, trade unionism and party political affiliation their faith no doubt was a major factor in sustaining them in the difficult times. Furthermore the churches, as always, endeavoured to alleviate obvious need, and in the Rhondda Valleys several good schemes were organised to help the unemployed and their families, which would have helped to foster good relations between church and people. In the 1930s some of the Anglican hierarchy and some Nonconformist ministers in South Wales did in fact take political action by visiting the Prime Minister to urge the government to take appropriate measures to bring employment to the area. This difficult period certainly marked a considerable growth in the church's realisation that it needed to be involved in issues of justice and social concern – a role which it has continued to develop.

In view of all the evidence the thesis that has been argued in this work can be summarised therefore as:

*Churches of all denominations, despite the problems they encountered and the weaknesses inherent in their organisation, made highly effective provision for the spiritual, social, cultural and educational needs of the coalmining communities, some of the impetus for this provision coming from the miners themselves; secularisation and decline in church membership did not develop to any extent until the inter-war years.*

Overall therefore this study dates the decline in institutional religion somewhat later than does Hugh McLeod in his *Religion and Society in England 1850-1914*, though undoubtedly the factors leading to decline in the inter-war period were present at the turn of the century. Robert Lee judged the Anglican mission to the Durham coalfield to be a failure but this study does not lead to the conclusion that the Anglican missions to either the East Midlands coalfield or the South Wales coalfield failed.

The coverage of this investigation has been wide in terms of the area, period and number of denominations examined, though hopefully the evidence selected has been sufficient to give an accurate assessment of the state and significance of institutional religion. Further study could perhaps focus on specific topics that the study has mentioned. One area, that of the effect on religion of the First World War, has already been suggested. Rather more specifically, the National Mission of Repentance and Hope has so far received very little in depth study; perhaps the subject should be revisited. Further study on the decline of Nonconformity in Wales would be useful to supplement the significant work already done by Robert Pope. Other worthwhile areas of study might include the relationship between social change and changes of emphasis in theology such as Robert Pope has already undertaken in relation to Welsh Nonconformity. Following the controversial work of Callum Brown it is probable that modern scholarship will focus more on the relationship between religion and culture, which this present study has indicated is important, rather than between religion and social class.

## Appendix

### Statistical Details for Individual Churches in the Rhondda Valleys

**Key:**

ad adults

ch children

E English-speaking Nonconformist churches

S Seating

W Welsh-speaking Nonconformist churches

**586** highest (or joint highest) membership in years recorded

(1876) date in brackets under church name indicates year of foundation

**Sources Used:**

1906 figure – as recorded by Royal Commission of 1910

All other figures – from the relevant denominational handbooks/ yearbooks

*Tables of Nonconformist churches grouped under Anglican parishes, with brief details of Anglican churches c1906*

**CLYDACH VALE** Population 1911: 10,669 (previously included in Llwynypia)

**Baptists**

Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Calvaria, Clydach Vale	700	W	345	403	384	481	264	239	218
Noddfa, Blaenclydach (1891)	750	W	-	304	463	395	240	192	145
Bethany, Blaenclydach (1894)	350	E	-	27	80	71	58	75	74
Total	1800		345	734	927	947	562	506	437
Total – Welsh	1450	W	345	707	847	876	504	431	363
Total – English	350	E	-	27	80	71	58	75	74
Total	1800		345	734	927	947	562	506	437

Sunday scholars (Ch = children; Ad = adults)

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Calvaria, Clydach Vale	W	412	498	150	150	351	272	230	132
Noddfa, Blaenclydach (1891)	W	-	258	200	243	360	160	160	110
Bethany, Blaenclydach (1894)	E	-	40	30	70	140	128	200	173
Total		412	796	380	463	851	560	590	415
Total – Welsh	W	412	756	350	393	711	432	390	242
Total – English	E	-	40	30	70	140	128	200	173
Total		412	796	380	463	851	560	590	415

*(Clydach Vale continued)***Congregationalists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Gosen	600	W	-	260	363	321	293	233	230
Zoar	878	W		301	432	368	420	349	308
Saron (1906)	1000	W	-	-	101	140	60	No entry	No entry
Total	2478	W	-	561	896	829	773	582	538

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Gosen	W	-	260	130	120	210	214	200	180
Zoar	W	-	350	230	170	366	481	154	120
Saron (1906)	W	-	-	32	50	70	90	No entry	No entry
Total	W	-	610	392	340	646	785	354	300

**Calvinistic Methodists**Members

Chapel	S	W/E	1898	1901	1906	1911	1922	1931	1937
Libanus	600	W	199	214	348	387	359	290	231

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/E	1898	1901	1906		1911	1922	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Libanus	W	200	260	120	180	351	273	239	150

*(Clydach Vale continued)***Wesleyans**Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>
Tabernacle, Clydach Vale	300	W	62
English, Clydach Vale	250	E	71
Total	550		133

Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>	
		<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>
Tabernacle, Clydach Vale	W	23	28
English, Clydach Vale	E	162	75
Total		185	103

**Primitive Methodists**Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>
Cwm Clydach	150	E	24

Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>	
		<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>
Cwm Clydach	E	70	25

**Anglican Church:**

No details – St Thomas's Church not built until 1907

**CWMPARC AND TREORCHY** Population 1901:10,440; 1911: 15,265**Baptists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Noddfa, Treorchy	1450	W	502	518	713	668	515	518	484
Ainon, Treorchy (1896)	500	W	-	116	254	193	181	172	160
Salem, Cwmparc	800	W	218	No entry	533	436	342	262	310
Horeb, Treorchy	500	E	165	144	140	202	80	129	109
Bethel, Cwmparc	600	E	218	272	180	132	92	104	126
Total	3850		1103	1050	1820	1631	1210	1185	1189
Total – Welsh	2750	W	720	634	1500	1297	1038	952	954
Total – English	1100	E	383	416	320	334	172	233	235
Total	3850		1103	1050	1820	1631	1210	1185	1189

Sunday Scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Noddfa, Treorchy	W	610	631	400	245	690	622	673	602
Ainon, Treorchy (1896)	W	-	200	76	94	176	200	175	190
Salem, Cwmparc	W	250	No entry	130	130	350	230	120	250
Horeb, Treorchy	E	200	160	60	140	187	180	204	138
Bethel, Cwmparc	E	250	200	180	120	150	120	244	258
Total		1310	1191	846	729	1553	1352	1416	1438
Total – Welsh	W	860	831	606	469	1216	1052	968	1042
Total – English	E	450	360	240	260	337	300	448	396
Total		1310	1191	846	729	1553	1352	1416	1438



*(Cwmparc and Treorchy continued)***Congregationalists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Ramah	1000	W		-	293	320	249	241	230
Bethania	1200	W		650	734	509	465	385	387
Hermon	700	W		302	414	330	345	310	368
Soar, Cwmparc	550	W		150	245	232	187	127	123
English (1910)		E		-	-	45	50	38	34
Total	3450			1102	1686	1436	1296	1101	1142
Total – Welsh	3450			1102	1686	1391	1246	1063	1108
Total – English				-	-	45	50	38	34
Total				1102	1686	1436	1296	1101	1142

Sunday Scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Ramah	W		*1080	182	124	350	322	180	195
Bethania	W			250	320	700	450	310	290
Hermon	W		355	209	278	405	454	313	316
Soar, Cwmparc	W		190	100	120	166	166	54	85
English (1910)	E		-	-	-	-	120	40	35
Total			1625	741	842	1621	1512	897	921
Total – Welsh			1625	741	842	1621	1392	857	886
Total – English			-	-	-	-	120	40	35
Total			1625	741	842	1621	1512	897	921

\* 1901 figure is a combined figure for Ramah and Bethania

*(Cwmparc and Treorchy continued)***Calvinistic Methodists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1898	1901	1906	1911	1922	1931	1937
Bethlehem, Treorchy	850	W	460	387	538	489	535	458	469
Gosen, Treorchy	650	W	-	107	252	310	271	235	220
Welsh, Cwmparc	500	W	201	213	348	280	229	228	191
English, Treorchy	450	E	-	88	125	116	118	120	85
English, Cwmparc (1905)	300	E	-	-	50	70	78	52	52
Total	2750		661	795	1313	1265	1231	1093	1017
Total – Welsh	2000	W	661	707	1138	1079	1035	921	880
Total – English	750	E	-	88	175	186	196	172	137
Total	2750		661	795	1313	1265	1231	1093	1017

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1898	1901	1906		1911	1922	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Bethlehem, Treorchy	W	687	530	287	383	622	653	422	349
Gosen, Treorchy	W	-	240	84	228	439	312	200	168
Welsh, Cwmparc	W	297	302	75	212	317	185	250	132
English, Treorchy	E	-	160	98	70	132	279	163	297
English, Cwmparc	E	-	-	33	36	125	128	96	100
Total		984	1232	577	929	1635	1557	1131	1046
Total – Welsh	W	984	1072	446	823	1378	1150	872	649
Total – English	E	-	160	131	106	257	407	259	397
Total		984	1232	577	929	1635	1557	1131	1046

*(Cwmparc and Treorchy continued)*

## **Wesleyans**

### Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>
Calfaria, Treorchy	450	W	138
English	500	E	98
Total	950		236

### Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>	
		<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>
Calfaria, Treorchy	W	51	108
English	E	130	132
Total		181	240

### **Anglican Church:**

1 Church, 2 Mission Rooms (Accommodation: 1,080)  
410 Communicants; Scholars: Ch 322, Ad 171

**CYMMER AND PORTH** Population 1901: 11,138; 1911: 12,780**Baptists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Salem, Porth	900	W	508	410	493	455	391	383	328
Seion, Porth (1897)	550	W	-	237	146	251	135	200	136
Bethania, Porth (1904)	650	W	-	-	220	247	232	137	65
Pisgah, Cymmer (1893)	310	W	-	37	146	119	120	70	60
Tabernacle, Porth	1200	E	204	276	400	300	384	564	385
Total	3610		712	960	1405	1372	1262	1354	974
Total – Welsh	2410	W	508	684	1005	1072	878	790	589
Total – English	1200	E	204	276	400	300	384	564	385
Total	3610		712	960	1405	1372	1262	1354	974

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Salem, Porth	W	572	430	293	200	490	300	302	220
Seion, Porth (1897)	W	-	336	150	60	160	156	200	80
Bethania, Porth (1904)	W	-	-	80	120	254	265	127	35
Pisgah, Cymmer (1893)	W	-	58	90	160	140	100	140	120
Tabernacle, Porth	E	300	400	200	400	400	450	746	354
Total		872	1224	813	940	1444	1271	1515	809
Total – Welsh	W	572	824	613	540	1044	821	769	455
Total – English	E	300	400	200	400	400	450	746	354
Total		872	1224	813	940	1444	1271	1515	809

*(Cymmer and Porth continued)***Congregationalists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Porth	550	W		275	450	379	351	310	271
Cymmer	1550	W		414	503	453	363	312	249
Porth	550	E		99	247	227	347	367	424
Total	2650			788	1200	1059	1061	989	944
Total - Welsh	2100	W		689	953	832	714	622	520
Total – English	550	E		99	247	227	347	367	424
Total	2650			788	1200	1059	1061	989	944

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Porth	W		370	150	150	381	485	257	139
Cymmer	W		550	373	282	650	463	310	132
Porth	E		113	231	85	324	492	441	417
Total			1033	754	517	1355	1440	1008	688
Total - Welsh	W		920	523	432	1031	948	567	271
Total – English	E		113	231	85	324	492	441	417
Total			1033	754	517	1355	1440	1008	688

**Calvinistic Methodists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1898	1901	1906	1911	1922	1931	1937
Bethlehem, Porth	750	W	242	260	368	420	239	209	180
Calfaria, Porth	650	W	138	154	225	311	180	135	108
English, Porth	500	E	-	83	125	77	83	124	77
Total	1900		380	497	718	808	502	468	365
Total – Welsh	1400	W	380	414	593	731	419	344	288
Total – English	500	E	-	83	125	77	83	124	77
Total	1900		380	497	718	808	502	468	365

*(Cymmer and Porth continued)*Sunday scholars (Calvinistic Methodists)

Chapel	W/ E	1898	1901	1906		1911	1922	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Bethlehem, Porth	W	322	455	220	284	425	179	203	114
Calfaria, Porth	W	221	258	80	193	230	188	154	98
English, Porth	E	-	139	150	64	135	137	237	140
Total		543	852	450	541	790	504	594	352
Total – Welsh	W	543	713	300	477	655	367	357	212
Total – English	E	-	139	150	64	135	137	237	140
Total		543	852	450	541	790	504	594	352

**Primitive Methodists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1906
Porth	450	E	69

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1906	
		Ch	Ad
Porth	E	134	58

**Wesleyans**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1906
Ebenezer, Porth	500	W	127
English, Porth	220	E	25
Total	720		152

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1906	
		Ch	Ad
Ebenezer, Porth	W	68	61
English, Porth	E	57	26
Total		125	87

*(Cymmer and Porth continued)*

**Anglican Church:**

2 Churches, 2 Mission Rooms (Accommodation: 1,905)

614 Communicants; Scholars: Ch 458, Ad 230

**DINAS AND PENYGRAIG** Population 1901: 9,701; 1911: 12,457**Baptists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Soar, Penygraig	870	W	252	265	332	243	186	137	138
Zion, Penrhiwfer	200	W	46	43	44	40	34	28	15
Total	1070		298	308	376	283	220	165	153

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Soar, Penygraig	W	240	200	160	140	200	195	148	130
Zion, Penrhiwfer	W	75	50	52	28	75	56	108	40
Total	W	315	250	212	168	275	251	256	170

**Congregationalists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Bethania, Dinas	350	W		100	144	120	99	71	60
Saron, Trewilliam	750	W		230	409	329	303	311	319
Total	1100			330	553	449	402	382	379

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Bethania, Dinas	W		110	100	78	112	100	105	105
Saron, Trewilliam	W		259	200	170	350	320	300	322
Total			369	300	248	462	420	405	427



*(Dinas and Penygraig continued)***Calvinistic Methodists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1898	1901	1906	1911	1922	1931	1937
Nazareth, Williamstown	650	W	183	201	267	235	227	170	147
Ebenezer, Dinas (1818)	620	W	58	54	93	87	61	41	33
Pisgah, Penygraig	600	W	225	236	275	278	228	218	185
English, Williamstown (1906)	250	E	-	-	62	98	83	44	53
Total	2120		466	491	697	698	599	473	418
Total – Welsh	1870	W	466	491	635	600	516	429	365
Total – English	250	E	-	-	62	98	83	44	53
Total	2120		466	491	697	698	599	473	418

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1898	1901	1906		1911	1922	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Nazareth, Williamstown	W	254	284	134	70	301	390	239	173
Ebenezer, Dinas (1818)	W	94	113	91	19	129	56	49	42
Pisgah, Penygraig	W	239	279	80	154	240	145	202	191
English, Williamstown (1906)	E	-	-	70	80	320	185	86	98
Total		587	676	375	323	990	776	576	504
Total – Welsh	W	587	676	305	243	670	591	490	406
Total – English	E	-	-	70	80	320	185	86	98
Total		587	676	375	323	990	776	576	504

*(Dinas and Penygraig continued)***Primitive Methodists**Members

Chapel	W/ E	1906
Dinas	E	55

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1906	
		Ch	Ad
Dinas	E	138	37

**Wesleyans**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1906
Seion, Penygraig	450	W	106
Williamstown	750	E	130
Total	1200		236

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1906	
		Ch	Ad
Seion, Penygraig	W	37	73
Williamstown	E	241	170
Total		278	243

**Anglican Church:**

2 Churches, 2 Mission Rooms (Accommodation: 1,115)  
 490 Communicants; Scholars: Ch 437, Ad 198

**FERNDALE (INCLUDING BLAENLLECHAU AND MAERDY)**

Population 1901: 15,351; 1911: 18,144

**Baptists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Salem Newydd, Ferndale	660	W	225	339	471	334	352	315	287
Seion, Maerdy	600	W	154	201	360	252	225	308	260
Nazareth, Blaenllechau	1325	W	220	206	316	240	230	155	160
Bethel, Ferndale	550	E	70	110	116	97	193	118	153
Carmel, Maerdy (1895)	250	E	-	49	97	78	94	41	52
Total	3385		669	905	1360	1001	1094	937	912
Total – Welsh	2585	W	599	746	1147	826	807	778	707
Total – English	800	E	70	159	213	175	287	159	205
Total	3385		669	905	1360	1001	1094	937	912

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Salem Newydd, Ferndale	W	160	240	120	180	300	325	300	250
Seion, Maerdy	W	170	230	150	150	300	290	507	358
Nazareth, Blaenllechau	W	200	300	200	100	300	300	160	154
Bethel, Ferndale	E	95	140	53	54	110	280	260	259
Carmel, Maerdy (1895)	E	-	91	30	100	150	350	60	119
Total		625	1001	553	584	1160	1545	1287	1140
Total – Welsh	W	530	770	470	430	900	915	967	762
Total – English	E	95	231	83	154	260	630	320	378
Total		625	1001	553	584	1160	1545	1287	1140

*(Ferndale continued)***Congregationalists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Trerhondda, Ferndale	800	W		435	588	485	457	376	313
Siloa, Maerdy	800	W		340	441	381	383	359	286
Tabernacle, Ferndale	630	W		400	523	483	499	418	405
English, Ferndale	450	E		130	163	96	93	70	81
Total	2680			1305	1715	1445	1432	1223	1085
Total – Welsh	2230	W		1175	1552	1349	1339	1153	1004
Total – English	450	E		130	163	96	93	70	81
Total	2680			1305	1715	1445	1432	1223	1085

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Trerhondda, Ferndale	W		365	160	220	372	404	280	250
Siloa, Maerdy	W		500	198	305	400	340	300	205
Tabernacle, Ferndale	W		410	160	175	325	350	260	220
English, Ferndale	E		180	100	50	150	110	129	120
Total			1455	618	750	1247	1204	969	795
Total – Welsh	W		1275	518	700	1097	1094	840	675
Total – English	E		180	100	50	150	110	129	120
Total			1455	618	750	1247	1204	969	795

*(Ferndale continued)***Calvinistic Methodists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1898	1901	1906	1911	1922	1931	1937
Bethania, Maerdy	700	W	241	250	432	412	328	274	259
Carmel, Ferndale	450	W	75	84	92	98	64	76	54
Ebenezer, Maerdy (1910)	?	W	-	-	-	-	183	147	117
Penuel, Ferndale	680	W	270	307	345	361	375	367	288
English, Ferndale (1904)	620	E	-	-	110	70	110	92	75
Total	2450		586	641	979	941	1060	956	793
Total – Welsh	1830	W	586	641	869	871	950	864	718
Total – English	620	E	-	-	110	70	110	92	75
Total	2450		586	641	979	941	1060	956	793

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1898	1901	1906		1911	1922	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Bethania, Maerdy	W	276	401	200	163	553	284	239	251
Carmel, Ferndale	W	90	156	71	59	147	64	130	32
Ebenezer, Maerdy (1910)	W	-	-	-	-	-	223	215	125
Penuel, Ferndale	W	303	430	186	150	310	518	378	301
English, Ferndale (1904)	E	-	-	102	90	215	282	186	121
Total		669	987	559	462	1225	1371	1148	830
Total – Welsh	W	669	987	457	372	1010	1089	962	709
Total – English	E	-	-	102	90	215	282	186	121
Total		669	987	559	462	1225	1371	1148	830

*(Ferndale continued)***Wesleyans**Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>
Capel Wesley, Ferndale	620	W	329
English, Ferndale	362	E	118
English, Maerdy	279	E	80
Total	1261		527
Total – Welsh	620	W	329
Total – English	641	E	198
Total	1261		527

Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>	
		<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>
Capel Wesley, Ferndale	W	112	262
English, Ferndale	E	178	101
English, Maerdy	E	88	54
Total		378	417
Total – Welsh	W	112	262
Total – English	E	266	155
Total		378	417

**Anglican Church:**

2 Churches, 2 Mission Rooms (Accommodation: 1,045)  
 475 Communicants; Scholars: Ch 387, Ad 229

**LLWYNYPIA, TONYPANDY AND TREALAW**

Population 1901: 22,285; 1911 (minus Clydach Vale but plus Trealaw): 18,718

**Baptists**Members

Chapel	S	W/E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Jerusalem, Llwynypia	900	W	410	483	395	213	181	183	162
Bethlehem, Trealaw	750	W	188	162	210	200	60	50	No entry
Moriah, Tonypany (1897)	700	W	-	-	200	215	187	118	131
Ainon, Trealaw (1911)	-	W	-	-	-	-	96	73	99
Beulah, Tyntyla (1905)	350	W	-	-	60	70	51	22	15
Carmel, Trealaw (1899)	500	E	-	-	108	82	109	105	113
Bethel, Tonypany	700	E	220	265	310	199	174	202	134
Total	3900		818	910	1283	979	858	753	654
Total – Welsh	2700	W	598	645	865	698	575	446	407
Total – English	1200	E	220	265	418	281	283	307	247
Total	3900		818	910	1283	979	858	753	654

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Jerusalem, Llwynypia	W	380	400	120	80	220	249	151	100
Bethlehem, Trealaw	W	200	180	100	85	230	100	65	No entry
Moriah, Tonypany (1897)	W	-	-	90	85	180	225	150	130
Ainon, Trealaw (1911)	W	-	-	-	-	-	120	165	120
Beulah, Tyntyla (1905)	W	-	-	100	50	100	165	50	50
Carmel, Trealaw (1899)	E	-	No entry	62	100	200	469	354	251
Bethel, Tonypany	E	215	270	120	130	330	285	230	137
Total		795	850	592	530	1260	1613	1165	788
Total – Welsh	W	580	580	410	300	730	859	581	400
Total – English	E	215	270	182	230	530	754	584	388
Total		795	850	592	530	1260	1613	1165	788

**Congregationalists**  
Members

(Llwynypia, Tonypany and Trealaw continued)

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Salem, Llwynypia	650	W		244	353	314	301	280	230
Ebenezer, Tonypany	850	W		407	611	478	374	304	323
Tabernacle, Trealaw (1897)	650	W		-	117	99	125	66	47
English, Llwynypia	400	E		89	112	314	No entry	No entry	No entry
English, Tonypany (1876) (no early evidence)	-	E		-	-	-	-	50	70
Total	2550			740	1193	1205	800	700	670
Total – Welsh	2150	W		651	1081	891	800	650	600
Total – English	400	E		89	112	314	-	50	70
Total	2550			740	1193	1205	800	700	670

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Salem, Llwynypia	W		350	150	150	420	164	150	140
Ebenezer, Tonypany	W		470	210	205	550	342	190	180
Tabernacle, Trealaw (1897)	W		No return	80	40	92	120	64	40
English, Llwynypia	E		174	82	85	420	No entry	No entry	No entry
English, Tonypany (1876) (no early evidence)	E							100	90
Total			994	522	480	1482	626	504	450
Total – Welsh	W		820	440	395	1062	626	404	360
Total – English	E		174	82	85	420	-	100	90
Total			994	522	480	1482	626	504	450



*(Llwynypia, Tonypandy and Trealaw continued)***Calvinistic Methodists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1898	1901	1906	1911	1922	1931	1937
Bethania, Llwynypia	500	W	133	185	300	338	337	255	234
Penuel, Pontrhondda	300	W			65				
Seion, Trealaw	500	W	184	195	279	298	257	210	172
English, Tonypandy	1000	E	-	417	635	412	270	249	228
Total	2300		317	797	1279	1048	864	714	634
Total – Welsh	1300	W	317	380	644	636	594	465	406
Total – English	1000	E	-	417	635	412	270	249	228
Total	2300		317	797	1279	1048	864	714	634

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1898	1901	1906		1911	1922	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Bethania, Llwynypia	W	178	256	100	191	326	287	287	230
Penuel, Pontrhondda	W			70	30				
Seion, Trealaw	W	226	234	110	150	324	185	225	126
English, Tonypandy	E	-	709	400	526	660	526	357	280
Total		404	1199	680	897	1310	998	869	636
Total – Welsh	W	404	490	280	371	650	472	512	356
Total – English	E	-	709	400	526	660	526	357	280
Total		404	1199	680	897	1310	998	869	636

**Wesleyans***(Llwynypia, Tonypandy and Trealaw continued)*Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>
Shiloh, Tonypandy	400	W	68
English, Llwynypia	250	E	46
English, Tonypandy	400	E	131
English, Trealaw	350	E	65
Total	1400		310
Total – Welsh	400	W	68
Total – English	1000	E	242
Total	1400		310

Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>	
		<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>
Shiloh, Tonypandy	W	24	36
English, Llwynypia	E	142	65
English, Tonypandy	E	129	91
English, Trealaw	E	122	105
Total		417	297
Total – Welsh	W	24	36
Total – English	E	393	261
Total		417	297

**Primitive Methodists**Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>
Llwynypia	400	E	86
Trealaw	200	E	58
Tonypandy	250	E	49
Sherwood	225	E	58
Total	1075	E	251

Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>	
		<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>
Llwynypia	E	99	83
Trealaw	E	108	40
Tonypandy	E	100	60
Sherwood	E	80	48
Total	E	387	231

*(Llwynypia, Tonypandy and Trealaw continued)*

**Anglican Church:** (NB in 1906 the parish of Llwynypia included Clydach Vale but not Trealaw)

2 Churches, 3 Mission Rooms (Accommodation: 1,875)  
842 Communicants; Scholars: Ch 840, Ad 333

**TREHERBERT WITH TYNEWYDD, BLAENRHONDDA AND  
BLAENYCWM** Population 1901:8,826; 1911: 13,393

**Baptists**

Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Soar, Blaenycwm	450	W	86	90	106	105	78	48	No entry
Blaenycwm	800	W	160	222	296	284	275	231	266
Blaenrhondda	250	W	68	140	196	117	140	161	162
Libanus, Treherbert	550	W	300	291	415	401	366	336	308
Bethany, Treherbert	500	E	158	188	320	291	430	304	279
Hope, Treherbert	350	E	90	-	82	70	50	34	41
Total	2900		862	931	1415	1268	1339	1114	1056
Total – Welsh	2050	W	614	743	1013	907	859	776	736
Total – English	850	E	248	188	402	361	480	338	320
Total	2900		862	931	1415	1268	1339	1114	1056

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Soar, Blaenycwm	W	130	139	64	60	110	70	50	No entry
Blaenycwm	W	220	279	140	207	340	263	230	250
Blaenrhondda	W	70	70	70	51	140	170	96	120
Libanus, Treherbert	W	380	350	230	195	517	368	357	297
Bethany, Treherbert	E	250	303	180	200	350	600	500	400
Hope, Treherbert	E	100	100	36	82	100	85	64	83
Total		1150	1241	720	795	1557	1556	1297	1150
Total – Welsh	W	800	838	504	513	1107	871	733	667
Total – English	E	350	403	216	282	450	685	564	483
Total		1150	1241	720	795	1557	1556	1297	1150

*(Treherbert continued)***Congregationalists**Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1906</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1937</b>
Tabernacle, Blaenrhondda	300	W		75	130	483	150	163	162
Ebenezer, Tynewydd	630	W		177	250	306	341	265	253
Carmel, Treherbert	900	W		266	447	354	265	272	239
English, Treherbert	250	E		87	146	120	204	183	190
<b>Total</b>	<b>2080</b>			<b>605</b>	<b>973</b>	<b>1263</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>883</b>	<b>844</b>
<b>Total – Welsh</b>	<b>1830</b>	<b>W</b>		<b>518</b>	<b>827</b>	<b>1143</b>	<b>756</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>654</b>
<b>Total – English</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>E</b>		<b>87</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2080</b>			<b>605</b>	<b>973</b>	<b>1263</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>883</b>	<b>844</b>

Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1906</b>		<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1937</b>
				<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>				
Tabernacle, Blaenrhondda	W		89	30	100	325	130	180	178
Ebenezer, Tynewydd	W		220	100	92	250	150	188	155
Carmel, Treherbert	W		426	200	183	238	268	230	168
English, Treherbert	E		105	60	90	210	130	170	133
<b>Total</b>			<b>840</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>1023</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>634</b>
<b>Total – Welsh</b>	<b>W</b>		<b>735</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>813</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>501</b>
<b>Total – English</b>	<b>E</b>		<b>105</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Total</b>			<b>840</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>1023</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>634</b>

*(Treherbert continued)***Calvinistic Methodists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1898	1901	1906	1911	1922	1931	1937
Horeb, Treherbert	768	W	262	278	365	382	367	297	286
Bethesda, Blaenrhondda	650	W	59	61	114	103	105	92	87
English, Treherbert	300	E	-	38	38	33	33	32	15
Total	1718		321	377	517	518	505	421	388
Total – Welsh	1418	W	321	339	479	485	472	389	373
Total – English	300	E	-	38	38	33	33	32	15
Total	1718		321	377	517	518	505	421	388

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1898	1901	1906		1911	1922	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Horeb, Treherbert	W	338	366	216	236	390	311	326	194
Bethesda, Blaenrhondda	W	95	106	87	100	167	120	82	105
English, Treherbert	E	-	110	25	29	47	70	50	30
Total		433	582	328	365	604	501	458	329
Total – Welsh	W	433	472	303	336	557	431	408	299
Total – English	E	-	110	25	29	47	70	50	30
Total		433	582	328	365	604	501	458	329

*(Treherbert continued)***Wesleyans**Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>
Saron, Treherbert	300	W	62
English, Blaenrhondda	230	E	40
English, Treherbert	425	E	125
Total	955		227
Total – Welsh	300	W	62
Total – English	655	E	165
Total	955		227

Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>	
		<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>
Saron, Treherbert	W	30	50
English, Blaenrhondda	E	60	45
English, Treherbert	E	99	94
Total		189	189
Total – Welsh	W	30	50
Total – English	E	159	139
Total		189	189

**Anglican Church:**

3 Churches, no Mission Rooms (Accommodation: 1.031)  
309 Communicants; Scholars: Ch 330, Ad 144

**TYLORSTOWN, STANLEYTOWN AND PONTYGWAITH**

Population 1901: 7,564; 1911: 12,040

**Baptists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Horeb, Tylorstown (1898)	800	W	-	144	300	249	176	142	152
Hermon, Pontygwaith	500	W	261	200	193	193	196	110	122
Beulah, Tylorstown (1896)	260	E	-	29	106	60	63	47	42
Total	1560		261	373	599	502	435	299	316
Total – Welsh	1300	W	261	344	493	442	372	252	274
Total – English	260	E	-	29	106	60	63	47	42
Total	1560		261	373	599	502	435	299	316

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Horeb, Tylorstown (1898)	W	-	160	100	200	250	199	186	215
Hermon, Pontygwaith	W	202	200	80	100	180	220	105	75
Beulah, Tylorstown (1896)	E	-	70	55	45	70	176	105	110
Total		202	430	235	345	500	595	396	400
Total – Welsh	W	202	360	180	300	430	419	291	290
Total – English	E	-	70	55	45	70	176	105	110
Total		202	430	235	345	500	595	396	400



*(Tylorstown continued)***Congregationalists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Soar, Pontygwaith	300	W		133	163	163	170	197	152
Ebenezer, Tylorstown	750	W		267	450	432	455	460	453
English, Tylorstown	350	E		53	101	84	96	125	85
English, Pontygwaith (1901)	150	E		-	29	27	23	No entry	-
Total	1550			453	743	706	744	782	690
Total – Welsh	1050	W		400	613	595	625	657	605
Total – English	500	E		53	130	111	119	125	85
Total	1550			453	743	706	744	782	690

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Soar, Pontygwaith	W		120	80	60	180	180	184	105
Ebenezer, Tylorstown	W		303	240	180	490	430	420	370
English, Tylorstown	E		258	185	62	266	301	250	130
English, Pontygwaith (1901)	E		-	40	30	70	71	No entry	No entry
Total			681	545	332	1006	982	854	605
Total – Welsh	W		423	320	240	670	610	604	475
Total – English	E		258	225	92	336	372	250	130
Total			681	545	332	1006	982	854	605

*(Tylorstown continued)***Calvinistic Methodists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1898	1901	1906	1911	1922	1931	1937
Seion, Pontygwaith	500	W	90	112	188	181	186	143	143
Libanus, Tylorstown	550	W	222	244	334	302	313	229	196
English, Pontygwaith	450	E	-	56	111	94	117	113	120
Total	1500		312	412	633	577	616	485	459
Total – Welsh	1050	W	312	356	522	483	499	372	339
Total – English	450	E	-	56	111	94	117	113	120
Total	1500		312	412	633	577	616	485	459

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/E	1898	1901	1906		1911	1922	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Seion, Pontygwaith	W	162	208	220	60	176	246	304	140
Libanus, Tylorstown	W	212	310	60	262	317	256	185	126
English, Pontygwaith	E	-	140	107	68	150	250	335	257
Total		374	658	387	390	643	752	824	523
Total – Welsh	W	374	518	280	322	493	502	489	266
Total – English	E	-	140	107	68	150	250	335	257
Total		374	658	387	390	643	752	824	523

*(Tylorstown continued)***Wesleyans**Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>
Moriah, Tylorstown	280	W	70

Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>	
		<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>
Moriah, Tylorstown	W	64	67

**Anglican Church:**

2 Churches, 1 Mission Room (Accommodation: 875)  
 329 Communicants; Scholars: Ch 325, Ad 105

**YNYSHIR AND WATTSTOWN** Population 1901: 5,730 ; 1911: 11,141**Baptists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Calfaria, Wattstown (1894)	600	W	-	95	160	186	120	79	57
Ainon, Ynyshir	750	W	167	105	195	164	219	121	118
Bethany, Ynyshir	350	E	22	58	55	116	113	*	81
Total	1700		189	258	410	466	452	200	256
Total – Welsh	1350	W	167	200	355	350	339	200	175
Total – English	350	E	22	58	55	116	113	*	81
Total	1700		189	258	410	466	452	200	256

\* Membership included in Tabernacle, Porth

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Calfaria, Wattstown (1894)	W	-	120	601	80	120	73	80	50
Ainon, Ynyshir	W	223	140	78	70	198	200	80	62
Bethany, Ynyshir	E	72	120	50	50	140	164	147	147
Total		295	380	729	200	458	437	307	259
Total – Welsh	W	223	260	679	150	318	273	160	112
Total – English	E	72	120	50	50	140	164	147	147
Total		295	380	729	200	458	437	307	259

*(Ynyshir and Wattstown continued)***Congregationalists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Carmel, Wattstown#	200	W			100				
Saron, Ynyshir	705	W		306	410	419	395	340	350
Total	905	W		306	510	419	395	340	350

# Appears in Royal Commission's Report but cannot trace other years in the Congregational year books

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Carmel, Wattstown	W			60	60				
Saron, Ynyshir	W		350	200	250	340	300	150	360
Total	W		350	260	310	340	300	150	360

**Calvinistic Methodists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1898	1901	1906	1911	1922	1931	1937
Nebo, Wattstown (1904)	220	W	-	-	64	93	53	33	-
Tabernacle, Ynyshir	500	W	181	186	232	279	297	239	183
Total	720	W	181	186	296	372	350	272	183

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/E	1898	1901	1906		1911	1922	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Nebo, Wattstown (1904)	W	-	-	97	32	170	88	78	-
Tabernacle, Ynyshir	W	265	348	113	116	297	226	169	168
Total	W	265	348	210	148	467	314	247	168

*(Ynyshir and Wattstown continued)***Wesleyans**Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>
Bethel, Ynyshir	260	W	87
English, Ynyshir	120	E	39
Total	380		126

Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>	
		<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>
Bethel, Ynyshir	W	50	67
English, Ynyshir	E	91	22
Total		141	89

**Anglican Church:**

1 Church, 1 Mission Room (Accommodation: 720)  
 417 Communicants; Scholars: Ch 208, Ad 59

**YSTRADYFODWG, INCLUDING PENTRE, TON PENTRE, GELLI  
AND YSTRAD RHONDDA** Population 1901: 21,964; 1911: 26,542

**Baptists**

Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Hebron, Ton Pentre	900	W	303	393	558	430	319	323	295
Moriah, Pentre	800	W	231	215	354	292	235	194	173
Nebo, Ystrad	800	W	235	228	318	281	236	195	150
Siloam, Gelli	750	W	128	142	244	157	147	100	59
Zion, Pentre	500	E	216	201	336	220	250	289	202
Hope, Gelli (1898)	980	E	-	46	230	164	157	146	130
Tabernacle, Ystrad	300	E	36	27	98	82	41	57	43
Total	5030		1149	1252	2138	1626	1385	1304	1052
Total – Welsh	3250	W	897	978	1474	1160	937	812	677
Total – English	1780	E	252	274	664	466	448	492	375
Total	5030		1149	1252	2138	1626	1385	1304	1052

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Hebron, Ton Pentre	W	250	335	200	154	336	296	350	201
Moriah, Pentre	W	310	250	120	202	320	225	200	150
Nebo, Ystrad	W	200	225	170	100	260	207	160	100
Siloam, Gelli	W	130	140	100	100	210	180	80	50
Zion, Pentre	E	260	280	297	60	284	400	260	250
Hope, Gelli (1898)	E	-	143	116	210	415	422	320	314
Tabernacle, Ystrad	E	140	9	30	40	120	125	105	120
Total		1290	1382	1033	866	1945	1855	1475	1185
Total – Welsh	W	890	950	590	556	1126	908	790	501
Total – English	E	400	432	443	310	819	947	685	684
Total		1290	1382	1033	866	1945	1855	1475	1185

*(Ystradyfodwg continued)***Congregationalists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1891	1901	1906	1911	1921	1931	1937
Siloah, Pentre	1140	W		450	530	479	427	450	460
Bethesda, Ton Pentre	650	W		328	394	358	415	364	340
Bodringallt, Ystrad	900	W		323	425	403	483	331	374
Bryn Seion, Gelli	700	W		146	214	160	133	73	58
English, Ystrad (1891)	250	E		142	22	No entry	No entry	?130	?106
English, Ton Pentre	430	E			246	208	163	150	135
<b>Total</b>	<b>4070</b>			<b>1389</b>	<b>1831</b>	<b>1608</b>	<b>1621</b>	<b>1498</b>	<b>1473</b>
<b>Total – Welsh</b>	<b>3390</b>	<b>W</b>		<b>1247</b>	<b>1563</b>	<b>1400</b>	<b>1458</b>	<b>1218</b>	<b>1232</b>
<b>Total – English</b>	<b>680</b>	<b>E</b>		<b>142</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4070</b>			<b>1389</b>	<b>1831</b>	<b>1608</b>	<b>1621</b>	<b>1498</b>	<b>1473</b>

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/ E	1891	1901	1906		1911	1921	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Siloah, Pentre	W		490	260	231	560	505	325	220
Bethesda, Ton Pentre	W		420	140	237	328	318	208	180
Bodringallt, Ystrad	W		402	227	326	434	518	250	251
Bryn Seion, Gelli	W		200	50	170	200	119	40	42
English, Ystrad (1891)	E		210	50	40	No entry	No entry	?160	No entry
English, Ton Pentre	E		No entry	149	110	210	148	160	125
<b>Total</b>			<b>1722</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>1114</b>	<b>1732</b>	<b>1608</b>	<b>1143</b>	<b>818</b>
<b>Total – Welsh</b>	<b>W</b>		<b>1512</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>964</b>	<b>1522</b>	<b>1460</b>	<b>823</b>	<b>693</b>
<b>Total – English</b>	<b>E</b>		<b>210</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Total</b>			<b>1722</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>1114</b>	<b>1732</b>	<b>1608</b>	<b>1143</b>	<b>818</b>



*(Ystradyfodwg continued)***Calvinistic Methodists**Members

Chapel	S	W/ E	1898	1901	1906	1911	1922	1931	1937
Nazareth, Pentre	860	W	348	381	479	474	348	303	271
Jerusalem, Ton Pentre	920	W	327	336	475	454	397	391	349
Bethel, Ystrad	600	W	160	172	217	210	198	146	112
Dyffryn, Gelli	600	W	110	113	178	170	135	95	55
English, Gelli	500	E	-	162	250	180	213	190	169
Total	3480		945	1164	1599	1488	1291	1125	956
Total – Welsh	2980	W	945	1002	1349	1308	1078	935	787
Total – English	500	E	-	162	250	180	213	190	169
Total	3480		945	1164	1599	1488	1291	1125	956

Sunday scholars

Chapel	W/E	1898	1901	1906		1911	1922	1931	1937
				Ch	Ad				
Nazareth, Pentre	W	519	520	250	453	673	275	206	173
Jerusalem, Ton Pentre	W	464	520	206	335	605	417	312	241
Bethel, Ystrad	W	215	228	80	168	223	173	112	64
Dyffryn, Gelli	W	187	210	86	131	317	106	94	38
English, Gelli	E	-	237	110	190	270	322	337	230
Total		1385	1715	732	1277	2088	1293	1061	746
Total – Welsh	W	1385	1478	622	1087	1818	971	724	516
Total – English	E	-	237	110	190	270	322	337	230
Total		1385	1715	732	1277	2088	1293	1061	746

*(Ystradyfodwg continued)***Wesleyans**Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>
Caer Salem, Ton Pentre	399	W	117
Horeb, Ystrad	350	W	65
English, Pentre	450	E	125
Jerusalem, Ystrad Rhondda	400	E	49
Total	1599		356
Total – Welsh	749	W	182
Total – English	850	E	174
Total	1599		356

Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>	
		<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>
Caer Salem, Ton Pentre	W	61	95
Horeb, Ystrad	W	20	44
English, Pentre	E	99	112
Jerusalem, Ystrad Rhondda	E	128	79
Total		308	330
Total – Welsh	W	81	139
Total – English	E	227	191
Total		308	330

**Primitive Methodists**Members

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>
Ystrad	500	E	57
Pentre	400	E	74
Total	900	E	131

Sunday scholars

<b>Chapel</b>	<b>W/ E</b>	<b>1906</b>	
		<b>Ch</b>	<b>Ad</b>
Ystrad	E	128	102
Pentre	E	103	32
Total	E	231	134

*(Ystradyfodwg continued)*

**Anglican Church:**

5 Churches, 5 Mission Rooms (Accommodation: 2,370)

1,153 Communicants; Scholars: Ch 912, Ad 542