The Origins, Development and Significance of the Circuit in Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism in England 1740 -1914

Christine Margaret Pocock, MA

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Abstract

This thesis is a contribution to the organisational history of Methodism. It seeks to investigate and record the origins, development and significance of the circuit in the connexional structure of Methodism. This is in order to rectify what is an omission in Methodist histories and to inform future reflection on organisation. The field of research is Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism in England from c.1740 to 1914.

Originally the travelling route of an itinerant preacher, the circuit soon became a 'sub-regional' unit of oversight, ministry and administration within a connexional structure. Itinerancy remained an essential element of the connexional system, and one of continuing significance throughout the period. After addressing circuit origins and the transition, this thesis proceeds to investigate its development, both internally and in the context of the Connexion. The main internal elements: the quarterly meeting, the local preachers' meeting and the role of assistant (later superintendent) receive individual attention, as do the 'temporal affairs' of the circuit. In the case of the local preachers' meeting, a significance previously underestimated is revealed.

In addressing the circuit in organisational terms, the implications, benefits and tensions of being part of a Connexion are brought to light. This includes the relationship between the conference and the circuits, and the expectations and understandings of lay people (including local preachers) against those of the itinerants. The inheritance of Wesley's disregard of existing ecclesiastical boundaries was flexibility in the size and shape of circuits. This flexibility is explored, and both influencing factors and opportunities afforded are investigated. The significant differences between Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist organisational practice, such as the Primitive Methodist circuit 'branch' system are identified. Examination of the suitability of the circuit and itinerant system for inner city work in the late nineteenth century shows its limitations in this specific respect.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to all those who have been a help to me and shown an interest in my research. Especial thanks are due to Dr. Frances Knight, my supervisor, for her patience, guidance and encouragement and also to my husband Peter, who has been my unfailing support. I am also grateful for the help I have received from Dr. Peter Forsaith at the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University and all those at the Methodist Archives and Research Centre, Manchester University. Thanks are due to the staff at the County Archives in Lincoln, Worcester and Shrewsbury, the Hallward Library at the University of Nottingham, the British Library, and also to Mariana von Benzon and Keith King.

William Myles' reason for writing his *Chronological History of the People called Methodists* [1799] was that: 'I have been acquainted with the People from my infancy and have always loved them'.[1] My incentive for embarking on this thesis was the same, and therefore I thank them.

[1] Extract from the preface of *A Chronological History of the People called Methodists* [1799].

Abbreviations

MARM	Methodist Archives and Research Centre John Rylands Library, University of Manchester
OCMCH	Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History Oxford Brookes University
LINC	Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln
SHROP	Shropshire Archives, Shrewsbury
WORC	Worcestershire Archives, Worcester
ECCO	Eighteenth Century Collections Online
PM	Primitive Methodist
UMFC	United Methodist Free Churches

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Introduction

Methodism emerged as a movement in the mid-eighteenth century in the context of the Evangelical Revival and as the practical outcome of John Wesley's personal spiritual experience.[1] A Church of England priest himself, he saw his mission as reviving the spiritual life of the Church of England and spreading 'scriptural holiness' across the nation. Despite travelling immense distances himself, he found that he was unable to achieve the task alone. In the 1740's Wesley took on laymen as travelling preachers. These preachers, under Wesley's direction, travelled on 'rounds' or circuits, across parish boundaries, preaching and establishing and supporting societies as they went. Connectedness to Wesley and to each other was a significant feature of this arrangement, the societies also being encouraged to regard themselves as a unity: a connexion of united societies. By 1750, the Methodist movement had evolved into a Connexion[2]: a structural expression of connectedness and interdependency in which the societies were related to each other in circuits, and circuits were related to each other through the itinerancy of the preachers, to Wesley and to an annual conference as its ultimate authority.

This connexional polity was something unique to Methodism. Unlike the polity of denominations of the Independent tradition, (Baptist, Congregational) in which the local church was autonomous, the circuit was the primary unit.[3] Methodist connexional polity also stood in contrast to the diocese/parish structure of the Church of England. When Primitive Methodism became established as a separate

[1] For this emergence see particularly the Introductory Essay to Rupert Davies, Gordon Rupp (eds.), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.1 (London: Epworth Press, 1965), xiii. Also, for example, Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the people called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).
[2] A capital 'C' is used throughout this thesis for the term 'Connexion', in the same way as a capital 'C' is used for the term 'Church'.
[3] 'The Circuit, rather than the local church, has been the primary church unit in British Methodism'. *Called to Love and Praise – A Methodist Conference Statement on the Church* (1999), para. 4.7.4., 51.

denomination, it retained a connexional polity, including the feature of the circuit.

There is a long held understanding in Methodism and noted by others[4] that the circuit is a, or even the, key unit of the connexional system. However, although there is a body of work on Wesley,[5] and for example, on the contribution of Methodism to social history,[6] and research into individual circuits,[7] little has been written specifically on the subject of the circuit as an institution. When Andrew Hindmarsh wrote on 'Methodist structures in the twenty-first century' for *Methodism and the Future* (1999) he felt that 'a more detailed consideration' of the 'lower level structures', (which included the circuits), could not be undertaken within the confines of his fourteen page chapter.[8] Delia Garratt described the lack of research into the circuit as a 'starting point' for her 2002 thesis on Primitive Methodism in Shropshire.[9]

In 1999, Jane Craske concluded that there was an increasing lack of 'circuit consciousness' among 'many Methodist people.'[10]. That is, they lacked interest in, or did not understand, the circuit as an

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[4] Obelkevich referred to the circuit as the 'key unit of Methodist organisation'. *Religion and Rural Society, South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 5,6,

[5] Examples are: Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London: Milner and Sowerby, 1792), (the earliest), George Eayrs, *John Wesley: Christian Philosopher and Church Founder* (London: Epworth Press, 1926), E.W. Thompson, Wesley*: Apostolic Man* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast* (London: Epworth Press, 1989), Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the people called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

[6] R.W. Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire 1817 - 1875* (Hull University Press, 1989), R.F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the struggle of the working classes* (Leicester: Edgar Backus, 1954), E. Halevy, *The birth of Methodism in England,* (Bernard Semmel trans. and ed.) (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), previously an article in *Revue de Paris* 1905.

[7] John Quincy Smith, "The Origin and Development of the Keighley Circuit: A study of Methodism in a Yorkshire Textile Community 1748 – 1850" (PhD thesis, Ohio State University, 1985).

[8] Andrew Hindmarsh, "Supports or shackles? - Methodist Structures in the twenty-first century" in Jane Craske and Clive Marsh, eds., *Methodism and the Future: Facing the Challenge* (London and New York: Cassells, 1999), 73-86.

[9] Delia Garratt, "Primitive Methodism in Shropshire, 1820-1900" (PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2002), unpublished.

[10] Jane Craske, "Towards a Holy Church", in Jane Craske and Clive Marsh (eds.), *Methodism and the Future* (London: Cassel, 1999), 172.

interdependent community and focus of Christian relationships. Such concern was not new. In a 1970 conference report on the restructuring of the Methodist Church, a lack of interest in the circuit was put down to Methodists either thinking 'ecumenically' or 'congregationally'.[11] Importantly however, both Craske and the authors of the report clearly accepted the givenness of the circuit and its basic internal structure. The report, for example, simply concluded that the circuit's internal 'machinery' needed an overhaul (in essence, fewer committee meetings). A 2006 internal paper by the General Secretary of the Methodist Church offered the tantalising comment that 'fresh expressions of circuit' were needed to address an effective strategy for mission, but he too appeared to assume the continuing existence of the circuit. [12] Finally, the recent (2012 onwards) development of greatly enlarged circuits for reasons of mission, finance and best use of resources, confirms a continuing commitment to the concept and word 'circuit'.[13] It can be concluded therefore that one element of the function of the circuit (being a mutually supportive community) is seen as not having the priority among Methodists that once it had. Angela Shier-Jones went as far as proposing that: 'The focus of attention seems to have moved away from the circuits and on to the societies or local churches'. However, the notion of a circuit as an organisational entity within the Connexion is not questioned. [14] All this confirms the status of the circuit within the Methodist Church as a given, and an institution open to new ways of being, but not to wholesale destruction. It is therefore surprising that such an institution lacks a history of its own: a history which might contribute to its ongoing development and

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[11] *Report on the restructuring of the Church in the Districts, the Circuits and the Societies* (London: Methodist Book Room, 1970).
[12] *Mapping a Way Forward – Regrouping for Mission* DGD / 15.10.06
[13] One example is the Gloucestershire Circuit. *Minutes of the Annual Conference 2013*, 90. County-wide circuits existed in the eighteenth century, but in pioneering circumstances.
[14] Angela Shier Jones, 'Theology within church structures' in Clive Marsh et al. eds., *Unmasking Methodist Theology* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 34-35. She further proposed, somewhat radically, that Methodism in 2004 was best described as 'a connexion of local churches'. She does not make it clear if this is a statement about relationships (as Craske) or about basic structure, but the former is most likely.

significance. This thesis is therefore intended to address this missing element in the history of British Methodism.

In this thesis both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist practice are chosen in order to examine similarities and differences, and also to obtain a more rounded view of circuit Methodism in the period. Primitive Methodism is chosen as the second denomination because it was the largest of the Wesleyan 'off-shoots' of the period. In 1871 for example, Wesleyans and Primitive Methodists together accounted for approximately 83% of all Methodist members.[15] Comparison of Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism also highlights features unique to Primitive Methodist circuits, such as the 'branch' system and early circuit dominance, but also similarities in aspiration in the two denominations by the close of the nineteenth century.

The period researched (from the adoption of itinerant preaching by John Wesley to 1914) takes in all the major developments relating to the development of the circuit. The length of the timeline necessarily restricted the scope of the study to one country – England; although it is recognised that in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Methodism covered Great Britain and Ireland, as well as being a growing development abroad.

Certain significant features of the period, while acknowledged and referred to at relevant points, are beyond the scope of this thesis. One is the number of Methodist movements, other than Primitive Methodism, which broke away from Wesleyanism. Robert Currie's classic work *Methodism Divided* provides a thorough treatment of these denominations and their lay emphasis.[16] Because the focus of this thesis is on circuit-level activity, the detailed function of societies and class meetings is also not covered. Andrew Goodhead's 2007 thesis

[15] Other denominations included Methodist New Connexion, Bible Christians, and United Methodist Free Churches.
[16] Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968).

"A Crown and a Cross" studied the eighteenth century class meeting.[17] The second feature is the influence of external events such as social conditions, emigration and economic factors, and also Methodist reform movements. These factors have been referred to at relevant points, but in a study of organisational matters, these cannot be explored in detail.

The methodology chosen is to examine the subject from an organisational perspective. This allows for the systematic examination of various structural elements of the circuit, identifying and examining previously under-researched and undervalued elements. The circuit quarterly meeting is identified as largely the means by which the circuit turned from being a preacher's round into an institution, and is shown to be the locus of lay discontent, often concerning the authority claimed by the itinerants. The circuit local preachers' meeting, almost entirely ignored by scholars, is shown to be a significant factor in the role of the circuit in the Connexion. Investigation of the emergence of the distinctive ministry of the local preacher brings greater clarity to the record. Examination of features of the working of the circuit show, for example, how the effectiveness of the itinerancy system depended on local lay leadership and how circuit life and priorities developed.

The structure of the chapters addresses first the circuit's origins in itinerancy, then its place in the wider structure of the Connexion, then the way in which the circuits developed. This is followed by examination of various circuit institutions including the origins and role of the assistant/superintendent and the origins and role of circuit-level meetings. The final chapter uses a development in late nineteenth - century Wesleyan Methodism: inner-city missions, as an example of a situation in which the relevance of circuit and itinerancy, regarded as of the essence of Methodism, was challenged.

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[17] Andrew F. Goodhead, "A Crown and a Cross: The origins, development and decline of the Methodist class meeting in eighteenth century England" (PhD thesis, Sheffield University, 2007), unpublished. Also Kenneth Cracknell and Susan J. White, (eds.), *An Introduction to World Methodism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 125 – 9 on class meetings.

This thesis concludes that the circuit was an effective means of delivering a connexional polity. Further, that the significance and value of the circuit was based on a combination of differing elements. These were the circuit as the locus of stationing itinerants, of local preacher monitoring and authorisation, the means of delivering local preaching, the role of the superintendent as overseer and conference representative, and the role of the quarterly meeting. The opportunity provided for small societies to be supported by larger societies was also an outcome of the circuit format.

Historiography

The history of the circuit in Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism is part of the history of British Methodism as a whole, and officially sanctioned histories provide an overall context. *A New History of Methodism* (2 vols.) was published in 1909 [18] and the wide-ranging *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain (*4 vols.) from 1965-1988.[19] Surprisingly, neither devoted a specific section to 'the circuit', despite its important place in both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism. References relevant to the circuit as an organisational unit and to its component parts exist but are scattered. Kent observed that twentieth -century historians were interested in Methodism 'as a factor in their analysis of early Victorian history [but] have rarely paid much attention to the internal affairs of Methodism itself'.[20] This observation can be carried further. In dealing with the internal history of British Methodism, Methodist historians have neglected the circuit, concentrating instead on the society, the conference and connexional matters and institutions.[21] When brief reference is made, summaries can be misleading.[22] For up to date scholarly writing relating to the early

[18] W.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman, George Eayrs, eds., *A New History of Methodism,* 2 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909).
[19] Rupert Davies, Gordon Rupp, (vol.1), plus Raymond A. George (vols. 2-4), general eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* 4 vols. (London: Epworth Press, vol.1 1965, vol.2 1978, vol.3 1983, vol.4 1988).
[20] Ibid, 249.
[21] The subject of the district being largely ignored.
[22] *Minutes of Conference* May 15, 1746 reads: 'how are your circuits now divided?' followed by a list of seven. Kenneth Cracknell and Susan White in *An Introduction to*

circuits, volume 10 (2011) of the multi-volume bicentennial edition of the *Works of John Wesley* provides material pertaining to these circuits and their 'temporal affairs' as well as to the early societies and conference.[23] John Lenton's 2009 social and statistical analysis of the early travelling preachers, (a form of investigation not previously undertaken), also covers practical aspects of life in the early circuits. [24]

Although general histories lack specific reference to the circuit as an institution, the denominational histories of Primitive Methodism were written in a 'circuit by circuit' format. Kendall's history of the development of the Primitive Methodist Connexion provides a sometimes overwhelming wealth of detail.[25] Obelkevich drew on Kendall's work in a chapter on the Primitive Methodist circuit and preachers; a rare if limited addressing of the subject of the circuit. [26] As with Kendall, Patterson's *Northern Primitive Methodism* (1909) also included considerable detail about individual people and the development of each of the circuits.[27] Histories of individual circuits have been compiled, including booklets produced to mark a centenary or similar event. [28] These latter are not generally scholarly works and tend to focus on personalities and events rather than organisational detail, but they do celebrate the circuit as something having a distinct 'life', function and purpose.

World Methodism write as though this minute was a policy decision on the number of circuits: 'There were to be seven circuits or preaching 'rounds',' 119.

[23] Henry D. Rack ed., *The Works of John Wesley,* vol. 10 (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2011).

[24] John Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers: a social and statistical analysis of the British and Irish Preachers who entered the Methodist Itinerancy before 1791* (Milton Keynes, Colorado Springs, Hyderabad: Paternoster, 2009).

[25] H.B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church,* 2 vols. (London: Robert Bryant, 1905). Also, John Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion from its origins to the conference of 1860,* new edn. (London: R. Davies, Conference Offices, 1864)

[26] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*.

[27] W.M. Patterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism: A record of the rise and progress of the circuits in the old Sunderland District* (London: E.Dalton, 1909).

[28] An early example is J.B. Dyson, *The History of Wesleyan Methodism in the Congleton Circuit* (London: John Mason,, 1856). A twentieth century example is Norman P. Nickless, *The Evolution of the Windsor Circuit 1815 – 1933* [1965].

Beyond the eighteenth century, when its novelty and unsettling nature evoked condemnation and incomprehension from Church of England clergy, Methodist practice was generally received favourably by non-Methodist authors. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, writing from Independent sources reveals interest in itinerancy and forms of connexionalism.[29] Then, Charles Booth's perceptive comments in 1903 on the likely need to reverse the usual order of circuit development in the case of Methodist inner-city missions is an example of views on organisation expressed from outside Methodism.[30] Another is Elie Halevy's interesting but inaccurate understanding of the structural origins of the circuit in *The Birth of Methodism in England* (1906).[31]

Sources

The organisational approach of the thesis has meant drawing extensively on the published *Minutes* of the Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodist annual conferences. The *Minutes of Conference* contained policy decisions, directives, stationing information and financial and other matters. The Conference *Journals,* (manuscript conference records) of both Connexions were accessed at the Methodist Archives and Research Centre, Manchester University. Volume 10 of *The Works of John Wesley* (bicentennial edn.) includes the *Minutes of Conference* 1744 – 1791 and the *Large Minutes,* together with copious helpful introductory passages and footnotes. [32]

The manuscript minutes of individual circuit quarterly meetings and local preachers' meetings from both denominations provide insight into the rhythm of contemporary circuit organisational life. Matters of

[29] Deryck W. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the transformation of English Dissent, 1780 – 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)
[30] Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the people of London,* third series, religious influences and summary (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1903). See para. 8.6
[31] Elie Halevy, *The Birth of Methodism in England,* Bernard Semmel (trans. and ed.) (Chicago 1971). See para.1.10.
[32] Rack, ed., *Works*, vol.10.

oversight, discipline and concern are revealed, together with how circuits received, interpreted and implemented official policy. Sources accessed were mainly Lincolnshire and Shropshire County Archives: counties on the east and west sides of England. Circuit preaching plans, of which a number were accessed in county and Methodist archives, offer a visual summary of circuit organisation and life.

Contemporary correspondence is also revealing. Referring to the content of the two volumes of Jabez Bunting's correspondence which he edited, Ward wrote that: 'Above all, the daily difficulties of circuit life are seen through the eyes and in the terms of ordinary itinerant preachers and laymen. A large slice of English life from Yorkshire to Cornwall which has never been adequately treated by historians is brought vividly to life'. [33] It is intended that the examination of circuit life in this thesis may to some degree rectify the inadequacy of its treatment thus far.

At an individual level, the personal journals, diaries and account books of travelling preachers provide significant data and supporting evidence. The diary of John Bennet, for example, gives the date of the first recorded quarterly meeting.[34] Account books on the other hand give evidence of household expenditure and stipends and allowances received.[35] Eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Methodist pamphlets reveal strongly expressed opinions in favour of, or opposition to, actions taken – often those of the conference. Alexander Kilham's pamphlet campaign for greater lay involvement (among other matters) provides insight into developing tensions and anxieties in Wesleyan Methodism at circuit level. [36]

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[33] W.R. Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-1858* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), introduction, xii.
[34] John Bennet, Ms. *Diary 1748*, MARM 1977/131.
[35] For example, Account book of Joseph Benson, travelling preacher (1806) MARM 1977/1209.
[36] Alexander Kilham, *The Progress of Liberty among the People called Methodists* (Anwick, 1795).

Nineteenth-century biographical works on preachers other than John Wesley fall into two groups: the ‘lives’ of the early preachers, compiled from their own accounts to inspire the faithful,[37] and volumes published in the later nineteenth century intended to place on record the contribution of Methodist ‘greats’.[38] Late-twentieth century biographies of these latter have the benefit of hindsight.[39]

The search for journal articles has shown up a paucity of articles on the subject of the circuit and its components. The *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* accessed online and at the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University provide nearly all the articles available. [40] A number of unpublished theses have covered some aspects of early and nineteenth-century Methodism at circuit level and these have been consulted, including Delia Garrett’s study of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire, previously mentioned.[41] One category of publication of particular relevance is the atlases / maps produced by Haigh (1824) and Tindall (1874) showing Wesleyan Methodism in England and Wales.[42] These showed how Wesleyan Methodism was a network of circuits; circuits which varied in coverage across the country.

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[37] Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers chiefly written by themselves,* 6 vols., 3rd. edn. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1865-66).
[38] For example, T.W. Blanchard, *The Life of Samuel Bradburn: the Methodist Demosthenes (*London: Elliot Stock, 1871).
[39] For example, Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999).
[40] For example, F.H. Mills, “Circuit Finance in Early Methodism”, Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, vol.23.3, Sept. 1941, 59-64 and Duncan Coomer, “The Local Preachers in Early Methodism”, Proc. WHS, vol.25.3, Sept. 1945, 33-42.
[41] Brian Greaves, “Methodism in Yorkshire 1740-1851” (PhD thesis, Liverpool University, 1968), with a chapter on the circuit system including circuit boundaries and division (in Yorkshire), Geoffrey Morris, “Primitive Methodism in Nottinghamshire 1815 – 1932” (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 1967), Margaret Batty, “Stages in the development and control of Wesleyan lay leadership 1791 – 1878” (PhD thesis, London University, 1988), Stephen George Hatcher, “The origin and expansion of Primitive Methodism in the Hull Circuit 1819 – 1851”(PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1993).
[42] William Buckley Hague, *A Map of the Circuits of the Wesleyan Methodists in England and Wales* (Wakefield: Design, 1824), British Library, (currently mislaid) and Edwin H. Tindall, *The Wesleyan Methodist Atlas of England and Wales* (London: Bemrose and Sons, c. 1874).

Accessibility of eighteenth and nineteenth-century material on Methodist history has increased over the period of preparing this thesis. For example, a number of works originally needing to be accessed personally at the British Library became available to read online through eighteenth-century collections online (ECCO), Google Books, and most recently, https://archive.org , the Methodist Heritage website.

The nature of the subject and organisational approach means that a high proportion of the source material has been factual information rather than scholarly opinion. In addition, the existence and relevance of the Methodist circuit was neither challenged by contemporaries, nor by scholars since. Nevertheless, this thesis demonstrates that 'the circuit' as an organisational unit, effectively fulfilled the criteria for delivering a connexional polity and a policy of itinerancy and local preaching, together with oversight and administration at a 'sub-regional' level. Its adoption (albeit with some variation in emphasis) by all 'off-shoots' of Wesleyan Methodism further supports this. Ultimately, the circuit was and is so bound up with the connexional polity of Methodism that to abandon it as an organisational entity within the Connexion would be to alter the very nature of British Methodism.

Chapter One

The Origins of the Circuit - in itinerancy

1.1 Introduction

The Methodist circuit – today a grouping of local churches and unit of oversight, ministry, administration and mission - has its origins in John Wesley's choice of method to 'spread scriptural holiness throughout the land'.[1] This method was itinerant ministry. In defining an itinerant, *Chambers English Dictionary* (1990) offered 'a Methodist preacher' as an example alongside a judge, a strolling musician or a pedlar as an example, showing the strength of the association. [2]

In this chapter Wesley's particular application of itinerant ministry in order to 'revive' the Church of England is explored and possible alternatives identified. Also examined is the rationale for, and significance of, using laymen as preachers to travel rounds or circuits, combining evangelism with the spiritual nurture of the societies. The extent to which the preachers themselves understood their mission in relation to the Church of England is identified as an area about which it is possible to know almost nothing. The extent to which the itinerant system depended on the quality and commitment of local leadership is noted as an under-researched area. The variety of scholars' interpretation of the first reference to circuits in the *Minutes of Conference* is noted and the transition of the circuit from travelling route to unit of oversight, ministry and administration is identified as a feature overlooked or blurred in the histories.

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[1] *Minutes of Several Conversations between Rev. Mr. Wesley and others. From the Year 1744 to the Year 1789*, [known as the *Large Minutes*] (London: 1791 edn.), ECCO. Currie interpreted this phrase as '…to convert all men to obedience to the Wesleyan norm'. Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 22.

[2] Catherine Schwarz et al., eds., *Chambers English Dictionary (*Edinburgh, New York, Toronto: W. and R. Chambers Ltd, 1990), 760.

1.2 John Wesley's adoption of itinerant ministry

John Wesley (1703-91), a priest of the Church of England, though not licensed to a parish, was convinced that the parish clergy of the Established Church were failing to reach those most in need of the Gospel. [3] He considered that parishioners' souls were being neglected by those with responsibility for their 'cure', and itinerant ministry appeared to Wesley to be the means by which these shortcomings could be remedied. Wesley intended the itinerant ministry to complement the work and worship of the parishes, but significantly it was not to be constrained by traditional parish boundaries, despite this being contrary to canon law.[4] He began his own itinerant ministry in 1739 and his *Journal* described, in detail, his travels, encounters and progress.[5]

There had been itinerant evangelism in English history before Wesley. There was the itinerancy of Wyclif's 'Biblemen'.[6] Wesley himself referred to twelve men appointed by Queen Elizabeth, 'to travel continually, in order to spread true religion through the kingdom…'[7] Southey referred to several earlier forms of itinerant preaching, but pointed out that all had ceased at least seventy years before Wesley, and therefore his

[3] Wesley's own spiritual development and what led up to his taking this initiative is beyond the scope of this thesis but comprehensively covered in many published works. More recent examples include Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1989), Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), Roy Hattersley, *John Wesley: A Brand from the Burning* (London: Little, Brown, 2002).

[4] Wesley considered that by virtue of his ordination, he was a 'priest of the Church Universal' and being ordained as a Fellow of a College he 'was not limited in any particular cure, but had 'an indeterminate commission to preach the Word of God in any part of the Church of England'. Henry Moore, *The Life of Rev. John Wesley* (1824), vol.1, 465. Canon 50 of the Canons of 1604 forbad exercising ministry in another's parish.

[5] Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.,* standard edn, 8 vols. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1906-16).

[6] Several examples in Alan Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion: A Sect in Action in Eighteenth-century England* (Oxford University Press 2003), Oxford Scholarship Online, 62.

[7] *The Works of John Wesley,* vol.12 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), reproduced by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 279.

system '…had all the effect of novelty'.[8] The novelty, however, extended beyond a revival of itinerant preaching. As Coke and Moore commented, previous revivals had failed to build on initial success for want of having some form of organisation into which converts could be channelled.[9] But Wesley brought his previous experience of the value of the religious society as the answer.[10] Religious societies were a form of spirituality already existing in Wesley's day.[11] He and his brother Charles had taken part in founding a Church of England religious society in Fetter Lane, London, early in 1738. Wesley's societies came about when there were too many people seeking his and his brother's spiritual guidance to be able to meet their needs individually. As Wesley put it 'So I told them "If you will all of you come together every Thursday, in the evening, I will gladly spend some time with you in prayer, and give you the best advice I can." 'Thus arose', wrote Wesley, 'without any previous design on either side what was afterwards called *A Society* – a very innocent name, and very common in London for any number of people associating themselves together'. [12]

> Such a society is no other than a company of men "having the form and seeking the power of godliness", united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation. [13]

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[8] Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley and the Progress of Methodism,* 3rd edn, vol.1, (1846), Maurice H. Fitzgerald, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 287.

[9] Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *The Life of Rev. John Wesley, A.M.,* new edition (London: Milner and Sowerby, 1792), dedication.

[10] James H. Rigg, *The Churchmanship of John Wesley, and the Relations of Wesleyan Methodism to the Church of England* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, 1878), new, revised edn, 1886, 57. Rigg was a Wesleyan itinerant, ecclesiologist and theologian.

[11] See Andrew, F. Goodhead, 'Religious Societies in England from 1678' in "A Crown and a Cross: The Origins, Development and Decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in Eighteenth Century England" (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 2007).

[12] John Wesley, "A plain account of the people called Methodists – in a letter to the Rev. Mr. Perronet, Vicar of Shoreham in Kent", 1749, in Rupert Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (bicentennial edn.), vol.9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 256.

[13] John Wesley, "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood and Newcastle upon Tyne" (Newcastle, 1743), in Davies, *Works,* vol. 9, 69. Wesley put up the question: was not this setting up of societies

As he itinerated around the country, Wesley recognised that if those who responded to his preaching were not brought into a society they: '…grew faint in their minds, and fell back into what they were before',[14] while those who were, '…continued striving to enter in at the strait gate and to lay hold on eternal life'.[15] He therefore combined itinerant preaching with establishing societies in which those newly converted could be spiritually and pastorally nurtured. [16]

Some years later, Wesley's reasoning was in danger of being ignored when eagerness to spread the Word more rapidly threatened the concept of societies. In 1748, the conference[17] was being pressed to consider preaching in as many places as possible, but without forming any societies. However it was agreed that a trial, conducted in Northumberland, had been a disaster since there was 'scarce any fruit of it remaining'.[18] It was clear that without the converts being gathered together for instruction, spiritual guidance, mutual support and encouragement, the benefits of itinerant preaching were lost. [19]

There were others following the itinerant round model in Wesley's day. Two of Wesley's early travelling preachers, (see para.1.3) had themselves previously established preaching rounds: John Bennet [20] in Lancashire, Cheshire and Derbyshire and William Darney [21] (from 1741) in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Walsh described how these rounds and others like them sprang up spontaneously in the early years of the

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taking people away from their parish church? Part of his answer was that in the parishes there was no means of providing what the societies could provide, so what did not exist could not be destroyed.

[14] John Wesley, quoted without reference in Coke and Moore, *Life,* 194.

[15] Ibid.

[16] '[Wesley] was the Protestant Loyola….for no sooner had he conquered a soldier in the enemy's ranks than he enlisted him in his own regiment, arranged for his drill and exercise…' George Eayrs, in W. J. Townsend, H.B. Workman, George Eayrs, eds., *A New History of Methodism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), vol.1, 280.

[17] The conference – see para. 2.3.4.

[18] "Minutes of Conference 1748", in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 210.

[19] Ibid, 210-211.

[20] John Bennet (c1715-59) became an itinerant preacher for Wesley in 1743. See also Chapter Four: The Circuit Quarterly Meeting, for his role in establishing it.

[21] William Darney (1709-1784). His round was incorporated into Wesley's system in 1747.

Evangelical Revival. [22] He wrote of their instigators: 'all built up loose connexions of their own, in which the basis of allegiance was highly personal rather than properly institutional'.[23] Wesley was therefore not alone in using the itinerant round model and his early work was also largely a personal mission. However, the continuing success of Wesley's movement was not only due to his model of spreading scriptural holiness through itinerancy or even of founding societies, but also because it did not remain simply the activity of one inspired and driven individual.

1.3 Help in the work

As Wesley developed his unorthodox ministry he traversed a route between those societies he had gradually established or adopted. He travelled a triangular route between Bristol, London and Newcastle, preaching as he travelled and providing oversight for the societies as they came into being. [24] Wesley's *Journal* for the period March 1739 to April 1742 for example, clearly shows his almost frenetic journeying backwards and forwards mainly between London and Bristol at that early stage. It demonstrates his efforts to maintain high standards in the societies, sort out disagreements, meet requests for his presence as a preacher, mentor or mediator and also develop further areas of evangelism. [25] There were times when it seems that no sooner had he arrived in London than he was urgently called back to be in Bristol and vice versa.[26] It can be argued that it was this experience of having to leave when he would have preferred to stay, being called off his tour to resolve problems, and the spontaneous establishment of societies in

[22] Henry Rack proposed that part of Wesley's role may in fact have been to 'weld together' the disparate societies and networks already existing, as well as supervising his own societies. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 214.
[23] John Walsh, "Origins of the Evangelical Revival" in G.V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh, eds. *Essays in Modern English Church History* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1966), 161, 162.
[24] Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History,* vol.1, 294.
[25] Curnock, *Wesley's Journal,* vol. 2, 198-536.
[26] For example see entries March 1739 – April 1742, ibid, 193-532.

places he had no time to visit, which convinced him of the need to accept help. [27]

Wesley had entertained hopes that in his scheme for reviving the mission of the Church of England from within, he would be joined by numbers of other Anglican priests. Had sufficient numbers joined him, the course of 'methodism' within the Church of England may have been very different. However in practice, only a small number proved sympathetic to his intentions and method and were interested in working with him.[28] The support of a number of fellow priests did mean that Wesley had a group of trained, episcopally ordained and experienced colleagues. But these were tied to their parishes for most of the time and so could not, or would not, provide the kind of assistance in the work which Wesley increasingly needed. [29] But since the help required was not for a priestly ministry, but for a complementary preaching and pastoral ministry, there were other possibilities - and the help was to come from laymen who put themselves forward and who Wesley described as his 'Sons in the Gospel'.[30]

He summarised the situation in his sermon "On God's Vineyard". [31] Having described how he, and also his brother Charles, took to preaching in public places from 1739 he wrote, (referring to himself and Charles):

> …this could not continue long; for everyone clearly saw these preachers would quickly wear themselves out, and no clergymen dare assist them. But soon one and another, though

[27] Despite being pressed to stay, 'I could not consent, having given my word in Birstal, with God's leave, on Tuesday night'. Wesley quoted in Coke and Moore, *Life,* 191.
[28] Thirty four are mentioned by name in a circular letter written by John Wesley on the subject of disunity dated April 29 1764. Coke and Moore, *Life,* 272.
[29]Introduction to Davies, *Works,* vol. 9, 15.
[30] 'To *me* [Wesley] the Preachers have engaged themselves to submit, to "Serve as Sons in the Gospel." *Large Minutes* (1791 edn.), 20.
[31] John Wesley, ''Sermon 107 – On God's Vineyard", in Albert Outler, ed., *Works,* vol.3, Sermons III (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 508, 509. John himself began public preaching in April 1739 near Bristol. With Charles, he began open-air preaching in London in the summer of 1739.

> not ordained, offered to assist them. God gave a signal blessing to their work.[32]

These 'one and another' were the lay volunteers who Wesley was to take on as assistants.[33]

1.4 The first lay assistants

Of the laymen offering to help Wesley, Thomas Maxfield was the first appointed [34] followed by Thomas Richards and Thomas Westall. [35] In a much-quoted incident, Wesley had left Maxfield to pray with and supervise the Methodist society at the Foundry in London in his absence during the winter of 1740/41. On his return he discovered that Maxfield had not only comforted and exhorted but also preached. At first this troubled Wesley, but he reluctantly agreed to permit it and Maxfield later became a lay assistant.[36] Wesley was anxious to point out that the initiative to join him came from Maxfield and the other volunteers, not from him 'but I durst not refuse their assistance'.[37] This phrase probably meant that Wesley was not necessarily keen to use lay help, but since he saw his work as obedience to a divine imperative, to refuse help would have been disobedient to his call. The laymen having offered and been accepted however, Wesley also made it clear that they were firmly under his direction and control. He wrote of his: 'power to appoint each of these, *when and where, and how* to labour'.[38] William

[32] Ibid, 508-509.
[33] '…in general they were not educated for the office, but mostly young men intended for trade. They had no thought of preaching till they knew the Lord…' William Myles, *A Chronological History of the People Called Methodists. Containing an account of their rise and progress, from the Year 1729, to the Year 1799…* (Liverpool, [1799]), 73, ECCO. Myles was an itinerant and is regarded as the first Methodist historian.
[34] Wesley had taken on other, short term assistance earlier, such as John Cennick in Bristol in June 1739, but Maxwell is generally regarded as the first Methodist lay assistant. See John Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers* (Milton Keynes. Colorado Springs. Hyderabad: Paternoster, 2009), 32, 33.
[35] *Large Minutes* (1791 edn.), 18.
[36] Coke and Moore, *Life,* 187. Exhorting was speaking on a spiritual subject but without 'taking a text' (that is, preaching), and was permitted to any suitable member of a society.
[37] *Large Minutes* (1791 edn.), 18.
[38] Ibid. Wesley explained that he never sought this power, but accepted it 'merely in obedience to the Providence of God and for the good of the people', *Large Minutes*, (1791 edn.) paragraph 5, 19. Nevertheless, he was not shy of using it. 'Himself the bishop, secretary, judge and governor of his people…' John Bennet quoted in William

Myles calculated that the first lay preachers began to assist Wesley as itinerants probably at the beginning of 1740, but was unable to give an exact month.[39]

A letter from Wesley to Rev. Samuel Walker of Truro, a sympathetic evangelical clergyman, shows how the lay assistants became itinerant:

> When I found it absolutely necessary for the continuance of the work which God had begun in many souls……I permitted several of their brethren, whom I believed God had called hereto, and qualified for the work, to comfort, exhort, and instruct… But, as the persons so qualified were so few, and those who wanted their assistance very many, it followed that most of these were obliged to travel continually from place to place…[40]

This paragraph also reveals something about John Wesley himself. Firstly the phrase 'When I found it absolutely necessary' reveals that for the very competent and all-sufficient Wesley to have to admit that he could not achieve all he felt compelled to do, seems to have come very hard. Yet he could not have succeeded in his mission without accepting help from untrained, untried laymen in varying stages of spiritual and emotional development with all its attendant risks. [41] Secondly, the 'I permitted' makes it clear that Wesley saw himself as someone who, though already having a given authority by virtue of his ordination, also

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Guirey, *The History of Episcopacy, in four parts, from its rise to the present day….* (Raleigh, N.C.?, [1799]),163, ECCO.

[39] William Myles, *Chronological History*, 10. Rigg gave it as 1741 in *Churchmanship*, 88.

[40] Letter from John Wesley to Rev. Mr. Walker of Truro, quoted in Coke and Moore, *Life,* 278.

[41] Thomas Butts, one of John Wesley's first book stewards noted in his diary that 'I think Mr. Wesley is highly to blame, in taking so many raw, young fellows from their trade; to a work they are as utterly unqualified for as for ministers of State!'. Diary of Thomas Butts of Bristol, quoted in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, vol.4 (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 115.

awarded himself the additional authority of giving hitherto unacceptable laymen official roles as pastor / preachers. [42]

Despite his protestations about staying within the Church of England,[43] Wesley made no attempt to seek some form of Anglican authorisation for the travelling preachers.[44] Wesley defined himself and his helpers as 'extraordinary messengers', a term which might reasonably describe evangelists and missioners.[45] However, the travelling preachers were messengers sent on Wesley's authority alone, rather than that of the Church he intended to renew and revive. The *Minutes of Conference* described the function of the extraordinary messengers as 1. To provoke the regular [Church of England] Ministers to jealousy. 2. To supply their lack of service, toward those who are perishing for want of knowledge.[46] What is not clear, and indeed the histories do not explore, is how these early travelling preachers perceived the situation themselves. J. Robinson and Arthur E. Gregory wrote that 'the majority of the preachers deemed themselves to be 'helps to the regular clergy', quoting an unknown source. [47] However, the sentiment seems unlikely. There is little sense from their diaries that they saw themselves as in any way part of the renewal of the mission of the Established Church. Nevertheless, since all people were and are assumed to be parishioners of one Church of England parish or another, whoever the travelling preachers appealed to would, by definition, be within the scope of the Established Church, however tenuously.

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[42] Henry Rack's interpretation of the 'I permitted' was that Wesley 'ingenuously' spoke of permitting rather than authorising so as to minimise the 'irregularity' of his actions. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 210.

[43] 'I never had any design of separating from the Church. I have no such design now'. John Wesley, "Farther thoughts on separation from the Church" (1789) in Davies, *Works,* vol.9, 538.

[44] Wesley wrote that if a travelling preacher was able to save souls from death and reclaim sinners from their sins (which, he suggested, those formally authorized did not always achieve) then that demonstrated his authority. "Letter to a Clergyman" ((1748) in Davies, *Works,* vol.9, 250-251.

[45] "Minutes of Conference, 14 May 1746", Henry D. Rack, *Works,* vol.10, *The Methodist Societies, The Minutes of Conference* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 177.

[46]Answer 24, "Large Minutes", Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 914.

[47] J. Robinson Gregory and Arthur E. Gregory, "Wesleyan Methodism – the middle period", Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History*, vol.1, 387.

Wesley's initial plan of 'the best way of spreading the gospel' was 'to go a little and a little farther from London, Bristol, St. Ives, Newcastle, or any other society. So a little leaven would spread with more effect and less noise, and help would always be at hand…'[48] From this, one gathers that the places where societies had already been established by Wesley provided bases from which the preachers could go out, with the possibility of establishing new societies. This system of ever-widening circles from a secure and friendly base was the first intimation of a 'circuit' approach to the work. The assistants were, 'in the absence of the Minister to feed and guide, to teach and govern the flock'.[49] This included expounding morning and evening, meeting the united societies, the bands, the select societies and the penitents weekly, and the stewards weekly, to overlook their accounts. This suggests that at this early stage, these assistants were never very far from the societies they supervised, but itinerancy on rounds or circuits changed this.

1.5 Itinerancy on a Round or Circuit

From the outset, the travelling preachers, referred to as 'helpers' were under Wesley's personal direction and went wherever he appointed.[50] However, the lack of a regular plan of the preachers' movements soon proved to be a problem. Success in Wesley's mission required a further development. This involved the helpers being sent to itinerate on allocated 'rounds' or 'circuits' which at first were of hundreds of miles each. [51] They travelled on horseback or on foot, preaching and founding and sustaining societies as they went.[52] A picture can be gained from

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[48] "Minutes of Conference, June 28, 1744", [the first] in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 138.
[49] "Minutes of Conference, June 29, 1744", in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 139. The Ministers referred to were the Church of England clergy.
[50] 'Before any circuits were formed, he went through Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Lancashire and several other counties in England…'. A reference to John Nelson, one of the early preachers in Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers, chiefly written by themselves,* six volumes, 3rd edn.(London: Wesleyan Conference Office,1865-1866),vol.1,178.
[51] 'He found it absolutely necessary to divide the whole work into circuits', Coke and Moore, *Life*, 228.
[52] Heintzenrater considered that the emphasis during this period was on widespread preaching rather than forming societies. This assessment appears to be based on Charles Wesley's enthusiasm for field preaching around 1746. Heintzenrater, *Wesley and the people called Methodists*, 163.

incidental comments such as this by the itinerant Thomas Olivers, from his journal c. 1759:

> Sometimes I was so ill, that when I left one place to go to another, the people took final farewell of me, as not expecting me to live to come round again at the end of three weeks or a month. However, I kept my circuit in general, which included a great part of Lancashire, Cheshire and Derbyshire…[53]

John Pawson needed eight weeks to travel once round the six counties of the York circuit in 1762/3. [54]

1.5.1 Those that travelled the early circuits

In these early days, the round and the person travelling it (the itinerant) were one and the same, and so these early preachers are part of the account of the origins of the round / circuit. William Myles listed what he described as 'the first race of Methodist Preachers' in an appendix to his *History*.[55] These were the preachers appointed up to 1765 and they totalled ninety-six. Myles marked those who had died 'in the work', those 'departed from it' and those that were 'expelled'. Those not so marked were either still itinerants at his time of writing [1799] or were 'Invalids, nearly worn out in the Lord's service'. Thirty-eight had died in service, thirty-five had resigned and two had been expelled, which shows a high rate of attrition. Not on this list, but referred to in the book, were five well regarded preachers who in 1754 left the itinerancy and 'got independent congregations for themselves' - probably, Myles considered, because there was no provision for wives and children.[56] One gains the impression that Wesley, perhaps subconsciously, imagined his band of travelling preachers as a band of evangelical friars. The discipline he imposed, the privations he expected the preachers to endure, together with his own difficulty in combining

[53] Extract from Thomas Olivers own account: "The Life of Mr. Thomas Olivers" in Jackson, *Lives*, vol.2, 80.
[54] "The Life of Mr. John Pawson by himself" in Jackson, *Lives,* vol.4, 25.
[55] Myles, *Chronological History,* appendix 1, 204-205.
[56] Myles, *Chronological History*, 60. Provision was eventually made. See Chapter Five: Temporal Affairs, para. 5.2.3.

married life with itinerancy all suggest this possibility. ‘To be a Methodist preacher was no small or easy matter. It required men of ardent piety, strong sense, unwearied energy, and unconquerable perseverance.’ [57]

Many of the early preachers came from what Wesley himself allowed were ‘low trades, tailors, shoemakers and the like’. He wrote that ‘It has been loudly affirmed that most of those persons now in connexion with *me* who believe it their duty to call sinners to repentance…are a set of poor, stupid, illiterate men‘[58] but he responded that he would:

> …rather cut off my right hand than suffer one of them to speak a word in any of our chapels if I had not reasonable proof that he had more knowledge in the Holy Scriptures, more knowledge of himself, more knowledge of God and the things of God, than nine in ten of the clergymen I have conversed with, either at the universities or elsewhere.[59]

Not all the earliest preachers lacked education; some ‘were men of great learning’. [60] However, in practical terms, it was difficult for those who needed more education to obtain it because ‘…their labours prevented them from improving their abilities’. They were ‘constantly travelling and living in friends houses’.[61] Myles’ ‘second race’ of preachers (1766-1790), with smaller circuits and more time at home were said to ‘love study’ and ‘improved in various branches of learning’.[62]

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[57] George H. Harwood, *The History of Wesleyan Methodism* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1854), 81.
[58] These were not just insults. An assistant wrote of his junior colleague: ’I suppose he could neither read nor write, till after his marriage: [did his wife teach him?] but he has made surprising progress…’ Robert Dickinson, *The Life of the Rev. John Braithwaite, Wesleyan Methodist Preacher* (London: 1825), 141.
[59] From John Wesley, Sermon 104: “On Attending the Church Service” in Outler, *Works,* vol.3, 471.
[60] Introduction, *List of all the Methodist Preachers who have laboured in connexion with the late Rev. John Wesley and with the Methodist Conference* (Bristol: 1801*)* in document collection MARM M4 1977/294.
[61] ibid
[62] ibid

Wesley's advice to his helpers was to spend their time partly in preaching and visiting from house to house and partly in reading, meditation and prayer.[63] Again, this seems more a description of someone in an apostolic religious community than of a travelling preacher.[64] The difficulty encountered by the preachers was of finding the time for the second part when they were spending so much time travelling from one place to the next on their circuit to achieve the first.[65] This is one illustration of Wesley's somewhat impractical counsel of perfection which caused much frustration to his travelling preachers. Another example he himself mentions. Having advised the preachers of the overwhelming benefits of one-to-one teaching and counselling ('close discourse'), he then went on to say 'I allow, in some of the country circuits, where you have only a day to spend in each place, you have no time for this excellent work'…[66] It might be asked 'then why allocate one day only in each place?'

Much of what is known of the activities of the earliest travelling preachers comes from the reports they sent to John Wesley at his request. These were published in the *Arminian Magazine*[67] and some were collected into the six volumes of *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers* published in 1865.[68] Many of the 'lives' are personal accounts of experiences, and all the more powerful for not being presented through a layer of hagiography. Inevitably they tend to record what aspects of his life were most vivid in the memory of the writer. There is therefore much on the writer's personal spiritual journey, persecutions and conversion successes and little on their routine

[63] *Large Minutes* (1791 edn.), 17.
[64] It is therefore not surprising that through the combination of being so much away from their families and their 'incessant labours' 'many of them desisted from travelling'. Introduction to *List of all Methodist Preachers.*
[65] 'They had very little time or opportunity for improvement, whether by reading or prayer, having seldom any place to retire unto…' John Pawson, *A serious and affectionate address to the junior preachers in the connection* [London], [1798], 9, ECCO.
[66] *Large Minutes* (1791 edn.), 9.
[67] Monthly journal first published by John Wesley in November 1777.
[68] Jackson, *Lives.* The preachers themselves lived and worked in the second half of the eighteenth century.

dealings with the societies.[69] It is also likely that the 'lives' chosen for publication were those of preachers who were most spiritually and literally articulate and not all travelling preachers met the high standards expected by Wesley.[70] Nonetheless the 'lives' provide a useful picture of the pattern of work of the earliest preachers.

1.5.2 The role of local leadership

In a 1751 letter to his brother Charles, John Wesley wrote: 'We *must* have forty itinerant preachers or drop some of our societies…' [71] By this he appears to mean that the societies would not thrive without the regular visitation of the itinerant preachers. But neither would they have survived on the visitations of these preachers alone. Itinerancy inevitably meant that the day to day spiritual supervision and nurture of the members of the societies largely depended on the local class leaders.[72] This crucial aspect has not received the research attention it deserves. For example, in his thesis on the eighteenth century class meeting, Andrew Goodhead made no mention of this significant element of the class leader's role.[73] The local class leaders continued to have an important role in the scheme of itinerancy throughout the nineteenth century. James Rigg described them as affording …'that minute and constant attention to the spiritual wants of the people which it is out of the ministers' power to give'. He continued:

> Without [the scheme of classes and class leaders], the connection between the ever changing ministers and the people would, of necessity, be extremely loose; pastoral oversight would scarcely exist even in name; and although

[69] Rare examples include Thomas Olivers being '…obliged to put thirty-five members out of the society' in Newcastle, but he does not say why. Jackson, *Lives,* vol.2, 81.
[70] There is also intriguing advice in a letter dated October I 1780, from John Wesley to John Valton (whose 'Life' appears in *Lives* vol. 6): 'You know what to omit and what to insert'. John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley,* vol.7 (1780-1787) (*London*: Epworth Press, 1931), reprinted 1960, 35.
[71] "Letter to Revd. Charles Wesley from John Wesley, August 8 1751" in Frank Baker, ed., *Works of John Wesley,* vol. 26, Letters II, 1740-1755 (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1982), 473.
[72] See 'A plain account of the people called Methodists', Davies, *Works,* vol.9, 261-264 for John Wesley's description of the role of the class leader as he envisaged it.
[73] Goodhead, "A Crown and a Cross".

> many sinners might be awakened and converted, there would be no effectual provision for the spiritual edification of the churches.[74]

1.5.3 The first official reference to circuits

The first official reference to circuits can be found in the *Minutes of Conference* of 1746. That year, Question 7 was 'How are your circuits now divided?' The answer was 'into seven':

1) London (which includes Surrey, Kent, Essex, Brentford, Egham, Windsor, Wycombe)

2) Bristol (which includes Somersetshire, Portland, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire)

3) Cornwall

4) Evesham (which includes Shrewsbury, Leominster, Hereford, and from Stroud to Wednesbury)

5) Yorkshire (which includes Cheshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutlandshire, Lincolnshire)

6) Newcastle

7) Wales. [75]

While organised rounds/circuits existed before this date, the conference was now taking on the task of a more formal process. The main place names on the list were locations where John Wesley had already established societies and built relationships.

There has been some confusion among scholars concerning the first references to circuits in the 1746 *Minutes of Conference.* Southey, in the nineteenth century, referred to 'the country' being divided into circuits, when it was not the country but the work of the itinerants being divided up into geographical areas: work which did not in fact, cover all

[74] James H. Rigg, *The Connexional Economy of Wesleyan Methodism in its ecclesiastical and spiritual aspects* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1879), 84-86.

[75] "Minutes of Conference, May 12, 1746 "in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 183. This is the first *reference* to circuits in the Minutes.

the country. [76] Currie, in the twentieth century, wrote that from 1746 'the entire denomination'…' was subdivided into 'circuits' of chapels and other preaching places'.[77] However, while the 1746 list describes the rounds the preachers were to travel, these rounds were not yet the organisational units of 'chapels and other preaching places' familiar to later generations. Further, the Methodist movement was still to develop into a 'denomination'. Laycock referred to the minute in the 1746 *Minutes of Conference* as '…the first indication of a regular system of providing ministerial oversight for the scattered societies, by the formation of large rounds, hereafter to develop by subdivision into circuits'.[78] Although this is a more accurate description of the process; that circuits were divisions of rounds appears to be his own construction on things, as the terms are usually regarded as synonymous.

In 1748, the *Minutes of Conference* referred to nine 'divisions', each with a number of places listed as part of that 'division'. The word 'division' is odd, since it was not used either before or after as a Methodist term for any part of the Connexion. [79] It may simply have been another way of expressing the 'how are your circuits divided?' of 1746, and the divisions are described as circuits in 1749. However, Laycock concluded that the locations listed under each division 'may be taken' as circuits.[80] Thus he described the Yorkshire 'division' as containing nine circuits. [81]

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[76] Southey, *The Life of Wesley*, vol.2, 83.
[77] Currie, *Methodism Divided,* 25.
[78]J.W. Laycock, *Methodist Heroes of the Great Haworth Round 1734-1784. Memorials compiled by J.W.Laycock* (Keighley: Wadsworth and Co., The Rydall Press, 1909), 46.
[79] Until the late twentieth century, when it was used for a time for the 'desks' within the connexional offices.
[80] Ibid, 46.
[81] For a route map of the Yarm Circuit of 1768 (previously part of the York circuit) see John Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers,* 138. The same route is listed by place name and day of the week by an unknown transcriber under the heading *Plan of the Yarm Circuit in 1764 when J. Rowell travelled it.* MARM 1977/486.

1.6 Itinerancy from circuit to circuit

Methodist itinerancy was the travelling preacher moving from place to place on his round or circuit. But it was *also* the movement of preachers from one circuit to another.

At first, Wesley personally directed the preachers from one circuit to another but the work expanded so much that this scheme proved inadequate to meet the need. A greater degree of organisation was required. Coke and Moore wrote:

> This [original] plan was attended with so many difficulties, and required so much thought, contrivance and foresight, that [Wesley] judged it expedient to summon annually a considerable number of the preachers…[to do the allocating].[82]

The process of the planned movement of preachers from one circuit to another was (and still is) referred to as 'stationing'. [83] The *Minutes* of 1746 show that at that time, the preachers changed rounds every month. By 1748 it was every six months and by 1770, the reference in the *Minutes* was to an annual change.[84] Until his death in 1791, Wesley appears to have overseen the stationing process. On arrival at his last conference (1790), Wesley was reported to have pulled out the list of the stations from his pocket, already decided, having written them on his journey from Newcastle to the conference in Bristol. [85] He was nevertheless open to appeals on grounds of family and other personal

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[82] Coke and Moore, *Life,* 228. 'Judged it expedient' was probably a polite way of saying that Wesley was overwhelmed by attempting an over-ambitious scheme single-handed. He himself said that 'preaching twice or thrice a day is no burden to me at all; but the care of all the preachers and all the people is a burden indeed!' *Large Minutes* (1791 edn.), 20. The gathering was the first conference (1744). The business also included discussion on doctrine and discipline. See Chapter Two: The Connexional Context of the Circuit, for further reference to the conference.

[83] The 'station' was where the preacher was sent (at this time, usually a circuit). The process of stationing took place at or just before the annual conference. The reason for choosing the terms 'station/stationing' in Methodism is unknown.

[84] "Minutes of Conference" 1746, 1748, 1770 in Rack, *Works,* vol. 10.

[85] Joseph Sutcliffe, "History of Methodism", extract in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.4, 232.

reasons, and sometimes he himself promised a particular circuit to a named preacher. It also seems that senior preachers could 'pull strings'. In 1791, John Braithwaite was desperate to leave Scotland and return to England, despite having been in circuit in Scotland barely a year. Rescue came through the intervention of a senior colleague. 'Lo! A letter from Conference is at last arrived! My destination is to be Burlington [Bridlington]…I suppose it is through the interposition of good old Mr. Hunter that I am thus favoured…'[86] Although it appears that by the end of the eighteenth century some form of 'common sense' arrangement was in operation in that some preachers spent their entire ministry in the northern half of England and others in the southern half,[87] the financial and personal cost incurred in travelling from one circuit to the next so frequently was considerable.[88]

One can track the spread of Methodism in the earliest days from lists of circuits to which the preachers were sent.[89] Thomas Carlill for example spent his first four travelling years (1765-1768) being stationed annually in circuits named (and the size of) Cornwall East, Lincolnshire East, Cornwall West and Lincolnshire West successively. However, in the 1780's and 90's when circuits were more numerous and smaller, he was sent to circuits based on towns everywhere from Rotherham to Diss, Sunderland to Brecon.[90]

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[86] Dickinson, *Life*, letter of August 3 1791, 91. By 1820, an American observer at the conference reported that there was now a 'stationing committee'. "Extract from the Diary of John Emory of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the proceedings of the Liverpool Conference 1820", in Davies, George and Rupp., *History,* vol.4, 365.
[87] Jonathan Cousins spent all his travelling years in 17 circuits never north of Northampton and John Crosby, 19 circuits never south. Kenneth B. Garlick, Compiler, *Mr. Wesley's Preachers: An alphabetical arrangement of Wesleyan Methodist Preachers and Missionaries, and the stations to which they were appointed 1739-1818* (London: Pinhorns, 1977), [known as Garlick's Arrangements] 16-17.
[88] Eventually, the 1805 conference addressed the cost, fearing that 'much money' had been 'needlessly expended in removing [preachers and their] families to a greater distance that was either necessary or expedient'. "Minutes of Conference 1805", *Minutes of Conference,* vol.2 (London: John Mason, 1863), 289.
[89] The first printed list of circuits was 1765.
[90] *Garlick's Arrangements*, 14.

1.6.1 Drawbacks to itinerancy between circuits

Not all aspects of circuit to circuit itinerancy were welcomed without reserve. William Myles, a preacher himself, challenged the process of frequent moves. While praising the system as a whole, he could see that no system was perfect. He pointed out that some preachers, knowing that they would only be staying in a circuit a year or two, only had a 'small stock' and the short stay did nothing '…to promote an increase of useful and edifying knowledge' in the preachers, to the detriment of the members. He also had a concern that the short time available in each circuit meant that preachers never had to deepen relationships[91] or deal with difficult ones, as the conference would soon move them on.[92] A similar concern was expressed by John Rattenbury in a letter to Samuel Romily Hall: 'It seems to be one of the weaknesses of our Itinerancy that some ministers are drawn into the temptation not to render support and help to their [colleagues].'[93] This last suggests that far from encouraging a spirit of mutual support and encouragement among the itinerants, the short time spent in any one circuit, encouraged a spirit of unhealthy self-sufficiency and reticence to become involved in each others' concerns.

Another drawback was that the preachers had little time to become acquainted with the members as individuals. When Alexander Kilham was making his case for greater lay involvement in decision-making in the late 1790's, he pointed out the ' vast difference' between Dissenter ministers 'who are stationed for life, in the places where they preach' and thus knew their congregations intimately and the Methodist preachers who never stayed anywhere long enough to know the local

[91] One hundred years later, a lesson appears to have been learned. The 1891 regulations of the United Methodist Free Churches included the advice 'That for …the efficient working of the circuits, it is essential that close fraternal feelings and confidence should be maintained between ministerial colleagues'. "Miscellaneous Regulations – Duties of Ministers to Circuits and their Colleagues" adopted 1891, in Edwin Askew, ed., *Free Methodist Manual comprising a statement of the origin, doctrines and Constitution of the United Methodist Free Churches* (London: Andrew Crombie, 1899), 74.

[92] Myles, *Chronological History*, 202- 203.

[93] Ms. letter from John Rattenbury (1806-79) itinerant, to Samuel Romilly Hall, *The Papers of the Rattenbury Family,* vol.1, 86.28.39, MARM PLP 86.28.39.

people. [94] For this reason, he argued, the travelling preachers (and he was not against itinerancy) really needed the involvement of the members in such tasks as selecting suitable persons to be local preachers.[95]

1.7 Rationales for itinerancy

When Wesley chose itinerant preaching on rounds/circuits as the means of spreading the Gospel, it was simply a means to an end. The act of travelling on circuits, across parish boundaries, with public preaching and the creation and nurturing of societies, fulfilled his intentions and met the need. However Wesley also claimed that there were inherent benefits to itinerancy around the country from one circuit to another. Since preaching was the focal activity of the itinerants, there was the matter of becoming stale. 'Be [the preachers'] talents ever so great, they will ere long grow dead themselves, and so will most of those that hear them'. [96] Then at a time when Anglican incumbencies regularly lasted for decades,[97] Wesley was promoting stays in circuits of less than one year because 'a frequent change of teacher is best' … ' No-one I ever knew, has all the talents which are needful for beginning, continuing and perfecting the work of grace in a whole congregation'.[98] The theory was that while not every preacher could meet all the needs of any one congregation, since gifting, ability and maturity varied, a series of preachers could meet that need over time. On a practical level,

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[94] See chapter 4: The Circuit Quarterly Meeting, for further details.

[95] Alexander Kilham, *The progress of liberty amongst the people called Methodists…* (Anwick, 1795), 22, ECCO.

[96] Letter of John Wesley to Rev. Mr. Walker of Truro, quoted in Coke and Moore, *Life,* 277ff. In a discussion on the merits of itinerancy against the Independent system, R.H. Rigg considered that itinerancy secured 'superior life, power and variety' in ministers' sermons, Rigg, *Connexional Economy*, 75.

[97] Between 1825 and 1875, 130 of 210 livings in South Lindsey (Lincs) had three successive incumbents or fewer and Incumbencies of thirty or forty years were not unusual. James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 118.

[98] Letter from John Wesley to Rev. Mr. Walker, Sept.3 1756 in *Arminian Magazine 1779*, 647. The constant change of preachers was described by Wesley as another of the excellent 'helps' his societies had, 'since the people profit less by any one person than by a variety of preachers'. "Sermon 107: On God's Vineyard", in Outler, *Works,* vol.3, 510. Robert Southey surmised that the frequent change of circuit might partly have been to discourage preachers 'comfortably settled' with a congregation being induced to 'take root there' and 'throw off dependence upon the Connexion'. Southey, *Life of Wesley,* vol.2 (1925 edn.), 88.

speaking from a tradition of 'settled' ministers, an Irish Baptist source remarked that 'The frequent exchanging of their preachers affords constant variety to the people as well as a kind of breathing to the preacher'.[99] Very importantly, itinerancy between circuits also demonstrated and reinforced the connexional nature of Methodism. On the one hand stationing by the conference demonstrated its position as the ultimate authority, and on the other, it demonstrated that the preachers were a shared resource across the Connexion.

In 1824**,** the rationale for itinerancy on and between circuits took another turn. Following a period of agitations for constitutional change,[100] the conference "annual address" described itinerancy as a way of ensuring that the preachers were 'never so connected' with any individual society that they might find themselves being used as 'organs of change and innovations which in particular places might be advocated'.[101] There had been no previous understanding of the purpose of itinerancy in terms of not being too connected to the societies and indeed, the whole scheme of Methodism was about the opposite.[102] It does however illustrate how the rationale for itinerancy could be appropriated as the occasion required; in this case, keeping the itinerants at arm's length from personal involvement in society and circuit 'politics'. [103] For James Rigg, writing in 1879, one of the strongest reasons for itinerancy was 'the necessity of securing for every circuit the presence of administrators of Connexional law, and expounders of

[99] The *Cork Baptist Church Book,* 44-45 quoted in David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and popular religion c. 1750-1900* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 31.
[100] See Chapter Four: The Circuit Quarterly Meeting.
[101] "Annual Address to the Methodist Societies in Great Britain, Minutes of Conference 1824", *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conferences,* vol.5 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Bookroom, 1864), 527.
[102] This understanding of the purpose of itinerancy nevertheless took hold. Charles Booth writing in 1903 concluded that Wesleyan Methodist itinerancy was 'distinctly connected with that policy of personal detachment which is sealed by the three years' limit of ministerial service'. Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London, Third Series: Religious Influences* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd, 1903).
[103] The term 'itinerancy' also represented the principle that it was the conference and not the trustees of the individual societies which had the authority to place and remove preachers. See "The Case of Birstall House" and the introductory comment in Davies, *Works,* vol. 9, 504 ff.

connexional principles, unbiased by local prejudices or interest'. [104] Clearly, reinforcing the fact that Wesleyan Methodism was connexional, and that connexional principles (propounded by the conference) were to be firmly applied in the circuits, was his particular interest and concern.

Whatever the rationale put forward for Methodist itinerancy, whether on rounds or from circuit to circuit, in the end it was simply a matter of what worked to achieve the aim of spreading scriptural holiness. Wesley himself wrote 'And if this end can be better answered in some other way, I should subscribe to it without delay'.[105] However, a justification for itinerancy was built up which became firmly embedded in Methodism, continuing to the present day. The thoughtful William Myles wrote 'It would betray a want of faith and humility to say, God could not carry out his work without itinerancy...' Nevertheless, despite Wesley's pragmatic approach, Myles produced what he must have considered an irreproachable justification for its use: '… and it is so agreeable to Holy Scripture and the practice of the first preachers of the gospel…', that it certainly is the bounden duty of both preachers and people to maintain it'.[106]

1.8 Other models of itinerant ministry

Other models of itinerant ministry might have suggested themselves to Wesley: perhaps preaching 'forays' there and back the same way from a town base, or allowing the preachers to tour the country at will and as the Spirit led. However, neither of these would have provided the same level of organised support for existing societies and the establishment of new ones. One advantage to Wesley of the circuit or round model was that he could know which areas of the country were being covered by whom, bringing order to a certain amount of chaos. Most importantly, it provided a regular reinforcement of the message first delivered, to

[104] Rigg, *Connexional Economy*, 73.
[105] Letter from John Wesley to Rev. Mr. Walker of Truro quoted in Coke and Moore, *Life,* 279.
[106] Myles, *Chronological History,* 203.

encourage converts to stay committed, and was an effective way of linking the scattered societies together.

Itinerant preaching also featured within the Dissenter traditions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, overlapping to some extent the work of Wesley. In his work on itinerancy and the transformation of English Dissent, Deryck Lovegrove provided a thorough treatment of what he described as a somewhat neglected subject. [107] Through his numerous examples drawn from local practice across the country and diagrams of patterns of itinerancy, it is possible to gain a clear picture of the nature and purpose of itinerant preaching among the Dissenters in this period. Evangelism, in particular in this itinerant form, appears to have come new to the Dissenting tradition in the late eighteenth century. It involved a move outward from the more inward looking concentration on the spiritual sustenance of the members themselves. What was established was a pattern of evangelistic outreach, primarily to the surrounding villages from a town base, but there were also patterns of itinerancy described as circuits.[108]

Much, but not all, Dissenter itinerant evangelism was conducted by relatively unlearned lay people, although settled ministers gradually added outreach to the care of their congregations, discovering that this evangelism had the advantage of enlarging their congregations. [109] In 1776, the *Societas Evangelica* was established in London with the object to 'extend the Gospel in Great Britain by itinerant preaching'[110] and around the same time, Rev. John Eyre founded a society afterwards known as the *Village Itinerancy or Evangelical Association for Spreading the Gospel in England.* These organisations sponsored

[107] Deryck W. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the transformation of English Dissent, 1780 – 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[108] Ibid, 49.
[109] Ibid 48.
[110] R.W. Dale completed and edited by A.W. Dale, *History of English Congregationalism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), 593. Dale gave no name or denomination for the founder/s.

and encouraged itinerant evangelism and eventually set up training academies.[111]

Comparing the Dissenter with the Methodist practice, it can be seen that itinerant preaching in evangelistic outreach was not something confined to John Wesley and Methodism, nor was the concept of itinerant preachers travelling round circuits. William Norris, a full-time evangelist supported by *Societas Evangelica* itinerated around a circuit in the North Riding of Yorkshire. In 1798 he reported travelling an average of seventy miles on foot each week, preaching eight or nine sermons.[112] The particular form of travelling round a circuit may have been inspired by Methodist practice, but that is not known for certain, although Walsh described these preaching campaigns as 'following Wesleyan example'.[113]

There were however significant differences between the Dissenter and the Methodist pattern. The Dissenters already had local churches and settled ministers. Itinerant preaching was a new and significant development, which challenged existing congregations.[114] In Methodist itinerancy it was up to the travelling preachers to establish their own bases by founding societies, meeting first in temporary accommodation and eventually for some, establishing preaching houses or chapels. 'Chapels and societies were the effects of their ministry, not accommodations provided beforehand'.[115] Although the Dissenter evangelists did link converts to existing chapels and sometimes started

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[111] Lovegrove listed some 78 Calvinistic Dissenting organisations active in itinerant evangelism between 1780 and 1830. These included Congregational and Baptist County Associations as well as organisations raised up for the purpose, for example the London Itinerant Society (1797).Lovegrove, *Established Church,* appendix B, 182.
[112] Lovegrove, *Established Church,* 51. William Church, reporting to *Village Itinerancy* in 1797 wrote of 'my little circuit'. Ibid, 49.
[113] John Walsh, "Methodism at the end of the Eighteenth Century" in Davies and Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.1(London: Epworth Press, 1965), 295.
[114] Lovegrove described the introduction of itinerant preaching to Dissent as 'fracturing attitudes, values, beliefs, structures'. Lovegrove, *Established Church,* conclusion, 162.
[115] Introductory essay to Jackson, *Lives,* vol. 1, xv.

up new causes, the founding and visitation of societies on rounds or circuits was both unique, and essential to Methodist itinerancy.

Another model for promoting his cause which may have occurred to Wesley was proposed by J.H. Rigg in his treatise for non-Methodists, first published in 1878, on the development of John Wesley's churchmanship and the relationship of Wesley's Methodist movement to the Church of England. Rigg considered it 'evident …that Wesley contemplated the possibility of the chief ministers in some of his circuits being stationary ordained clergymen of the Church of England, with and under whom, itinerant Methodist Evangelists might do the work of the circuits'. [116] One person who might have been a model was William Grimshaw, a significant figure in the history of the Evangelical Revival in his own right.[117] Grimshaw was perpetual curate of Haworth who in 1742 had a spiritual experience which led him to establish a pattern of preaching in each of the four hamlets in his parish three times a month. This led to requests for his preaching outside his own parish [118] and he established two rounds which he followed every week alternately.[119] Grimshaw was concerned about the rightness of his actions and wrote to John Wesley in August 1747 that…'sometimes I have made more excursions into neighbouring parishes…and to the great offence of the clergy' and he said he had resolved to 'sally out no more, but content myself within my own bounds' but the compulsion 'to preach the gospel abroad' was too great.[120]

Grimshaw had the same compulsion as John Wesley, but he remained in his parish, managing to combine parish duties with an unorthodox preaching ministry. His particular link to Wesley was that he took

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[116] James H. Rigg, *Churchmanship,* 85, 86.
[117] See "William Grimshaw (1708-1763)" at http://www.oxforddnb.com for the wider aspects of his life and ministry at Haworth.
[118] '[Grimshaw] was, perhaps, the very first man in Yorkshire, whose zeal prompted him to preach in the parish of another minister, without his consent.' William Myles, *The Life and Writings of the Late William Grimshaw, A.B., Minister of Haworth,* 2nd edn. (London: Conference Office, 1813), 11.
[119]Coke and Moore, *Life,* 284, quoting John Wesley's journal but without reference.
[120] Letter from William Grimshaw to John Wesley, August 20 1747, quoted in Myles, *Life and Writings,* 164.

responsibility for supervising preaching rounds in Wesley's network as well as his own in Lancashire and Cheshire. He wrote that in addition to caring for his own parish in Haworth he would add 'by divine assistance'…'so frequent a visitation of Mr Bennet's, William Darney's, the Leeds and Birstall Societies' as his convenience and their need permitted.' [121] This suggests that Grimshaw saw himself as a kind of 'under bishop' to Wesley. William Myles wrote that: 'The circuit where Mr Grimshaw resided was always called Mr. Grimshaw's circuit…because he officiated as Mr. Wesley's assistant of the circuit'.[122] Grimshaw was also an intriguing example of someone whose practice demonstrated how things might have worked out if 'methodism' had taken hold as a movement within the Church of England. The Methodist preachers used the vicarage kitchen as one of their preaching-places and Grimshaw gave notice of the Methodist preaching in his parish services.[123]

Rigg also considered that 'Wesley's dream, probably, was that a number…of Methodist preachers might be appointed to benefices situated respectively at the head place or in the centre of the 'circuits' of Methodism [and] act as the chief ministers of such circuits'.[124] This latter is an interesting thought, but since appointments to benefices were in the hands of Anglican bishops and patrons, it is difficult to see how this would have worked out in practice. It also contradicts Wesley's views on the importance of frequent moves and Rigg gave no references. Wesley turned down a proposal that four of the travelling preachers in Cornwall cease to itinerate but settle instead in certain key towns. He argued that if the preachers were to settle with single

[121]Ibid, 165. Bennet and Darney's rounds continued to be so named, even when these were absorbed into Wesley's Connexion.
[122] Ibid, 28. Initially, the term 'assistant' was used for all Wesley's helpers. Later, 'assistant' was used for the head preacher in the circuit. See Chapter Six: The Assistant / Superintendent.
[123] Ibid, 26.
[124] Rigg, *Churchmanship,* 86.

societies in key places, societies in outlying areas would not receive the spiritual attention they needed. [125]

1.9 Evolution of the use of the term 'circuit'

When the travelling preachers had circuits of hundreds of miles, it would have been virtually impossible for the societies to have any sense of being a single body, or even meeting and knowing one another. But as the number of societies grew and the size of the circuits shrank, a change in what was meant by 'a circuit' can be perceived. [126]

The 1748 *Minutes of Conference* record the question: 'Would it not be of use if all the societies were more firmly and closely united together? The corresponding answer was: 'Without doubt it would be much to the glory of God, to the ease of the ministers and to the benefit of the societies themselves both in things spiritual and temporal'.[127] It would seem that the invisible linking of the societies made by the preachers' travels was no longer sufficient and that some more tangible expression was required. Further, that the amount of administration involved in maintaining the societies needed co-ordination to avoid needless repetition and drawing the preachers away from their core task. The result was that a transition took place. Although the circuit remained a grouping of societies served by one or more itinerants, it changed from being a travelling preacher's round to being a unit of oversight, ministry and administration in the Connexion.

There is no indication in the *Minutes of Conference* of a definite transition taking place. Histories do not refer to the transition, usually blurring the progress from one to the other. However, Goodhead went as far as identifying 1749 as the date at which 'the circuit system was fully established'. [128] He seems to have considered that this date represented the shift from circuits as rounds toward circuits as structural

[125] Letter from John Wesley to Rev. Mr. Walker of Truro quoted in Myles, *Life*, 280.
[126] See Chapter Three: The Development of Circuits.
[127] "Minutes of Conference, 1748", in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 225-226.
[128] Goodhead, "A Crown and a Cross".

entities. His categorisation of Wesleyan Methodism pre-1749 as a 'movement' and post-1749 as an 'organisation' is a useful way of highlighting the transition. It will be argued in chapter 4.0: The Circuit Quarterly Meeting, that it was the creation of the circuit quarterly meeting, first mentioned in the same 1748 *Minutes,* which finally established the circuit as a unit of administration and oversight, as opposed to being a round. Goodhead's 1749 date allowed time for implementation.

Even when the transition had taken place, one gains no strong sense of the circuit at first being regarded as anything other than simply a practical means of connecting the societies. For example, the *Plan of Pacification* (1795) was a very significant connexional document yet in all its paragraphs, there is no mention of the circuit. [129] The whole focus is on the individual societies and the lack of reference to the circuit is quite striking. However, only two years later, the "Address to the Methodist Societies" from the Leeds conference of 1797 is full of references to circuits and quarterly meetings. [130] The societies were never autonomous, but now the circuit had become the primary focus and, as a unit of oversight, ministry and administration, established as part of the connexional structure.

Did this development into a more institutional mode mean losing touch with origins? To some degree, the origins themselves helped to bring about the institutional stage. Establishing societies on rounds, a concept which so effectively retained and nurtured converts, also paved the way to an institutional future as the societies were formed into named and settled circuits. However, itinerancy continued to be an essential ingredient in Methodism and in so doing, acted as a strong reminder of origins.

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[129] The Plan of Pacification concerned allowing the administration of the Lord's Supper in Methodist preaching places, among other matters.
[130] "Address to the Methodist Societies, Leeds, August 7th 1797", in John Beecham, *An Essay on the Constitution of Wesleyan Methodism etc…,* 2nd edn., corrected and enlarged (Liverpool, 1829), appendix, 118-120.

1.10 Conclusion

In investigating the origins of the circuit, a number of points have come to light. One is that scholars' exhaustive treatments of this early period have proved to be surprisingly vague on structural matters. Another is that the origins of the circuit lie not in being a fully functioning structure imposed by Wesley, but rather in a combination of pragmatism and necessity. It moved from one man's desire to revive the Church of England through an itinerant preaching ministry, at first on his own and then with lay helpers, which developed into a scheme of rounds or circuits. In an essay of 1906, Elie Halevy wrote that:

> …the very organisation that Wesley imposed on the Methodist Society…seems to have been based upon the organisation of the industrial society of the time when Wesley went preaching from town to town…[131]

It is not surprising that Halevy made sense of the origins of the circuit by supposing that Wesley utilised familiar secular structures as an 'instant' model, especially in view of his particular interest in the social context of the birth of Methodism. But the origins were, as has been shown, very different.

Concerning the practicalities of the early round/circuit system, it has been shown that without the work of the class and other leaders in maintaining the spiritual life of the societies while the preachers travelled their rounds, consolidation and growth would have been far less successful. It can be argued that the unease which later developed among members over the status and power of the travelling preachers, and calls for greater lay participation in decision-making, may have had some roots in the memory of this dependency.

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[131] Elie Halevy, *The Birth of Methodism in England,* Bernard Semmel trans. and ed. (Chicago, 1971). Halevy went on to describe the structure, as he supposed it to be, in some detail. A thorough assessment of this essay can be found in J.D. Walsh, *Elie Halevy and the birth of Methodism*, transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Fifth Series) (1975), Cambridge Journals Online.

The period during which the term ‘circuit’ referred to the route travelled by an itinerant Methodist preacher was quite brief. Nevertheless, when the route evolved into a structural entity, the term ‘circuit’ continued, and has remained to this day.

Chapter Two

The Connexional context of the Circuit.

2.1 Introduction

Both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism had a connexional polity. The circuits were connected to one another and to the conference, the whole being termed ‘the Connexion’. In this chapter, the connexional context of the circuit in Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism is described. The terms ‘Connexion’ and ‘connexionalism’ are explored and conclusions drawn. The place and significance of the circuit within the Connexion is examined, both as a part of the connexional structure and as an expression of connexionalism.

With reference to the Connexion, it is shown that a structure named a ‘Connexion’ was not John Wesley’s predetermined model. Rather the Connexion was an effective coming together of the outcomes of his various objectives, achieving his overall aim. With reference to the circuit, it is concluded that while its roots were in the preacher’s round, its continuing value lay in its role of oversight, ministry and administration exercised at sub-regional level. With reference to the conference / circuit balance of ‘power’, a significant difference in attitude and organisation between Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist traditions is identified.

Also identified is that the ‘district’ layer of the Connexion in Wesleyan Methodism warrants a more thorough investigation than can be undertaken in this study. This would include investigation of the obscure reasons for choosing this form of regional oversight. Such a study may well be useful in informing ongoing ecumenical discussions.

In the last twenty years or so, there has been considerable attention paid to connexionalism as a core concept of Methodism.[1] A number of academic papers have been written in the light of both ecumenical discussions and renewed interest in the concept of *koinonia*.[2] This chapter however is limited to the subject in relation to the circuit in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and in historical reflection on that period.

2.2 The Connexion

'The Connexion' described the structure and form of Methodism, and was also used by both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists to describe what would later be referred to as the Wesleyan or Primitive Methodist Church.

The term 'connexion' is said to have been applied originally to a group meeting together with a Church of England clergyman, as a protection against being regarded as an illegal conventicle. [3] As a term applied to a Christian denomination it was not unique to Methodism. The Baptist New Connexion was founded in 1770 and the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion in 1783. Raymond Brown described the Baptist New Connexion as having a 'concern for community' which 'led to a thriving associationalism among their churches, including "mutual encouragement, fresh ideas, as well as giving practical support and healthy doctrinal instruction to one another'.[4] These denominations may or may not have copied the Methodist usage.

[1] See para. 4.6: "The Connexional Principle" in *Called to Love and Praise: A Methodist Conference statement on the Church* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999).
[2] For example, Bruce W. Robbins and David Carter, "Connexionalism and *koinonia:* a Wesleyan contribution to ecclesiology", *One in Christ,* vol.34 ((1998), 320–336 and Douglas W. Mills, http://salvationarmyusa.org/usn/publications/WD_2006_May3_Doctrine_of_the_Church.pdf, 39, accessed 11/1/11.
[3] Margaret Batty, "Stages in the Development and Control of Wesleyan Lay Leadership 1791-1878" (PhD thesis, University of London, 1988).
[4] Raymond Brown quoted in Walter B Shurden, ed., *Turning Points in Baptist History: A Festschrift in honor of Harry Leon McBeth* (Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2001).

The sphere of the Connexion might best be described as wherever Methodism was active, regardless of existing national or ecclesiastical boundaries. Simply as a structure, the Connexion had a pyramidal shape with the societies forming the base, grouped in circuits which formed the next layer, and the annual conference forming the apex. After Wesley's death in 1791 a further layer, the district, was introduced between the circuits and the conference. This connexional structure has been described as '… resembling that of the Scottish Presbyterian churches in the order of the courts, in the relation they bear to one another and their respective constitutions and functions.' [5] Kendall, historian of the Primitive Methodist Church, was keen to emphasise this similarity when defending the denomination's choice to have 'managing committees' rather than a 'general superintendent'.[6] In complete contrast, Methodist connexional polity has also been described as 'hierarchical', but this description is problematical. [7] The dictionary definition of a hierarchy as 'an organisation or body with successively subordinate grades' does not fit with a body in which the members of the 'ultimate authority' (the conference) were also the pastors of the 'lower grades' – the societies and circuits.[8] Nevertheless, the term 'hierarchy' was sometimes used loosely as a term to express disquiet about the conference and its executive.

Importantly, the connexional structure had a lateral as well as a vertical dimension, the circuits being connected to each other. Indeed, the model was three- dimensional. It was a network: the connectivity being created and reinforced through the policy of itinerancy, as described in chapter one. Dennis Campbell pointed out that the term 'Connexion' also implies that the ministry of the Church 'is never whole in any one

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[5] Horace Mann, *1851 Census of Great Britain – Religious Worship in England and Wales, abridged from the original report* (London: George Routledge and Co., 1854), 27.
[6] Holliday Bickerstaff Kendall, *The Origins and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (London: Edwin Dalton: n.d.), vol. 1, 379.
[7] Robert Currie used the term in several places in *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968).
[8] Catherine Schwartz et al., eds., *Chambers English Dictionary* (Edinburgh, New York, Toronto, 1990), 669. *Called to Love and Praise,* para.4.6.6, 49.

locality'. [9] To say 'never' is claiming too much and such a claim might be disputed by those of a Congregational polity. But if intended as meaning that being a Connexion means access to a wider diversity of gifts and insights, then this is a valid comment.

A very early description of the Connexion was that of a 'body'. At the 1749 Conference the question was put: 'Might not all the Societies in England be considered as one body, firmly united by one spirit of love and heavenly-mindedness?'[10] The answer was taken as 'yes'. This decision was made when the circuits were still 'rounds', but clearly shows the intention that the movement should have a wholeness about it and reflect the concept of Christians as the body of Christ, with its various parts acting together.[11] Campbell, writing in 2009, considered that the term 'Connexion' was fundamental to Methodism because it was (and is): '… a dynamic community connected by commitment and service'.[12] In this interpretation, the Connexion is a 'community' and the connectedness is the exercise of the community's shared Christian values. There is nothing here about structure or about a dependency on the activity of the itinerants alone.

As can be seen from these several descriptions and interpretations, the term 'Connexion', while being the description of a structure, was more than that. It accrued a wealth of meaning: a process which continues to the present day.

2.3 Connexional Structure in Wesleyan Methodism

2.3.1 The Societies

The origins of the society have been referred to in chapter one. In the Connexion, the society was the most local expression of Methodism: a

[9] Dennis M. Campbell, chap. 15, "ministry and itinerancy in Methodism" in William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 275.
[10] "Minutes of Conference Nov. 16 1749", in Henry Rack, ed., *The Works of John Wesley,* vol.10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 231.
[11] As expressed in 1 Corinthians: 12.
[12] Campbell, "ministry and itinerancy in Methodism", 275.

worshipping community in which the members were spiritually nurtured, received direction and found mutual encouragement in their faith. It is a commonplace to say that a church is the people and not the building. But this was particularly true of the Methodist societies, which existed as formal entities, regardless of the accommodation in which they met during the week and on Sundays. The internal system of spiritual guidance and pastoral support: the classes, class meetings, and class leaders, is beyond the scope of this thesis, but this feature has been covered extensively by scholars. For example, a detailed description of the early societies can be found in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.1 (1965)[13] and Andrew Goodhead examined the eighteenth century class meeting in his thesis "A Crown and a Cross" (2007). [14] The management of temporal affairs was the responsibility of the society stewards, and there was a regular leaders' meeting composed of class leaders, stewards and others with responsibilities, together with the relevant itinerant.[15] When societies obtained their own premises, trustees were appointed. Although societies ran their own domestic affairs' they were not autonomous. As societies were established they automatically became part of a circuit. Indeed, a circuit, by definition, was a grouping of societies.[16] Oversight and policy decision-making was exercised at the level of the circuit. (See Chapter Three: The Development of Circuits, for further detail on this process).

One simple feature which demonstrated the position of the societies was that in the *Minutes of Conference,* while the circuits were listed by name as 'stations', the individual societies in those circuits were never

[13] Rupert Davies, Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.1 (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 219ff**.**

[14] Andrew F. Goodhead, "A Crown and a Cross: The origins, development and decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in Eighteenth Century England" (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 2007).

[15] For greater detail of the functioning of the leaders' meeting, in this case towards the end of the nineteenth century, see H.R. Burton, *A Manual of Methodism and of Wesleyan Polity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1881).

[16] The circuit preaching plan was a visual demonstration of this, with the societies comprising the circuit, listed down the left hand side of the 'chart'. See Plate 7(following page 228) for an example of an early preaching plan.

listed.[17] Although 'society' remained (and remains) the correct term for the local community of Methodists, as permanent chapels were built, it became more common to refer to the named chapel rather than to the society of which it was the visible expression. [18]

2.3.2 The Circuits[19]

The Methodist Connexion came into being as a network of increasing numbers of circuits overseen by, and connected first to Wesley, then the conference. The Connexion *was* the circuits plus the conference (with the later addition of the 'district' layer).

The system as it developed out of the early rounds/circuits proved an effective way of providing a sub-regional level of oversight, administration and organisation of preachers in a fast-growing organisation. The oversight of the circuit with its societies was the responsibility of the senior itinerant in the circuit, and this significant role is discussed in Chapter Six: The Assistant / Superintendent. This responsibility was one delegated by the conference, but being exercised at a local level, it could be informed by local circumstances and concerns. Administration of the circuit as a whole was the responsibility of the circuit quarterly meeting, and this is the subject of Chapter Four: The Circuit Quarterly Meeting. In respect of the organisation of preachers there were three elements. The circuit was the level at which the preaching appointments for both local and travelling preachers were organised; it was the level at which local preachers were trained, monitored and authorised, (see Chapter Seven: para. 7.3) and it was the level at which itinerant preachers were 'stationed' by the conference. [20]

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[17] This practice has continued to the present time.
[18] See also Chapter Five: Temporal Affairs, para. 5.4.
[19] This paragraph relates only to the place and function of the circuit as part of the connexional structure. Succeeding chapters deal with the internal structures such as the quarterly meeting and local preachers' meeting.
[20] The process of stationing was a judicious combination of 'sending' by the conference, 'inviting' by the circuits and some limited input by the preachers being stationed.

The itinerants and local preachers would have a clear awareness of the circuit as an organisational structure as they travelled out to take services in the various preaching places or chapels. The officers of the circuit and the individual societies attending the meeting would also have that same sense from the agenda they worked through. The percentage of the general membership who ever felt a loyalty to the circuit *as an institution* may not have been great, but support for circuit 'events' and for other societies on special occasions was encouraged, and reinforced a sense of community.

The system of grouped societies (circuits) is generally regarded as a distinctively Methodist arrangement. Elements were however considered by others. In reflecting on the difficulties of maintaining Baptist causes in rural areas in the latter part of the nineteenth century, John Clifford declared that 'everyone admits that wherever possible small churches should be 'grouped' together under one efficient pastor, assisted by a staff of "Local Preachers".[21]

One illustration of how the circuit 'sat' in the connexional structure was the process of producing candidates for the itinerancy. In the mid-nineteenth century, for example, a candidate, having already acquitted himself satisfactorily as a class leader in a society, then as an exhorter and then as a local preacher in the circuit, had then to be endorsed by his own society, voted upon and recommended by the circuit quarterly meeting. He was then passed on to the district meeting for further voting before being approved by the conference for a four year probationary period, before being examined by the President at the conference, and if satisfactory, 'solemnly set apart' during the conference.[22] The Leeds Mercury reported that at the 1857 Wesleyan conference in Liverpool '…*through their respective circuits and districts*,

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[21] John Clifford, *Religious Life in the Rural Districts of England* (London: Yates and Alexander, 1876), 8.
[22] Robert Dickinson, *The Life of the Rev. John Braithwaite, Wesleyan Methodist Preacher* (London, 1825), 286.

(italics mine) sixty five young men had offered themselves for the Wesleyan Itinerancy'.[23]

Within Wesleyan Methodism, there were occasional moves for circuits to gain greater autonomy in respect of discipline and decision-making. This was perceived by the conference as a threat to Methodism itself. In a report of the memorials committee adopted by the conference in 1852, it was said that no countenance would be given to proposals for 'establishing, especially as it regards disciplinary matters, the absolute local independency, either of single societies, or circuits or districts [which] amount to virtually nothing more than the suggestion for the abandonment of our Connexional system…' [24] Although this statement was a defence of Wesleyan connexional polity; because disciplinary matters were dealt with exclusively by the itinerants, it also shows defensiveness over their authority.

The Wesleyan conference position that by its nature, being a Connexion required very limited circuit freedom, was something challenged by the constitutions of some of the break-away denominations such as the United Methodist Free Churches.[25] These churches adopted a connexional polity and a connexional structure, but at the same time they chose greater independence for the circuits with stronger power for the local lay leadership. They succeeded in achieving a compromise which Wesleyans could not envisage. [26] It can be argued that the reason a compromise was possible in UMFC was because the Wesleyan defence, portrayed as a need to protect its connexional nature, was in fact a disguised anxiety of the itinerants and the conference to protect their status over and against the laity. Since

[23] *The Leeds Mercury,* Sat. August 8 1857, Nineteenth Century Newspapers online.
[24] "Resolutions of the Conference on the Report of the Memorials Committee", Ms. *Journal of the Wesleyan Conference 1852*, 446, MARM 1977/585.
[25] The United Methodist Free Churches (1857) formed from earlier reform groups which had broken away from Wesleyan Methodism on issues of church government.
[26] 'Each Circuit in these Churches has, subject to the provision of their Foundation Deeds…the right and power to govern itself, by its Local Courts without interference of any external authority in its internal and strictly local affairs'. The (*draft) Suggested Circuit Rules and Regulations* (c1893) of the United Methodist Free Churches, 2-3.

this was not an issue with UMFC, this denomination could be more relaxed about the amount of autonomy circuits were permitted, while retaining a strong Connexion.

2.3.3 The Districts

The districts came into existence when in 1791, after John Wesley's death, the conference agreed to divide the 'kingdoms' into twenty-seven districts, England being divided into nineteen. This decision was a response to the reflection 'What regulations are necessary for the preservation of our whole economy, as Rev. Mr. Wesley left it? [27] Wesley, in his own person, had provided continuity of oversight between the annual conferences and therefore on his death an alternative means of fulfilling this function was considered necessary. However why a number of geographical districts, with their governing district meetings should be the answer and not, for example, a conference 'standing committee', is not clear. Wesley himself had suggested a standing committee.[28]

All circuits thus became within one or other district. In each district, a senior itinerant from the circuits was given the authority to 'summon the preachers of his district who are in Full Connexion…' who would then form the district meeting and choose a chairman, and the committee's decisions would be final until the next conference.[29] By creating districts, the conference was altering the structure of the Connexion as Wesley had left it, inserting a layer between the circuits and the conference. There are important features to note concerning the

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[27] Ms. *Journal of the Methodist Conference 1791*.The answer to Q.8. MARM 1977/ 585.

[28] In a letter read to the itinerants during the conference of 1769 suggesting how the movement might be managed after his death, Wesley proposed 'a committee, of three, five or seven' which was 'to do what I do now; propose preachers to be tried, admitted, or excluded; fix the place of each preacher for the ensuing year…', but this was ignored after his death. "Minutes of Conference 1769", Henry Rack, ed., *Works,* vol.10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 378.

[29] Ibid. 'In Full Connexion' meant those preachers accepted duly authorised as preachers/ministers in the Connexion. When ordination by laying-on hands was introduced in 1836, being received into Full Connexion continued, as a separate but linked rite. It remains so to this day.

district. One is that it was ‘the kingdoms’ which were being divided, not ‘the work’ as in earlier times. This geographical division of ‘the kingdoms’ must have meant that regardless of how much or how little (Wesleyan) Methodism had penetrated the various parts of the ‘kingdoms’, there was general oversight at a geographically regional level. [30] Secondly, this geographical division was quite different from the organic development of the circuits. [31] Thirdly, the fact that the district was not John Wesley’s invention is some evidence to show that he did not have a blue-print for a fully formed structure called a Connexion, from the outset.

The 1791 establishment of geographical districts and district committees met with widely differing acceptance. The ‘Redruth Proposals’ of 1791 stated among other matters that: ‘We highly disapprove of the proposal for dividing the kingdoms into districts, conceiving it to be injurious to Methodism’.[32] They did not say why, but interfering with the direct connection between circuits and conference is a possibility. Also perhaps, adding bureaucracy to what was perceived as the purity of the original organisation. By contrast, and looking back, George Smith wrote in 1858, that:

> Never were the leaders of Methodism more evidently guided by a divine hand than when they divided the Connexion into Districts and invested the several District Committees with supreme power in their respective localities during intervals of Conference. [33]

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[30] Although sometimes of similar size to Anglican dioceses, they were not equivalent.
[31] Martin Wellings has referred to the role of the District Chair in current Methodism as being ‘problematical’ because ‘Methodism has considered itself a connexion of societies, not of regions, i.e. of people not of places’. Martin Wellings in Clive Marsh et al., *Unmasking Methodist Theology* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 33-34. This shows the far-reaching effect of the decision to create districts.
[32] The ‘Redruth Proposals’, dated June 14 1791 and issued from delegates and others from the Methodist societies in Cornwall. Quoted in full in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.4 (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 243-244.
[33] George Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism,* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1858), vol.3, 509.

This1858 comment somewhat confirmed the ‘Redruth’ anxieties. Time and a period of tension between circuits and the conference had shown districts to be a useful tool in keeping the circuits in check. Although the district meetings were set up to attend to urgent business between annual conferences, it was not long before their function changed significantly; a change which affected the relationship between the circuits and the conference. Imperceptibly, the district meeting took on the oversight of the circuits.[34] So imperceptibly that this is not something to which histories of Methodism draw attention. District meetings became a layer of administration, coordination and discipline through which business between the circuits and the conference and connexional officers had to pass. The change in role from that intended in 1791 produced a much heavier connexional structure than would otherwise have been the case, although it could be argued that sooner or later, the sheer complexity of the Connexion would have required some form of layer between the circuits and the conference.

What is striking, when looking through examples of district *Minutes,* is the extent to which every aspect of circuit activity and matters pertaining to the Connexion became the intimate concern of the district. For example, the Bradford District, in May 1835, approved doctor’s bills and funeral expenses for a travelling preacher, approved the division of one of its circuits, decided the number of travelling preachers and monitored the catechising of children in the district. [35] While the district had necessarily taken on some of the detailed work from the conference (there now being too many circuits for the conference to handle individually), there is a real sense that the circuits had thereby

[34] ‘What is our opinion of the work of each circuit?’ Q. 18, “Minutes of the Bristol District Meeting, May 17-19, 1814”, Ms. *Minute Book 1814-1819*, MARM 1977/ 598. ‘In order to bring the state and progress of the work of God in every circuit directly and distinctly under the examination of the District Meetings, the Circuit Schedules duly filled up, shall be annually produced, read and considered…’ Ms. *Journal of Wesleyan Conference 1827,* MARM 1977/585.
[35] *Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Bradford District, May 26 & 27, 1835,* MARM 1977/ 598.

lost status. [36] The amount of authority in the hands of the itinerants of the district meetings was considerable. With the establishment of these meetings, there were now two foci of authority at sub-conference level. Both the superintendents of the circuits and the district committees had delegated authority from the conference.

2.3.4 The Conference

In 1744, John Wesley called together a small number of sympathetic Anglican priests and invited travelling preachers to confer with him on the doctrinal direction of the Methodist movement. This was the first of the annual conferences (which continue to this day). The *Deed of Declaration* (1784**)** gave legal status to the conference after Wesley's death. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into the history of the conference in detail, but John Lenton's recent sociological and statistical analysis of travelling preachers before 1791 provides helpful and thorough detail of the working of the annual Conference up to 1791 (Wesley's death) in its various aspects. [37] Sections III, IV and V of the Introduction of volume 10 of the biennial edition of *The Works of John Wesley* also provide detailed information on the composition, agenda, business and structure of the conference.[38]

The conference was the ultimate authority in the Connexion: making laws, administering discipline, developing doctrine, directing development and authorising and stationing the itinerants. In Wesley's lifetime, the conference gave him the opportunity to monitor what was happening in the circuits. Each assistant was required to attend, bringing reports on the numbers of members in his circuit and their

[36] 'It was the policy of the Conference to delegate more and more power to the District Meetings so formed'. W. J. Townsend, H.B. Workman, George Eayrs, eds., *A New History of Methodism* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), vol.1, 404.

[37] John Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers: a social and statistical analysis of the British and Irish Preachers who entered the Methodist Itinerancy before 1791*(Milton Keynes, Colorado Springs, Hyderabad: Paternoster, 2009), 157-172. For the development of the conferences of reformed Methodism, and in passing, the later Wesleyan conference, see Currie, *Methodism Divided*, chapter 5.
[38] Introduction to Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 24-47.

spiritual progress, together with their contributions to the connexional causes such as Kingswood (the school set up by Wesley). On Wesley's death the conference became the 'corporate Wesley' and took on his level of oversight of the Connexion.[39] It was composed entirely of itinerants until 1878 when laymen were admitted. Immediately after Wesley's death and in the first half of the nineteenth century the Wesleyan conference became the target of much protest and unrest in the circuits over what was seen as a high-handed body which promoted clerical domination and betrayed its early roots in revivalism. In its turn, the conference did nothing to dispel this perception by embracing and promoting the concept of the "pastoral office".[40] The conference was the stay which held the Connexion together although it can be argued that had its handling of protest from the circuits been more sensitive, some of the breakaways, such as the formation of the Methodist New Connexion in 1797 and Primitive Methodism in 1811, would not have taken place.[41]

The conference attracted its 'supporters' and 'opponents' and there was particular strength of feeling in both camps toward Jabez Bunting, four times President of Conference and holder of several offices. [42] There were newspapers published both in support of and in condemnation of the actions of the conference and its executive.[43] The colourful nature of the exchanges, directives and decisions, especially

[39] John Wesley's *Deed of Declaration* (1784) set out the 'rules' for the conference. "Appendix B", Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History,* vol.2, 551.
[40] The right of the preachers, not the lay people, to deal with spiritual and disciplinary matters. See Chapter Six: The Assistant / Superintendent.
[41] Most of Alexander Kilham's proposals which led to his expulsion and the forming of the Methodist New Connexion in 1797 were later adopted in Wesleyanism. Also, had the conference been able to accept revival practices such as camp meetings. Primitive Methodism may well not have become a separate denomination. Neither of these breakaways involved differences over doctrine.
[42] Jabez Bunting (1779-1858**)**. The *Fly Sheets* (anonymous pamphlets) of 1844 onwards contained pointed attacks 'chiefly upon Dr Bunting'. Rupert Davies, Raymond A. George and Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.2 (London: Epworth, 1978)*,* 319.
[43] The *Watchman* supported the conference and the *Wesleyan Times* supported the opposition.

of Jabez Bunting himself, has drawn historians to the period.[44] The usual conclusion has been that this was neither the conference nor its executive at its best. Robert Currie, for example, allocated several pages of *Methodism Divided* to Bunting's 'reign' and clearly found Bunting wanting.[45]

2.3.5 The system in practice in Wesleyanism

The following illustration shows how being a Connexion worked in practice for the circuits. In 1822, the conference authorised a deputation to visit the Banwell circuit following complaints that the preachers were not being paid the stipends due according to connexional standards. Should the circuit quarterly meeting[46] comply, the deputation was to authorise money from the connexional 'contingent fund' to pay money owed to the preachers working in the circuit, past and present, and liquidate the debt. Should the quarterly meeting not be able to make provision 'by prudent local exertions', then a new circuit would be formed with those who supported the conference action; and that circuit would be funded by the contingent fund until it became self-supporting.[47] Generous support went hand in hand with firm discipline.

While there was support *from* the Connexion, the circuits in their turn were expected to provide support *to* the Connexion. For Wesleyan circuits, being part of a Connexion also had considerable financial implications. Each circuit was obliged to collect contributions from members for several connexional funds for the support of ministry and other purposes and this was not always agreeable.[48] The number of

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[44] David Hempton referred to 'our Freudian fascination for the powerful and Machiavellian ecclesiastic' being almost exhausted, pointing out that there is even a history of Bunting's historians. David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion c 1750 – 1900* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 129. Nevertheless, Hempton himself devoted chapter 5 to Bunting in *Religion of the People.*

[45] Currie, *Methodism Divided*, 30ff.

[46] For detail on the circuit quarterly meeting, see Chapter Four.

[47] Ms. *Journal of Wesleyan Conference 1822*, MARM 1977/ 585.

[48] The 1852 Conference admonished those who had started refusing to pay the usual contributions: 'the injustice of such a course was greatly aggravated by the fact that

contributions required from the circuits increased as the Connexion developed. A circuit quarterly preaching plan of 1899 listed the following, which were all contributions to be made to connexional funds:

Quarterly Collection	Education Fund
Home Mission collection	Theological Institution
Chapel Fund	Schools Fund
Connexional expenses	Foreign Missions collections
Worn-out Ministers Fund	Local Preachers' Mutual Aid.[49]

In 1909 the connexional contingent fund was described as supplying '…the necessary resources for welding together the circuits into a unity, and to make that unity effective in administration and control'.[50] Although what was being described was simply the cost of running the organisation at the connexional level, by describing it in terms of the connexional principle of 'unity' it was put onto a higher plane. If circuits grumbled about the demands of the connexional fund; they had to realise that being a Connexion had its costs.

2.4 Connexional structure in Primitive Methodism

Primitive Methodism adopted the connexional structure of its Wesleyan 'parent'. It had societies, circuits, districts and an annual conference. [51] While there was a difference of view over methods of evangelism and the role of lay people, the founders had no difficulty in adopting the concept of a Connexion from Wesleyan Methodism. The Primitive Methodist conference declared that '…the whole of these smaller

ours is a Connexional ministry, supported by common funds, so that refusal of one…necessarily imposes a greater burden on others'. "Support of the ministry", Ms. *Journal of Wesleyan Conference 1852,* MARM 1977/ 585. See also Chapter Five : Temporal Affairs, for further reference to the Contingent Fund.

[49] *Order of Divine Services in the Wesleyan Methodist Chapels in the Coningsby Wesleyan Circuit February 5 – April 30 1899.* LINC, preaching plans collection.

[50] R. Waddy Moss, in Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History*, vol.1, 450.

[51] The original term was 'annual meeting'. The term 'conference' was introduced in 1825.

societies, by a general union, form one general society, community or Connexion, called the Primitive Methodist Connexion…'[52]

2.4.1 The Societies

Primitive Methodism assumed the Wesleyan arrangement of societies grouped in circuits and there was no significant organisational difference between Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist leaders' meetings. Duties included examining class books, paying over the weekly class money and taking 'due cognisance' of the conduct of the members in general. The leaders' meeting oversight of the classes and their leadership featured strongly in the Church *General Rules* of 1912 which suggests that class meetings were still an important aspect of Primitive Methodism at that date.[53] A rule that no person could be dismembered [*sic*] by a leaders' meeting without the sanction of the circuit quarterly meeting is an example of reinforcing the fact that authority lay with the circuit, not the society.[54]

2.4.2 The Circuits

The Primitive Methodist definition of a circuit was that it '…consists of a number of societies united together for mutual assistance'. [55] Much of the internal arrangement of the PM circuit, including the societies, was the same as a Wesleyan circuit. There was a superintendent (the senior itinerant) and a quarterly meeting (referred to as the quarter-day board). Both local and travelling preachers also served the circuit as a whole, and were not appointed by individual societies. However, the

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[52] *General Minutes of the Conferences of the Primitive Methodist Connexion consolidated at and by the Conference held at Lynn-Regis, in Norfolk, May 20-25 1836* (Bemersley: 1836). See Chapter Three: The Development of Circuits. A rare objection to the term 'Connexion' came from H.B. Kendall, the Primitive Methodist historian. For him, the term was reminiscent of 'a mere mechanical connection of parts such as a carpenter might achieve by nails or…use of dovetail and mortice'. He preferred the word 'Church' as being a 'higher and more spiritual vocabule', Holliday Bickerstaff Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (London: Robert Bryant, 1905) General Books, print on demand edn., vol.1, 69.
[53] Paragraphs 293, 294 in *The General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church; revised by order of the ninety-third Annual Conference, held at Norwich, June 12-20, 1912* (London: W.A. Hammond, 1912), print on demand edn., 40.
[54] Ibid.
[55] *General Minutes of Meetings, held by the Primitive Methodist Connexion, Halifax, 1821*, Answer 7, 3. (Bemersley: 1821).

Primitive Methodist Connexion constitution also provided for sub-circuit units called branches. This arrangement is described in greater detail in Chapter Three: The Development of Circuits, para 3.3.2. Although the internal *arrangement* of the PM circuit was similar to a Wesleyan circuit, the *character* of the circuit was different in that its function included a vigorous home missionary element. This affected the shape and size of the circuit, and the way in which it was organised and developed (see Chapter Three: The Development of Circuits).

2.4.3 The Districts

Primitive Methodism also followed the Wesleyans in having districts, but the origins and reasons were somewhat different. In Primitive Methodism, districts came into being when in answer to the question 'How shall the connexion be arranged?' the 1821 Annual Meeting [Conference] agreed that it should be divided into districts, initially five: Tunstall, Nottingham, Hull, Scotter (Lincs) and Sheffield. The main reason was to organise representation to the conference by grouping circuits, as it had become clear that the increasing number of circuits made direct representation unwieldy.[56] The Primitive Methodist districts also had district meetings, but in their case the rules were weighted heavily toward lay representation. Three delegates were to be sent from each circuit, but only one was to be a travelling preacher. More than this, the two lay delegates had to prove that they were not harbouring any intention of being a travelling preacher in the future.[57] Primitive Methodism was not a breakaway movement for greater lay participation as was the Methodist New Connexion; rather, it was a revival movement. Nevertheless, its emphasis on lay representation shows that memories of what some had previously experienced as clerical domination during their time as Wesleyans influenced their later decision-making.

[56] 'How shall the Connexion be arranged? It shall be divided into Districts…' ibid.
[57] Ibid.

For the greater part of the nineteenth century, a Primitive Methodist district was far more than a 'committee' layer. It functioned as a national Connexion in miniature and unlike Wesleyan Methodism, had the right to station travelling preachers.[58] Many travelling preachers spent their entire ministry in one district.[59] This period of 'districtism' and consequent weak sense of 'national' connexionalism had, however, a limited life. The 1869 annual pastoral address of the Primitive Methodist conference to the societies addressed the issue of preachers being 'confined in their circuit work to their respective districts' as unsatisfactory and that:

> …our sectional character [districtism] has we fear operated prejudicially on both ministers and people, if not destroying, at least stunting the growth of *Connexional* attachment, an imparting to us the selfishness of distinctive interests inconsistent with that broad affection that should distinguish us as one body. [60]

Legislation establishing connexional stationing was brought forward at the following Conference.

2.4.4 The Conference

The Primitive Methodist annual meeting or conference was first established in 1819. Kendall described how in the 'rudimentary period' up to 1819, Hugh Bourne had acted as General Superintendent over the whole Connexion consisting of first one, then three circuits. But with Bourne's health failing a representative annual meeting or conference was created, the first, held in Nottingham, being referred to as a 'preparatory meeting' in the manner of the Quakers who Bourne

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[58] 'Each District Meeting shall station the preachers in its respective District, for one year only…They may station a preacher to be six months in one circuit, and six months in another…[etc.] ibid,4. The districts continued to have that right until 1878.

[59] A description of the 'District Man' can be found in H.B. Kendall, *What Hath God Wrought*! c1900, 64, extract in Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2002), 24.

[60] "Annual Address of the Primitive Methodist Conference to the Societies under its Care", *Minutes of the 1869 Annual Conference of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, Grimsby* (London: William Lister, 1869), 82-83.

admired. The reason Bourne himself gave for instituting the annual meeting / conference was that 'an enlargement of discipline was found necessary in order to preserve the unity of the connexion and promote proper variety and exchange among the travelling preachers'.[61] These two features, unity and itinerancy, were of course at the heart of Wesleyan Methodism and its conference, from which Primitive Methodism had parted company. The PM conference was however a somewhat different body from that of the Wesleyans, being representative from the beginning. The rule was that delegates were elected at the district meetings in the proportion of two lay persons to one travelling preacher.[62] This feature clearly demonstrates the intention for lay dominance in the Connexion.

Rules for eligibility were very demanding for both lay and ministerial representatives. In 1845, rules laid down for those eligible to attend the conference meant that a preacher needed to have travelled 18 years and been a superintendent 12 years to qualify, and a lay person a member for 12 years and an official for 10. Even at the turn of the twentieth century, conditions laid down for prospective lay delegates were decidedly restrictive. With the intention of ensuring a high standard of debate, decision-making and spiritual maturity, those deemed ineligible ranged from people who were 'inattentive to discipline' or 'troublesome in the church' (echoes of the Wesleyan past), or were insolvent, to needing to hold office and 'As far as practicable' to be '…those brethren who possess general intelligence and business habits, and who habitually devote their energies to promoting the work of God'.[63] Such restrictions may have had the desired result, but seem somewhat at odds with the image of the spirit of openness and acceptance usually associated with Primitive Methodism.

[61] John Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion from its origin to the Conference of 1860,* a new edition, revised and enlarged (London: R.Davies, Conference Office, 1864), 97. Petty was quoting Hugh Bourne verbatim.
[62] Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism*, 22.
[63] *The General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church (1912)*, print on demand edn., 19.

2.5 Connexionalism

The term ‘connexionalism’ or the ‘connexional principle’ in Methodism described the practice of being a Connexion and is a multi-faceted term. It described the relationship between the travelling preachers and John Wesley: they were ‘in connexion’ with him. It pointed to unity of doctrine and discipline under the authority of the conference. (The question ‘what to teach?’ on the agenda of the first (1743) conference implied an intention to have a single doctrinal basis). It expressed connectedness through the itinerancy of the travelling preachers both within and between their circuits. It described the sharing of human resources as demonstrated by the ‘stationing’ of travelling preachers to their circuits by the conference. It was expressed in a spirit of mutual support and encouragement across and within the circuits.

The term was also used to refer to the centralisation of certain functions such as connexional funds, which went with being ‘one body’. With a stronger emphasis on centralisation as control, Robert Currie described connexionalism as ‘...co-ordination of effort and centralisation of control and direction through a series of courts culminating in one supreme authority’.[64] The ‘series of courts’ reflects the similarities between Methodist and Presbyterian polity.

Critics have used the term to refer to the perceived controlling power of the annual conference and its executive when considered excessive. Julia Stewart Werner, her own sympathies clear, used it in this way in her 1984 study of early Primitive Methodism:

> The corollary of the new clericalism [in Wesleyan Methodism] was connexionalism, a strengthening of central power at the expense of local autonomy. Many Methodists, irked by

[64] Currie, *Methodism Divided,* 141. E.R. Taylor was very critical of the centralisation he perceived as having been introduced and promoted by Jabez Bunting. Taylor, *Methodism and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933). It should be noted however that Wesley himself encouraged central control through his demands for reports and statistics from the circuits.

> itinerants who set themselves up as "reverends", were likewise vexed when, with increasing frequency, the hand of Conference was visible in their affairs[65]

2.5.1 Connexionalism in Wesleyan Methodism

As described earlier, the concept of connexionalism was multi-faceted. At different points in Wesleyan Methodism, individual features came to be highlighted as having particular significance; a choice which sometimes reflected the circumstances and mindset of the writers.

One abiding understanding of the connexional principle was highlighted by Samuel Jackson: that of interdependence and mutual support. In 1850 he wrote that:

> From this union of the societies with one another, the most important benefits have arisen. The strong have helped the weak, the large and wealthy societies have furnished liberal aid to those which are small and poor…A healthy circulation has thus been maintained in the body…[66]

It appears that Jackson saw this feature almost as a welcome bonus of the connexional arrangements. It was however these 'benefits' which became commonly considered as being at the heart of connexionalism at both national and circuit level.

In 1851, it was the feature of a common discipline and order that was seized upon. In its "pastoral address" of that year, the Wesleyan conference described itself as standing by 'the connexional principle

[65] 'Mainly to tighten discipline and so protect the Wesleyan image, the Conference increasingly stressed its own authority. This connexionalism…..', Julia Stewart Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its background and Early History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 180-181.

[66] Samuel Jackson and a sub-committee, eds., *The Wesleyan Vindicator and Constitutional Methodist,* (London: John Mason, 1850), 184. Mutual assistance between the societies was also part of the Primitive Methodist understanding of being a Connexion. "General Rules", in Robert Smith (collector and arranger), *Minutary Records: being Rules, Regulations and Reports, made and published by the Primitive Methodist Connexion,* vol.1, 1814 -30 (Leeds: R Smith Holbeck, 1854).

adopted by Mr Wesley'. It was 'that in which…the great strength of Wesleyan Methodism lies, for the conservation of its internal purity and order; and for the accomplishment of the great spiritual objectives…' Describing Mr Wesley as having 'adopted' such a 'principle' gave kudos to this interpretation. The same pastoral address included the words 'Our churches must be, not in word only, but in deed, UNITED in doctrine and discipline'.[67] Here, following a period of disruption in the Connexion an appeal to the feature of a common discipline was a firm reminder that any movement for constitutional reform was not welcome.

In 1909, when aggressive evangelism was seen as the priority for Wesleyan Methodism, the benefits of connexionalism were cited as being an effective means of pursuing this objective. '…the stability and the aggressive fitness and force that are supplied by a unifying organisation…' [68] Some of this theme had been picked up much earlier by John Clifford. In a paper read to the Baptist Union in 1876, he pleaded for devolving the 'chief direction of affairs, the distribution of funds and the general control upon this Great Parliament of Baptists, the Baptist Union' saying that 'The superior evangelising power of Methodism is due more to the adoption of this principle than anything else'.[69] Whether or not this was true, Clifford clearly thought it was a sufficiently strong argument to persuade his peers. Sellars referred to the 'triumph of connexionalism' in the Dissenter community in *Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity* implying that something which had started as a Methodist idea had become more widely adopted.[70]

[67] A quotation from the Annual Address of the Conference to the Methodist Societies, "Minutes of Conference 1851",*Minutes of the Methodist Conferences,* vol.1(London: John Mason at the Wesleyan Conference Office, 1862).
[68]R. Waddy Moss, in Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History,* vol. 1, 440.
[69] John Clifford, *Religious Life in the Rural Districts of England*: a paper read at the Baptist Union, held at Birmingham October 2-5 1876 (London: Yates and Alexander, 1876). Clifford (1836-1923) was President of the General Baptist Association 1872 and 1891 and of the Baptist Union 1888 and 1899. http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32451 accessed 6 Sept. 2011.
[70] Ian Sellars, *Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 4-5.

For W.J. Townsend, (c1909) connexionalism meant '…the circulation throughout the whole system of the same principles and methods of government…'[71] and he pointed to the increasing ease of transport at the end of the eighteenth century as an enabling factor. He noted that the conference was able to become a much larger gathering of travelling preachers and synods (district), and committees could now be held without undue expense and excessive localisation. [72] This commentary not only offers yet another understanding of connexionalism, and highlights the relevance of external influences, but also gives a very different impression of Methodism: one of committees and synods rather than the intense spirituality of the early days.

2.5.2 Connexionalism in Primitive Methodism

Geoffrey Milburn referred to early Primitive Methodism as having a 'weak connexional sense'.[73] By this he meant both a lack of centralisation and a tendency toward a 'parochial' attitude in districts and circuits. It is true that until 1843 there was little centralisation and 'The circuits had great powers of initiative and control…' [74] An early example comes from the quarterly meeting *Minutes* of the Hull circuit September 1819. Here, it was the circuit, (not the conference) which was authorising and directing travelling preachers: 'John Abey having preached before and been examined by the Circuit Committee he shall go out as a travelling preacher as soon as he can (say a fortnight)'.[75] A later example comes from the Yarmouth circuit. In 1837, the conference received a plea from the Yarmouth circuit through its district representative at conference that the Connexion should send missionaries to Africa. The conference response was that when the

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[71] W.J. Townsend in Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History*, vol.1, 342.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism*, 77.
[74] Kendall, *Origin and History,* vol.1, print on demand edn., 98.
[75]Ms. *Quarterly Meeting Minutes, Hull* [Primitive Methodist] *Circuit, 1819-1829,* circuit committee minutes, 14 September 1819. MARM 1986/003. The accounts record John Abey was paid a Quarter's salary of £7.16.0 at the March 1821 Quarter Day, but also needed a 'gift during sickness' of £2.5.0 in that month. There were eleven full time and eight half time travelling preachers being sustained by the Hull Circuit by December 1820.

Yarmouth circuit, by itself or jointly with another circuit saw 'a clear providential opening' for a mission to Africa then other circuits in the Connexion would give 'what assistance they providentially can'. Kendall's comment was that 'we are still in the circuit-dispensation; the time for combined Connexional action was not yet'. [76]

The 'Connexional action' came when the conference recognised that the connexional principles of unity and mutual support were being put in jeopardy by the continuing emphasis on the district and circuit and not on the Connexion as a whole. However, if there was a 'weak' sense of connexionalism, in the sense of centralisation and overall unity, it could not be said there was disregard for connexional rules. References in circuit minute books to chapels needing to be settled on the Connexional Trust Deed (as opposed to a local arrangement) show a clear sense that the circuits accepted that they were part of a Connexion.[77]

The fact that Primitive Methodism's period of 'weak' connexionalism was relatively brief (up to 1819) might indicate that such a model could not work in the long term. But by 1905, H.B. Kendall was ruefully wondering if the greater centralisation which took place after 1819 was not a mixed blessing. He questioned 'whether we have not lost as well as gained by centralisation and whether we should not do well to revert in part to the method which was crowned with such signal success…'[78] Of course the signal success may have been unrelated to the structures but rather to a period receptive to the Primitive Methodist style of revival. However, Kendall's comment suggests that losing a degree of autonomy for circuits was not simply an issue of power but also about curbing or even stifling creativity and evangelistic risk-taking. This raises an interesting point about the reforming movements

[76] Kendall, *Origin and History,* print on demand edn., vol.2, 357.
[77] 'The Mill Street New Chapel to be conveyed to Trustees upon Trust for the Whole Body of People called Primitive Methodists', Ms. *Minutes of Hull* [Primitive Methodist] *Quarterly Meeting, December 1819,* MARM 1986/003.
[78] Kendall, *Origin and History,* vol. 1, print on demand edn., 98.

within the *Wesleyan* Connexion.[79] Although these were movements for greater freedom, they appear to have had no element of appeal to greater *evangelistic* freedom, only freedom from what was seen as clerical domination. Either this was because there was little interest in evangelism at the time among Wesleyans, or that the reformers' only interest was the balance of power between lay people and the travelling preachers. If so, this last might add strength to the argument that the Wesleyan reformers were influenced by the spirit of the times in society at large.

While there was a significant contrast between the conference/circuit relationship in early Primitive Methodism and that of Wesleyan Methodism, a more centralised system developed in Primitive Methodism, probably inevitably. The *General Rules* as revised by the 1912 conference reveal the work of a centralised executive. For example, sub-paragraphs a – j in Paragraph 701 are concerned in minute detail with exactly how much per mile various classes of preachers in various circumstances could claim from the connexional fund for travelling expenses.[80] Even the method of measurement to be used was described.

2.6 Theories on the choice of a connexional polity

A number of theories have been put forward as to why the Methodist movement came to be connexional in nature and structure.

In the 1850's the practice of the early Church was put forward as the basis of the connexional polity. An article in *The Watchman*[81] newspaper in defence of a connexional polity referred to passages in

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[79] See references in Chapter Four: The Quarterly Meeting.

[80] On moving from one circuit to another: 'For an approved list minister of more than one years standing as such, seven pence per mile for every mile beyond the first fifty miles, together with one penny per mile for each of his children born during his ministry, and under eighteen years of age removing with him' Ibid, para.701, 1b.

[81] The *Watchman* was a strong supporter of the conference interpretation of connexionalism at a time when reformers were challenging conference domination and wanting more circuit freedom and lay participation in decision making.

the Letters to Timothy and to Titus as New Testament evidence for connexionalism: '…a church-arrangement corresponding in its general outline pretty nearly with our Wesleyan circuit organisation and union – essentially connexional'.[82] It was proposed that the essence of this and another article might be turned into a tract for popular consumption, because Methodist members were ignorant of the scriptural basis of 'our economy'.[83] While Wesley certainly expressed an opinion on church organisation - on the three-fold ministry for example [84]- and of course on unity within the body, this is not the same thing as identifying organisational connexionalism in the early church. J. H. Rigg also managed to find precedence in the New Testament [85] but this view was dismissed by Ernest Rattenbury. [86] He pointed out that since Wesley was not attempting to found a Church, he had the freedom not to follow any previous theoretical Church principles. 'He was…not limited by first century or sixteenth century precedents.' Rattenbury continued: The polity of Wesleyan Methodism is not the polity of the New Testament, and the attempts of later years to find it there are purely artificial'.[87]

The Methodist historian Rupert Davies proposed that Wesley '…took every opportunity of uniting individual societies for consultation and mutual support' because he was opposed to the democratic principle

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[82] "The Respective merits of Independence and Connexionalism", *The Watchman and Wesleyan Advertiser,* Wednesday, 4 December 1850.
[83] James Hoby to Jabez Bunting, December 5 1850 in W.R. Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-1858 (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 406.
[84] Questions 8,9,10 in the *Minutes of Conference 1747* are a brief discussion on the three orders of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. The conclusion was that though having a scriptural basis, God had not designed this pattern to 'obtain in all churches throughout all ages'. "Extract from Minutes of the Conference of 1747", Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.4, 86.
[85] The churches of Jerusalem and Ephesus '…not all being able to meet in one place, embraced several, probably many, separate congregations. These therefore constituting altogether…but one church, under a common government, must have been connexionally united'. James H. Rigg, *The Connexional Economy of Wesleyan Methodism in its Ecclesiastical and Spiritual Aspects* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1879), 19. This statement has all the appearance of being a justification seeking a basis.
[86] R. Ernest Rattenbury, *Wesley's Legacy to the World* (London: The Epworth Press, 1928), 138-139.
[87] Ibid.

and ‘allowed no vestige of congregationalism’.[88] When Wesley had to face the issue of local trustees wanting to control appointments (in the congregational manner), and thus threaten itinerancy, all preaching places were placed under the ultimate control of the conference (the Model Deed).[89]

Robert Currie proposed that Wesley deliberately chose the connexional format over and against the way the Established Church was organised at that time. He wrote that ’Wesley’s Methodism was organised as a connexion, in an attempt to replace the inefficiency, divided control; and vested interests of contemporary Anglicanism…’ [90] However I have found no evidence for such an ‘attempt’. Wesley’s primary motive was not to replace anything, but to spread spiritual renewal and to achieve the effective pastoral and spiritual oversight and development of his societies.

Each of these examples presupposes to some degree, that Wesley had an organisational plan in mind, yet he was not founding a Church but leading a revival. Wesley’s writings display little concern for structural matters; structures simply evolved. For example the society classes came into existence quite accidentally, albeit very usefully[91] and at the other end of the scale, the annual conference began out of practical necessity.[92] The circuits, as has been shown in chapter one, developed from a means of efficiently delivering a preaching and pastoral ministry and providing oversight for the scattered societies. Wesley himself

[88] Introduction to Davies, *Works*, vol.9, 16.
[89] The first Model Deed, *Large Minutes 1763,* 25 – 7 reproduced in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* 149-150.
[90] Currie, *Methodism Divided*, 141.
[91] A system of collecting funds proposed to Wesley by a Captain Foy developed into a means of oversight of the members. See “Thoughts upon Methodism” (1786) in Davies, *Works,* vol.9, 528, 529.
[92]According to Coke and Moore, John Wesley discovered that managing the organization of his travelling preachers to and in their rounds/circuits singlehanded was ‘attended by so many difficulties’ and required ‘…so much thought, contrivance and foresight’ that he ‘judged it expedient to summon annually, a considerable number of the preachers, in order to consult together concerning the affairs of the societies’. Thomas Coke, and Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley A.M.,* new edn (London: Milner and Sowerby, 1792), 228.

wrote that the whole Methodist system arose '…without any previous design or plan at all. Everything arose just as the occasion offered'.[93] Nevertheless, as Southey pointed out in his 'warts and all' *Life* of John Wesley:

> …while the constitution of Methodism, like most forms of government, had arisen out of accidents and circumstances…Wesley had availed himself of these with great skill, and made them subservient to his views and purposes as they arose: whatever power of mind was displayed in the formation of Methodism was his own. [94]

Frank Baker, Methodist historian, concluded that '…the principle of connexionalism remains one of the greatest contributions made by Wesley to ecclesiastical polity'. This also appears to imply that Wesley had a full-blown theory for his movement. But Baker made his case simply on Wesley's overall premise that 'it was folly to preach without ensuring Christian society for his converts' and, according to Baker, that Methodist societies needed linking together if they were to grow in spiritual strength and efficacy. [95] Plainly Wesley acted at each turn to achieve his objective of spreading scriptural holiness and to meet each organisational challenge as it arose, but attempts to attribute a connexional polity as such, as the pre-determined plan of the founding father, are misplaced. Rather, it can be argued that its origins dwelt somewhere in a combination of Wesley's intention for unity between the societies; his system of itinerancy which he himself regarded as a practical measure, not an ideological one; his determination to keep a firm and guiding hand both on doctrinal issues and the directing of preachers. It is therefore sufficient to say that societies grouped in

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[93] John Wesley quoted without reference in Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History,* vol.1, 228.
[94] Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism – with Notes by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Remarks on the life and character of John Wesley by Alexander Knox,*(1846, 3rd edn.), Maurice H. Fitzgerald, ed.(London: Oxford University Press, 1925), vol.1, 286.
[95] Davies and Rupp, *History,* vol.1, 230.

circuits, with the circuits connected to one another and to the conference as the supreme authority, together with a shared doctrine, discipline and resources, and expressed in a structure referred to as the Connexion, simply emerged as the most satisfactory way of expressing Wesley's intentions for the Methodist movement within the Church of England.

Despite Currie's comment mentioned earlier, he does appear to support this latter conclusion in saying that '…although pressures and needs [of attempting to evangelise a largely illiterate population knowing little of religion] shaped much of the Methodist structure, large parts of this structure are simply organisational embodiments of Wesley's doctrine or reflections of Wesley's psychology'.[96] Alexander Knox, a personal acquaintance of Wesley, went so far as to say that Wesley would have been 'totally incapable of preconceiving' his religious polity because '…this would have implied an exercise of forethought and political contrivance, than which nothing could be more opposite to his whole mental constitution'.[97]

2.7 Conclusion

Any national organisation of any size requires some form of oversight, administrative coordination and management at a sub-regional level. At its most basic, taking no account of its spiritual life, this is what the circuit achieved. Further, the rounds/circuits of the travelling preachers, introduced for very practical organisational purposes, developed into a means of expressing and supporting every aspect of connexionalism and were effective tools in the application of connexional principles. The responsibility of conveying a sense of connexionalism to individual members worshipping in individual chapels fell to the circuits, although to what extent these individuals were aware of the significance of connexionalism is not known.

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[96] Currie, *Methodism Divided,* 22. He did not say to which part of Methodist organisation he refers.
[97] Alexander Knox, "Remarks on the Life and Character of John Wesley" in Southey, *Life of Wesley*, vol.2, Fitzgerald, ed., 353.

While in both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism, the circuits were an integral part of the wider Connexion and the application of connexionalism across it, they had differing models of how a circuit might function within a Connexion. The Wesleyan model included strong central control which abhorred any degree of circuit autonomy. Early Primitive Methodism held out the possibility that greater individual circuit autonomy and freedom allowed creative and enthusiastic initiatives in mission to take place, if not always to succeed. The first leant toward risk-avoidance, the second toward risk-taking.

The early phase of Primitive Methodist existence offered greater circuit freedom for initiative but less of a sense of unity and mutual support across the Connexion. Before long, a conference desire to strength the latter meant greater restriction of the former. This suggests that a Methodist Connexion only worked as a Connexion when circuit freedom was limited and the Connexion controlled by a strong central executive and Conference. But the Wesleyan experience showed that too strong a central control and exercise of ministerial 'power' was also detrimental to circuit life and connexional harmony. It can therefore be argued that the difficulty of maintaining a healthy balance in the life of a Methodist Connexion should not be underestimated, and that achieving a fine balancing act should be regarded as one of the necessary aspects of connexionalism. [98]

[98] An example of the effort needed can be drawn from the early experience of the United Methodist Free Churches: 'Sometimes it seemed that the endeavour to maintain an exact equipoise between connexionalism and circuit independence absorbed time and strength needed for more important tasks'. Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History,* vol. 1, 538.

Chapter Three

The Development of Circuits

3.1 Introduction.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the significance of the circuit in the spread of Methodism by examining the process of circuit development, and the reasons behind decisions made. The notion of a circuit boundary is investigated, together with possible reasons for the shape and structure of the circuit. In relation to the size of a circuit, the conclusion reached is that in the absence of connexional norms, 'manageability' was the key factor in determining size, although internal politics played their part. There were considerable differences between the Wesleyan approach to 'circuit making' and the method of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, and these are explored.

3.2 Circuit development In Wesleyan Methodism

3.2.1 Initial developments

The spread of Methodism across the country was achieved through the means of establishing circuits, as described in chapter one. As a method of growing an ecclesial community through establishing interconnecting and interdependent groups of societies this was probably unique to Methodism. It can be argued that one aspect of the significance of the circuit in Methodism lies in its essential part in the historical development process.

In 1746 the whole of the Methodist work had consisted of seven rounds or circuits, each covering several counties, although not all. Plate 1 shows the extent of the circuits in 1749-50. By 1790 however, circuits had been established covering all individual English counties except Surrey and Hampshire,[1] although membership numbers varied greatly.[2]

[1] A Primitive Methodist missionary preacher reported that 'In the great majority of villages we found neither Independents, nor Baptists, nor Wesleyan Methodists, when

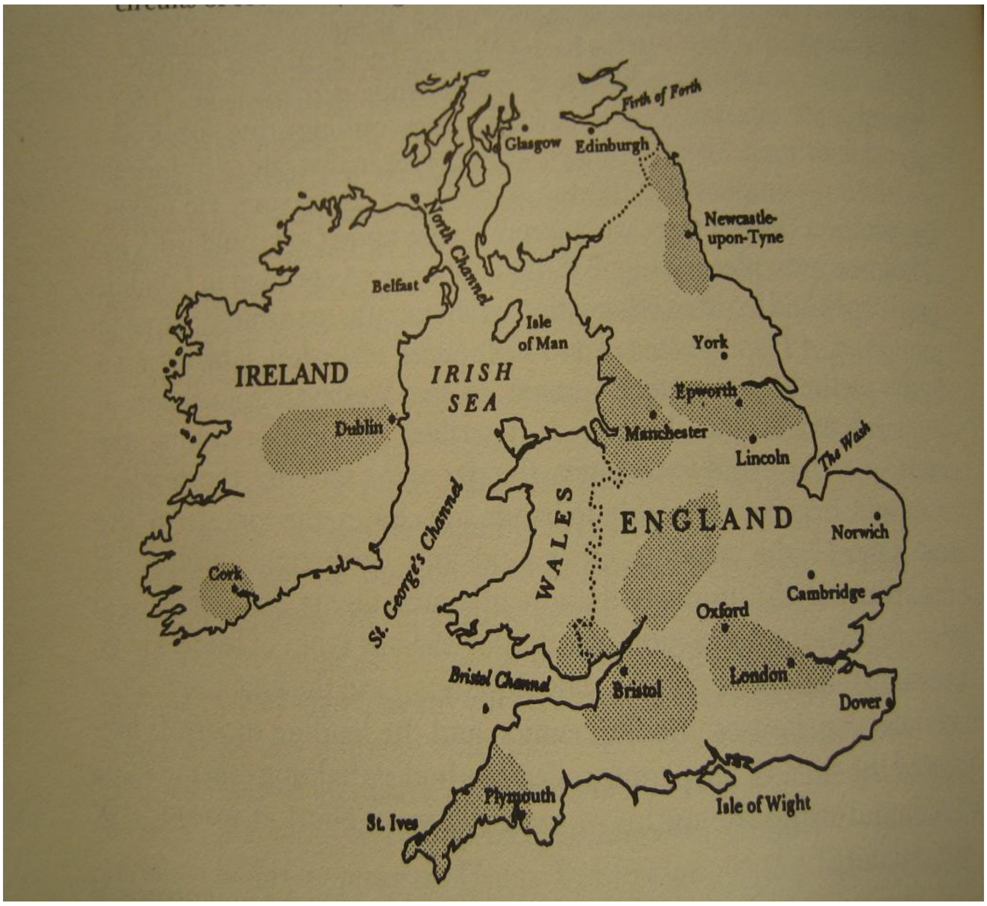

Plate 1

"Methodist Circuits in 1749-50 in England and Ireland"

R. P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the people called Methodists,* 180

The shaded areas show the approximate extent of the circuits

Circuits grew in density through increasing the number of societies within their purview or by incorporating societies established independently. They also grew steadily smaller as the vast early rounds were divided (See para.3.2.6 for circuit division). In 1798, in an address to the junior preachers, John Pawson was able to write that while for 'our Fathers and Brethren who have gone before us', 'the circuits were very large, their journeys long, and their labour hard…', in [1798]'…our circuits are greatly contracted, our journeys are generally short, our accommodation, for the most part comfortable'.[3] By 1824, John Rattenbury[4] found that in the Stourbridge Circuit, although he was out preaching at one society or another nearly every evening, his walks were short, the roads generally good and he could sleep at home every night.[5]

The developing establishment of circuits across the country can be traced by consulting the list of 'stations' to which the preachers were being sent for the coming year, produced annually in the *Minutes of Conference.*[6] For example, while on the very first list (1746) the 'London' round included the county of Kent, the 1786 list shows that Kent was numbered separately, because it had become a circuit in its own right. [7] While the majority of the names of circuits on the early lists

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we entered the county [Hampshire] in 1832', John Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, new edition revised and enlarged (London: R. Davies, Conference Offices, 1864), 331.

[2] Circuit membership numbers ranged, for example, from 1840 (Redruth) and 2060 (Manchester) to 300 (Colchester) and 249 (Sussex). Table of numbers of members in circuits, "Minutes of Conference 1790, question 10", reproduced in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church,* vol.4 (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 235.

[3] John Pawson, *A serious and affectionate address to the junior preachers in the Methodist connection.* [London, 1798], ECCO.

[4] John Rattenbury, Itinerant, 1806-79.

[5] Ms letter from John Rattenbury to Revd George Cubitt, Wesleyan Minister, Sheffield dated Jan.31 1824. *The Papers of the Rattenbury Family,* vol.1, MARM PLP/86/28/4.

[6] Stations were the places to which itinerants were sent by the conference to minister ('stationed'). The majority of stations were circuits, but could include for example 'headquarters' appointments and, when founded, appointments in theological colleges.

[7] Stations were numbered – London was always no.1, but other numbers changed as circuits divided. For example Bedfordshire was no. 6 in 1779, but by 1791, the newly established Diss, Bury, Lynn and Wells circuits had pushed 'Bedford' down to no.11.

were whole or half counties, [8] these county names came to be replaced by individual place names as smaller circuits, named after the main centre of habitation (usually a town) were established out of the larger ones.[9]

Following the names on the list in the *Minutes of Conference* is not a straightforward task because names of circuits appear and disappear. ‘Kent’ disappeared from the list in 1790, but Chatham and Canterbury appeared. In 1791, Canterbury remained, but Rochester replaced Chatham. There were several reasons for the names of the circuits on the list changing. One was simply the establishment of smaller circuits out of larger ones. Another was because a circuit had failed to take root. But another reason was because ‘the place first named was not found just then to be so favourable a centre of Methodist operations as some other places in the neighbourhood’.[10] Torquay for example, on the 1810 list, was not the name of a newly established circuit. This town had simply been found to be a better main base than Brixham and the circuit name therefore changed.

In his study of Yorkshire Methodism, Greaves examined the reason for the choice of particular centres of habitation as the heads of circuits. [11] He identified that these were usually centres of social and economic activity, mainly market towns, but not always. Sometimes a smaller place having social or perhaps industrial significance in the area might be chosen. [12] In Yorkshire, while Doncaster, Dewsbury and Halifax, (all described as market towns in 1830) were heads of circuits, so also were Denby Dale (pop.1412) and Grassington (pop.983), a lead mining

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[8] Exceptions, such as London, Bristol, Newcastle and Yarm were the names of significant locations and bases on Wesley’s original itinerancy.
[9] For example, Cheltenham, Spalding, Bury St. Edmunds, Salford and Brixton all appeared for the first time in the *Minutes of Conference 1813,* as numbered circuits.
[10]George Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism,* 3rd. edn. revised (London: Longman, Brown, Green Longmans and Roberts, 1858), vol.2, 522.
[11] Brian Greaves, “Methodism in Yorkshire 1740-1851” (PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 1968).
[12] Ibid, 263.

area.[13] Greaves also identified that the 'circuit town' was not necessarily the location of the society with the largest number of members.[14]

The coming and going on the list of circuits, helps to demonstrate the dynamic nature of Methodism in its first century or so. There may have been an overall strategic plan (at its most basic, Wesley's intention to 'spread scriptural holiness'), but its implementation did not follow a national structural blueprint. Implementation across the country by circuits depended on the efforts of both travelling preachers and local people, and by the effect of unforeseen or external events such as 'revivals' and economic circumstances.

3.2.2 Circuit Boundaries

George Smith's definition of a Wesleyan circuit was: '…an association of a given number of societies, spread over a certain portion of the country'.[15] This highlights the fact that what made a circuit a circuit was primarily the 'association' of societies and not a defined area on a map. It also begs the question of what then was the boundary of a circuit and how might that boundary be defined? Was it even possible or desirable accurately to plot such a boundary and what might be the issues concerning its 'plot-ability'?

Delia Garrett commented that '… [preaching] Plans… reveal the exact dimensions of a circuit', but this sounds more accurate than it was possible to be, since a preaching plan showed simply a list of villages, towns or other locations where preaching services had been established. [16] 'Extent' would have been a better expression. Unlike parish boundaries which, by the advent of Methodism, were nearly

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[13] William Buckley Haigh, *Synopsis of Wesleyan Methodism in Yorkshire and Companion to the county plan of circuits* (Leeds: 1830), 10-11.
[14] Greaves, "Methodism in Yorkshire", 263.
[15] Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism*, vol.3, 491.
[16] Delia Garrett, "Primitive Methodism in Shropshire 1820-1900" (PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 2002). Although this comment referred to Primitive Methodism, it would be equally applicable to Wesleyan Methodism.

always abutting, if a Methodist cause failed, the extent of the circuit might be reduced and a 'no-man's land' between circuits created. [17] Or, a 'no-man's land' might already exist because two circuits, established separately, did not abut. Dyson described how when the Congleton Circuit was created out of the two ends of Macclesfield and Chester Circuits it resulted in '...a chasm betwixt them of about ten miles distant' (which was later filled in by more societies).[18] The opposite could also be the case. The lack of charted boundaries led the Manchester and the Salford circuits in 1820 into 'perpetual collision and strife' because of the 'admixture of classes'. [19] Salford circuit was encroaching into Manchester circuit territory by forming classes there.

One thing is clear; that the extent of individual circuits bore no intentional relationship to any existing ecclesiastical boundaries. Although Methodism began as a renewal movement within the Church of England, from the beginning it had disregarded the limitations of historic parish or diocesan boundaries. Circuits had begun as riding rounds for missioning purposes and when circuits became units within a connexional structure, these boundaries continued to be ignored. Reflection on boundaries only emphasises the uncomfortable compromise with which Methodism lived, since even as a complementary preaching and missioning movement, the links with the structural Church of England were very tenuous. It was only in the latter part of the twentieth century, when a now ecumenically-minded Methodism looked toward, for example, establishing 'areas of ecumenical experiment', that for strategic reasons, the issue of boundaries needed to be addressed.

[17] There were occasional instances of tracts of uninhabited moorland 'between' parish boundaries. For a thorough study of parish boundaries from ancient times, see N.G.G. Pounds, *A History of the English Parish* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chapter 3, "The Parish, its bounds and division".
[18] J.B. Dyson, *The History of Wesleyan Methodism in the Congleton Circuit* (London: 1856), 122.
[19] Ms. *Journal, Liverpool Conference 1820,* miscellaneous orders 2, MARM 1977/585.

3.2.3 Mapping the Circuits

One product of nineteenth-century Wesleyan Methodism was a map and an atlas, published fifty years apart, identifying the distribution of circuits across the country. Both these publications have been examined. It can be argued that intentionally or not, these maps were a way of reinforcing and celebrating a sense of being a Connexion and of being an established presence in the nation. They also show that what had been a dynamic movement was now sufficiently stable to be capable of mapping.

William Hague's *A Map of the Circuits of the Wesleyan Methodists in England and Wales* was published in 1824. [20] This map linked the Wesleyan circuits and their 'population' of members to administrative counties (numbered) and their populations[21] - a connection reinforced by the membership being listed as a ratio of the general population. Such a list looks like a statement of confidence, and perhaps also well timed to address the founding and rise of Primitive Methodism. There is very much a sense of order and organisation. Each circuit in each county was marked by the position of the circuit town, giving the number of members and the date the town was made head of a circuit. For example: 'Andover 200.18' meant a circuit of 200 members based on Andover since 1818. The map nevertheless also shows that the distribution of Wesleyan Methodism in this period was still patchy and varied considerably from county to county, even allowing for variation in county size. There were twenty-two circuits in Lancashire, but only one in Surrey and none in Hertfordshire. Two other observations can be made. One is the interest in being linked to the secular county boundaries, hinting that among the Wesleyans were people with 'local authority' interests and responsibilities. The other is the fact that

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[20] William Buckley Haigh, *A Map of the Circuits of the Wesleyan Methodists in England and Wales* (Wakefield: Design, 1824). The omission of Scotland might have been due to lack of space or, more likely, the fact that Wesleyan Methodism was having difficulty in establishing itself in Scotland. The copy examined in the British Library was mislaid by the library following access for this thesis but before it could be scanned for use as an illustration.

[21] For example, XXVII Northumberland, 198965 (pop.), 5 circuits, 3035 members.

although Haigh's map purported to be a map of the circuits, there were no boundary lines, only place names.

The atlas was published in c1874 by Edwin Tindall: *The Wesleyan Methodist Atlas of England and Wales*. [22] This very large publication contained fifteen plates showing the Methodist districts. (Plate 2 is a copy of one half of such plate). On each plate was marked the boundaries of the Wesleyan districts, railways, county boundaries, main roads and bye-roads. Each circuit was marked by the town with the 'circuit church' as a large coloured dot and 'places adjacent to' the circuit town with same-coloured but smaller dots. This system clearly identifies the geographical range of each circuit, together with the preaching places within it, but without boundary lines. However, the reason that Tindall created the atlas was not in fact to mark the circuits themselves, but to mark those locations where there was no Wesleyan presence. His interest was in those places in which societies still needed to be formed and added to the circuits. The names of these places were marked in italics.[23] Tindall wrote: 'It is confidently hoped that the facts and pictorial representations of Methodism here given will be found helpful in stimulating aggressive evangelical work.'[24]

Identifying stretches of Wesleyan 'no-man's land' between circuits suggests a mentality of mission and outreach whereas drawing boundaries suggests a more settled and less 'missionary' mode. The atlas may have been Tindall's way of making a 'call to arms'. However, the danger of identifying areas as yet without a Wesleyan presence was the possibility that two circuits adjoining these places would both attempt to extend into the same area. [25]

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[22] Edwin H. Tindall, *The Wesleyan Methodist Atlas of England and Wales containing fifteen plates, carefully designed and arranged by the Rev. Edwin H Tindall* (London: Bemrose and Sons, c1874**)**.
[23] 'Townships, parishes and places of 250 inhabitants and upwards without a Methodist chapel or preaching house', ibid, introductory page.
[24] Ibid, introductory page.
[25] Primitive Methodism had a 'no poaching' rule.

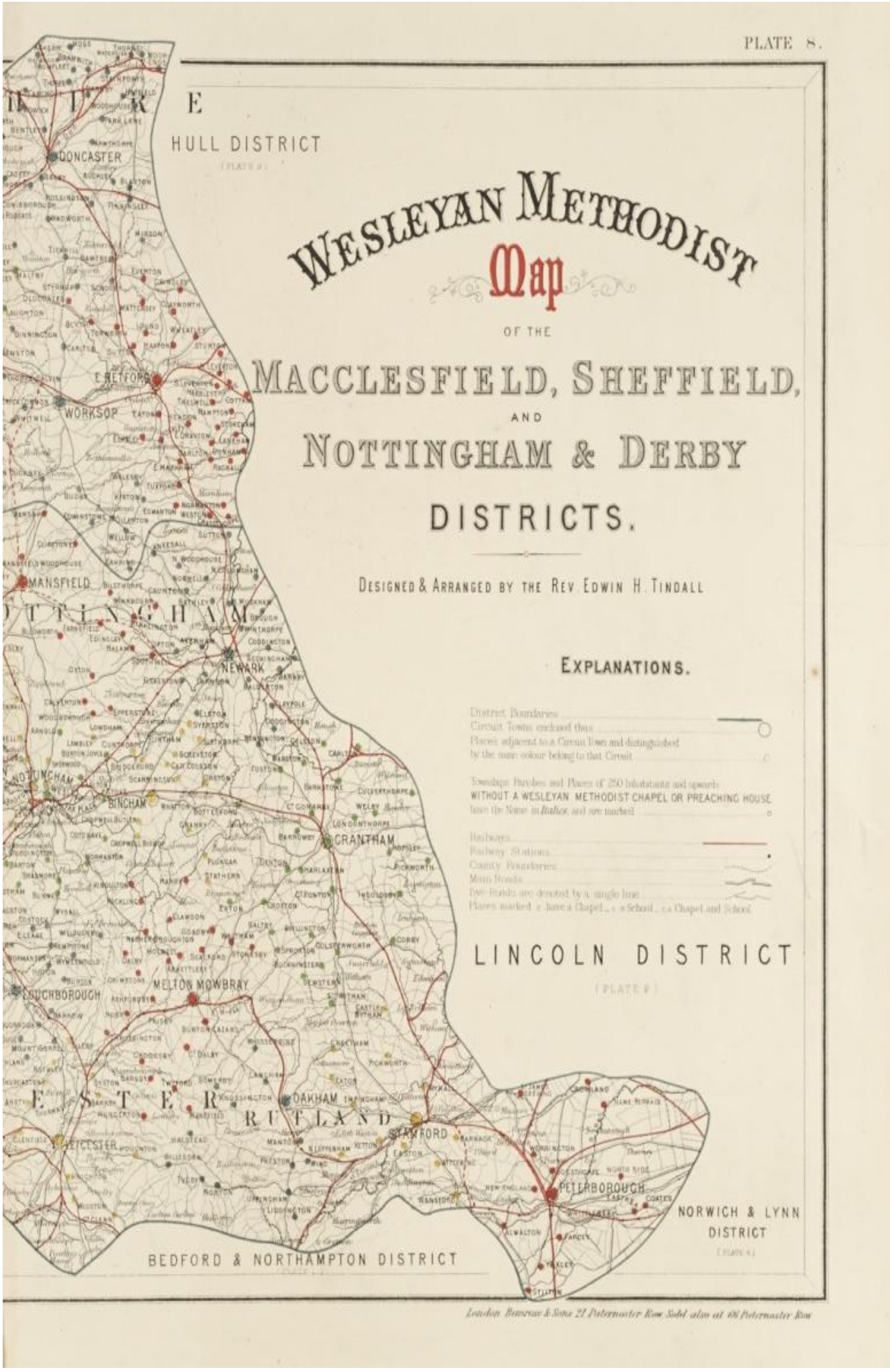

Plate 2

Plate 8,The Wesleyan Methodist Atlas of England and Wales (1874)

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3.2.4 The size, form and shape of circuits

While John Wesley did have views on the size of a circuit in terms of 'riding miles', there appears to have been no regulation established in the eighteenth or nineteenth century for what constituted an appropriate size of a circuit. One indication of what might have been deemed the *wrong* size comes from the *Minutes* of 1820 in which the conference expressed its strong disapproval of the recently developing practice of forming a circuit in which only one travelling preacher was stationed. [26] The reason for such practice may well have been that in a very rural situation, local people felt the need to link societies together in a circuit, even though numbers of members only warranted the labours and cost of one travelling preacher. The reason for conference disapproval is not stated in the *Minutes* but one clue is the requirement that the preacher exchange periodically with a preacher of a neighbouring circuit. It may be that the aversion to a one-person circuit was to avoid a slip into a 'congregational' model of ministry, and exchanging preachers maintained a sense of itinerancy.

Concern about smallness (and congregationalism) continued into the twentieth century. In 1909 Sir Percy Bunting pondered on an appropriate size for a circuit. He commented that in [his] recent times 'the plan has been tried of endeavouring to fix responsibility by creating small circuits, especially in towns, comprising only one, two or three congregations, or even single stations', but it was not a successful experiment. 'Methodism is not going to become Congregational'[27].

It can be argued that the determining factor in the size of a circuit was a matter of whether or not the circuit was manageable. There would come a point at which either travelling distances, the number of members or number of societies per travelling preacher became excessive and unworkable. The June-November 1826 preaching plan

[26] "Minutes of Conference 1820", *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences,* vol.5 (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, 1820), 145.

[27] Percy Bunting, "Methodism Today – Development and Reunion" in W.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman, George Eayrs, *A New History of Methodism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), vol.2, 495.

for the Leeds Circuit shows 43 preaching places plus two ‘in the open air’. This must have been the highest level of tolerance because by the following December-May Quarter (1826/7), Leeds had been split into two circuits, East and West.[28] Alternatively, it might be that a circuit was too small to be viable. Windsor, head of a single-minister circuit established in 1815, spent a year being part of a Hammersmith and Windsor Circuit in 1818, its viability being in doubt. But by 1820, prospects and membership numbers (153) had improved and the Windsor Circuit was cut loose again.[29]

A typical circuit was composed of a society in a larger centre of habitation (often a town) together with a number of other societies in surrounding villages. Obelkevich described the circuit towns of this period as the ‘capitals’ of Methodist circuits, and the hub of the circuit activity.[30] This was still the case in 1910. A notice on the October 1910 – January 1911 Newark Wesleyan Plan headed ‘Market Day’ referred to the superintendent being available every Wednesday at a location in Newark, the circuit town, ‘to transact business with office bearers and others from the villages’. There were 26 chapels and preaching places in the circuit outside Newark and the superintendent was obviously making the best use of his time and theirs by arranging meetings when they were in town for the market.[31] Greaves claimed that the significance of the ‘market town’ to circuit organisation was waning by the end of the nineteenth century. This plan shows that at least in Newark it lasted longer.

The ‘town plus villages’ pattern has been of interest to geographers. It has been compared to the model established for the Poor Law Unions in the mid-nineteenth century and Pryce, while acknowledging the different origins, saw a similar intended pattern for efficiency and

[28] Early preaching plans of the Leeds Circuit, OCMCH.
[29] Norman P. Nickless, *The Evolution of the Windsor Circuit 1815 – 1933,* undated [? 1965], OCMCH.
[30] James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 5- 6.
[31] *Newark Circuit Preaching Plan October 1910-January 1911*, in author’s possession.

effectiveness in both.[32] Pryce concluded that '…the circuit areas resulted from cost minimization along the same lines as the 'economic arguments advanced by Christaller for defining urban centrality'.[33] He based his conclusion on Greaves' (1968) study of Wesleyan circuits in East Yorkshire.[34] Pryce described the study as revealing that 'The preaching circuits had been designed so that, on theoretical grounds, minimum energy input would achieve the maximum effectiveness in the promotion of the Christian religion, with greatest savings and efficiencies'.

Pryce was mistaken however, in concluding that the circuit pattern of 'town plus villages' was intentionally set up with 'cost minimization' in mind, since the history suggests otherwise. [35] The pattern of the 'circuit town plus villages' originally simply emerged, however fortuitously, from the need for a base from which the travelling preacher might visit the societies and form new ones. The origins of Methodism lay in the pattern of the outward and circulating movement of the early travelling preachers around their circuits/rounds, and not in the pattern of believers being expected to travel into a town to a single church (as might be the case with the Roman Catholic community). Nevertheless, the pattern proved to be useful in many cases, such as in the Newark example. It would also be true that travelling distances and pastoral access became one important consideration when large circuits came to be divided. (See para.3.2.6 below).

Greaves discussed the ideal shape of a circuit and using geographer's methods, concluded that the best shape was hexagonal. He wrote '…It is justifiable to claim therefore that a hexagonal tessellation was latent in the Methodist circuit system during the nineteenth century though the

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[32] W. T. R. Pryce, ed., *From Family History to Community History* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 133, 134.
[33] Pryce, *Family History,* 134.
[34] Greaves, "Methodism in Yorkshire", cited in Pryce, *Family History*, 133-134.
[35] There was sometimes a subtle distinction made between town and village implying, rightly or wrongly, that the 'town' members were more capable and more sophisticated.

tessellation was not necessarily visible…' [36] He also looked in detail at the link between the area of the Poor Law Unions and the circuits and demonstrated a number of similarities; indeed identical boundaries in many rural areas of Yorkshire in his study period. [37] However, while such shapes and similarities existed, and the hexagonal shape was one which supported maximum efficiency and reduced travelling distances, it is doubtful if those planning either the expansion or division of circuits gave thought to the specific matters of hexagonal shape or correspondence with Poor Law areas. Much can be attributed to coincidence. Another difficulty with both Greaves' and Pryce's conclusions is that there is no reference to factors such as membership numbers and pastoral considerations. Further, as Greaves did note, topography sometimes dictated circuit size and shape (such as in the Pennine Dales), creating circuits which were long and thin. In these cases the efficiency argument is less convincing. Again, as cities grew, these were divided into several circuits, each of which was wedge-shaped, with a portion of suburbs and countryside.[38] Greaves quoted the example of the Leeds East and West circuits in 1831, which also corresponded to '…wedge – shaped divisions of the urban field of the city denoted by the Poor Law boundaries.'[39]

There was a negative aspect of the 'town plus surrounding villages' model, of which modern geographers had no reason to be aware: one which emerged in the nineteenth century. That was the sense of neglect felt by members in the smaller villages, because the pastoral and preaching resource of the itinerants had come to be focused in the town and larger villages. The 'town plus villages' model of a circuit encouraged the practice of housing ministers in the towns. In this scenario, they barely had time to attend to the rising town populations, simply rushing out at the last minute to a village for a week-night service, before hastening back. As early as 1819, William Myles was

[36] Greaves, "Methodism in Yorkshire", 285.
[37] Ibid, 266.
[38] Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism,* vol.3, 2nd edn. revised, 491.
[39] Greaves, "Methodism in Yorkshire", 267and his fig.50.

attributing the success of the Ranters (Primitive Methodists) to 'The [Wesleyan] present Plan of Preachers living in the great towns…and only just preaching in the country'.[40] The concept of the itinerant on his round being the routinely regular, if necessarily infrequent, pastor, encourager, adviser and teacher to each of the societies in turn, be they large or small, had vanished. Rural discontent suggests that something of what was seen as essentially Wesleyan Methodist was lost in the change.

Looking for a solution, one author proposed in 1873 that '…both for the villages themselves and for the relief of towns, not infrequently hampered by the claims of numerous village places…village circuits' should be established.[41] In proposing this he felt the need to counter an argument that such a circuit would be seen as demotion for a minister by pointing out the recuperative benefits of the pace of country life. What this author had not taken into account was the element of 'the strong supporting the weak': a significant expression of connexionalism in the individual circuit. The town church often provided the resources of finance and members with professional skills to support the village chapels.

3.2.5 Measurement of circuit size

One measure of the size of a circuit was the number of societies it comprised. 'We broke up much fresh ground, took in many new places, and many souls were converted to God.'[42] At the 1834 local preachers' meeting of the Bourn Wesleyan circuit, three villages, Falkingham, Dowsby and Cawthorpe, were described as being 'taken onto the Plan'. That meant that societies (however fragile) had been established in those villages and these would now feature on the preaching plan: the rota for preaching in the circuit. In other words,

[40] Letter from William Myles to Jabez Bunting; Hull, 5 June, 1819 quoted in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.4*,* 358.
[41] Quotation from Frederick J. Jobson, *A Plea for the Support and Spread of Methodism in the Villages,* 1873, 4-8, in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.4, 544.
[42] William Hunter, Scarborough Circuit, report in *Arminian Magazine 1779*, 593.

they had become part of the circuit.[43] This particular circuit therefore became larger by three additional societies to manage and provide for, and a number of miles longer.

In the earliest days, societies were coming and going from a circuit as some causes thrived and became established and others were too weak to survive. The itinerant James Rogers described how, in his youth, he and a few friends asked about 'getting the preaching' in their own village. The preachers were willing 'to make a trial', this was successful and so 'they soon joined about fifteen of us in a class, and afterwards took us into their Plan'. [44] Unfortunately, some then lost enthusiasm and drifted away, the leader and his wife died, followed by the man who provided hospitality for the preachers, and the cause failed. This account is a good illustration of one way in which the early circuits developed, grew or shrank, and also of the fragility of the situation and the dependence on local leadership and support.

A review written in 1878 about Tindall's *Wesleyan Atlas,* observing the varying density of coloured dots, noted that while 'in North Durham and the region around Newcastle upon Tyne …chapels of that [Wesleyan Methodist] denomination are numerous and clustered very near one another' '…the map of Hants is dreary indeed'. [45] The reviewer seems alarmed at the thought that 'in England alone', 8,631 places still had no Wesleyan chapel; and that roughly half of these were places with fewer than 250 inhabitants. The reviewer may have intended his remark to draw attention to Wesleyan Methodism being less strong in rural areas. However, the question of whether a circuit could or should sustain a society in every village of less than 250 inhabitants, especially at a time

[43] *Bourn Wesleyan Local Preachers Meeting Minutes 1838 onwards*, LINC Meth/B/Bourne.
[44] 'The Life of Mr. James Rogers' in Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers chiefly written by themselves,* 3rd edn., vol.4 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1866), 281-282.
[45] Review (author unknown), *London Quarterly Review,* October 1877-January 1878, vol.19, 152-3 and 157-8, quoted in Robert F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes 1850-1900* (Leicester, Edgar Backus, 1954), 97.

of rapid movement to the towns, does not seem to have occurred to him.[46]

Another way of describing the size of a circuit was to state the number of members. Unlike the Church of England whose parish size could be stated in terms of general population, Methodist circuits were described in terms of the number of members in each society added together. The list of 'Numbers of members in our Societies' in the Conference *Minutes* (first produced in 1767) was shown by circuit and this gives a clue to the size of each. [47] In 1820 for example, numbers ranged from such as Kettering 230, Maidstone 315 and Swindon 111, to such as Louth 1500, Hull 2150 and Manchester 3025.[48] These circuit membership figures could have several interpretations. A lower number could indicate a newly established or newly divided circuit.[49] The Isle of Wight circuit first appears on the list of 1788 with 87 members.[50] A lower number could also indicate an exodus due to emigration (both abroad and to the towns),[51] the effects of a local dispute or a reforming movement,[52] the closure of a main provider of employment or the strength of other traditions in the area. Conversely, a higher number could indicate a well established circuit going back to Wesley's early itinerancy,[53] a 'revival', a particular enthusiasm for Methodism in the area, an exodus from another tradition, or a heavily populated area. Epidemics also played a part. 'There has been a great

[46] Haigh had a similar concern and included in his *Synopsis* a list of 366 'Places unoccupied as yet, by the Wesleyan Methodists'. Some of the places had (in 1821) populations as low as 56 (Youlton). Haigh, *Synopsis.*
[47] "Minutes of Conference 1767" in Henry Rack, ed., *The Works of John Wesley,* vol.10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 346, 347.
[48]Ms. *Journal of the Liverpool Conference 1820*, Question11, MARM 1977/ 585.
[49] See later for circuit division.
[50] *"*Minutes of Conference 1788*"* in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 657.
[51] 'I fear the prodigious amount of emigration to America, etc. will keep our aggregate numbers low.' Letter from Jabez Bunting to Edmund Grindrod, Liverpool, May 1 1832, in W.R. Ward, ed., *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830 - 1858* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 124.
[52] In 1797, 320 of the 600 members of the town society of the Nottingham Wesleyan circuit left to join the Methodist New Connexion - 'the Kilhamites'. In this case, also seizing a chapel and preachers' houses. G.H.H., [initials only] compiler, *The History of Wesleyan Methodism in Nottingham and its Vicinity* (Nottingham: W.Bunny, Bridgesmith Gate, 1859), 55.
[53] For example, London, Bristol and Newcastle.

turning to religion in those parts [Birmingham] since the cholera began its ravages'.[54]

Numbers of members were monitored closely by the conference. In the 1769 list of circuits in the *Minutes*, some (Norfolk, Sheffield and Lancashire South) were marked as having 'fewer members than there were a year ago.'[55] This looks like an early example of 'name and shame'.

3.2.6 Circuit Division

John Wesley was very reluctant to decrease the size of the vast circuits of his day. He had agreed to the division of the Bradford-on-Avon Circuit in 1781, but only if there was just one horse kept in each circuit.[56] The reason for this comment is not clear but may have had to do with not making things too convenient for the preacher, or perhaps avoiding unnecessary expense. He was still of the same opinion in 1790: 'Most of our circuits are too small rather than too large. I wish we had no circuit with fewer than three preachers in it, or less than 400 miles riding in it in four weeks'.[57] In a reply to a letter from Thomas Hanson, Wesley wrote that he was 'never fond of multiplying circuits without an absolute necessity' and agreed with Hanson that the idea of more (and therefore smaller) circuits 'is oftener proposed for the *ease* of the preachers than the profit of the people.'[58] Having said this, it was not beyond Wesley to offer the opposite opinion. One year later in

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[54] Quotation from Hugh Bourne's journal in John T. Wilkinson, *Hugh Bourn 1772 – 1852* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 142.

[55] "Minutes of Conference 1769" in *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences,* vol.1 (London: John Mason at the Wesleyan Conference Office, 1862).

[56] Letter from John Wesley to Samuel Bradburn, dated November 1781, John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley,* vol.7, 1780-1787 (London: Epworth Press, 1931, reprinted 1960), 88.

[57] Quotation from a letter from John Wesley to a local preacher in the Sarum Circuit 1790, in Barry Briggs, "Saints of the Soil: Early Methodism in Agricultural Areas" in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* (hereafter *Proc. WHS*), vol.48, October 1992, 187.

[58] Letter from John Wesley to Thomas Hanson dated London, January 30, 1782 in Telford, *Letters,* vol.7, 104.

1791, he was saying that the Dales Circuit was too large and that 'four or five others might be taken out of it'.[59]

Circuits nevertheless were divided in Wesley's lifetime, and at first the process of circuit division seems to have been simple and straightforward. On arriving from the conference of 1776, the itinerant Thomas Taylor found the Keighley circuit to be 'a large rambling range' and wrote that: 'I divided the circuit into two very compact rounds, making Colne and the societies which surrounded it into a circuit by itself; by which means both the circuits are become very agreeable.'[60] Taylor appears to have taken this action on his own authority and for his own (and possibly colleagues') benefit. Too much cannot rest on one example, but it could be concluded that before about 1790, when members were untroubled by stirrings of discontent over the 'power' of the itinerants, they were content to allow travelling preachers to take such decisions.

Some eighteen years later the situation was very different. The 1793 Leeds Wesleyan conference addressed the matter of dividing circuits and directed that: 'No division shall be made in a Circuit, where it does not appear to the District Meeting, the Committee of Delegates and the Conference that there is such an enlargement of the work of God as requires it'.[61] Concerns about financial viability lay behind this directive, but it also highlights the strength of control of the conference and the district meeting over the circuits at this time. By 1797 however, after a period of turbulence, the conference recognized the need to make some concessions to local decision-making. Thus, the 1797 Leeds Wesleyan conference special address to the societies included the rule that in future circuits could not be divided without the

[59] The Dales Circuit originally included the dales of the northern Pennines and much of Westmoreland.
[60] "The Life of Mr. Thomas Taylor", in Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers, chiefly written by themselves,* vol.5 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1866), 42- 43.
[61] The answer to question 23: 'What directions shall be given concerning the division of Circuits?' Ms. *Journal of the Leeds Conference 1793.* MARM 1977/ 585.

‘abbrobation’ of the quarterly meeting. [62] The history of such legislation provides insight into the way in which within the connexional system, the balance of elements of power shifted backwards and forwards.

By 1827, the increasing population density of the towns meant that single-town circuits had to be divided to remain manageable, and it would appear that members were taking advantage of the freedom this offered to choose in which circuit they preferred to attend their class meeting and hold their membership.[63] The 1827 Manchester conference perceived the potential for a breakdown of order and discipline, so it was ruled that members were to meet in classes in the circuits in which they resided. One reason given for the rule was that ‘no security can be obtained on the purity and character of non-resident members’.[64] If a person could not be seen day to day, they could be falling into bad habits without being noticed. This attention to individual purity and character harked back to the earliest days of Methodism. There also appears to be one rule for the members and another for the itinerants. In their case: ‘Preachers of different circuits in the same town are advised to meet once a month for mutual conference and prayer, brotherly love and friendly consultation on subjects of common concern to their respective circuits’.[65]

The most obvious reason for division was the sheer number of members and/or societies for the travelling preachers effectively to do their job. The superintendent of the Devonport circuit described how, in a circuit of ’46 chapels, preaching houses and societies’ it was proving impossible for the itinerants to visit many of the societies more than once a month, and several of them only once a quarter. [66] He partly

[62] Se Chapter Four – The Circuit Quarterly Meeting.
[63] See also Chapter Seven: Local Preachers, the Local Preachers’ Meeting and the Preaching Plan.
[64] MS *Journal, Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1827, Manchester*, 821, MARM 1977/ 585.
[65] ibid
[66] Letter from Corbett Cooke to Jabez Bunting dated Conference, 1840, in Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism*, no. 189, 244.

attributed the way that the Warrenite revolt had been able to take root in the circuit to the low level of pastoral influence.

Division of circuits could create as many problems as they attempted to solve. Greaves examined the further division into four of the Leeds circuits in the 1840's and noted the problems created by the 'unwieldy and expansive arrangement'. One issue was the distances created between the main part of the Leeds Fourth circuit and the outlying villages which led to excessive horse hire expenditure. Another was a dispute around the relationship between a proposed dividing boundary and the main road which formed a civic boundary. [67] It took until much later in the century for the conference to legislate on the matter of the boundaries of divided circuits:

> …The boundaries of circuits which are divided shall in future be fully stated in the Minutes of the Synod to which they belong…and a copy inserted in the Minutes of the Quarterly Meetings of the Circuits concerned…Ordinance or for other maps of the localities concerned shall be coloured to show the boundaries… [68]

Plate 3, a diagram of the boundary of a divided circuit in Preston, may be one such 'map of the locality'.[69]

Although many Wesleyan circuit divisions were made for straightforward reasons, there were others made for tactical reasons. It would appear that by 1812, some circuits had become worldly-wise in regard to the benefits of being a Connexion. By the tactic of dividing large circuits, they could justify more preachers, whose allowances

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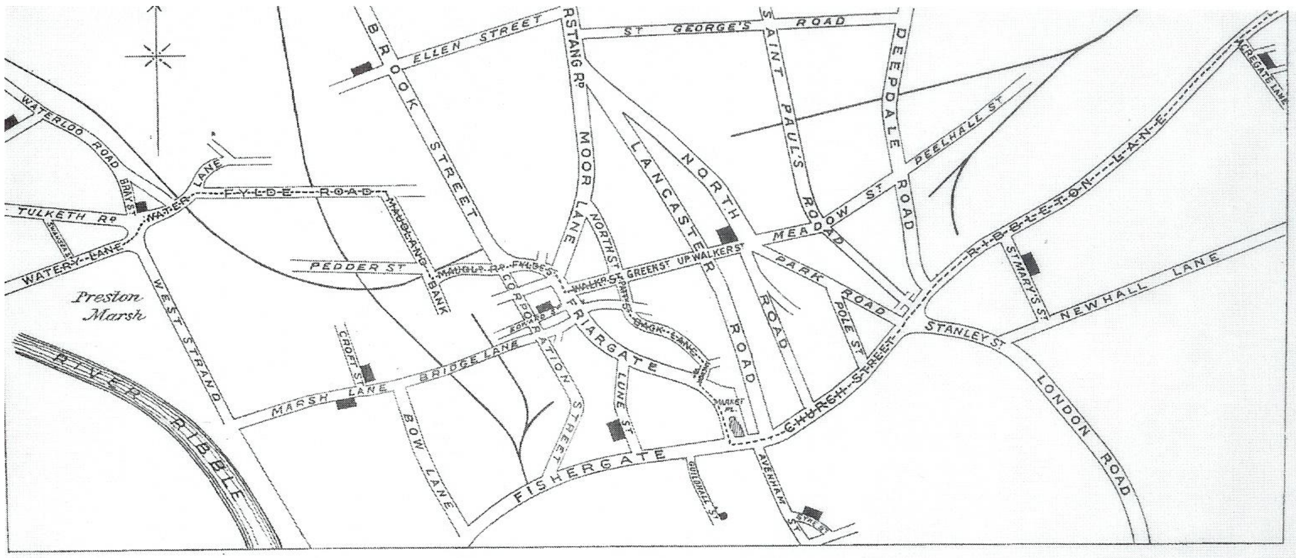
[67] Greaves, "Methodism in Yorkshire", chapter 9, 250.

[68] "Standing Orders, 49 – Boundaries of Circuits" *in Minutes of Conference 1895* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Bookroom, 1895), 350.

[69] Found in W. Pilkington, *The Makers of Wesleyan Methodism in Preston and the relation of Methodism to the Temperance and Teetotal Movements* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1890), 94. Accessed at https://archive.org/bookreader.



The boundaries of the two Circuits are defined by a line commencing at the Marsh end, and thence continuing along the centre of the following streets, viz.:—Swansea Terrace, Water Lane, Fylde Road, Maudland Bank, Maudland Road, Fylde Street, Walker Street, Patten Street, Back Lane, Anchor Weind, Market Place (west side), Church Street, and Ribbleton Lane.

Boundary marked thus..................

Wesleyan Chapels and Mission Rooms marked thus ■

Plate 3 Map showing the boundary created when the Preston circuit was divided by the conference of 1866 according to a plan recommended by the circuit committee

W. Pilkington, *The Makers of Wesleyan Methodism in Preston* could then be claimed, to some extent, from connexional funds.[70] This tactic put a severe strain on the already embarrassed connexional finances. As early as 1797, the conference issued a directive that '…where any circuit has been divided, so as to render more preachers necessary than the people are able to support …such circuits must again be united' . [71] The circuits continued to try the tactic and the 1812 conference was obliged to direct that a circuit wishing to divide had to 'distinctly prove' that there was enough work for another travelling preacher, whose expenses would be borne by the circuit. [72]

In his notes on the conference of 1813, Jonathan Crowther attributed the pecuniary embarrassment of the connexional funds at that time to 'making so many poor circuits out of the inferior parts of good ones'. He described the circuits thus formed as being generally 'burdensome on the conference'.[73] It is not clear from his writing exactly why these divisions were taking place. It may have been the attempts to gain extra connexional funding. An even less worthy motive however may have been to lose the 'inferior parts' to provide a more desirable and less scattered circuit to attract good preachers. One writer, with justification or not, complained that the 1829 division of the Wesleyan Bristol circuit left 'all the distant country places…with a mass of very poor people' in one half and the other half, the Metropolitan Circuit,…suited to the state of some venerable father of the connection [*sic*] and his favoured helpers'.[74] The writer implied not only that the division had been weighted to favour the 'Metropolitan Circuit', where Bristol city, with Wesley's New Room, would have had a certain

[70] See Chapter Five – Temporal Affairs.
[71] Quotation from a letter from the conference "To the Superintendents throughout the Connexion – Minutes of Conference 1797", *Minutes of the Methodist Conference,* vol.1 (London: John Mason, 1862), 227.
[72]"Minutes of Conference 1812" in *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences,* vol.3 (London: John Mason, 1863), 293.
[73]Jonathan Crowther, *A Portraiture of Methodism: or the History of the Wesleyan Methodists…*2nd edn. enlarged and considerably improved (London: Richard Edwards, 1815), 154.
[74] Letter from William Leach dated Bristol, July 17 1829, in W.R.Ward, ed., *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1820-1829,* (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1972), no. 137, 209.

amount of prestige, but also that stationing had become tinged with issues of reward and favour.[75]

The financial implications of dividing circuits were also an issue for the New Itinerancy (Methodist New Connexion), which broke away from Wesleyan Methodism in 1797. Question 16 of the 1800 conference minutes asked 'what can be done to prevent expense by the division of circuits? ' Those gathered must have known from previous experience in the Wesleyan Connexion that increasing expense was a hazard. The answer was that if a quarterly meeting deemed a division necessary, then the details had to be sent to the conference '…that the brethren may determine the propriety of it'.[76]

Division was also used as a tactical tool to deal with 'agitators'. The separation of the Wesleyan Lambeth circuit from Southwark in 1829 was described as having 'confounded and mortified the opposition party' and that 'providence has graciously interfered to break, at least in great degree, this most destructive coalition'.[77] In 1837, James Blackett commented that while shifting certain societies from the Wesleyan Bramley circuit to the neighbouring circuits of Yeadon and Leeds West would see them 'better supplied' [by preachers] it would also have the advantage that it would '…divide the influence of the local preachers by various arts and plans taking the affairs of the circuit into their own hands…'[78] This tactic was noted and abhorred by those wanting reform and an end to what they saw as domination by the travelling preachers. It only served to prove their case: '…can you see nothing in all this [the division of circuits] but the "Policy of the Preachers",

[75] 'I will do my best to get you a comfortable and easier circuit'. Ms. letter from John Rattenbury (1806-79) to Richard Tabraham (stationed in Lewes) dated January 27 1868. *The Papers of the Rattenbury Family,* vol.1, MARM PLP 86.28.49.
[76] *Minutes of Conversations between Preaches and Delegates, late in Connexion with the Rev. John Wesley held in Manchester on 2nd etc. June 1800,* Question 16.
[77] Letter from David McNicholl to Jabez Bunting, Lambeth, July 17 1829, Ward, *Early Correspondence,* no.138, 210.
[78] Letter from James Blackett, Superintendent of the Bramley Circuit 1835-7, to Jabez Bunting, Bramley, July 14, 1837, in Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism,* no.143, 189. This was to do with an attempt to establish voting by ballot in the quarterly meeting.

Superintendents imbibing despotic principles; …a crafty attempt to divide that they might weaken the local courts?' [79]

Although the process of dividing circuits, for whatever reason, was largely a matter of administrative procedure, a comment from 'An Old Local Preacher' written in 1820 is a reminder that there was a personal cost to this. He commented that 'By the division of the Circuits, when new ones are formed out of parts of old ones, the Local Preachers are separated from their old friends, among whom they have laboured with acceptance, comfort and success…' [80] The travelling preachers would be moving on in any case; but the local preachers were limited to the reduced area of the new circuit. This meant that relationships forged with the societies and people they had served were brought to an abrupt end.

In 1871, the Derby Wesleyan circuit quarterly meeting was asked to approve the division of the circuit into two – Derby North (14 churches) and Derby South (10 churches). The local newspaper reported that 'Derby Circuit has long been felt unwieldy in its interests and management, and there has been a gradual and earnest feeling that a division was best for the spiritual work of the circuit'. The agreed arrangement was considered the wisest course of action 'financially with respect to the income and trust property; numerically, as to the members and preaching places; and geographically as to the position and accessibility of the country places'.[81] This list of the factors supports an argument for saying that, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, official regulations on the 'right' size for a circuit simply did not exist in Methodism because regulations were neither necessary, nor the Methodist style of doing things. In this example,

[79] Letter to Mr. William Carter in reply to a pamphlet entitled "Methodism, Past and Present", by George Taylor, Wesleyan Minister (London: Whittaker and C, 1852),1, OCMCH
[80] Vicary Purdy, *Thoughts on the case of the Local Preachers in the Methodist Connexion* (Bristol: 1820), 9.
[81] "Derby Wesleyan Methodist Circuit" in *The Derby Mercury,* Wednesday, April 12, 1871; issue 8184, Nineteenth-Century British Library Newspapers online.

apparently without any 'guidelines', the aim of the division is clearly spiritual, the factors weighed are several and practical, and the result acceptable.

3.2.7 Circuit Amalgamation

Circuits were not only divided but also amalgamated. By the mid-nineteenth century, it was clear that not all circuits were thriving. The 1854 Wesleyan *Minutes of Conference* contained a report which discussed the possibility of uniting circuits: the small or feeble with the strong so that work could be consolidated. [82] It even suggested that 'unproductive places' might be abandoned so that 'greater energy' could be directed 'to those places which shall be retained for cultivation'. One of the main causes for circuit amalgamation was population movement. By the second half of the nineteenth century, rural members were heading to the towns to find employment. The shift of industry to locations along the line of the new railways dealt a severe blow to small rural chapels. In 1886, the "Annual Address of the Conference to the Societies" referred to 'constantly decreasing populations of our villages and rural districts' with '…the villages constantly acting as feeders to our large centres, a continuous stream flowing from the villages to the towns'. [83] Around 1909, one writer described the struggle for existence of chapels in many such circuits as hopeless: 'Depression induced languor; languor and dullness were fatal to aggressiveness [spreading the gospel]'.[84] The writer's own depression was lifted by contemplating the possibilities of the bicycle: '…with that easy means of locomotion to hand, the policy of amalgamating two or three circuits has been adopted'.[85] What is not

[82] "Minutes of Conference 1854", *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences,* vol.12 (London: John Mason, 1862).
[83] "Annual Address to the Methodist Societies", *Minutes of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, July 1886* (London; Wesleyan Methodist Book-Room), 306. Kendall referred to the building up of strong Primitive Methodist societies in the countryside '…seemingly thwarted by the laws which control the labour market'. He gave the example of Berwick. Kendall, *Origin and History,* vol.2, print on demand edn., 137.
[84] R. Waddy Moss, "Wesleyan Methodism – the Last Fifty Years" in W. J. Townsend, H. B. Workman and George Eayrs, eds., *A New History of Methodism* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), vol.1, 463.
[85] Ibid.

clear is whether amalgamation generally resulted in the closure of some preaching places. If amalgamation was simply a way of maintaining sufficient numbers of members to make the stationing of one or more ministers viable, the problem of too many individual societies for effective pastoral contact remained.

Around the same time, another phase of amalgamating circuits occurred. In 1902 for example, the St. Neots, St. Ives and Huntingdon circuits were designated for amalgamation; the united circuit to be called 'The Huntingdonshire Mission' and the Guildford, Alton, Petersfield and Basingstoke circuits to be united and called the 'Surrey and North Hampshire Mission'. This was presented as a strategy for 'mission', but in reality it may have been more of a financial necessity. Wesleyan Methodism in Hampshire appears never to have been strong.

By 1909, the amalgamation of many circuits was under way. Sir Percy Bunting remarked that '…both in towns and in the country the aggregation of circuits into larger areas is going well.' Again it is not clear what were the underlying reasons for this process or what strategic planning had been undertaken. However he expressed concern that in a large circuit, the individuality of congregations would need attention paid and therefore ministers should serve their own churches regularly (presumably rather than generally serve the whole of the circuit). [86] This last remark highlights the tension in the Methodist system between ministers being appointed to the circuit as a whole, yet needing to engage with specific congregations sufficiently often to build up relationships.

3.3 Circuit development In Primitive Methodism

Primitive Methodism adopted the concept of the circuit from its Wesleyan 'parent' and as with Wesleyan Methodism, there were no

[86] Sir Percy Bunting, in Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History,* vol. 2, 495, 496.

specific rules laid down for the size of a circuit. PM circuits could also be described in terms of membership or numbers of societies. Petty described a Primitive Methodist circuit simply as '…of more or less extent, according to the number of the societies included, and the distance of the places at which respective societies meet'.[87] This description of a circuit might equally well have applied to a Wesleyan circuit, yet the way in which Primitive Methodist circuits grew, multiplied, divided and established boundaries was completely different.

3.3.1 Circuit Expansion

The Primitive Methodist Connexion began as a single circuit: Tunstall, in the West Midlands. From the foundation of the Connexion in 1811[88] until 1816 it remained a single circuit, consolidating and strengthening its position. But at that point, frustration with this policy (which was seen to be contrary to the revivalist origins of the denomination) won the day and an active policy of missionary work began.[89] From this one circuit, 'missionaries' both male and female,[90] were sent out into the surrounding area. In Primitive Methodism, the whole process of establishing new centres of activity was referred to in terms of mission, thus 'mission stations' were infant circuits and the preachers sent to establish new societies were referred to as 'missionaries'. Structural development reflected the ethos of the denomination: this was how Primitive Methodism interpreted its reason for being.

[87] Petty, *History,* 568. The official definition of 'circuits' was 'each circuit is composed of a number of places at which public worship is established…' *General Minutes of the Conferences of the Primitive Methodist Connexion consolidated at and by the Conference held at Lynn-Regis in Norfolk, May 20-25, 1836* (Bemersley: 1836).

[88] The first class tickets were issued in May 1811 and the name Primitive Methodists was first adopted in February 1812.

[89] The consolidation policy, referred to as the 'Tunstall non-mission law' had been favoured by the majority in the circuit, and articulated by the circuit steward, James Steele. Hugh Bourne favoured aggressive evangelism. H. B. Kendall, in Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History,* vol. I, 572, 573.

[90] 'Hannah Johnson acting as a Missionary for one quarter shall receive £1.0.0'. Ms. *Minutes of the Hull Primitive Methodist Quarterly Meeting* 13 September 1819. MARM 1986/003.

From this one very large Tunstall circuit, others were created, thus expanding the Connexion. The process was rather delightfully described by H.B. Kendall, much-quoted early historian of Primitive Methodism, 'by analogies with organic chemistry'.[91] He described 'budding', as in the yeast cell and 'dissemination' as in the 'seed of a thistle wafting on downy wings to a favouring spot' and even a shoot springing up 'in an unexpected quarter from the parent root'.[92] Kendall's analogy is useful in describing what took place.

The 'budding' process he described was that once a section of a circuit proved strong enough to manage its own affairs, it was let go from the 'parent' to become another circuit. An illustration of 'budding' was the establishment of the Hull circuit. In this case, a delegation from Hull petitioned the Nottingham quarterly meeting in 1819 to send them a 'missionary'. There had already been a revival movement in Hull, but Wesleyan members, Mr and Mrs Woolhouse, were frustrated by lack of Wesleyan support. Mrs Woolhouse personally appeared before the Nottingham December quarterly meeting and petitioned for a travelling preacher to be sent to Hull. William Clowes, one of the founders of Primitive Methodism, was sent.[93] Hull thus became a 'branch' of the Nottingham circuit; but so successful was this enterprise that Hull was 'budded' to become a separate circuit from Nottingham only six months later in June 1819 and the first purpose-built chapel, Mill Street Chapel, opened in September that year.[94] By 1824, the Hull Circuit had itself 'budded' another seventeen circuits.[95]

Kendall's 'thistle' illustration described the process of establishing mission stations as outreaches from the original circuits. One reason was that a circuit could not increase in size for being hemmed in by

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[91] Holliday Bickerstaff Kendall, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, (London: Joseph Toulson, [1890]), 51.
[92] Ibid, 51**.**
[93] See Kendall or Petty for the role of William Clowes in the origins of Primitive Methodism.
[94] Kendall, *History,* 42ff.
[95] Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History*, vol. 1, 580.

others, another that there was insufficient work for its preachers. A further reason was simply a passion for ‘spreading the gospel’ anywhere and everywhere. Thus, Tunstall circuit, assisted by Scotter (Lincs) circuit, opened a mission in Gloucester and Somerset, (the Western Mission).[96] The Bolton circuit sent a missionary to the Isle of Man (c1823) only six months after itself becoming a circuit, formed from the Manchester circuit.[97] A mission was ‘…an outpost to which the circuit serves as the base’.[98] Once a mission had enough suitable leaders, it became a circuit in its own right. By 1823, the four branches of the Nottingham Circuit in East Anglia: Norwich, Fakenham, Cambridge and Lynn had become separate circuits.[99]

This passion for outreach caused Kendall to admit to his readers that it was impossible to give ‘…any clear idea of the geographical extension of the denomination from this year 1819. There was no formal allotment of territory to the tribes [circuits]. Each and all were trying to conquer as much of the good land for themselves as they could’.[100] One of the features of Kendall’s history of the denomination is the rich anecdotal material accompanying the record of this circuit expansion. One example explains the process as recorded at the time. On July 15 1821, a certain Walton Carter of the Manchester Circuit ‘went to open’ Rochdale. Carter wrote:

> Three of our Society went with me, we sang up the street at one o’clock, and collected a good many people. But heavy rain coming on, I was obliged to desist; but resumed my place at five, and preached to a large and attentive

[96] Kendall, *History,* 55. The Western Mission eventually produced six circuits for the Bristol District and seven for the Southampton and Salisbury District.
[97] Holliday Bickerstaff Kendall, *The Origins and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (London: Robert Bryant, 1905), vol.2, print on demand edn., 29.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Geoffrey Morris, “Primitive Methodism in Nottinghamshire 1815-1932” (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 1967), 10.
[100] Kendall, *History,* 48. An allusion to the tribes of Israel entering the ‘Promised Land’.

> congregation. Some were affected and I have heard since brought to God'.[101]

There was sometimes considerable geographical distance between the 'sending' circuit and the mission, and this must have posed problems of management and supervision. The heart too often ruled the head and an unrealistic expectation of cost was a regular problem. Sunderland Circuit established a mission in Weymouth, Dorset in 1834. But Petty tells of how, after an initial enthusiastic reception, which Petty attributed partly to the novelty of one of the two missionaries, Mr Cosens, 'being a man of colour', things did not go well. [102] The two men fell out. One became a Baptist preacher and the other a preacher in the Methodist New Connexion. The station did recover, as in 1837 four preachers were stationed there. This time Weymouth Mission was 'under the care' of the similarly distant Manchester Circuit. John Petty's officially approved history of the Primitive Methodist Connexion to 1860 was not hagiographic and he gave a balanced picture of the progress of the Connexion. He was, however, a little too discreet in covering the reasons for lack of success and outright disasters both in circuit policy and in preachers. The illustration given is perhaps the nearest he came to explaining why things did not work out as planned.

Despite Kendall's description of the outreach process as floating thistle seeds, it was actually somewhat aggressive. This is well illustrated by the need for a connexional regulation about what constituted 'the right of a circuit to occupy a place': 'It having been always that the first possession had the right, and that such right continued, until the circuit possessing such right relinquished it; resolved that this order be permanent…'. [103] There was no connexional master plan until 1843

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[101] Walton Carter quoted in Kendall, *Origin and History,* vol. 2, print on demand edn., 36.

[102] Mr. George Cosens was West Indian. He had previously (1832) been sent as a missionary to Guernsey in the hope that his colour would prove an attraction at open-air services. Ibid, 160.

[103] *Primitive Methodist Conference Consolidated Minutes 1836*, Question 22.The influence of this Rule still existed in 19i2. No. 276 of the revised rules refers to a station having a 'right of occupation' free from 'interference from another station',

when the sheer scale of missionary operations across the country required the establishment of a connexional General Missionary Committee to manage this aspect of the work. Until then, each circuit simply set out to convert whatever area of the country it chose. [104]

There were many failures in establishing missions and circuits. Most of the problems appear to have been unrealistic expectations of success, internal quarrels and sometimes inadequate resources and insufficient prior knowledge of the area.[105]

3.3.2 Circuit Division

Primitive Methodist circuits initially grew very rapidly. The administrative unwieldiness of a large size of a circuit did not however necessarily mean the creation of a new circuit. Uniquely, the Primitive Methodist Connexion had a system of dividing the circuit internally into 'branches'. 'If a circuit be large, the quarter-day board may form it into branches or branch circuits; each, (except the home branch) have a branch committee and steward, acting under the direction of the circuit committee…'[106] These branches had then the potential to become circuits themselves, when in the branch there were '…a sufficient number of experienced persons to conduct the affairs of a circuit…'[107] For example, in 1820, Darlington (Co. Durham) was created a branch of the Hull Circuit, and the following year, Barnard Castle was

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suggesting a continuing evangelistic competitiveness between circuits. *The General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church; Revised by Order of the Ninety-Third Annual Conference, held at Norwich, June 12-20 1912* (Primitive Methodist Church (Great Britain), 1912), General Books, print on demand edn.

[104] Kendall, *History*, 48.

[105] Kendall went into considerable detail over the origins and difficulties of the mission to London. Kendall, *Origin and History,* vol.2, print on demand edn. 190. However by 1904 there were 47 'London' circuits, nearly 10,000 members and 115 churches. Ibid, 399.

[106]*Primitive Methodist Connexion Consolidated Minutes 1836*, Question 44. According to Kendall the concept of branches originated in 1819 in response to the difficulty in making a preaching plan for so wide an area as the then Nottingham Circuit. Kendall, *History*, 112.

[107] "Minutes of the First Primitive Methodist annual conference 1820", extract from Primitive Methodist. Magazine 1820, 206-21 in Davies, George and Rupp, *History*, vol.4, 377.

separated from it and together with Wolsingham, was formed into a new branch. [108]

There were advantages to the branch system. One was that because the administration of a branch mirrored that of a circuit, the transition from the one to the other could be achieved with ease. Hugh Bourne also saw convenience in being able to plan preachers in a kind of internal itinerancy around the branches of a circuit: two quarters in each branch.[109] Kendall described how the home branch 'exercised rights of jurisdiction and government over the most distant branch, while for local purposes that branch had all the rights of initiative and independence that were needful'.[110]

The speed with which missions became branches and branches circuits shows a spiritual enthusiasm which sometimes outran the organising strength and the ability of the people to sustain the work. In a year when twenty-four new circuits were reported, the 1824 Conference set out regulations to stop branches prematurely being made into circuits. A list of five criteria was drawn up, such as needing enough experienced people to conduct the new circuit's business, and the original circuit business being too much to transact in one day. [111] Enthusiasm however was not always dampened. In 1840, the Fulbeck (Lincs) circuit 'made a fourth attempt to establish a cause in the town of Sleaford'. Yet despite its fragility, Sleaford was made 'head of a circuit, having a branch at Newark' in 1843.[112]

Wesleyan-like simple division of large circuits also took place. In 1840, the Nottingham Circuit reported 925 members, a number which by 1845 had risen to 1279. In 1846 the circuit was divided into two, Nottingham South and Nottingham North, with a total number of

[108] W. M. Patterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism* (London: E.Dalton, 1909).
[109] Hugh Bourne, "History of the Primitive Methodists - chapter 7", in *Primitive Methodist Magazine 1822,*269.
[110] Kendall, *History*, 54*.*
[111] Petty, *History*, 214.
[112] Petty, *History,* 415. Newark became a separate circuit from Sleaford in 1865 with 315 members.

members of 1715. This subdividing must have been overdone in some places because Kendall, looking back on the mid-nineteenth century, reflected on the danger to connexionalism in that some circuits had '…ceased to be a circuit and the preachers itinerant' due to their small size.[113] Nevertheless, he conceded that there were benefits in the form of concentrating effort and developing possibilities in a 'workable area'. The perceived danger of slipping from a connexional to a congregational model of being was a thread which ran through both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism.

In his thesis on Primitive Methodism in Nottinghamshire,[114] Geoffrey Morris reflected on the dynamics of the development of the circuits, and noted a distinct change at the turn of the twentieth century. Circuit division, which had previously been a necessity because of the growth of members and societies, was being used for purely administrative purposes because, according to Morris, a more compact circuit was easier to manage. However, this resulted in the 'parent' circuit being drained of financial and spiritual support. He wrote '…the old circuits rarely lost the old chapels with their debts, and now had fewer members to pay off the debts.' Further: 'Too many circuits now had only one minister and younger ministers therefore forfeited the guidance they had formerly received from a team ministry'. [115] He gave no references for his conclusions and 'team ministry' is a late twentieth century concept, but the membership figures he gave were certainly small. The entire Newark circuit had only 142 members in 1910.[116] It would appear that the 1824 Conference's somewhat prophetic advice had been ignored.

The whole early Primitive Methodist circuit process is nicely summed up in a quotation from a travelling preacher in South Lincolnshire:

[113] Kendall, *History,* 100.
[114] Morris, "Primitive Methodism in Nottinghamshire".
[115] Ibid. Delia Garratt also addressed specific circuit division in "Primitive Methodism in Shropshire, 1820-1900" (PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2002), 237.
[116] Morris, "Primitive Methodism in Nottinghamshire ", appendix 1, 394-395.

> When I commenced travelling [in May 1821] Boston was then a branch of Nottingham Circuit. In a fortnight…I was sent to labour in that branch. About six weeks afterwards Boston was made a circuit, and Spalding Branch became a Branch of Nottingham Circuit. I was appointed to labour in this branch with five other preachers, though at this time there was not sufficient work for two. We therefore opened a mission in the county of Norfolk, where the work of God spread rapidly, and hundreds were soon converted to God.[117]

3.4 Conclusion

The circuit: the primary unit of ministry and oversight was the means by which Methodism was spread across the country and in this lies part of its significance. Because a circuit was a grouping of societies and not a specified, mapped, geographical area, there could be flexibility in responding to changing circumstances. The method of circuit extension used by the early Primitive Methodists demonstrates the use of the circuit as a means of home missionary work, albeit impractical due to distance from the parent circuit. The system of 'branches' however was an effective tool for dealing with large circuits.

Change in circuit size was a tool by which both worthy and less worthy motives could be achieved and one influenced by both internal and external factors. An important determining factor concerning the size of a circuit was manageability; primarily adequate pastoral contact, travelling distances for preachers and financial control. Without connexional guidelines, a combination of workable arrangements for worship services and pastoral care, together with financial viability, and general harmony was sufficient guide.

Since a circuit was the local means of expressing the unity of the individual societies, one with another, the actual size of a circuit should

[117] Kendall, quoting John Oscroft in *Origin and History,* vol.1, 559.

not have mattered, providing that the connexional principle and various practicalities could be achieved. Nevertheless, it can be argued that it was *because* the circuit was not simply a geographical area, but a grouping of specific people, with their own needs and expectations that its size was at times a focus of tension and disagreement.

Chapter Four

The Circuit Quarterly Meeting

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the origins and nature of the circuit quarterly meeting are examined. The conclusion drawn is that it was largely the institution of the quarterly meeting which changed the nature of the circuit from a travelling preacher's round to an organisational unit. It is shown that this important meeting was not a product of Wesley's planning, but the idea and institution of one or other of his preachers. The role of the quarterly meeting is identified as a focus for struggles over power and authority in the Wesleyan Connexion of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the extent of external influences are examined. The development of the constitutions and agenda of Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist meetings are explored and the differences noted.

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4.2 Origins

At first, although the societies were linked by the travels of the preachers on their circuits/rounds, there was no formal means of the society representatives and the preachers meeting together on a regular basis. But an entry in the 1749 *Minutes of Conference* assumes the existence of such a meeting. In answer to Question 7: 'What is the office of an Assistant?' item 6 of the reply was 'To hold Quarterly Meetings, and therein diligently to inquire into the spiritual and temporal state of each Society'.[1] This minute is the first official reference to a circuit quarterly meeting. When and how had this meeting come into being? William Stamp wrote in 1843:

> Upon the *origin* of this important circuit-court, the records of the body [the Connexion] cast no light. The institution of Quarterly Meetings may, however, be traced to a very early

[1] "Minutes of Conference 1749" in Henry D. Rack, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, vol.10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 234.

> period in the history of Methodism; and with other parts of our disciplinary system, appears to have been suggested and rendered necessary by existing circumstances.[2]

Stamp was right in that there is no record of the inauguration of the circuit quarterly meeting in the *Minutes of Conference.* Because of this, William Peirce, in his standard work *Ecclesiastical Principles and Polity of the Wesleyan Methodists* (1873) wrote that it was probably established 'soon, if not immediately after the Methodist Societies were divided into Circuits… in 1746'.[3] This is oddly vague for Peirce, but of course his usual source of information, the *Minutes*, provided him with no clue. Peirce simply made the reasonable assumption that the quarterly meeting had existed for as long as the circuits themselves.

At the 1748 conference there had been a discussion concerning the usefulness of uniting the societies 'more firmly and closely together'.[4] It was agreed that: 'Without doubt it would be much to the glory of God, to the ease of the Ministers, and to the benefit of the Societies themselves both in things spiritual and temporal'[5]. Based on this information, Frank Baker, Methodist historian, concluded that as the itinerants John Bennet and William Darney returned from this conference, Bennet realised that a scheme he used on his own round prior to 1746 might be the answer.[6] This was the idea of holding a quarterly meeting; an idea which he had borrowed from the Society of Friends whose practices he admired, as already noted. [7] Quakers

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[2] William W. Stamp, "On the Origin of Quarterly Meetings", *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine 1843*, 376. Stamp was President of the Conference 1860.
[3] William Peirce, *Ecclesiastical Principles and Polity of the Wesleyan Methodists,* 3rd edn. (London: 1873), 345.
[4] Q.8, "Minutes of Conference 1748" in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 225.
[5] A.8, ibid, 226.
[6] Frank Baker, "The People Called Methodists: Polity", in Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.1 (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 239. Baker did not cite his source for the information that Bennet already had such a scheme.
[7] Frank Baker, "John Bennet and Early Methodist Polity" in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society,* [hereafter *Proc. WHS*] vol. 35, March 1965, 1-4. Baker referred to the four folio pages of the Friends Epistle from the Yearly Meeting for 1747 which Bennet had copied into his letter book.

certainly used a system of quarterly meetings. In eighteenth-century Lincolnshire for example, the seventeen weekly Quaker Meetings for worship and business were grouped under four monthly meetings and these were represented at a pan-Lincolnshire quarterly meeting, which was linked to the yearly meeting in London. The Friends quarterly meeting responded to ‘Queries’ sent down from the yearly meeting. Queries ranged from regular matters such as appropriate certificates for Friends travelling ‘in the work of the Ministry’, the conduct of households and the education of children and the care of the poor; to topical issues such as refusal to pay tithes and bear arms and take part in smuggling. The agenda of the quarterly meeting also covered finance and property matters. [8]

Baker’s conclusion does not itself point to a specific date of institution, but rather is an explanation of how it came to be that Bennet’s diary entry for 18 October 1748 records:

> Was the Quarterly Meeting at Todmorden Edge. The business of the day was over in good time…present Wm Darney, P. Greener, B. Spencer, Mr Grimshaw who preached from Luke 10.42. B. Spencer exhorted and afterwards Mr Grimshaw.[9]

This entry is generally considered to be the earliest record of a circuit quarterly meeting taking place. There were claims for an earlier meeting. W.W. Stamp referred to a belief, current in his day, that the first quarterly meeting took place at Booth Bank in Cheshire. However he refuted the claim, commenting that not only was the meeting a less formal gathering, but that it took place shortly after the Todmorden Meeting.[10] The confusion may have arisen from a comment in Dyson’s history of the Congleton Circuit: ’…on the 20th April in that year, the first Quarterly Meeting was held at Booth-Bank (in the home of an Ann

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[8] Information from transcribed copies of the Society of Friends Quarterly Meetings held in Lincoln,” the 1st 4th mo.1767” and “17th 6th mo.1767”. LINC SOC/ FR3.
[9] John Bennet, entry for 18 October 1748 in Ms. *Diary 1748*, 113, MARM 1977/131.
[10]Stamp, *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine 1843,* 376-382.

Crosse, being a central place).[11] But this was a reference to the first quarterly meeting in the newly established Manchester Circuit (1752), not the first quarterly meeting ever. In fact, Dyson had a footnote referring to the Todmorden Edge meeting, October 18, 1748 as 'the first ever'.[12]

The entry in Bennet's diary for 18 October 1748 gives no clue as to the Todmorden Edge meeting being a connexionally inaugural event. He had noted in his diary for 27 July 1748 that the October meeting would be 'The first Quarterly Meeting *in Lancashire'* [13] [my italics]. However, when Baker referred to a meeting the following April as ' William Grimshaw's *pioneer* Quarterly Meeting at Todmorden Edge *now six months old*' [my italics] he presumably considered that the Todmorden meeting was the connexional first.[14] Without an inauguration date in the *Minutes* and without evidence to the contrary, scholars, other than Peirce, take the earliest known record dated October 1748 to be the date of the very first quarterly meeting.[15] This is not unreasonable, but the compromise is not made clear.

Assuming however that the Todmorden Edge meeting was the first ever, to whom the credit should go for its institution, is uncertain. According to a plaque on the building at Todmorden Edge, William Grimshaw *convened* the meeting. Hunter and Baker concluded that Grimshaw 'took charge' of the meeting, and in his thesis, John Q. Smith attributed the *institution* of the quarterly meeting to Grimshaw for

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[11] J.B. Dyson, *The History of Wesleyan Methodism in the Congleton Circuit* (London: 1856), 42- 43.
[12] A report of the Booth-Bank meeting can be found in an article by G. Marsden in the *Methodist Magazine,* 1843.
[13] John Bennett, diary entry for 27 July 1748:'The first Quarterly Meeting in Lancashire is held at Major Marshall's at Todmorden Edge on Tuesday 18 October 1748'. Bennett also noted the date of the upcoming first Quarterly Meeting for Cheshire – at Woodley on Thursday 20 October. F.F.Bretherton, "Quarterly Meetings" in *Proc. WHS,* vol. 7.4, 1909, 80.
[14] Baker, "John Bennet and Early Methodist Polity".
[15] As well as Baker, these include Richard P. Heitzenrater in *Wesley and the People called Methodists* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1995), 166 and John Lenton in *John Wesley's Preachers* (Milton Keynes, Colorado Springs, Hyderabad: Paternoster Press, 2009), 129.

the Haworth Round.[16] It is therefore far from clear whether it was only the idea which was Bennett's and the practical putting into place, Grimshaw's, or not. The idea was, however, commended to John Wesley by Bennet, as worthy of wider use. In Bennet's 'assistant's report' to John Wesley dated October 22nd 1748, he referred to the business of both the Todmorden quarterly meeting and the one at Woodley shortly afterwards. His report on the Woodley meeting shows how the meetings had two parts, the first business and the second a period of devotions when a hymn was sung, several brethren prayed and Bennet gave a short exhortation. The report went on: 'O dear sir, let this method be used in other places!' [17] There is ambiguity here, since it is not clear if he was referring to the concept of a quarterly meeting as a whole, or simply the two part arrangement, although it is widely assumed that he is referring to the concept as a whole. In any case, this then makes Bennet, if not the practical inaugurator of the quarterly meeting on that round, at least its conceiver and promoter. What is not in doubt is that while John Wesley is rightly credited for many things, he cannot be credited with the invention of the circuit quarterly meeting. The credit for this goes to others, most likely to John Bennet and William Grimshaw.

4.3 The Purpose and nature of a Quarterly Meeting

In 1749, John Bennet described his understanding of the meeting as follows:

> The original purpose and design of these our Quarterly and Monthly meetings was the exercise of a prudent and Christian care of the churches in general, that peace and

[16] John Quincy Smith "A Study of Methodism in a Local Textile Community 1748-1850" (PhD thesis, Ohio State University, 1985), authorised facsimile published by UMI, printed 1987.
[17] Letter from John Bennet to John Wesley dated Chinley, Oct. 22nd, 1748, *The Works of John Wesley,* vol.26, *Letters II, 1749-1755,* Frank Baker, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 335.

> good order may be maintained and that all of us might adorn our profession of Godliness by good works…[18]

This is somewhat different in tone to the purpose minuted at the conference of that same year. For Wesley, it was quite clearly the assistant's meeting of enquiry and oversight, if not interrogation, putting the assistant in the dominant position. Rupert Davies, Methodist historian, wrote that Wesley 'took every opportunity of uniting individual societies for purposes of consultation and mutual support' and so the Quarterly Meeting was an early product of Wesley's 'way of thinking'.[19] If Davies meant that the eventual adoption of Bennet's scheme by the conference fell within Wesley's expressed desire for unity in the Connexion, then there is no difficulty. However, it is clear from the *Minutes* (see note 1) that the democratic concept of consultation referred to by Davies was not what Wesley and the conference thought was the purpose of the meeting.

At the same conference, the question was put 'But some of them know not the nature of Quarterly Meetings. How shall we help them? The answer was to 'desire John Bennet 1. To send us up his plan[20] 2. To go himself as soon as may be to Newcastle and Wednesbury and teach them the nature and methods of these meetings'.[21] Evidence of John Bennet undertaking this specific task is elusive.[22] However, it appears that he was already at work. He recorded in his diary that in May 1749: 'I came to Leeds and it was their Quarterly Meeting. The

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[18] Epistle of John Bennet "To the Stewards at Birstol, May 4th 1749" quoted in Baker "John Bennet and Early Methodist Polity". Monthly meetings never became policy.
[19] Introduction, Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley,* vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 16.
[20] This reference to 'his plan' adds some weight to Bennet being the 'inventor' of the quarterly meeting.
[21] This section was part of the fuller edition of the 1749 minutes: appended to the 1862 minutes. It was added below the statement that the assistant was required to hold quarterly meetings.
[22] Hunter and Baker pointed to the 'missing' *Minutes of Conference* for several ensuing years as the reason for lack of evidence. Frederick Hunter, Frank Baker, "The Origin of the Methodist Quarterly Meeting", *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review,* vol. 18, January 1949, 28-37.

business of the day was not transacted as I would have wished'.[23] Implementation across the Connexion took place, but not instantaneously.

There was no specific rule which linked the timing of the quarterly meetings with quarter-days; perhaps because at that time, planning life by quarter-days was so familiar that it was taken for granted. However, a link can be deduced from a 1777 letter from John Wesley concerning reducing the expenses of a particular circuit by sharing out the cost of the quarterly meeting dinner between the societies:

> …the Motcombe Society has engaged to furnish the Quarterly Dinner every Midsummer, the Coleford Society every Michaelmas, the Societies of Frome and Corsley every Christmas. If the Bradford Society chooses to furnish it at Lady Day, it is well…By this means several pounds in the year will be saved…[24]

The meal would be necessary sustenance for those attending the quarterly meeting, as members would have travelled considerable distances. The tradition of a meal continued into the next century. In March 1828, the Shrewsbury Primitive Methodist circuit committee made plans for 'the same quantity of meat and potatoes' for the next quarterly meeting and agreed that 'there be 3 gallons ale and 6 gallons of beer got'.[25] This was to be paid for by a collection at the dinner.

An important feature of the quarterly meeting was that of the society representatives handing over their financial contributions, both for paying the preachers' stipends and for connexional funds. Smith refers to a George Marsden's uncle travelling from 'Chelmorton in the Peak of

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[23] John Bennet, *Diary.*

[24] John Wesley, Letter to Samuel Wells dated Bristol, September 1777 in John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley,* vol.6 (London: Epworth Press, 1931reprinted 1960), 277-278.

[25] *Committee Minute Book of the Shrewsbury Circuit of the Primitive Methodist Society 1826,* SHROP, NM2123/263.

Derbyshire' to attend the June 1752 meeting in the Manchester Circuit (then including Lancashire, Cheshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and part of Yorkshire) bearing the five shillings contribution of his society.[26]

A revealing picture of this process can be found in "Notes on how to make a profitable Quarterly Meeting" written by Samuel Bradburn at the end of the eighteenth century. Bradburn was concerned that this part of the meeting could become protracted to the detriment of other (probably more spiritual) matters:

> IV That the temporal business may be dispatched as quickly as possible, let every man have his money in his hand, to put down the moment his place is named, and not have to fumble ever so long in getting it out of his pocket. And it would be well to have as little to do, as can be, in having to get change…And as the names of the places are always already written, the money may be gathered in less than half an hour.[27]

Bradburn was clearly describing something with which he was very familiar. While Bradburn was keen to make the process more efficient, he was also concerned that the members saw it as more than simply an occasion to hand over money. (Many of the members would be used to paying their landlords on quarter-days). He reminded them that they were not simply attending as 'errand boys', bringing the money, dining and then departing. They were there to engage with the business in hand and to feel themselves 'accountable to God Almighty' for whatever was transacted.[28]

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[26] George Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism*, 3rd edn. revised (London: Longman, Brown, Green Longmans and Roberts, 1858), vol. 1, 258.
[27] Item IV in Ms. "Notes on how to make a profitable Quarterly Meeting" in collection of Samuel Bradburn letters, n.d, MARM 1977/474. Samuel Bradburn was President of the Conference 1799.
[28] Ibid, item III.

These descriptions help to illustrate the way in which the quarterly meeting contributed to turning the round of the travelling preacher into a unit of oversight, administration and mutual support within a connexional structure. The uncle would never have met up with most of the leaders of the other societies had it not been for the quarterly meeting. Similarly, the action implicit in the heading of very early circuit accounts, for example: “A true Account of the Money brought in by the Stewards from each Society in the Manchester Round” [29] shows how even financial matters were aiding the establishment of a circuit ‘corporate identity’.

In his sermon “On God’s Vineyard”, written in 1787 and first published in 1788, John Wesley described the quarterly meeting as one of a number of ‘helps which few other communities had…’ ‘The use of these Quarterly Meetings was soon found to be exceeding great; in consideration of which they were gradually spread to all the societies in the kingdom.’ [30]

The quarterly meeting in the eighteenth century was conducted in the wider context of worship: lovefeasts and watchnights accompanying the meeting for business.[31] This may have been the way Methodists viewed their meetings at this time (not unlike Quakers), but it might also have had practical purpose. Having gathered members from scattered societies for one meeting, it would make sense to use the opportunity for joint worship as well. One insight into the nature of eighteenth-century meetings comes from a 1799 pamphlet ‘published at the earnest request of the Sheffield Quarterly Meeting addressed to the

[29] Extract from the first page of the record of the Quarterly Meeting held at Booth Bank Cheshire 20 April 1752 in Bretherton, “Quarterly Meetings”: 79.
[30] John Wesley, “On God’s Vineyard”, Sermon 107 in Albert Outler, *The Works of John Wesley,* vol.3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 509-510.
[31] ‘We had our Quarter-Day both for Pocklington and Bridlington today, at Driffield. A love-feast was held in the afternoon and a watch-night afterwards.’ Robert Dickinson, *The Life of the Rev. John Braithwaite, Wesleyan Preacher, compiled form his letters by Robert Dickinson* (London: 1825), 118.

members of the Methodist Societies'.[32] The pamphlet was an exhortation to the members of the Methodist societies (in general) to avoid the moral and spiritual perils of traditional feasts, funeral refreshments and paying needless visits to relatives on the Sabbath. If this address was the outcome of the deliberations of that quarterly meeting, this does suggest a strong spiritual element in quarterly meeting business in the early days.

However, some seventy years later the situation seems to have changed. William Peirce's 1873 description of the function of the Wesleyan quarterly meeting was: 'These are the chief local courts in the economy of Methodism, but their functions are chiefly administrative'.[33] This suggests that by then, the meeting was very different from that which Wesley and the conference of 1749 had intended. Peirce's comment does however reveal quite a lot about the place and status of the meeting. On the one hand, the reference to 'chiefly administrative' functions made it clear that the quarterly meeting had no disciplinary function or role in spiritual oversight. On the other hand however, his reference to 'chief local courts' does reinforce the position of the circuit, not the local society, as the main focus of administration.

4.4 Wesleyan Quarterly Meetings

4.4.1 Constitutions

John Bennet's 'assistant's report' described what Bennet and his colleagues proposed as a future pattern of these quarterly meetings: one quarter each year to be a meeting of all the leaders, and the other quarters, the society stewards only, meeting to present their accounts. His way, he wrote, would not be expensive; which if the reported attendance figures were correct, would have been an important factor.

[32] James Wood, Preacher of the Gospel, *An Address to the Members of the Methodist Societies, published at the earnest request of the Quarterly Meeting of the Sheffield Circuit* (London: 1799).
[33] Peirce, *Ecclesiastical Principles*, 345.

However, for the first hundred years there was no formal constitution for the Wesleyan quarterly meeting and circuits varied in their practice. Jonathan Crowther, in his *Portraiture of Methodism* (1815) wrote:

> A Quarterly Meeting is composed of the travelling preachers stationed in the circuit…the stewards of such circuit, the stewards of the different societies in the circuit, and sometimes other particular friends, members of society, who may be invited, or may wish to attend are present.[34]

This suggests that in his day, the meetings were still partly 'open' and perhaps that certain individuals who were not preachers or officers were recognised as having something to contribute to the meeting. He did not say who could or could not vote. In some circuits, voting membership was restricted to itinerants, circuit stewards and the society stewards. Elsewhere, when these were given membership of the meeting, leaders, local preachers and trustees were also allowed a vote.[35]

Benjamin Gregory put the delay in establishing a formal constitution down to the prevarication of Jabez Bunting. According to Gregory, Bunting was against codifying various aspects of Wesleyan polity, on the grounds that this left the conference (or Bunting) scope for modification as circumstances arose.[36] So successful was Bunting at avoiding the codifying that: 'the Quarterly Meeting could not get to know who had the right to help discharge its important Church functions or to be helped to its hearty Christmas Dinner'.[37] The lack of a definition provided scope for manipulation at circuit level as well. It

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[34] Jonathan Crowther, *A Portraiture of Methodism: or the History of Wesleyan Methodists…,* 2nd edn., enlarged and considerably improved (London: Richard Edwards, 1815), 229.
[35] Henry W. Williams, *The Constitution and Polity of Wesleyan Methodism* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1880), 81.
[36] The background to Gregory's unhappiness was the 'Leeds Organ Case' in which the conference had contradicted its own rules in the judgment it made.
[37] Benjamin Gregory, *Sidelights on the Conflicts of Methodism 1827-52* (London: Cassell and Co. Ltd., 1899), 501.

allowed superintendents to curtail the activities of local preachers supporting reform movements, by denying that they had a right to membership of the quarterly meeting. In July 1846 Benjamin Sadler, superintendent of the Myton Circuit, sought clarification on this matter from Jabez Bunting, clearly hoping that his understanding that local preachers were not members of the meeting was correct. [38]

Eventually, in response to many memorials[39] from across the country, the Sheffield conference of 1852 accepted 'the general desire' expressed in the memorials and in view of '…the desirability of precluding in future such debate and contentions as have occasionally arisen from uncertainty existing on this subject…' laid down the definitive constitution of the quarterly meeting's membership and recommended its immediate adoption: [40]

1 All the Ministers and Preachers on Trial in the Circuit, and the Supernumeraries whose names appear in the printed Minutes of the Conference.
2. All Circuit Stewards, all Society Stewards, and all Poor Stewards.
3. All the Class Leaders in the Circuit.
4. All the Local Preachers of three years continuous standing, after having been twelve months on trial; they being resident Members of Society in the Circuit.
5. All the Trustees of Chapels situate in places as named on the Circuit-plan; such Trustees being resident Members of Society in the Circuit. [41] (residence qualification removed 1872)

The result was therefore one which was 'really representative of the officials and active laity of the circuit'.[42] While this was true, an

[38] Letter from Benjamin Sadler to Jabez Bunting, July 13 1846, letter 268 in W.R. Ward, ed., *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-1858* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 341-342.
[39] Memorials were official communications from the circuits to the conference. See page 131.
[40] "Resolutions of the Conference on the report of the Memorials Committee", Ms. *Journal of Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1852,* 499. MARM 1977/585.
[41] Ibid.

interesting suggestion that even more members should be involved came from William Harris, President of the Local Preachers' Mutual Aid Association to Jabez Bunting. He proposed that in addition to the quarterly meeting 'at least half-yearly, call a meeting of all the members of society who choose to attend, and they should be made acquainted with the condition of the circuit, both as to numbers of members and the state of the finance'.[43] The suggestion was not taken up. It was probably too 'democratic' a suggestion for the period.

The approved constitution of a Wesleyan quarterly meeting continued to grow into the twentieth century. By 1910, Sunday-School and Wesley Guild representatives, and elected members of society leaders' meetings and society meetings, had been added. The Newark Wesleyan Circuit Plan for October 1910-January 1911 (covering 29 places) listed 75 people eligible to attend the quarterly meeting 'in addition to the names otherwise appearing on the Plan'.[44] These other names included 40 society stewards, 40 poor stewards, 36 class leaders, 56 local preachers and 3 ministers. Even allowing for a fair degree of overlap this is a considerable number.

4.4.2 Agenda

Turning to agenda, the first indication of some kind of agenda for a quarterly meeting can be found in the 1749 *Minutes.* The assistant was directed to make diligent enquiry at every quarterly meeting, of every society:

1 Are you in debt?
2 How much and to whom?
3 Are all in your Society poor?
4 Are not some therein both able and willing to contribute toward the public debt?
5 or, to the furtherance of the Gospel yearly?

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[42] R. Waddy Moss, in W. J. Townsend, H.B. Workman, George Eayrs, eds., *A New History of Methodism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), vol.1, 439.
[43] *Letter to the Rev. Jabez Bunting, DD from William Harris, President of the Local Preachers' Mutual Aid Association* (London: Aylott and Jones, 1850), 10.
[44] Newark preaching plan in the author's possession.

6 or, toward the common stock?

7 Who keeps your accounts? How?

And the answers he receives let him transmit quarterly to London.[45]

This only covers the temporal aspects of the meeting but it is quite revealing. It shows Wesley's serious concern about debt, (a subject which plagued the Wesleyan Connexion for years after his death)[46] and also how even at this early stage he was fostering a sense of mutual support. It also says something about the members, in that they are assumed to be nearly all poor; although this reference could also be a coded message about encouraging the not so poor to contribute more generously.

How the 'work of God' was progressing was also part of the agenda. It continued: 'Let every Assistant enquire at every Quarterly Meeting, and send a circumstantial account to London: 1, of every remarkable conversion and 2, of everyone who dies in the Triumph of Faith'.[47] The purpose of the enquiry was for the conference to 'profit more by the work of God carried out in the distant societies.' Whether this meant that the accounts were to provide encouragement to the itinerants gathered in conference, or that it was a way of checking up on the effectiveness of the itinerants and class leaders, cannot be determined. It might even betray a certain anxiety on Wesley's part that the 'distant' societies were beyond his immediate control. In any case this is an early example of the statistical aspect of being a Connexion.

The early part of the nineteenth century was a period of agenda innovation. Jonathan Crowther wrote that 'It is not unusual at these meetings to take into consideration any proposed improvements in the circuit, sometimes the propriety of dividing the circuit, having additional

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[45]" Minutes of Conference1749" in Rack, *Works*, vol.10, 231-232

[46]See Chapter Five – Temporal Affairs.

[47] "Minutes of Conference 1749" in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 235.

preachers…' [48] He pondered on how the quarterly meetings (composed of course, mainly of lay members) were beginning to take strategic decisions for the circuit: 'Of late years, many Quarterly Meetings have taken to themselves the authority of discussing the question of what preachers it would be proper for their circuit next year…'. To him, as a travelling preacher, this must have seemed a bold step and one can detect a hint of nervousness as to where these developments might lead.

The agenda of the Wesleyan quarterly meeting in the latter half of the nineteenth century would have seemed completely familiar to a late-twentieth-century Methodist quarterly meeting representative. In December, the circuit stewards were appointed (or re-appointed). In March, invitations to ministers from other circuits were considered. [49] Ministers could be invited for a further year, but not all were keen to stay. John Meatyard wrote in his diary on February 31 1863: 'Quarter Day. Invited to stay a third year but <u>not</u> unanimously. I had some differences with rabid Teetotallers. I cannot stay here. My mind has long been made up'.[50]

Also in March, any prospective candidates for the itinerant ministry had to be voted upon before being passed upward to the district, then the conference. In March 1865, the Boston quarterly meeting proposed William Kirkman 'as a Travelling Preacher' and the vote was unanimous. Two years later, a Bro. Beulah was proposed as a 'Candidate for the Ministry'. [51] Both entries refer to the same process, but the change in terminology, which will have been connexionally driven, is significant. There was now 'a ministry' rather than a band of

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[48] Crowther*, Portraiture,* 270. Crowther (1759 – 1824) was President of Conference 1819.
[49]Circuits were free to extend invitations to travelling preachers/ministers but the conference had the final word on who was to be stationed in which circuit.
[50] John Meatyard, diary entry in *The Wesleyan Methodist Kalender and Daily Remembrancer 1858* (London: John Mason, 1858).
[51] Ms. *Minutes of the Boston Wesleyan Methodist quarterly meeting 1861* onwards, LINC Meth/B / Boston/ 9 (1)

travelling preachers. Nevertheless, the language of 'travelling' remained deeply embedded. To this day, years in the Methodist ministry are referred to as 'years travelled'.

On other specified occasions during the year, matters from the local preachers' meeting would be considered, or chapels to be built, altered or closed discussed. [52] The superintendent minister would present the schedule of the number of members and the state of the membership, the accounts would be presented and the financial state of the circuit reported and often bemoaned. As the century progressed, sub-committees were established for such matters as home and overseas missions, education, Sabbath-schools and temperance. [53] All these were reported on at the quarterly meeting. Details of a year's agenda for a Wesleyan quarterly meeting in the late nineteenth century are given in chapter 9 of *The Constitution and Polity of Wesleyan Methodism* (1880).[54]

One of the functions of the quarterly meeting, through the circuit stewards, was to pay the stipends and expenses of the itinerants, and the accounts of quarterly meetings are very much concerned with these payments. (Chapter Five: Temporal Affairs covers the subject in more detail). This arrangement did mean that the preachers were entirely in the hands of the quarterly meeting when it came to receiving the means of sustaining themselves and their families. In the debates which raged over the 'power' which the preachers were perceived as having over the lay members (see para. 4.6), it is odd that this does not appear as a counter-argument from the preachers.

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[52] See Chapter Seven: Local Preachers, the Local Preachers' Meeting and the Preaching Plan.
[53] Statistics from the *Alford* (Lincs*) Circuit Stewards Book 1884* show that in a circuit of 24 chapels, 3 ministers and 1424 members there were 23 Sabbath Schools with 1676 children and 19 Band of Hope [Temperance] groups, with 1242 members. LINC Meth/B/Alford.
[54] Williams, *Constitution and Polity*, 81ff

Quarterly meeting agenda also reveal the change over time from concern about the personal morality and growth in faith of individual members, to concern about social morality. By the early twentieth century, addressing the social 'evils' of drink and gambling and supporting their antidote, temperance, took the place of interest in members' spiritual lives. While it can be argued that the introspective nature of the early quarterly meetings needed to be balanced with a concern for the wider world, it can also be argued that campaigning against social evils 'out there' detracted from attention to the spiritual lives of the members, to their detriment.

An examination of the minutes of the quarterly meetings of one Wesleyan circuit (Evesham) for 1907 and following years bears out the change of emphasis. Occasionally, a superintendent would introduce a 'spiritual' topic, such as the need for some definite aggressive evangelistic work; the value of class meetings (in decline in the circuit); and the serious need to secure able leaders for classes (there was a lack of suitable volunteers). There were however, earnest concerns around social responsibility issues. Rising numbers of 'abstainers' were reported. There were petitions to the Prime Minister, Henry Campbell Bannerman, on temperance legislation and one to the League of Nations concerning the sale of intoxicants in Central Africa.[55]

4.5 Primitive Methodist Quarterly Meetings

Primitive Methodism (1812) also followed the practice of holding circuit quarterly meetings.[56] At the first General Meeting [conference] at Nottingham the question was put 'How shall the circuits be managed?' The answer was: 'Each Circuit shall have a general Quarterly Meeting

[55] Ms. *Evesham Wesleyan Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1907-1923.*WORC 898.7312, BA 8608, parcel 4 (iv). Teetotalism was at first regarded unfavourably by the Wesleyan Connexion, but by the end of the nineteenth century this position had been reversed.

[56] The institution of the quarterly meeting was also accepted by each of the breakaway Methodist denominations. Curry provided a useful summary of their practice in Robert Curry, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 146-149.

which shall form its local government'.[57] Kendall referred to this same meeting as declaring that the quarterly meeting was 'the seat of authority' and the source 'whence all power was drawn' and commented that this was still the case in his day.[58] This description shows vividly where Primitive Methodists perceived the power-base of their Connexion to be. The contrast with Wesleyan Methodism's focus on the conference as the 'seat of authority' could not have been greater.

4.5.1 Constitutions

The Primitive Methodist circuit general quarter-day meeting had two parts: first the preachers' meeting (discussed in chapter seven) and then the full quarter-day board. The connexional rule laid down in 1822 was that the full board should be composed of travelling and local preachers, leaders, stewards, delegates from societies within the circuit 'and such other person or persons as the meeting may choose to admit'.[59] Specifically mentioned were 'females': 'Females may be allowed to speak in quarter-days, but not vote'.[60] It is of interest that it should be thought necessary to single out the position of women. This may have been a way of demonstrating a more liberal attitude than the Wesleyans. More likely, since women had been accepted as travelling preachers in the Primitive Methodist Connexion from at least 1813 it might have been a way of clarifying their position and accepting their existence. It would have been difficult to refuse them at least a seat on

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[57] 'Each circuit shall have a general Quarterly Meeting which shall form its local government'. *Minutes of a Meeting held at Nottingham in the month of August 1819 by the delegates of the Society of People called Primitive Methodists* (Nottingham: 1819), 8.

[58] Holliday Bickerstaff Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church,* 2 vols. (London: Robert Bryant, c 1905), General Books, print on demand edn, vol. 1, 253.

i[59] *General Minutes of the Conferences of the Primitive Methodist Connexion consolidated at and by the Conference held at Lynn-Regis, in Norfolk May 20-25 1836* (Bemersley: 1836).

[59] *General Minutes of the Conferences of the Primitive Methodist Connexion consolidated at and by the Conference held at Lynn-Regis, in Norfolk May 20-25 1836* (Bemersley: 1836).

[60]"Of circuits", *General Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* 1822 (Bemersley: 1822).

the quarter-day board. [61] However, that females, though present, were not allowed to vote, shows the influence of wider culture, there being no universal suffrage at that time.

The numbers eligible to attend a Primitive Methodist quarterly meeting would have been similar to a Wesleyan meeting. Morris commented that less than half of those eligible usually attended, supposing that 'the long and irregular hours of the working classes' prevented more regular attendance (no references given). His reason for drawing attention to this was that while Primitive Methodism was democratic in principle, only a representative minority actually governed, since sometimes 'only 1/30th' of the circuit was involved in the decision-making. [62] Morris was making too much of this, since the attendance at any official meeting (provided the meeting is quorate) does not affect the principle behind the constitution, and democracy regularly works on a governing minority. What *is* clear is that attendance, at least in the early days, was taken very seriously. In 1820 it was agreed that every member of the Hull quarter board who failed to arrive by the appointed time was fined sixpence and a further sum for every quarter of an hour thereafter. Those failing to attend the fortnightly circuit committee (see below) were fined one shilling.[63]

Also in Primitive Methodism the constitution provided for a 'circuit committee' which dealt with circuit business between quarterly meetings. This practise originated in the success of a committee of 'intelligent and efficient brethren' set up in the Tunstall circuit in the earliest days, to deal with 'the lack of attention to pecuniary matters'

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[61] Sarah Kirkland '…was proposed for the plan in September 1813' and Mary Hawksley was made 'a salaried evangelist' by Hugh Bourne in May 1813. Kendall, *Origin and History,* vol.1, 109, print on demand edn.
[62] Geoffrey Morris," Primitive Methodism in Nottinghamshire 1815-1932" (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 1967), unpublished, 141.
[63] Ms. *Minutes of the Hull [Primitive Methodist] Quarterly Meeting* June 1820. MARM 1986 / 003.

due to concentrating on missionary outreach.[64] This development is a comment on the all-consuming passion of the early Primitive Methodists for evangelism, but also on their ability, at times, to be grounded, practical and innovative. A circuit committee consisted of the circuit stewards plus not less than four other persons. Travelling preachers were all permitted to attend but only two could 'have a voice' and these two were to be the senior preachers. [65] In the Hull circuit at least, the circuit committee appears to have been given considerable responsibility. It was the body that examined and heard preach prospective travelling preachers and authorised them for ministry. In 1820, there were no fewer than twelve 'sent out' from this circuit.[66]

At first, PM circuit quarterly meetings were able to send representatives direct to the annual conference and in marked contrast to the Wesleyan tradition these were in the proportion of two lay delegates to one travelling preacher.[67] However, as the number of circuits increased, this was soon no longer practicable, not least in terms of expense. At the Tunstall conference of 1821, Districts were formed from groups of co-terminus circuits for expediency, and the representatives (still in the same proportion) were in future sent from the districts.[68]

The Primitive Methodist innovation of 'branches', instituted to cope with the unwieldy size of some circuits, also provided a solution to unwieldy quarterly meetings.[69] In the trend toward much larger circuits in twenty-first century Methodism, this form of management from the Primitive Methodist tradition might provide a useful model.

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[64] John Petty. *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion from its origins to the Conference of 1860…* new edn., revised and enlarged (London: R. Davies, Conference Offices, 1864), 82.
[65] Ms. *Minutes of the Hull Primitive Methodist Circuit Quarterly Meeting 1819-1829,* entry for 12 December 1819. MARM 1986/003.
[66] 'John Abey, having preached before and been examined by the Circuit Committee shall go out as a Travelling Preacher as soon as he can (say a Fortnight)'.*Minutes of the Hull Primitive Methodist Quarterly Meeting* 14 September 1819. MARM 1986/003.
[67] There were no lay representatives in the Wesleyan Conference until 1878.
[68] Kendall, *Origin and History,* print on demand edn., vol.1, , 237.
[69] 'When the places in a circuit become too numerous…to be conveniently managed at one quarterly meeting, a number of the places are frequently formed into a "branch" '.Petty, *History*, 571.

Early Primitive Methodist quarterly meetings could be very long. The Nottingham meeting at which Hull petitioned for a missionary lasted four days from 10-15 December 1819. It is not surprising to read that when someone was needed to go over to the Tunstall quarterly meeting, to secure William Clowes for Hull, a Mr King declined 'as there was work waiting for him to do, as good as ten shillings a day to him'.[70]

4.5.2 Agenda

The agenda of a Primitive Methodist quarterly meeting was not dissimilar to that of the Wesleyans, except that its two part arrangement meant that it is not always clear from written minutes which business was transacted by which meeting.

The *General Rules* provide guidance on the constitution and conduct of the quarterly meeting, which was described as 'the highest official meeting of the station'. The 'regular business' is listed in paragraphs 216 – 224 of the 1912 revision.[71] One feature peculiar to Primitive Methodism was a rule requiring any potential lay member of the meeting other than a local preacher to undergo an examination by the quarterly meeting or circuit committee. This examination was to be on 'his beliefs in the doctrines, and his knowledge of the consolidated rules', his 'readiness to maintain church discipline in both his private and official capacity' and his 'willingness to support the funds and institutions of the Church according to his means'. This sounds a somewhat excessive requirement for a member of a meeting, and the extent to which the rule was adhered to in the circuits is not known. It does however demonstrate the considerable importance and seriousness attached to membership of the circuit quarterly meeting in the Primitive Methodist tradition.

[70] Kendall, *Origin and History,* vol.1, print on demand edn., vol. 1, 241.
[71] *The General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church; revised by order of the Ninety-third Annual Conference, June 12 – 20, 1912* (London: Primitive Methodist Church, 1912), print on demand edn.

As with Wesleyan Methodism, examination of the agenda and decisions of individual meetings does help to give a flavour both of the procedures and the concerns of circuits during the course of the period studied. In the earliest days, a distinctive identity needed to be established and one way of doing this was through a 'dress code' which emphasised simplicity implying piety. A Hull minute of December 1819 required E. Taylor to let no-one into the singers' pew except for those who appeared in 'plain dress'. Specifically, men were to wear plain coats and no pantaloons. Women, no frills, no bunches of ribbons, no curls and no 'superfluities' whatsoever. Similarly, 'all Preachers and Leaders are requested to get Plain Dress as soon as possible in order that they may insist on plainness in all the Society'. [72] This minute has the appearance of being the application of a connexional rule and 'plain dress' the summary description of what was expected. Recruits to Primitive Methodism would often be people who were too poor to have spent what little they had on superfluities. However, in the case of ribbons, these were sold at fairs and by pedlars and were a way of poor women relieving the monotony of otherwise drab clothing. Giving up ribbons would have meant some sacrifice. This directive might also suggest that new members were beginning to be drawn from those with more money. A marker had also to be put down to distinguish them from Wesleyans.

4.6 Quarterly Meetings and agitations over power

4.6.1 In Eighteenth-Century Wesleyan Methodism

Soon after Wesley's death in 1791, the balance of power in the quarterly meeting became the focus of much discontent. Power seemed to lie too much in the hands of the preachers and not enough with the members.[73] Scott Lidgett perceptively concluded that Wesley himself, in encouraging both spiritual liberation and an authoritarian

[72] Extract from *Minutes of the Hull Primitive Methodist Circuit Quarterly Meeting 1819 – 1829,* entry for December 1819 in Davies, George and Rupp (eds.), *History,* vol.4, 362-364.

[73] Robert Currie described 'local lay officialdom' as although '…essential to the expansion and survival of the movement' were 'taxed but not represented, indispensible but unrecognised'. Currie, *Methodism Divided*, 81.

structure '…concealed from the beginning the elements of a new conflict between the principles of authority and liberty'.[74]

Alexander Kilham, a young itinerant preacher ordained in 1792, challenged the dominance of the preachers in Wesleyan polity. He urged the union of lay officers with the preachers in control of the circuit and that a lay delegate from the circuit should represent it at the annual conference. These proposals reflected the Presbyterian polity Kilham had observed at work in Scotland while he was in circuit there, and which he concluded was a better system.[75] It was however contrary to the Methodist system in which the assistant controlled the quarterly meeting and the annual conference was composed entirely of travelling preachers.

In 1795, Kilham published a pamphlet, *The Progress of Liberty,* containing several constitutional proposals for the Connexion, most of which became standard practice in the twentieth century, but when Kilham proposed them, they were too far ahead of their time.[76] In relation to the quarterly meeting, Kilham argued that while in the earliest days it may have been acceptable for Mr. Wesley and the travelling preachers to admit and expel members, and put forward men as travelling preachers without consultation, this was no longer acceptable practice. The ordinary members of the quarterly meeting needed to be involved in the decision-making. He pointed out that the short time travelling preachers stayed in each circuit meant that they never really came to know people well, whereas the 'people' knew the candidates, had heard them preach, and were therefore in a position to assess their suitability. The further approval at the district meeting, being the 'next level up' in the Connexion was also an issue for Kilham, because this meeting was composed entirely of travelling preachers at that time. He wrote:

[74] J.Scott Lidgett in Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History*, vol.2, 420.
[75] George Eayrs in *New History*, vol.1, 491.
[76] Alexander Kilham, *The Progress of Liberty among the People called Methodists* (Anwick: 1795), ECCO.

> Indeed, quarterly meetings have been in a great measure overlooked in this *very important* business. As none but [travelling] preachers have hitherto been allowed to attend our district meetings, it is possible for a local preacher to be recommended there by an assistant, without the knowledge, and against the minds of the people in the circuit, which he represents….If delegates from the quarterly, attended the district meetings, they could declare the sense of the brethren they represent on this subject. [77]

Kilham somewhat sarcastically illustrated his point. He described how a local preacher might cheerfully take on a travelling preacher's 'disagreeable and distant' appointments for a year knowing that he might be rewarded for his services by the travelling preacher getting him 'a place among the travelling preachers, without stopping to ask at a quarterly meeting whether or not he would be suitable'.[78] Kilham appears to have known that such a tactic actually took place.

In Kilham's view: 'Quarterly Meetings may be made a singular blessing to our connexion' provided that a delegate from every society could be persuaded to attend, along with the local preachers, leaders and stewards. He considered that the work of the quarterly meeting thus constituted could deal with allegations against the 'character, doctrines and abilities' of the preachers, and if too big a problem to handle, could prepare a brief for the district meeting.[79] The conference found this very threatening because it implied taking power and authority from the preachers. Kilham was tried on *The Progress of Liberty* by the London conference of 1796 and expelled; although his expulsion was said to be as much to do with his 'indecent and slanderous language', as his proposals.[80] He went on to co-found the Methodist New Connexion

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[77] Kilham, *Progress of Liberty*, 33.
[78] ibid, 33-34.
[79] Ibid, 36-37.
[80] Thomas Blanchard, *Notes from the life of Samuel Bradburn, the Methodist Demosthenes* (London: Elliot Stock, 1871), 164.

(1797) which embodied his general principles and to which the Wesleyan Connexion lost about 5,000 members.[81]

Despite Kilham's expulsion, his constitutional proposals would not go away and remained as a thorn in the side of the conference. In 1797 the Leeds conference drew up some revised regulations presented as an "Address to the Methodist Societies". These are usually referred to as *The Leeds Regulations (1797).* In these regulations, it was conceded that in respect of the quarterly meeting, accounts for collections for connexional funds hitherto unseen by the members, and applications for grants to meet the financial deficiencies of the circuit, would first have to be approved by the quarterly meeting. Circuits were not to be divided without the approval of the quarterly meetings and 'no other temporal matter shall be transacted by the District Committees till the abbrobation of the respective quarterly meetings be first given then signed by circuit stewards'. In short, 'The whole management of our temporal concerns may now be truly said to be invested in the Quarterly-Meetings, the District-Meetings having nothing left to them but a negative'.[82]

The Conference answered its critics using the language of sacrifice:

> Dear Brethren…You will see that the sacrifices in respect of authority, which we have made on the part of the whole body of preachers, evidence of our willingness to meet our brethren in everything which is consistent with the existence of the Methodist discipline, and our readiness to be their servants for Jesus' sake. [83]

[81] John Munsey Turner, *Wesleyan Methodism* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2005), 10.
[82] Quotation from an "Address to the Methodist Societies" from the 1797 Leeds Conference, in John Beecham *An Essay on the Constitution of Wesleyan Methodism,* 2nd ed., corrected and enlarged (London: John Mason, 1850), appendix, 120, 121.
[83] Ibid.

The powers given to the district meetings had been a step too far and a relatively hasty retreat was the best way of keeping the peace. This was not however, a retreat from the authority claimed for the travelling preachers in respect of spiritual oversight. That which was being given up was the management of 'temporal concerns' which the preachers would be pleased to lose in any case. [84] Circuits' complaints however, were as much about the spiritual authority of the preachers as about another layer of administration.

Disquiet about the balance of power between the district meeting and the quarterly meetings also extended to the relationship between the quarterly meetings and the annual conference. Before 1797, the conference made new laws and regulations without any challenge or opportunity for comment by those affected: the members in the circuits. This became an issue which again had as much to do with the perceived power of the preachers as with the laws and regulations themselves. To address the disquiet, the *Leeds Regulations* also included the concession that quarterly meetings could consider any new legislation and comment upon it. Further, if it was considered by the meeting that the rule might be: 'injurious to the prosperity of that circuit', the rule would be suspended and would not be enforced until the next conference.[85]

These concessions did not however satisfy everyone. One discontented individual in Beverley considered the various concessions

[84] Jonathan Crowther, although generally commenting unfavourably on Kilham's proposals for constitutional change, nevertheless agreed that handing over temporal affairs to lay people would be a good idea because 'Many of the preachers would be glad indeed to have nothing to do with anything but preaching, reading etc.' Jonathan Crowther, *Christian Order: or, liberty without anarchy…..*(Bristol: 1796), 9.
[85] "Address to the Methodist Societies", Leeds 1797, in Beecham, *Essay,* appendix, 119. A Kilham supporter pointed out that this regulation was useless because the conference always had the last word and there was no lay representation in the conference to speak for the case. *An Apology for the Methodists of the New Connexion*, (1815).

as no more than an illusion. [86] He complained that the quarterly meeting had no real power since the superintendent could forbid discussion of any question. He complained that while *circuits* were forbidden from speaking to each other, the *preachers* from the circuits could consult at the conference. This letter in turn drew out a strong defence of the conference, referring to:'…the immense power with which [the conference] has invested these Quarterly Meetings, in which the people so largely outnumber the preachers, by subjecting every new law to discussion there'. [87]

4.6.2 In Nineteenth-Century Wesleyan Methodism

As mentioned earlier, in referring to 'authority' Wesleyans had two distinct spheres of authority in mind: temporal and spiritual. Temporal authority concerned decisions on matters of finance, buildings and other practical issues. Spiritual authority was that which the travelling preachers/ministers held. It was the practical application of this spiritual authority - the 'doctrine' of the "pastoral office", espoused by Wesley and supported enthusiastically by the Wesleyan conference - which continued to cause disquiet among lay members of Wesleyan quarterly meetings into the nineteenth century. [88]

Seen from the conference point of view, it was the proper right of the travelling preachers to exercise spiritual authority, while granting a measure of power in temporal matters to the lay people. But to numbers of lay Methodists this was too 'high' an understanding and one which they saw as being used as a tool of domination.[89] There

[86] Mark Robinson, *Observations on the System of Wesleyan Methodism,* in a letter dated Beverley 23 March 1824 to Rev. R. Johnson, Superintendent of the Hull Circuit (London:1824), OCM 262.834 ROB. (Robinson was a local preacher and leader).
[87] Humphrey Sandwith, *An Apology for the System of Wesleyan Methodism, being a reply to Mr. Mark Robinson's observations on the same subject* (London: 1825), OCMCH 262.834 SAN.
[88]John Kent 'The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849' in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.2 (London: Epworth, 1978), 271.
[89] Although this was refuted: '[the preacher's] *authority* of the people and their *subjection* to us is small'. Joseph Benson, *The Discipline of the Methodists Defended* (Leeds: March 22 1796), The words he put in italics he was quoting from Alexander

were those who opined that there had been a time when both lay people and preachers had shared authority for temporal *and* spiritual matters, but John Beecham's address to his Christmas quarterly meeting in 1829 was an exercise in getting the facts straight about the early days of Methodism. As a supporter of the notion of the pastoral office, he pointed out that there had never been a time when quarterly meetings were democratic, and certainly not on spiritual matters. '…the local jurisdiction had no *directing* or *controlling* power in *spiritual* affairs…in the Quarterly Meetings, the preacher inquired into the spiritual state of the whole Circuit; but this was all that [the] meeting had to do with spiritual affairs'.[90] One fascinating observation on the balance of power and lay discontent was that made by Elie Halevy in about 1905. He wrote that: '…since the death of Wesley, the entire History of the Methodist Church in England has consisted of the efforts of the pastors to diminish as much as possible the authority over the Church exercised by the lay faithful'. [91]This is a somewhat sweeping statement, but it does show the impression that was being given to onlookers. It also suggests that Halevy himself saw Methodism as primarily a lay movement.

One opportunity a Wesleyan quarterly meeting did have to communicate with the conference (other than in routine returns) was the system of 'memorials' instituted in 1835, probably as a way of placating the quarterly meetings. A memorial was intended to be a means by which any quarterly meeting could convey its opinions on connexional matters, including suggestions for developments. In 1852, regulations for sending memorials from quarterly meetings to the conference were laid down: 'That should a majority of the June

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Kilham. A year later, the Conference made concessions and attempted to redress the balance.

[90] Beecham, *Essay*, 9. This Essay was originally an address which as superintendent, he 'delivered at our Christmas Quarterly-Meeting, on the constitutional questions by which some individuals have attempted to agitate the Connexion'.

[91] Elie Halevy, *The Birth of Methodism in England* (1905), B. Semmel trans. and ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 51.

quarterly meeting, in any circuit …be of the opinion that it is desirable to address to the Conference a memorial on any connexional subject, and agree to do so, that meeting itself… shall have authority to adopt and transmit to the Conference such a memorial;...' [92] These regulations do however reflect the extreme nervousness of the conference at this time. Various 'agitations' still being fresh in the memory, the conference took the precaution of disallowing proposals 'of a manifestly revolutionary character' and direct interference with the affairs of another circuit. It also disallowed memorials proposing alterations to the nature and constitution of the Connexion: 'All suggestions manifestly contravening any of the three great principles avowed in these resolutions; namely the integrity of the Pastoral Office, the inviolability of the Connexional Principle and the authority of the District Committee'. [93] This list amounted to a defensive position in which very little of substance was left to send memorials about, and the idea that the authority of the district meeting should be a 'great principle' was an invention, since districts were not instituted until after Wesley's death.[94] The conference was keen to prevent anything which might be '…subversive of that system of doctrine or discipline which has been confided to it as a sacred deposit by Mr Wesley'. [95] In this statement, Wesley's creativity had turned into tablets of stone, and reference to Wesley's system as a 'sacred deposit' verged on moral blackmail.

The Wesleyan conference of 1853 confirmed the 1852 regulations on memorials to the conference, expressing its satisfaction with 'the cordial reception…so extensively given to [them]'; hoping that: 'their

[92] Peirce, *Ecclesiastical Principles,* 377 quoting the Minutes of Conference 1852.
[93] Ms *Journal of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, Sheffield, 1852*, 446- 447. MARM 1977/ 585.
[94] R. Waddy Moss attempted to justify the reference to the authority of the district meeting by saying that it was a corollary to the connexional principle, which was necessarily inviolate. That he needed to find a justification suggests a weak argument. 'The Last Fifty Years' in Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History*, vol.1, 439.
[95] *"Minutes* of Conference 1852", *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences* vol.12 (London: John Mason at the Wesleyan Conference Office).

operation will prove conducive to the peace and harmony of the Connexion'. It is not entirely clear why the process of sending memorials would be conducive to peace and harmony. It may have been that it was hoped that the memorials system would demonstrate the (entirely ministerial) conference's willingness to listen to the concerns and suggestions of the (majority lay) membership of the quarterly meetings. It is also possible that hope for peace and harmony was linked to the threat posed by breakaway movements. A memorial sent from the quarterly meeting of the Louth circuit to the 1853 Bradford conference may bear this out. [96] It concerned the problems caused by defectors to 'the reform party' running a kind of parallel circuit and occupying the Wesleyan chapels for (Methodist) 'reform meetings' and use by 'radical' local preachers.

By 1900 the conference no longer felt under threat. The *Minutes* for that year included a directive that 'the Quarterly Meeting has complete freedom to memorialise Conference'… 'It is not competent for the chairman of a June Quarterly Meeting to rule any Memorial out of order' [only the Conference could do that].[97]

4.6.3 Were external political agitations an influence?

In *The Progress of Liberty,* Alexander Kilham's arguments were presented as a rational development based on practical experience and there is little sign of him arguing from a political position. However, such were the times that his proposals were criticised largely in political terms.[98] He was accused of republicanism,[99] of following Tom Paine,

[96] Contemporary transcript of the memorial in LINC, Meth/B/Louth. A poster produced by these 'reformers' in January 1854 described their newly established 'Free Methodist Church' as 'delivered from the oppressive bondage of a ministerial hierarchy'. LINC, Meth/B/Louth/32/6

[97] *Minutes of Conference 1900* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Bookroom), item 5, 493.

[98] But not entirely: Joseph Benson challenged Kilham on the spiritual relevance of his proposals. 'Do you imagine that…disputing about this and that mode of worship and form of church-government will restore what [people who have lost inward union with God] have lost?' Benson, *The Discipline of the Methodists Defended* (Leeds: March 22 1796).

[99] [His] 'ecclesiastical principles being of the republican order', Thomas Blanchard describing Kilham in Blanchard, *The Life of Samuel Bradburn*, 145-6.

and that he had ‘not only unhappily imbibed the levelling doctrines which were common in that day, but had even strangely applied them to religion.’[100] In 1835, John Bicknell, a travelling preacher in the Hull circuit, wrote to Jabez Bunting accusing the recently passed Reform Act (1832) of having ‘produced, or if not produced, greatly aggravated and inflamed such a lust for power in a considerable number of our people…’. He complained that ‘it is becoming very difficult…to exercise that pastoral authority, with which I believe the New Testament has invested the minister of Christ, and which is indispensible to order and good government’ [101]

The subject of the extent to which the political movements either of Kilham’s time or later, and concerns around the 1832 Reform Act, influenced Wesleyan Methodists, has been very widely researched and written upon. Halevy took the view that they had been influenced; and until relatively recently his opinion has been widely taken as authoritative. John Kent however concluded that Halevy failed sufficiently to take into account the internal complexities of Wesleyan Methodism.[102] But whether or not Wesleyan reformers were actively involved in the wider political agitations of the time, its spirit and language did pervade their religious actions and thinking. One cannot ignore the perception and evidence of contemporary writers who did use the terms ‘radical’ and ‘liberal’.[103] In his book *Religion of the People,* David Hempton provided a helpful review of a number of studies, spread across the twentieth century, of the relationship between popular evangelicalism and political radicalism. He weighed

[100]Tom Paine was author of the *Rights of Man,* published 1791 – 1792. The quotation comes from William Myles, *A Chronological history of the people called Methodists…* (Liverpool: [1799]), 183, ECCO.
[101]Letter from John Bicknell (preacher, Hull Circuit 1834-5) to Jabez Bunting, March 2, 1835, letter 86 in Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism,* 126.
[102] John Kent, “The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849”, in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.2 (1978), 251. Kent was not however consistent. In *The Age of Disunity* (London: Epworth Press, 1966), 38, he attributed the emergence of Primitive Methodism to the efforts of the nineteenth century worker to achieve dignity and equality; with no reference to the spiritual origins in camp meetings.
[103] For examples see letters from John Scott, from William Bond and from Joseph Agar to Jabez Bunting: letters no. 1, no. 294, no.76 in Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism*.

these up carefully, but indicated that in his opinion, the whole issue was far more complex and nuanced than most writers have acknowledged. In his opinion: '… [Wesleyan] Methodist polity was itself an intense theatre of conflict which mirrored, sometimes uncannily, the `political and constitutional issues at stake between 1780 and 1850'.[104] A contemporary summary of the situation comes from John Beecham: 'In England [around 1795] the spirit of uprooting reform raged like fury through the land…It would have been surprising if the Methodist body had kept wholly free from the contagion.'[105]

An overlooked factor in the discussion of these agitations is the parties' reference to scripture to justify opinions. Both conference supporters and reform supporters referred to their position as scriptural and their opponents' position as unscriptural. [106] This helps to show where the roots of the arguments were, (or where the parties wanted to demonstrate they were); even if they were played out in the wider context of the contemporary political scene.

4.7 A note on Primitive Methodism and internal agitations

An aspect of the nineteenth century internal agitations in Methodism which is largely ignored is the contrast between Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism. Although Primitive Methodists were largely working class, since the Connexion was already run on democratic lines, there was no internal struggle to appeal to, or be fuelled by the wider reforming movements in the country. Indeed, Primitive Methodists may have fed the reforming movements with their

[104] David Hempton, "Popular Evangelicalism, Reform and Political Stability in England' *c.*1780-1850", *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion c. 1750-1900* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 172-173. Authors reviewed included E.P. Thompson, Robert Wearmouth, Victor Kiernan, W.R. Ward, Alan Gilbert and Michael Winstanley.
[105] Beecham, *Constitution,* 1829.
[106]For example, James Hoby, a Conference supporter, referring to the reforming party, wrote that '…the object is really to make Methodism a democratic system, a thing without scriptural warrant…' Letter from James Hoby to Jabez Bunting dated 1850, no.330 in Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism,* 406.

democratic views.[107] What is known is that external events did affect membership. Decrease in membership was blamed, among other things, on the 'serious and long continued strikes for an advance in wages', conflicts which had brought '…suffering and privation in their train' and caused workmen to move to other areas and 'the pressure of poverty' which had caused people to 'withdraw from Church fellowship'.[108] The Wesleyan issue of the "pastoral office", which caused or exacerbated the frustration of the lay people, was not an issue for Primitive Methodists. However, tensions between members and preachers did arise from time to time. Morris quoted a celebrated example of a tussle between the itinerants and the lay members of the quarterly meeting of the Belper Circuit in 1838 and no doubt there were other examples. Morris cited this incident as an example of 'the essential democratic and non-clerical character of Primitive Methodism',[109] but it looks more like an example of the limits of attempting to establish a completely democratic organisation.

4.8 Conclusion

The quarterly meeting was described by John Beecham as: 'next to the Class meeting, the Conference and the Circuit, the oldest and most central part of our economy'.[110] This is not saying a great deal, since this leaves only the district and district meeting, instituted after Wesley's death. Nevertheless, the quarterly meeting held the circuit together and reinforced the fact that in it, rather than in the individual societies, lay temporal authority locally. It has been argued that it was the institution of the quarterly meeting which turned the circuit from the journeying of an individual preacher into an institutional entity.[111]

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[107] Chapter 7 in Robert F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes 1850-1900* (Leicester: Edgar Backus, 1954), covers the relationship between Primitive Methodism and Trade Unionism in detail.

[108] *Minutes of Primitive Methodist Conference 1854* quoted in Wearmouth, *Struggle*, 101.

[109] Geoffrey Morris, "Primitive Methodism in Nottinghamshire 1815 -1932" (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 1967), 47.

[110] Beecham, *Essay,* 111.

[111] Hunter and Baker concluded that it '…has enabled the Methodist Church to become a compact ecclesiastical organisation, a Connexion, rather than a number of

The quarterly meeting also provided a forum for lay people, on a wider scale than the society, to discuss church business. This led to it being used in Wesleyan Methodism as the place for airing discontent about the itinerants' authority. A discontent related, consciously or subconsciously, to their exposure to the general discontent over the balance of power and authority in the country at large.

loosely associated congregations'. "The Origin of the Methodist Quarterly Meeting", *The London and Holborn Quarterly Review,* January 1949, 28.

Chapter Five

Temporal Affairs

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the financial and material responsibilities of Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist circuits. In exploring this feature of circuit life, both the circuit's place as a level of administration within the Connexion and its place in the financial aspects of the connexional organisation are shown. Locally, the development of financial and material support for travelling preachers and their households is examined, including the effect of having married preachers. Particularly identified is the uneasy tension between circuits' enthusiasm for mission on the one hand and financial reality on the other. Examination of the demands on the Wesleyan connexional Contingency Fund and the phenomenon of chapel-building in both denominations reveal practical examples of this tension. In recognising the place of the circuits as the main source of connexional funds, the position of the circuit as an essential and integral part of the Connexion can be seen to be reinforced.

Examination of the temporal affairs of Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist circuits reveals the very practical side of circuit life; a subject not often addressed by scholars, who have tended to favour, for example, the subject of Methodists' spiritual life or their influence and involvement in the political life of the nation. David Hempton did however address a number of aspects of temporal affairs in Wesleyan Methodism in a chapter entitled "money and power"; on the basis that 'squabbles about money…shed light on deeper structural tensions…' [1]

[1] David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 109 – 119. Delia Garrett also covered some aspects of the topic in "Primitive Methodism in Shropshire, 1820 1900" (PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2002).

5.2 Wesleyan Circuit expenditure

A circuit was expected to be responsible for meeting its own general expenses.[2] This fact, though simple, is nevertheless important because it further illustrates the position and significance of the circuit within the connexional scheme of things. Financial self-sufficiency (exceptional circumstances apart) involved covering preachers' stipends,[3] allowances and expenses,[4] and certain allowances for their households. There was also the cost involved in supporting the societies in either renting accommodation for worship, or building, purchasing and maintaining chapels. Added to this were the travelling costs for the preachers to attend the annual conference, and their regular removal expenses.[5] This chapter will consider various aspects of circuit temporal affairs in more detail.

To raise the necessary amount to cover regular circuit outgoings, there was a system of contributions from the members:

> Let every Assistant be particularly careful to enforce the weekly collection of a penny from each member of our society in the class-meetings, and the quarterly collection of a shilling from each member that can afford to pay it at the quarterly visitation.[6]

The word 'enforce' seems somewhat incompatible with any sense of voluntary Christian giving. Although the contributions, however modest, would be necessary to run the circuit, the most likely

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[2] For example, see the Summary of the Circuit Stewards Account for the year to June 1788 in F.H. Mills, "Circuit Finance in Early Methodism", Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, (hereafter Proc.WHS), vol.23 (1941), 62.

[3] Paid quarterly, hence 'quarterage'.

[4] In the eighteenth century for example, this meant items such as turnpike charges, window and land tax, shoeing horses, coals and candles.

[5] When Mr Morton, a preacher in the Epworth circuit went to the conference in 1790, it cost the circuit £2.14.0. *Epworth Circuit Stewards Book, Michaelmas 1787 onwards,* LINC Meth/B/Epworth W/B/5/1.

[6] Q&A 22, "Minutes of the 1788 Conference" in Henry D. Rack, ed., *The Works of John Wesley,* vol.10, The Methodist Societies and the Minutes of Conference (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 665. The quarterly visitation was the travelling preacher's visitation of the class meetings.

explanation is that this was about discipline and a demonstration of commitment. On the other hand, the qualification 'that can afford to pay it' in the next sentence shows pastoral sensitivity. These were two sides of the same coin of Wesley's own approach to such matters.

The circuit also had an additional responsibility to support connexional funds. Initially, these were limited to the Contingency Fund [7] and the Kingswood Fund.[8] But during the nineteenth century, several more connexional funds were brought into existence, for example the Chapel Fund and a fund for supporting foreign missions. Julia Stewart Werner attributed Primitive Methodist success in the rural areas partly to these areas being 'unable to bear the weight of [Wesleyan] financial structures'.[9] The nineteenth-century personal annual diary, the *Wesleyan Methodist Kalender and Daily Remembrancer* provided guidance through this collections minefield. It explained the nature and purpose of all circuit and connexional funds, together with the times when collections were to be made. In February for example: 'The collections for the Chapel Fund made this month are to be immediately remitted to ---. At the March visitation of the classes, usually commenced this month [February], the Yearly Collection is always made'.[10]

Managing the temporal affairs of a circuit was the task of the circuit stewards on behalf of the circuit quarterly meeting. [11] This office first came into being when laymen had come to John Wesley, pointing out that running the London society involved financial transactions and who

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[7] See paragraph 2.5.
[8] Kingswood School (founded by Wesley) provided an education for sons of lay Methodists and travelling preachers. The fund was also used for allowances to preachers' daughters.
[9]Julia Stewart Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History,* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 14.
[10] *The Wesleyan Methodist Kalender and Daily Remembrancer (*London: John Mason, 1858). One odd feature of the *Kalender* was dates which Wesleyans did not mark; for example, the Purification of the Virgin Mary. This may simply have been the printer's choice.
[11] In the Methodist connexional system, stewards were appointed at both society and circuit level. This chapter concerns circuit stewards although sometimes rules applied to both.

would see to receiving and paying in the money? One of them volunteered, and this, said Wesley, was the first steward. Wesley then appointed others.[12] In describing these appointments, Wesley took the opportunity to air his distaste for anything which might be considered democratic. 'Let it be remarked it was *myself*, not the *people* who chose these stewards…' [13] Wesley produced a list of rules and instructions for the London stewards and these were recommended to all the stewards in the Connexion.[14]

William Peirce concluded that while the precise date of the appointment of the first circuit stewards (after Wesley's London stewards) could not be ascertained, it was probably at the same time as the first mention of circuits in the *Minutes of Conference* of 1746.[15] Certainly in 1748, John Bennet's diary entry for 18 October reads that at the quarterly meeting 'Four stewards were appointed to inspect into and regulate the temporal affairs of the societies.' [16]

Wesleyan circuit stewards were appointed at the December quarterly meeting on the nomination of the assistant/superintendent. [17] Up to the turn of the nineteenth century, not only the nomination, but also the appointment, was entirely in the hands of this preacher (following Wesley's example). The possible danger was that, not being in each circuit very long, the assistant would appoint someone unsuitable through not knowing them well enough. Alexander Kilham complained that because being a steward was 'a very honourable office, as high or higher than a churchwarden, many of our pious Methodists go after

[12] "Minutes of Conference 1766" in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 327-328.
[13] *Minutes of Several Conversations between Rev. Mr. Wesley and others. From the year 1744, to the year 1789.* [known as the *Large Minutes*] (London, 1791), 18, ECCO.
[14] The 'business' of and 'rules' for these stewards is described in "A plain account of the people called Methodists" (1749), in Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley,* vol.9, The Methodist Societies: History, Nature and Design (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 273.
[15] William Peirce, *Ecclesiastical Principles and Polity of the Wesleyan Methodists,* 3rd edn. (London: 1873), 339.
[16] John Bennet, entry for 18 October 1748, in Ms. *Diary 1748,* 113, MARM 1977/131.
[17] That is, the head travelling preacher of the circuit. See Chapter Six: The Assistant / Superintendent.

it…longing to be useful… so that very often ignorant or designing men are frequently put in by ignorant though well meaning Assistants…' [18]

5.2.1 Preachers' Stipends

Before 1752, the travelling preachers received no stipend, but the society stewards were expected to supply what they needed from voluntary donations as they travelled their circuits.[19] One consequence of this system was that the popular preachers were well served and the less popular were practically destitute. But the sheer poverty of the members was also a factor in the early days. John Bennet's 1748 "assistant's report" to John Wesley included the comment that the Todmorden members were 'exceeding poor' and that once the bills had been paid they would not be able 'to maintain the preachers and William Darney's family'.[20] In 1752 the conference directed the circuits that preachers should receive twelve pounds per annum because the local stewards were supposed to do this, but did not always.[21] The Epworth circuit accounts of 1788 record that the preachers, Mr Tatershall and Mr Mowitt, did receive £3 per quarter stipend. [22] Indeed, by 1790, this had risen, by now for a Mr Brown, to £6 a quarter. However, it was many years before the conference directive was generally observed.[23] This suggests that while being a Connexion meant that rules and directives were made for the circuits by the conference, the circuits felt free to implement these at their own pace and according to their own circumstances and opinions.

Stipends (paid in arrears) and allowances varied from circuit to circuit according to how much the circuit could afford. Some preachers could

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[18] Alexander Kilham, *An Address to the Methodists in Birstall Circuit - by an Old Methodist* [Birstall?], [1797], ECCO.
[19] Myles, *A Chronological History of the people called Methodists* (1799), 55, ECCO.
[20] Letter from John Bennet to John Wesley dated Chinley, October 22nd 1748, Frank Baker, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), vol. 26, 335.
[21] George Harwood, *The History of Wesleyan Methodism* (London: 1854), 91. Connexional division of responsibilities meant that it was the conference which recommended the amounts, but the circuits individually which had to find the money and pay the stipends.
[22] *Epworth Circuit, Circuit Stewards Book, Michaelmas 1787 onwards.*
[23] George Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism* (London: Longman, Brown, Green Longmans and Roberts, 1858), vol.1, 259.

accept this arrangement. Henry Moore for example, wrote in 1806 that he was content to accept what was offered, which sometimes involved having to pay for his own lodging, coal and candles.[24] However, he (or his wife) may have had private means.[25] Moore did reflect on the possibility of a system of equalisation but thought it impossible; presumably because he considered that the financial circumstances of circuits were too varied.[26]

In 1800 the conference asked the quarterly meetings to raise the preachers' allowance to £4 per quarter.[27] It might be supposed that this meagre allowance (plus certain expenses) would of necessity be supplemented by income from some additional form of employment. However, this was not an option: 'We judge…that such a pursuit of private emolument is incompatible with our ministerial duties.'[28] This high-minded directive must nevertheless have caused some distress to the impoverished preachers. One enterprising early preacher who found a way round this was Jacob Rowell who, while keeping to rule by not having a trade, had a wife who kept a small shop in Barnard Castle. As he travelled his great round he took orders from customers in the remote Pennine Dales.[29]

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[24] Henry Moore, Letter dated August 5 1806, in *Extracts from Original Correspondence of Mr. Wesley's Preachers,* transcribed by hand. MARM 1977/486.

[25] '…it appears to me that few situations in life render it more necessary than that of an Itinerant Preacher to possess some little dependence exclusive of what he may receive from the people he serves…'   James Rogers, travelling preacher (1749-1807), Ms. *Personal Accounts 1784-1804,* MARM MA 1977/294.

[26] Letter dated August 5 1806, Moore, *Extracts from Original Correspondence.*

[27] The Liverpool circuit must have been in a position to be relatively generous. Possibly a number of members were merchants. The December 1802 quarterly meeting agreed a quarterage of 5 guineas instead of the previous four and a half. "Extracts of the Minute Book of the Liverpool Circuit beginning Sept. 29 1802" in Tyerman, transcriber, *Early Preachers' Letters,* 436. MARM 1977/486.

[28] This rule was confirmed in 1804: Q18, "Minutes of Conference 1804" in *Minutes of Conference vol.2, 1799 – 1807* (London: John Mason, 1863), 239.

[29] He recorded such items as a hat for someone in West Allendale, two lanterns, one Bible and a Concordance for another; an order for two dishes and a cup, design carefully specified, for Miss Simpson and a banister brush for Newsham. *Extracts from the ms. book of the late venerable Jacob Rowell, one of the first race of Methodist Preachers.* From a collection of transcriptions [no date and no name of the transcriber] MARM 1977/486.

The recommended stipend did increase little by little. In 1852 the second minister of the Gainsborough circuit was receiving £36; about as much as a farm labourer, but by 1873 it had risen to £64, rather more than the labourer.[30]

5.2.2 Preachers' Allowances

In the earliest days, preachers on their long rounds depended on a series of individuals for their overnight board and lodging.[31] By 1805, smaller circuits meant that preachers spent more time at home and relied less on hospitality. They therefore needed some kind of allowance for sustenance at home. The 1805 conference found it necessary to consider the plight of 'our poorest brethren that have families and are stationed in the poorer circuits'[32] and concluded that:

> …a regular weekly allowance for board, more or less, as may be judged requisite, all circumstances considered, would most effectually relieve them; we recommend it to the Quarterly Meetings of those Circuits in which this is not already done, to take into their serious consideration the propriety and necessity of doing it. [33]

The diplomatic, even tentative, nature of this minute suggests that at this time, the conference did not consider itself as having strength of power over the circuit quarterly meetings. There was also the fact that it was the preachers themselves (who made up the conference) who were asking for more money. The provision of an allowance for board was not universally welcomed by the quarterly meetings. F.H. Mills, in noting that a conference ruling of 1817 had stated that this allowance should not be less than 10/6 a week for a married preacher and family

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[30] James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 223.
[31] At first only lodging was provided until it was found that preachers were wasting time looking for every meal at one or another supporter's home - and a meal allowance was introduced. Q &A 23, "Minutes of Conference1788" in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 665.
[32] "Minutes of Conference 1805", *Minutes of Conference*, vol.2, 291.
[33] ibid.

commented that this ‘strengthens the suspicion’ that the circuits hoped the £12 per year stipend would cover everything.[34] Nevertheless, by 1858 the allowance was well established and in Louth circuit, for example Rev. H. Kirkland received £13.0.0 for 13 weeks board.[35]

A basic annuity fund was established in 1798. In 1800, there was an admission fee of one guinea for under 30’s, then rising, and an annual fee of one guinea, collected at the time of the conference. Members superannuated by the conference, and widows until they remarried, received 12 guineas a year.[36] The rigours of the early itinerant ministry took its toll on both preachers and families and there was a high attrition rate. This fund became the appropriately named ‘Worn-Out Ministers and Widows Fund’.

5.2.3 Wives, children and servants

As the Connexion developed, the cost and means of supporting the preachers’ families became a significant issue. William Myles provided a table of the comparative increase of members, travelling preachers and families between 1770 and 1799. He calculated that in 1780, one family was supported by 843 members whereas in 1799, it was 536 members.[37] He wrote that ‘The Families are certainly at present a great burden, and the People do not feel it as they ought to do’.[38] The issue was that while circuits were ‘zealous for their several societies and the conversion of their ungodly neighbours’; they were managing to avoid their responsibilities for these preachers’ families. This they did by claiming their allowances from the connexional fund intended ‘to supply the wants of poor circuits and the *contingencies* of the Body at large’.[39] William Myles gave the distinct impression that he would have

[34] Mills, “Circuit Finance in Early Methodism”, 80.
[35] *Louth Circuit Account Book 1858*, LINC Meth/B/Louth/13.
[36] *The rules and regulations of an institution called the Itinerant Methodist Preachers Annuity – begun in Bristol, Aug. 7 1798* (Bristol: 1800), MARM, MA 1977/294.
[37] William Myles, *A Chronological history of the people Called Methodists. Containing an account of their rise and progress from the Year 1729 to the Year 1799…* (Liverpool, [1799]), 199, ECCO.
[38] Ibid, 200.
[39] Ibid, 200.

preferred preachers to be unmarried, but admitted that this was not possible 'without making unscriptural rules'. [40] By this he must have meant that he saw no scriptural warrant for having celibate preachers. Hempton considered that 'the original ideal' for Methodist travelling preachers was that of a 'celibate, self-sacrificing, and ascetic brotherhood' though it proved to be unrealisable. However, while self-sacrifice cannot be disputed, there appears to be no evidence from the period for consideration of celibacy, even as an ideal.[41]

In the earliest days, the fact of itinerancy in vast circuits sat uneasily with the existence of preachers' wives, who were left on their own for weeks at a time with little means of support. The 1753 conference, in considering what 'hardships' among the travelling preachers were in its power to remove, concluded that one was the lack of financial support for wives. The initial judgement was harsh: '…if [the preacher] marry one that has nothing, he must be content to return to his temporal business, and so commence a local preacher'.[42] But opinions appear to have softened in the course of the conference since it was further minuted that each assistant was to enquire at every quarterly meeting what each preacher's wife needed and that those needs were to be supplied as a priority. [43] But the wives had to do their part. They were required to be 'exemplary' and never to be 'idle' so that societies would be encouraged 'to more readily assist' married preachers.[44] Circuits were nevertheless unhappy about the arrangement: 'The preachers who are most wanted in several places cannot be sent thither because they are married. And if they are sent, the people look at them with an evil eye, because they cannot bear the burden of their families'.[45]

The conference agreed in 1774, that every preacher's wife (except in London and Bristol) should have £12 a year and further, that the circuit

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[40] Ibid, 200.
[41] David Hempton, *Methodism*, 111.
[42]"Minutes of Conference 1753", in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 266.
[43] Ibid, 267.
[44]Q&A 20, "Minutes of Conference 1753", in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 266.
[45] "Large Minutes", 1770 edn., in Rack, *Works*, vol. 10, 895.

should also find a lodging, coal and candles or allow her fifteen pounds a year.[46] Early circuit accounts reveal details of these payments. In the Epworth circuit, for example, Mrs Mowett and her children regularly received £4 per quarter and in 1788 the circuit paid her lying-in doctor's fees of £1.11.6. [47] By 1789 there were ninety-eight preachers' wives listed and named in the *Minutes*, sixty-eight of whom were being provided for by the circuits. However, the other twenty wives had to be paid from the connexional Preacher's Fund [48] and from donations, because circuits could not afford to do so.[49] Already, circuits were having problems in meeting their financial obligations and a tendency to expect rescue from connexional funds had begun to emerge. This is discussed further below.

Support for wives continued to be an issue into the next century. The 1805 conference "Address" to the Methodist membership included the comment that some circuits were only paying the allowance when the preacher was at his home base. As the preacher spent half to two thirds of his time away from home, 'during his absence' the family was left without any allowance, causing considerable distress. The address suggested that such problems may have arisen 'from want of consideration'. [50] If so, then this implies that either the circuits had not come to terms with the fact of wives and families or circuit stewards were seeing how long they could avoid paying out the full amount.

Circuits were also expected to provide a children's allowance. The recommended amount was 2 guineas per child per quarter. A preacher in the Louth circuit in 1852 received £14.14.0 per quarter, presumably because he had seven children.[51] Such a payment would be a heavy

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[46] Q & A 22 "Minutes of Conference 1774" in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 435.
[47] *Circuit Stewards Book, Epworth Circuit, Michaelmas 1787 onwards.* LINC Meth/B/Epworth W/B/5/1.
[48] A Fund each of the itinerants were required to pay into, for retirement or superannuation.
[49] "Annual Minutes and Conference Journal 1789" in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 690-691.
[50] "Minutes of Conference 1805", *Minutes of Conference,* vol.2, 293.
[51] *Louth Circuit Account Book 1826*, LINC Meth/B/Louth/13.

demand on a circuit and would not endear large families to circuit officials. Sons of the travelling preachers could also receive boarding education at Kingswood School.

An allowance could also be claimed for employing a servant. The Louth Wesleyan circuit accounts of 1826 show 2 guineas per quarter for Mr. Fielden's servant. [52] Church of England incumbents almost always had servants,[53] but the domestic circumstances of Wesleyan preachers, being generally more humble, makes the mention of servants seem somewhat surprising. One answer is that servants were much more common in all households in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. [54] That servants were assumed to be a necessary part of the household is supported by a note written by the travelling preacher Joseph Entwisle in 1798: ' My whole income appears to be less than would support my growing family with food and pay the servant's wages; so that there is nothing left for clothing…' .[55] In his mind, the servant appears to have been more of a basic necessity than clothing.

5.2.4 Preachers' Houses

As already mentioned, at first, preachers were dependent on the hospitality of members as they travelled their huge circuits. The accommodation was very variable and the *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers* provides examples. There could be a lack of privacy. In 1822 John Braithwaite wrote that he was 'afraid to struggle in conflicting, weeping prayer' because 'We are so much among families, in some parts, that we can be very little alone'.[56] Occasionally, some

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[52] Ibid.
[53]For example, in 1871, Rev J.B.M. Camm, Vicar of Monkton Wyld, his wife and three children, had a parlour maid, a cook, a housemaid and a nurse. www.opcdorset.org/Monkton Wyld.
[54] For example, the 1861 census showed that there were nearly 5000 adult female servants in South Lincolnshire. R.W. Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers* (Hull University Press, 1989), 11.
[55] Joseph Entwisle quoted in J. Entwistle (jnr.) *Memoir of Rev. Joseph Entwisle – fifty four years a Wesleyan minister, by his son*, fourth edn. (London: 1856), 35.
[56] Letter to his brother Robert April 1822, in Robert Dickinson, *The Life of Rev. John Braithwaite, Wesleyan Methodist Preacher, by Robert Dickinson – containing an account of his travels, labours in the ministry, and writings* (London : 1825), 120. The

accommodation was available in the actual preaching-house. A 1780 letter of John Wesley refers to Mr. Bradburn and his wife having accommodation in the preaching-house at Keighley. 'As he is the Assistant he is to have the upper rooms…'[57]

However, as the rounds became less extensive, preachers' houses began to be required. Some were built adjacent to the chapels. In 1797, the Hockley Chapel Nottingham had two dwelling houses adjacent for the preachers and their families together with a stable and 'other offices'.[58] Houses for preachers involved further financial outlay by the members. Alexander Kilham challenged the proposer of a scheme for Birstall 'to consider the dwelling houses of his hearers, their clothes, their bedding…the very pictures of poverty and distress…' These were people 'who could hardly keep our families from the workhouse, and starve ourselves to support those preachers we already have…'[59] This may have been an isolated incident, but it illustrates the dilemma faced by some circuits, of success bringing heavy practical and financial demands on the very 'converts' who made the success. Not all circuits were so poverty stricken. In c1787, the financially secure Wakefield circuit built and equipped a manse (preacher's house) at a cost of nearly £400.00. A list of furniture and furnishings purchased suggest a degree of practical comfort, for example £10.4.9 spent on three bedsteads and hangings and £10.2.6 on three feather beds, bolsters and pillows.[60]

A letter to Jabez Bunting about the Cambridge circuit, hints at a kind of informal categorization of circuits around their ability to provide for their preachers. Referring to his successor, Edward Lloyd wrote:

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letters covered a period c. 1722-1804. One of the later rules for assistants was to arrange for separate rooms for the preachers.

[57] John Wesley, letter to Mrs. Colbeck, October 12, 1780, John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley,* vol.6, 1772-1780 (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 36. It is not clear if being given the upper rooms in the preaching-house was an assistant's 'bonus' or simply the most useful place for the assistant to live.

[58] G.H.H. [initials only] compiler, *The History of Wesleyan Methodism in Nottingham and its vicinity.* (Nottingham; W. Bunny, 1859), 55.

[59] Kilham*, An Address to the Methodists in Birstall circuit.*

[60] Mills, "Circuit Finance in Early Methodism"*,* 61.

> If he have been in but *middling* circuits, so much the better, he will then feel less inconveniences of this *poor* circuit; for it is certainly a *very poor* circuit, and would not be suitable for a man who has enjoyed many of the comforts of life.[61]

The question of accommodation for married preachers exercised the Wesleyan Conference of 1827. There were difficulties in stationing these preachers because of a deficiency of preachers' houses in certain circuits.[62] This reluctance of circuits to provide houses continued through to 1854, when the connexional Committee of Distribution discovered that there were sixty-three married ministers in the circuits not only without houses but also obliged to live on a single minister's income.[63] Confusingly, in the same *Minutes,* the Contingency Fund report had the conference being 'gratified to learn' that fifty additional houses had been furnished for married ministers.[64] This rather suggests that the committees, despite covering similar ground, did not regularly 'speak' to each other.

5.2.5 Circuit Transport

In 1769, the Wesleyan Conference recommended that every circuit should provide the preachers with a means of transport where needed:

> Q22 Does it belong to each circuit to provide the preachers who need them with horses, saddles, and bridles?
> A. Undoubtedly it does; for they cannot be supposed to buy them out of their little allowance.[65]

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[61] Letter to Jabez Bunting from E.B. Lloyd dated Cambridge, July 13, 1821, *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1820-1829,* edited for the Royal Historical Society (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1972) no.45, 80. The accommodation available had only 'two small chambers'.
[62] These could be either rented or bought. For example: 'Rent of Preacher's House ¼ year £9.11.5' *Louth Wesleyan Circuit Accounts* March 1826, LINC Meth/B/Louth/13.
[63]" Report of the Special Committee of Finance, Minutes of Conference 1854", *Minutes of Conference* vol.12, 1852 – 54 (London: John Mason, 1855), 535.
[64] "Contingent Fund report, Minutes of Conference 1854", ibid, 463.
[65] "Minutes of Conference 1769" in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 375.

This minute illustrates the fact that many of the travelling preachers were from a humble background, possessing no riding horse of their own and unable to purchase one on their meagre stipend. Yet not all preachers were in this position. Joseph Entwisle's biographer noted that in the Oxford circuit in 1787, each of the three preachers had his own horse.[66] As the stipends were extremely low at this time, these men must have already owned riding horses before becoming preachers.

The minute also illustrates the development of rules concerning the responsibilities of a circuit. If the itinerancy was to work, the circuits would have to provide the means. As the cost and maintenance of a horse was not inconsiderable, one might wonder if this directive was not also about encouraging the circuits to realise what was involved in asking to have a preacher stationed in their circuit. [67] In his comment on the division of the Bristol circuit in 1829, William Leach complained that the half with the 'distant country places' would require the preacher to have a horse, yet the people of the area were very poor (and therefore, one concludes, would be least able to pay for its upkeep).[68]

At the end of the eighteenth century the London circuit preachers could take advantage of coach services to reach their outer areas. John Braithwaite and his colleagues walked up to five miles out of the city 'to the country places' [c.1792] but 'for those that were more remote we take the coach'.[69] (The London circuit covered several counties at the time). There was a small allowance for coach-hire, but Braithwaite preferred to walk when feasible and save the allowance to buy books.

In 1820, the 1769 directive on providing circuit horses was still producing patchy results. An American delegate to the 1820 Liverpool

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[66] Entwistle (jnr.), *Memoir of Rev. Joseph Entwisle*, 28.
[67] Horse corn cost the Louth circuit £11.14.6 for the year ending June 1841. *Louth Wesleyan Circuit Accounts* 1826 onwards. LINC Meth/B/Louth/13.
[68] Letter from William Leach to Jabez Bunting dated Bristol, July 17, 1829 in Ward, ed., *Early Correspondence*, no.137, 209.
[69] Robert Dickinson, *Life of Rev. John Braithwaite,* 186.

conference, having mingled with the preachers attending, wrote a memo to himself that ‘2 or 3 Preachers in one circuit keep one horse, owned and kept by the circuit….Many circuits no horse’. [70] This must have greatly puzzled the delegate who, accustomed to the vast distances traversed by the American preachers, would not have understood how any preacher could do his work without a horse. Itinerants in America were called Circuit Riders with good reason.

Horses for preachers were often hired rather than owned by a circuit, but horse-hire was not a cheap option. In 1858 it cost the Louth circuit £26.0.0 in one quarter.[71] In many circuits a specific Horse Hire Fund was set up. This fund could also cover other forms of transport. There are references in minutes to a circuit ‘conveyance’ (for the preachers on Sundays) in the Grantham Circuit in both 1855 and 1861; mentioning the villages to which it travelled and the frequency with which it operated.[72] Unfortunately, there is no indication of what form the conveyance took. In Evesham, the Horse Hire Fund was still in operation some time after preachers had ceased to use horses. The December 1914 quarterly meeting included an animated discussion about whether or not the fund should be continued; the issue being resolved in 1915, by allowing cyclists to claim from it. [73]

5.2.6 Circuit use of the Wesleyan Contingency Fund

Circuits were keen to have more preachers, but had difficulties in meeting the cost of their stipends and allowances, family allowances and even accommodation. A way round this problem was to claim assistance from the connexional Contingency Fund which had been established in 1763. It was maintained through a yearly collection in the classes and a July collection in the societies, supplemented by

[70] Extract from *Diary of Rev. John Emory of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, reproduced in Davies, George and Rupp, *History*, vol. 4, 367. See also letter from Jonathan Crowther to Timothy Crowther, December 1815, ibid, 347.
[71] *Louth Wesleyan Circuit, Circuit Accounts 1858,* LINC Meth/B/Louth/13.
[72] *Grantham Wesleyan Circuit Local Preachers’ Meeting Minutes*, Jan. 1st 1855 and June 24th 1861. LINC Meth/B/Grantham/18.
[73] *Evesham Wesleyan Circuit Quarterly Meeting, Minutes 1907 – 1923.* WORC 898.7312, BA 8608, parcel 4 (iv).

profits from the Book Room.[74] Originally, the fund was intended for such matters as releasing local preachers from small debts so that they could become travelling preachers, and sustaining ministry in circuits such as the north-west of Ireland and the North of Scotland, where the people could not afford to support a preacher. It met both 'extraordinary' and 'ordinary' deficiencies. The first included support for preachers and families in difficult circumstances.[75] The category of 'Ordinary Deficiencies' was intended to meet deficiencies where new or genuinely struggling circuits were simply unable to raise sufficient funds themselves.[76]

However, it was not only genuinely needy circuits that were calling on the fund for assistance, but also those whose enthusiasm for employing preachers had outstripped their ability to support them and their families. By 1793, the conference found it necessary to lay down a list of priorities for such claims on the fund: '1.The deficiencies in the preachers' salaries, 2.The deficiencies in the salaries of the wives, 3.The deficiencies in the allowances for the children of preachers…[77].

Eventually, in 1797, a letter had to be sent to superintendents throughout the Connexion asking them to persuade the people in their circuits to provide for the preachers otherwise 'we shall be under the disagreeable necessity to send no more preachers – than they are able and willing to provide for.'[78] Circuits such as Colchester, Diss, Bedford, Blandford, Leek and Hull could not even cover the preacher's quarterage. The letter even suggested that '…the smaller places in each circuit which can scarcely support the preachers while they are

[74] The Book Room was the connexional printing and publishing arm.
[75] Although by 1846, even financial claims for the 'supply of places for afflicted and deceased ministers' were viewed with suspicion and applications were required to be watched with 'more than ordinary vigilance.' Peirce, *Ecclesiastical Principles,* 428 quoting *Minutes of Conference 1846,* vol.10*,* 384.
[76] In 1825, for example, the Carlisle Circuit only managed to raise £50.14.6 locally, leaving a deficiency to be made up by the Fund of £330.00.
[77] Q18, Ms. *Journal* of the 1793 Leeds Conference, MARM 1977/ 585.
[78] Letter "To all Superintendents throughout the Connexion" dated London Sept. 5 1797, *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from the first, held in London, by the late Rev. John Wesley A.M in the year 1744* (London: Conference Office, 1812), 397.

with them, must have less preaching, if not wholly be given up'. [79] This position seems so much at odds with the outgoing missionary efforts of the earlier preachers, planting societies as they travelled their rounds, but realism had come into play. An organisation with (albeit very poorly) paid employees requiring accommodation and expenses needed a different mind-set.

In 1817, Jonathan Crowther, a travelling preacher and later President of the Conference, wrote his *Thoughts upon the Finances or Temporal Affairs of the Methodist Connexion*…'[80] Crowther complained that the circuits would be better off without the Contingent Fund because while the fund existed and they paid into it, '…they view it somewhat in the light of a sick-club-box, or a parish fund…' [81] He identified the principle source of the problem as '…the demand of more preaching on the sabbath-days, from Travelling Preachers, which has arisen chiefly from the building so many new chapels. This has led to an increase of travelling preachers; that to an increase of wives; and that to an increase of children, house-rent and other expenses'. [82] His solution was no additional preachers until the circuits could afford this with locally raised funds.

The demands on the Contingent Fund continued to outstrip its income, and the reason for this was laid largely at the door of those circuits, which, in modern parlance, would be described as 'playing the system'. It appeared that circuits had 'By sanguine representations of opening and promising prospects of usefulness, and by urgent entreaty…induced the conference to call out and appoint single men'.[83] Then, when these men were married, other circuits or the Contingent

[79] Ibid.
[80] Jonathan Crowther, "Thoughts upon the finances or temporal affairs of the Methodist Connexion…written just before the Conference of 1817" quoted in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.4 (London: Epworth, 1986), 352.
[81] Ibid.
[82] ibid.
[83] "Appendix VI, Report of the Special Committee of Finance, Minutes of Conference 1854" in *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences,* vol.12, 534 – 540.

Fund were called upon to make up the difference in allowances. This process was then repeated. Further, some circuits which failed in their bids for grants sufficient to cover their shortfall 'quietly, without any investigation of their case at the annual district meetings, evaded their obligation to make suitable provision for the ministers they employ, by giving up a house, in some cases selling the furniture to pay deficiencies…' [84]

Some of the difficulties in which circuits found themselves can be attributed to the economic stress experienced from time to time in the country at large. The 1826 conference "annual address" had referred to the 'unexampled distress which has, during the past year overwhelmed or embarrassed so many merchants, manufacturers and tradesmen and plunged so many thousands of the labouring classes into penury and want'. [85] Later in the century, summaries of the Annual Assembly proceedings of the United Methodist Free Churches show that in 1878, 'in consequence of the great commercial depression', it had not been found possible to increase the stipends of ministers in dependent circuits. [86] It is not clear if the difficulty was a drop in the value of investments or members in reduced circumstances being less able to contribute to connexional funds. It may have been both.

5.3 Primitive Methodist Circuit Expenditure

Primitive Methodist circuits equally had responsibility for managing their own finances, and these finances appear to have been as precarious as those of Wesleyan circuits. As late as 1914, the "quarterly letter" from the ministers in the Shrewsbury PM preaching plan began: 'The finance question, like the poor, is always with us, and has been the

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[84] Ibid.

[85] "Annual Address of the Conference to the Methodist Societies", *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, vol.6, 1825-1830 (London: John Mason [1826]), 174.

[86] Summaries of the proceedings of annual assemblies in Edwin Askew, ed., *Free Methodist Manual – comprising a statement of the origin, doctrines and constitution of the United Methodist Free Churches* (London: Andrew Crombie, 1899).

fruitful cause of much trouble'.[87] The problem, as in Wesleyan circuits, was trust debts on individual chapels and general circuit finance. Delia Garrett examined the finances of the Ludlow Primitive Methodist circuit of the mid -1800's in some detail, through the accounts and committee minutes, and found the same problems.[88]

The Primitive Methodists also adopted the role of circuit steward in 'attending to the general business of the circuit', but they (usually three) were elected by the quarter-day board, not appointed by the superintendent, and originally, for one quarter only. Every quarter, the principal steward's accounts had to be closed, then had to be audited by the board.[89]

5.3.1 Preachers' Stipends

Primitive Methodist travelling preachers received an even smaller stipend than the Wesleyans, but were equally forbidden to supplement this with business activities. [90] The rate laid down by the first Annual Meeting (1820) was for a single man, no more than £3.15.0 per quarter plus board and lodging. If the preacher was female, then the stipend was £2.0.0.[91] For a married man it was 12/- per week, but no claims could then be allowed for house rent or victuals. The one concession was that if he was 'planned to labour in the town in which his wife resides' he might claim 1/6 per day board. [92] The travelling preacher was also allowed to keep 10% of the profits of (connexional) books sold. This was plainly an incentive to maintain sales. Book-room profits

[87] *Shrewsbury Primitive Methodist Circuit Preachers' Plan of Sabbath and Week-day appointments, July – September 1914.* SHROP NM/2123/28.
[88] Delia Garrett, "Primitive Methodism in Shropshire, 1820-1900".
[89] *General Minutes of the Conferences of the Primitive Methodist Connexion consolidated at and by the Conference held at Lynn-Regis, in Norfolk, May 20-25, 1836* (Bemersley: 1836).
[90] In 1819 a Primitive Methodist preacher, his wife and family, 'earned about half the minimum salary of a Wesleyan Itinerant with a comparable family'. Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion,* 181.
[91] The 1833 Conference ruled that 'females shall be stationed the same as male preachers and that they be subject to the same regulations and rules as male preachers'. Ms. *Journal of Primitive Methodist Conference 1834*, para.38, MARM 1977/ 590. It is not clear if this included an equal stipend.
[92] *General Minutes of the Annual Meeting Hull 1820.* Questions 18-38.

also came to the rescue of preachers in 'poor but improving circuits'. In 1849, the conference agreed that a portion of the profits could be made available to help with salaries and expenses, but making a claim involved agreeing to many conditions.[93]

Circuit account books of the period provide ample evidence of the amounts circuits paid to travelling preachers. In December 1828, J. Tims was paid £9.2.0 quarterage by the Shrewsbury Circuit.[94] Almost fifty years later, in 1874, the Alford [Lincolnshire Wolds] PM quarterly meeting resolved that the quarterage of the preachers should be raised from the same 9 guineas to 11 guineas.[95] This suggests that the Alford members had simply not had the financial means to raise the quarterage before that date. At roughly the same period, even the worst-off Church of England curate serving two parishes was likely to have an income per annum of £100 at least, which was three times the average income of the farm labourer.[96] The Congregational Union was recommending an annual minimum stipend of £100 for the country and £150 in towns. [97]

The *General Rules* of the Connexion issued in 1912, provide not only details of recommended ministers' stipends, by now £25 per quarter, but also insight into what may have been a regular bone of contention among the ministers. Rule 430 stated that: 'If a station refuse to pay the salary to which a minister deems himself entitled, according to rule, he may lay all the facts of the case before his district committee for

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[93] *General Minutes made at the Thirtieth Annual Conference of the Primitive Methodist Connexion. Sunderland June 6-16 1849* (London: Thomas Holliday, Conference Offices and Bookroom, 1849), 21.
[94]*Circuit Accounts, Shrewsbury Primitive Methodist Circuit*, *1828 onwards* SHROP NM2123/433. The fragility of circuit finance can be illustrated by the fact that in June 1834, the same quarterly meeting had to instruct the circuit stewards to 'borrow £10 to pay the preachers.' Ibid.
[95]*Alford Primitive Methodist Local Preachers Meeting Minutes 1848-1856*, LINC/Meth/B/unlisted.
[96] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey 1825-1875*, 223, 114.
[97] 'Congregational Union Financial Committee – interim report 1874, Albert Peel, *These Hundred Years: A History of the Congregational Union of England and Wales 1831-1931* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1931), 303.

adjudication'.[98] Provision in the rules for such an eventuality implies that such disagreements were not uncommon. Refusal was not the same as inability to pay. Rather it suggests that part or all of the salary might be withheld by a quarterly meeting if the minister's 'performance' was not acceptable in some way.

Something of both the sacrificial attitude expected from Primitive Methodist preachers, and the financial constraints under which their circuits laboured, is illustrated in the appendix to a pledge that a probationer minister was required to sign. Where the candidate was a married man or a widower with children, he was required to pledge that:

> …I will accept, as the sole quarterly salary for myself and my family the sum fixed by Rule 428, without expecting any extras for rent or any other thing during the whole time of my probation; and if any station [circuit] to which I may be sent cannot raise this amount without being involved in debt, I promise that I will accept as my quarterly salary the amount which it can raise…'.[99]

The itinerants who suffered the most in respect of stipends were those of the United Methodist Free Churches. In 1844 the ministers' salaries were actually reduced, to £80 for those in Full Connexion and £55 for Probationers. In 1852, a further reduction was made. The blame fell on emigration and 'needless controversies'.[100]

5.3.2 Preachers' Allowances

Primitive Methodist preachers received board and meal allowances in much the same way as the Wesleyan preachers. In the Shrewsbury Primitive Methodist circuit, in 1829, the single preacher's meal bill came

[98] *The General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church; revised by order of the Ninety-Third Annual Conference held at Norwich, June 12- 20 1912 (*London: W.A. Hammond, 1912), General Books, print on demand edn. para. 430, 60.
[99] Ibid, para. 407,57.
[100] Askew, *Free Methodist Manual.*

to £2.8.5 for the quarter. [101] However, perhaps the most unexpected form of allowance is found in the 1825 *Minutes* of the Primitive Methodist conference; an allowance that can only be described as a results-related bonus. ‘Useful, industrious and laborious travelling preachers, whose labours are crowned with success, and whose ministry is a constant means of bringing the circuits up into a state of prosperity’ were entitled to an advance over and above the regular stipend if the circuit could afford it. A married man was entitled to 3/- a week.[102]

There was some small financial assistance available to itinerants who had to retire. Founded in 1823, the *Primitive Methodist Itinerant Preachers’ Friendly Society* offered some help to superannuated members. Membership criteria were however very strict. Preachers deemed ‘inefficient’ were not accepted or if already enrolled, had their contributions returned. [103] The scale of annuities fixed in 1857 allowed £10.00 after 6 years membership and up to £30.00 after 25 years. Widows and orphans were also provided for. In 1848 for example, a Mrs Shinwell and her four children received a funeral allowance of £7.0.0 and afterwards £6.5s 9d per quarter. [104]

5.3.3 Wives, children and servants

Wives of Primitive Methodist preachers were, like their Wesleyan sisters, under the watchful eye of the circuit; and even before marriage. A circuit form had to be completed for the fiancée of a candidate for the ministry, confirming that: ‘in our opinion ‘X’ is in all respects a suitable person to become the wife of a Primitive Methodist travelling

[101] *Shrewsbury Primitive Methodist Circuit Accounts, 1828 onwards,* entry for March 1829. SHROP NM2123/533.
[102] Q.15, *Small Minutes of the Annual Meeting or Conference of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, June 1825* (Bemersley near Tunstall: 1825), 5.
[103] ‘Inefficiency’ in ministry was a technical expression in Primitive Methodism and was a reason for dispensing with a preacher’s services.
[104] *Yearly Report of the Primitive Methodist Itinerants Friendly Society,* 1841-58 (London: J. Dickenson, Conference Offices) entry for 1848.

preacher'.[105] However, no evidence of any financial support for preachers' wives has been found in the conference *Journals* or *Minutes.* There is reference to a children's allowance. The very early 1820 connexional *Minutes* record the recommendation of fifteen pence per week for each child under eight years; and this had increased to two shillings per week by 1912.[106] The 1853 conference did find a solution to the cost of large ministerial families. The circuits and branches were directed to contribute an equal share toward the maintenance of children in proportion to their membership.[107] As with the Wesleyans, the cost of wives and children caused problems. The 1853 conference concluded that 'to relieve poor circuits which are heavily burdened with married preachers', the answer was that married preachers should be followed by single ones. [108] There is no evidence of allowances for servants.

5.3.4 Preachers' Houses

As with Wesleyan Methodism, Primitive Methodist circuits were required to rent (if not buy) and furnish a house for each of its married travelling preachers. However, 'each preacher who inhabits such a house shall and must absolutely pay one shilling a quarter acknowledgment for the use of the furniture'.[109] It is not known how long this rule continued but it does not seem to have guaranteed suitable accommodation. The Alford October 1861 local preachers' meeting agreed that 'Brother Kendall have liberty to remove from his preacher's house, it being damp and unwholesome'.[110] Accommodation plainly varied. The Shrewsbury PM Circuit *Inventory of*

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[105] *The General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church, revised 1912,* print on demand edn. 50.
[106] Ibid, para. 429, print on demand edn., 60.
[107] *Minutes of the Thirty-fourth Conference of the Primitive Methodist Connexion 1853* (London: Thomas Holliday, 1853), 33.
[108] Ibid 31.
[109] Items A1 and A2, *Small Minutes of the Annual Meeting or Conference of the Primitive Methodist Connexion 1825* (Bemersley, nr. Tunstall, 1825).
[110] Ms. *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Branch Local Preacher's Meeting Alford 1848-1856.* LINC METH/B/unlisted.

Furniture in the Preacher's House, compiled in 1880,[111] listed the contents of a five-bedroom house with study, kitchen, larder and cellar. A contemporary survey of the furniture listed in the inventory however, revealed its state. Two chairs in the study were 'very old and worn out', as was the carpet in bedroom 2. The child's bedstead was 'broken', a mirror 'no use' and the kitchen bellows 'broken (lost its wind)'. In 1886 the child's bedstead was still 'broken'. The only reference to bathing facilities was two tin baths stored in the cellar.

5.3.5 Circuit Transport

While riding was a more efficient means of travel, Primitive Methodist travelling preachers did still walk to their appointments. In 1839, a travelling preacher stationed on the Isle of Man recorded: 'Preached twice in Castletown chapel. Led the Preachers Class and walked ten miles after the evening service. This has been a good day. Bless the Lord.' [112] William Garner, a Primitive Methodist travelling preacher, recorded that he had travelled 44,936 miles on foot in the course of his first twenty-one years of itinerancy, having regularly walked twenty and occasionally thirty miles a day.[113]

5.3.6 The Primitive Methodist Contingency Fund

The Primitive Methodist Connexion also found it necessary to establish a Contingency Fund. To some extent, this went against the grain, since there was no wish to burden the members of the societies with the many claims for funds which were a cause of disquiet about and defection from the Wesleyan Connexion. However, it could not be denied that 'extreme cases of affliction and distress' might arise among the travelling preachers, hired local preachers[114], preachers' widows and fatherless children, and some means of relieving this distress was

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[111] *Inventory of Furniture in Preachers House 1880,* Shrewsbury Primitive Methodist Circuit, SHROP NM2123/533.

[112] Transcript *Diary of a Primitive Methodist Travelling Preacher* March 1839, www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/methodism/tpdiary.htm

[113] John Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion from its origin to the Conference of 1860,* new edn., revised and enlarged (London: R.Davies, Conference Offices, 1864), 441-3.

[114] Local preachers remunerated for doing the work of itinerants for limited periods.

needed. The language of the rules for the Fund reflects the reticence to ask for money from the members. It was '*recommended* to the circuits to *attempt* to raise a provision, by soliciting subscriptions of one penny per member…'[115] [italics mine]. Unfortunately it seems that such reticence led to a shortage of funds. The 1828 conference declared that no distressed case could be relieved that year and in 1831, that help with doctor's bills could not be given in the first three weeks of illness 'because the fund can do no more'.[116] No evidence has been found of circuits 'playing the system' in the manner of the Wesleyan circuits.

5.4 Chapel building - Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist

In both Connexions, the early newly-established societies first met in cottages, rented rooms, barns and similar. [117] However, circuits and societies were often eager to move beyond these into their own permanent accommodation.[118] The problem was that enthusiasm for building chapels often outstripped the ability to repay the debt or even the wisdom of building a particular chapel in the first place. Chapel-building involved capital outlay which placed demands on members with little money.[119] Finding the cost of land and a building was of a different order from paying a modest rent, but it seems that any horror of debt was overridden by pious optimism. Early PM circuits did sometimes try to bridge the gap with self-help and self-build.[120]

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[115] "Rules for the Contingent Fund", *General Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Connexion 1822,* 14.
[116] *Minutes of Primitive Methodist Conferences* 1828 and 1831.
[117] The Manchester Primitive Methodist circuit progressed from meetings held in a loft over a stable, to meetings in the top room over a factory, before building a chapel (Old Jersey Street Chapel) in 1824. Holliday Bickerstaff Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (London: Robert Bryant, 1905), vol.2, print on demand edn. 16-17.
[118] 'The people of Mixenden in this circuit are building a chapel without consulting the Building Committee…I could not prevent it.' William Myles to Jabez Bunting August 18 1820. Extract in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.4, 373.
[119] 'That Bros. Drayton and [?] buy the ground of Mr. Bowyer for a chapel at Pontesford as cheap as they can'. *Shrewsbury Primitive Methodist Circuit Local Preachers and Quarterly Meeting Minute Book 1823-1830,* entry for June 22, 1835*,* SHROP NM2 123/433.
[120] See several examples in Kendall, *Origin and History*, print on demand edn., 214-215.

Occasionally, sympathetic landowners would help. Lord Yarborough agreed to provide land for a chapel at Keelby (Lincs) and gave orders for his steward to stake out 12 yards square.[121] At times, circuits of both Connexions took on chapels made redundant by others, such as Dissenter congregations.[122] But that still left many circuits in significant debt.

As early as 1765, the Wesleyan Conference had to direct: 'Let no preaching-house be begun, but by the advice of the Assistant. And let no Assistant consent thereto without absolute necessity'. [123] This was still a problem in 1783, when the conference considered that '…the heedless multiplying of preaching-houses' was 'a great evil'.[124] There was no reason given for this being a great evil, but it was probably the issue of debt which had little prospect of being repaid quickly. Although all chapels in both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist Connexions were required to be settled on a connexional Model Deed[125], the conference looks rather helpless in the face of this spirited, yet somewhat reckless, building boom. This shows that despite quarterly meetings and assistants, local societies had a strong independent streak and managed to evade oversight of their plans for building chapels which, being simple and small, were relatively quickly erected.

Finally in 1815, and probably as a result of a Bristol district meeting suggestion, the Wesleyan conference established a connexional chapel committee 'to prevent the imprudent erection of chapels'.[126] Despite these concerns, rapid chapel building went ahead. Nearly fifty years later, in the rural Alford Wesleyan circuit, the circuit quarterly

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[121] Report of chapel opening at Keelby October 1836, *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, vols. 6 and 7, 237.
[122] For example, 'A convenient chapel was procured which had been built for the Anabaptists' *Arminian Magazine, 1779*, 39.
[123] Q&A 10, "Minutes of Conference 1765", in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 309.
[124] Q22, "Minutes of Conference 1783", in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 541.

[125] The Wesleyan *Model Trust Deed* dated from 1832.
[126] Harwood, *History of Wesleyan Methodism,* 188. Primitive Methodism set up district building committees in 1835.

meeting approved a chapel at Ulceby in 1862,[127] at Hogsthorpe in 1863, in Alsford in 1863, the same at Swaby in 1865, at Mablethorpe in 1866, at Sloothby in 1868, at Brinkhill in 1871 and at Witham in 1874.[128]

There is detailed guidance in connexional *Minutes* and *Rules* on the procedures to be followed in erecting chapels, with firm direction on the amount to be raised before construction could begin. This guidance plainly arose from bitter experience of circuits falling into bad debt. Some guidance however, is more enigmatic. A brief 1914 directive to Primitive Methodist district building committees warned that they must be careful as to '…how they give sanction to build cottages in connection with chapels, as they are often found to be a source of trouble'.[129] Possibly cottages were built as a source of income, and tenants were the trouble.

Advice to avoid building chapels may seem strange, but for a revival movement, building anything permanent signalled a significant shift of focus. The advice expressed in terms of the avoidance of debt as previously described, also contained an unmentioned and perhaps unpalatable truth. Chapel-building was marking the end of the first flush of evangelistic endeavour, both in Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist traditions. Kendall discussed the matter of Primitive Methodist chapel-building at some length and dated the start of what he called the 'chapel building era' as 1847. [130] He noted that while in

[127] The parish of Ulceby was described in 1839 as being 'with very few exceptions almost entirely populated by Wesleyan Methodists'. Quoted by Dinah Tyszka in 'My Dear Lord: Letters to Bishop Kaye', 127 in Dinah Tyszka, Keith Miller, Geoffrey Bryant, eds., *Land, People and Landscapes: Essays on the History of the Lincolnshire Region* (Lincolnshire Books, Lincolnshire County Council, 1991).
[128] These were mostly very small villages. Even the 1901 census gave populations of 305 for Swaby, 113 for Brinkhill, 610 for Hogsthorpe and 196 for Witham.
[129] *The General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church (1914)*, print on demand edn., 23, para.164.
[130] Chapel building was still going strong in Primitive Methodism 50 years later. In 1897, it was recorded that 60 new chapels with 13245 sittings had been built 'during the year'. But some were closed. Reasons included declining population, mine closure and repeated efforts to revive a cause without success. Ms. *Journal, Primitive Methodist Conference 1897* MARM 1977/590.

1847 the rented rooms outnumbered the chapels by more than two to one (3340 to 1421), by 1868 the chapels outnumbered the rented rooms: 3235 chapels and 3034 rented rooms. Kendall considered that the figures 'unmistakeably' showed that very much of the early chapel building was simply substituting a rented room for a chapel. This led him to see 'sinister import' in the decreased number of rented rooms, in that it demonstrated a 'decline in home-missionary enterprise'. [131]

5.4.1 Motivation for chapel-building

Chapels represented visible presence. Ambler concluded that for Lincolnshire Primitive Methodists, having a chapel drew them into a more central place in village life and a chapel building was seen as 'a reflection of the status' of the worshipping community. [132] However, there were other reasons. Sometimes it was quite simply that there was no longer enough room in the existing accommodation. 'In consequence of a gracious revival of God's work in Thoresby, the present house in which we worship is inconveniently crowded. A chapel is very much needed'.[133] Sometimes a local Methodist convert simply wished to demonstrate commitment and/or largesse.[134]

Another reason for chapel-building was population increase. A correspondent of John Kaye, Bishop of Lincoln, anxiously wrote in 1851 that in Grimsby 'The Wesleyans have lately built a chapel to accommodate eight hundred persons' and 'If the Church of England does not provide for the religious wants of the increasing population, the Wesleyans and other dissenters will occupy the vacant ground'.[135]

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[131] Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol.2, print on demand edn., 342.
[132] Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, 59.
[133] *Alford Wesleyan Quarterly Meeting Minute Book 1861 onwards,* entry for March 27, 1862.LINC Meth B / Alford.
[134] A New Wesleyan chapel was built in Hatcliffe (Lincs) 'chiefly through the liberality of Mr Christopher Coates, aided by Messrs F. and John Sowerby'. R.W. Ambler ed. *Lincolnshire Parish Correspondence of John Kaye, Bishop of Lincoln, 1827-53* (Lincoln Record Society: 2006), note 28, 13. A 'beautiful' Primitive Methodist chapel was built for the St. Alban's Mission in Bushey by C. Vines, Esq., costing more than £400. Petty, *History*, 524.
[135] Ambler, *Lincolnshire Parish Correspondence,* 11.6, Letter dated 15 November 1851, 62-63. H.B. Kendall described the rise of Grimsby from 'obscurity' and a population of 'barely 3,000' in 1819 to 'all the world' knowing about its 'spacious

The Grimsby Primitive Methodist circuit also responded to the rapidly growing population. From a small chapel purchased for £300 in 1821, they progressed to establishing, in 1859, ‘a new chapel in the Doric Style’ seating around 1000 people. Petty described this as ‘a noble sanctuary’ in a ‘prosperous town’. [136]

Occasionally, the enthusiasm of an individual spiralled out of control, and this had disastrous consequences. Both in Kent and Louth, John Stamp, a Primitive Methodist preacher, led his circuits into building and buying chapels without any thought as to how they might be paid for. Kendall wrote that Stamp was an effective evangelist ‘…and he should have kept *to* it and *from* having anything to do with bricks and mortar, and promissory notes and balance sheets’.[137]

By the middle of the nineteenth century,[138] Wesleyan circuits were beginning to replace town churches at least, by much grander buildings.[139] 1847 saw the opening of what was described as a ‘beautiful and spacious’ new chapel in Halifax Place, Nottingham. ‘The interior is magnificent. The pulpit is of solid mahogany, exquisitely finished’ and ‘the ceiling is the highest of any Wesleyan place of worship in the kingdom, being 41 feet from the floor.’ ‘The number of sittings is 1800; including free seats, to which the trustees, with commendable self-denial, have appropriated some of the most

docks’ in Kendall’s day (1909). *Origin and History*, print on demand edn., vol.1, 291,292. ‘…in a most eligible situation in one of the principle streets’. Petty, *History,* (1864), 505- 506.

[136] Ibid, 505-506.

[137] Kendall, *Origin and History,* print on demand edn., vol.1, 301.

[138] Julia Stewart Werner referred to the ‘new and pretentious [Wesleyan] chapels being built in the early nineteenth century’ as a contrast to ‘stark pewless [Primitive Methodist] chapels on undesirable sites’. It makes a compelling contrast, but ‘early’ is inaccurate and the Primitive Methodists soon followed. Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion,* 182.

[139] One contemporary source, said to have been influential, was F.J. Jobson, *Chapel and School Architecture as appropriate to the buildings of non-conformists, particularly those of the Wesleyan Methodists* (1840). Extracts in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.4, 491-494.

valuable parts of the chapel.'[140] Providing 'free' seats for the poorer members of the congregation in these positions meant a reduction in income from pew rent. [141] The actual motivation of the trustees is unknown, as the writer's interest was simply in the way the building was fitted out.

Methodist preaching houses/chapels had begun very modestly. Plate 4 shows the first chapel built by Wesleyans in the village of Coleby in Lincolnshire and opened in 1835. It had 128 seats, of which 78 were free and 50 subject to pew rent.[142] Early Primitive Methodist chapels, even in towns, were built on grounds of simplicity and necessity. [143] Kendall wrote:

> 'Architecturally, our fathers did not aim very high. They set before them no lofty ideal of what a place of worship should be. The one problem they cared to solve was this: how to enclose so many cubic feet of space with weather-tight walls and roof, so that sitting room might be found for a given number of men and women to hear the everlasting gospel.'[144]

However, this attitude changed. The first permanent chapel (1842) of a Primitive Methodist society in the Chesterfield Second circuit had been designed by the circuit travelling preacher, Mr. Booth, who also helped to build it. But it passed through several enlargements, and ended up as a 'handsome Gothic church' constructed in a 'prominent part' of

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[140] 'GHH' compiler, *The History of Wesleyan Methodism in Nottingham and its vicinity* (Nottingham; W.Bunny, 1859),106. A note indicates that some of the architectural description came from '*Old and New Nottingham'*.
[141] Pew Rent provided significant income. In the 1870's, the Wesleyan Park Chapel Sheffield, charged, per sitting, first row 9s.6d, third row 6s.6d, and the fifth row 4s. per year. K. Theodore Hoppen, *The New Oxford History of England: The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 454.
[142] Chrysanthe J. Marriott, *The History of Coleby Wesleyan Methodist Chapel* (Lincoln: Firs Publishing, 2011), 9. This building was replaced in 1903 with a building of more church-like appearance.
[143] For example, a new chapel 35 feet by 25 feet (estimated cost £150) at Street in the Glastonbury Circuit in 1839. Ms. *Minutes of the Bath District Meeting commencing September 1838.* MARM 1977/598. Many were much smaller.
[144] Kendall, *Origins and History,* 373. His example was Mill Street: the first Primitive Methodist Chapel in Hull.

Plate 4

The first Wesleyan Chapel, Coleby, Lincs, built on land sold to the circuit by Sir Charles Tempest for £5.0.0 and opened 3 March 1835

Photograph reproduced by permission of Chrysanthe E. Marriott.

town in 1890. The well-known painting *The Primitive Methodists at Prayer* (early 1890's) is celebrated for its portrayal of simplicity and devotion in the person of an elderly fisherman kneeling on a bench in prayer (See Plate 5). What is not remarked upon is the fact that the church behind him is a spacious, pillared and galleried church, with large organ and pulpit and box pews. Where the man is kneeling is the row of wooden benches set to one side of the church, as the 'free seats'. [145] By the 1890's, Primitive Methodist churches in towns had caught up with Wesleyan design and aspirations.

The motivation for grandness was mixed. The regular use of the word 'commodious' in descriptions of new chapels suggests that members were no longer content to squeeze into basic chapels and onto benches. [146] The civic architecture of the period was also on a grand scale, so following architectural trends is a possibility, particularly where chapels, previously in side streets in towns, were being rebuilt in more prominent positions. [147] Hoppen proposed that increasingly middle-class Nonconformists built more grandly to compensate for social structures becoming 'less favourable' toward them in general society. [148] This is however unlikely, since this period represented the opposite: a high point of Non-Conformity. A more likely motive would have been a desire to demonstrate denominational success - 'we are here to stay, and we are growing and our chapel is the most impressive in town'.

In the Primitive Methodist Connexion, a hint of the tension which did exist between a desire for continuing missionary extension in the PM tradition and that for a significant and impressive presence, can be

[145] *The Primitive Methodists at Prayer* by W. H. Y. Titcomb (early 1890s). The church is the Primitive Methodist Chapel, Fore Street, St. Ives, Cornwall.
[146] 'The very commodious building, greatly admired by the public…' *Primitive Methodist Magazine, October 1832,* 392, quoted in Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers,* 59. This is in fact a very modest brick building, known to the author.
[147] For example, Birmingham Town Hall built 1834, Leeds 1858, Grimsby 1863 in the 'Modern Italian Style' and Manchester 1877, Neo-Gothic.
[148] Theodore K. Hoppen, *New Oxford History of England,* 437.

Plate 5 “Primitive Methodists at Prayer” by William H.Y. Titcomb
Dudley Museum Services
www.bbc.co.uk/arts/your paintings.

found in a reference to a Hull circuit ‘policy decision’. A choice had to be made between a chapel ‘built beyond the bridge in the Holderness Road direction’ (a downtown location) and ‘a large central chapel’ on a ‘splendid site’.[149] John Bywater, the minister and enthusiastic chapel-builder, convinced the circuit to go for the central site.

5.5 Conclusion

The subject of temporal affairs contributes to seeing the circuits as populated by those who were at one and the same time both enthusiastic for their cause and somewhat unrealistic concerning its financial cost. The issue of the cost implications of Wesleyan preachers’ wives shows, among other things, a serious mismatch between an idealised view of a travelling preacher whose material needs were few, and the reality. The subject also serves to reinforce the significance of the circuit within the Methodist Connexions as the focus of the management of temporal affairs. The ‘conversation’ between the Wesleyan circuits and the conference and its executive on matters such as allowances for families and building more chapels reveals a tension which existed from the earliest years. Connexionalism, although a core principle of Methodism, was nevertheless strained at times.

[149] Kendall, *Origin and History,* print on demand edn., vol. 2, 344.

Chapter Six

The Assistant / Superintendent

6.1 Introduction

The itinerant at the head of each Methodist circuit was known as the 'assistant' in John Wesley's lifetime and the 'superintendent' afterwards. This chapter concerns the development of that role, the duties assigned to it, and its significance within the Methodist scheme of oversight. The transition from one term to the other is explored and a lack of any previous study of the transition identified. In this chapter the role of the assistant / superintendent as a means of implementing conference policy is demonstrated; as is his responsibility for oversight within the circuit. Efforts to introduce regional superintendency are explored, along with the British Methodist aversion to personal episcopacy. Also identified is the contradictory and somewhat unresolved nature of superintendency itself.

6.2 Origins – The Assistant

Until c1749 Wesley himself superintended the work of all the travelling preachers on their circuits. The preachers themselves were described as 'helpers' (as in *Minutes of Conference 1746*) and there was no level of oversight or administration between Wesley and the travelling preachers. However, a change took place as a result of deliberations at the Newcastle conference of November 16, 1749. At this conference the matter of greater unity of the societies, previously discussed at the 1748 conference, was raised again.[1] There was a desire for the societies to be '…firmly united together by one spirit of love and heavenly mindedness'.[2] At a practical level, this intention of unity was interpreted as requiring a greater degree of organisation in 'temporal'

[1] "Minutes of Conference 1748", Q.8, in Henry D. Rack, ed., *The Works of John Wesley,* vol.10, The Methodist Societies and the Minutes of Conference (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 225.
[2] "Minutes of Conference 1749", Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 231.

matters, both locally and as a connexion of societies.[3] It was also to enable Wesley to have an overall picture of the movement, and have a finger on the pulse of the progress and problems within the societies.[4] The conference agreed (or Wesley decided) that 'advances' towards these objectives might be achieved: 'by appointing one of our helpers in each circuit to take charge of the societies therein to distinguish this person from the rest': he 'may be termed an 'Assistant''.[5] Thus the role was established on a purely practical basis to meet a particular need. Nevertheless, the phrase 'take charge' suggests a degree of conferred authority. It can also be argued that part of the origin of this role lay in the need to reinforce the connexional nature of Methodism (its unity).

The origin also lay in the need to have a means of oversight at circuit level. The 1749 *Minutes* show that in the course of that conference a 'job specification' for an assistant emerged. The duties and responsibilities were numerous, especially considering that this was to be a role additional to that of being a travelling preacher. When the role was established, the circuits were few but vast. In 1749, William Shent, for example, was designated assistant for circuit 8 which was 'Yorkshire and Lincolnshire'.

When the conference asked: 'What is the Office of an Assistant?'[6] the answer was:

1) To visit the classes in each place, and write new lists of the societies.
2) To regulate the bands
3) To deliver new [class] tickets
4) To keep watch-nights and love-feasts monthly
5) To take in or put out of the society or bands
6) To hold quarterly meetings and therein diligently to inquire into the spiritual and temporal state of each society

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[3] Ibid. The way the *Minutes* are set out is a little confusing, since there is reference in Q1 to the use of assistants, before the record of the decision to 'invent' assistants, in Q2.
[4] Ibid, Q.1, 232. 'London' meant Wesley and his stewards at his London base.
[5] "Minutes of Conference 1749", Q.2 and 3, in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 232. The person he was to assist was of course, John Wesley.
[6] Ibid, 233.

7) To watch over the helpers in his circuit, and see that [they] behave well, and want nothing.

8) To take care that every society be supplied with books,[7] and that the money for them be returned quarterly.[8]

The 1749 *Minutes* continued with more duties of a practical nature: 'Let them [the assistants] take care:

1) That every society provide a private room for the helper.

2) That every society provide a set of books for the helper.

The assistant was also identified as a collector of data: 'Let each Assistant take an exact list of each society every Easter; and transmit those lists to London sometime before Whitsuntide.' The completion of circuit schedules had very early origins. Other duties outlined in the 1749 *Minutes* included accompanying Wesley when he was travelling in the assistant's area, (to make his journeying more useful), and being the first 'gatekeeper' in the process of receiving a new helper: 'Let him be recommended to us by the Assistant'.[9]

This list of duties gives insight into what kind of movement Wesley saw Methodism to be: a mixture of strict sectarian discipline, a tight control on developments from the 'centre' and yet a care for both the personal needs of the itinerants and the spiritual 'improvement' of the members. It was the same mixture of ruthless discipline and kindly concern which characterised Wesley's own practice.

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[7] Wesley was very keen to provide suitable literature and worship material for the societies, and the travelling preachers acted as distribution agents.

[8] The *Large Minutes* (1753 edn.) of the list refers to the money being 'constantly' returned. A sign that finances were then in a precarious state and that 'book money' sent only once a quarter was not often enough. Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 865- 866.

[9] "Minutes of Conference 1749" in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 235.

6.2.1 Being an Assistant

The 1749 collection of duties and responsibilities also gives insight into the level of authority the assistants had been given. The assistant was to be Wesley's eyes and ears in the circuit, and a 'little Wesley' in exercising oversight locally. There was the oversight of the other itinerants in the circuit, the societies and the accounts. There was the weighty authority to admit or eject a person from membership. He could also recommend and set men to travel as itinerants purely on his own authority. In a letter to John Wesley, John Pawson recalled that: 'About Lady-Day 1762, the Assistant employed me among the local preachers… In August following, the Conference was at Leeds and the Assistant desired me to attend…Several young men were proposed as candidates for travelling…I was ordered for the York circuit.'[10]

It may be considered surprising that despite assistants being drawn from Wesley's 'lay' travelling preachers, they were given so much authority and responsibility. Such a move could be interpreted as an act of desperation on Wesley's part; he realising reluctantly, that without delegation, the expanding Connexion would become impossible to manage. Alternatively it may have been a brave display of confidence in people who generally had little previous experience of 'management'. As noted in chapter four, the level of authority given to the assistants together with the concomitant lack of democratic involvement by the members became part of Alexander Kilham's complaint about the Wesleyan system in the late 1790's.

While Wesley did give his assistants a great deal of authority, he nevertheless monitored their performance very closely, and it would appear that his expectations of them often exceeded their ability to deliver on the many tasks he had given them. In 1763 he complained that 'not one in three' had executed the office of assistant to his satisfaction. Some of his complaint concerned practical matters such

[10] From "An Account of Mr. John Pawson", in the *Arminian Magazine,* 1779, 36-37.

as ensuring a private room and a bed to himself for every preacher. Some concerned the fact that the societies were not receiving the approved literature.[11] However, he also appears to have given responsibility with one hand, only to take it away with the other. Having given responsibility, in 1749, for seeing that the other preachers behave well, he was fussing in 1763 about not having been '…sent word whether they did or no…'[12]

The qualification for the role of assistant was simple, yet profound. To the Question 'How shall an Assistant be qualified for this charge?' The Answer was: 'Not so much by superior gifts as by walking closely with God.'[13] The emphasis on spiritual maturity rather than 'gifts' shows that in the eighteenth century at least, the role was not limited to those with a better education, seniority or talents in leadership.

Named assistants can be followed through the early *Minutes of Conference* and it can be seen that though the designation was annual, some retained the responsibility for some time, despite changing circuits mostly every year. For example John Furz, in the years 1766-1774, was successively assistant of the Cornwall East, Devon (2 years), Wiltshire North, Oxfordshire, Pembrokeshire, Brecon, Gloucestershire, and Cornwall West circuits. Eventually however, he returned to the ranks as the second man in Gloucester circuit in 1775 and the third man in Wiltshire North in 1776. A similar pattern was followed by Thomas Johnson, another name picked at random from the list of assistants. [14] No reason is given but possibilities are increasing

[11] He expected Kempis, *Instructions for Children* and *Primitive Physic*, at least, to be in every member's house. *Large Minutes* 1763 edn. in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 867.
[12] Ibid, 866- 867.
[13] Q. 4, "Minutes of conference 1749" in Rack, *Works,* vol. 10, 232. The *Large Minutes* (1763 edn.) added '…by understanding and loving discipline, ours in particular, and by loving the Church of England, and resolving not to separate from it'. Rack, *Works*, vol. 10, 864.
[14] Thomas Johnson served from 1766-1776 as assistant in the Cheshire, Derbyshire (two years), Lincolnshire East, Yarm, Devon, Haworth (two years) circuits before becoming third, then second man in Birstall circuit (two years) then third man in Leeds circuit. "Minutes of Conference 1766-1776", Rack, *Works,* vol.10.

age, a greater number of suitable candidates to choose from, or even expressed preference.

Assistants were not always men of long experience. In 1792 the travelling preacher John Braithwaite wrote that while still a probationer,[15] he acted as an assistant, although he felt he fulfilled the role 'in a defective manner'. He was so challenged by the responsibility that he thought he would rather stop travelling than find himself as an assistant again.[16] In a statistical study of the ages of assistants, John Lenton noted that the most common pattern was to be an assistant 'after four or five years from entry until middle age then not again'.[17] He offered the suggestion that Wesley chose younger men because of the need for administrative ability, and what Lenton called 'business considerations'.[18] But as mentioned earlier, spiritual maturity appears to have been the principal qualification. By the end of the nineteenth century, assistants must have tended to be older men. The 1891 conference resolved that:

> Any senior minister in health and vigour who wishes to be relieved of the cares of superintendency, and is willing to take the second or third position in a circuit, with the conditions of that position, may be so appointed.[19]

This suggests that returning to a non-superintendent position was considered an unusual step at that stage. It also hints that reverting to a more lowly position could present problems.

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[15] At this time, travelling preachers had a four-year probationary period (but no formal education) before being received into Full Connexion. Note 438 in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 416 refers to Michael Moorhouse still being 'on trial' when designated an assistant in 1773.
[16] Robert Dickinson, *The Life of the Rev. John Braithwaite, Wesleyan Methodist Minister, compiled from his letters by Robert Dickinson, containing an account of his travels, labours in the ministry and writings* (London: 1825),121.
[17] John Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers: A social and statistical analysis of the British and Irish preachers who entered the Methodist itinerancy before 1791* (Milton Keynes. Colorado Springs. Hyderabad; Paternoster, 2009), 83.
[18] Ibid, 83
[19] "Miscellaneous Resolutions", *Minutes of Conference 1891* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Bookroom, 1891), 229.

Over a number of years the list of assistant's duties was added to and adapted, as can be seen from the list in *The Large Minutes* (1791 edn.).[20]

As the years progressed, the usefulness of having an assistant in each circuit became apparent. When the question of providing for preacher's wives was raised at the Conference of 1753, it was the assistant who was given the task of finding out what 'wants' each wife had and making sure these were met first out of the circuit funds.[21] He was also required to monitor the activities of the stewards, having first instructed them in their duties.[22] In the *Minutes* of 1755, in a section on maintaining discipline among the preachers, the question was asked: 'What Assistant enforces uniformly every branch of the Methodist plan on the preachers and people? Visits all the societies quarterly?'[23] The assistant was thus also an instrument of discipline and control in the application of Wesley's demanded discipline in the societies.

Reading the early *Minutes of Conference,* it is noticeable how both detailed and miscellaneous are the further instructions to the assistants. It is as though Wesley put together a random list from whatever came into his head as something needing attention. A good example is found in the 1766 *Minutes.*[24] At question 27 Wesley asked if a number of his sermons were being distributed, and if not, the assistants are to '…do it now'. The same question 27 had an additional paragraph about each assistant insisting on cleanliness and decency everywhere and also giving 'an account to his successor of the state of

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[20] *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and others. From the year 1744, to the year 1789.* [referred to as the *Large Minutes*] (London: 1791), 28, ECCO. Following this list, Wesley reprimanded assistants who have failed to attend to these duties with sufficient rigour.

[21] Q.8.A.,"Minutes of Conference 1753" in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 267.

[22] Q.10A, ibid.

[23] "Minutes of Conference1756"*,* Rack *Works,* vol.10, 276. In his sermon *In God's Vineyard* Wesley wrote that because members were so numerous and the risk of backsliding great, he expected the 'principal preacher' in each circuit to examine every member each quarter. Albert Outler, ed., *Works,* vol. 3, Sermons III, (Nashville Abingdon Press, 1986), Sermon 107.

[24] "Minutes of Conference1766"*,* Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 324-325.

things in his circuit'. A third paragraph under the same question reminded assistants so to organise the preaching in their circuits 'that no preacher may be obliged to miss the [parish] church more than two Sundays in a month'. These points illustrate again, Wesley's concerns for puritanical discipline, the general and spiritual education of the members, and his belief in his movement as continuing to be within the Church of England.[25] In the years up to Wesley's death in 1791, various other duties were added to the work of the assistants, including the 'diligent' superintendence of building 'houses' [preaching houses] to avoid poor construction.[26] While it is a mistake to think that Wesley set up a preformed connexional structure he certainly had firm ideas of the type of movement he wanted it to be and how these ideas were to be implemented. The assistants were an important element in achieving his objectives.

6.2.2 The Status of the Assistant

The *Large Minutes* (1753 edn.) defined the assistant as: 'That preacher in each circuit who is *appointed from time to time* [my italics] to take charge of the societies and the other preachers therein'.[27] Designation as assistant (while continuing to be an itinerant) was in the hands of the conference because it was part of the annual stationing process. Question 3 in the *Minutes of Conference 1765,* (the first of the printed *Minutes)* was 'Who act as *Assistants* this year?' followed by a list of names. [28] The way the question was put demonstrates that being an assistant was not regarded as permanent. On the other hand, the fact that the assistants were listed separately showed recognition of their authority over members and colleagues. A pamphlet of 1841 again raised the issue of the permanence of the assistant role in the

[25] See reference in the *Large Minutes,* 1763 edn: 1. 'Let all our preachers go to Church. 2. Let all our people go constantly. 3 Receive the Sacrament at every opportunity' [i.e. at the Parish Church] Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 867.
[26] "Minutes of Conference 1777" in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 472. This was probably prompted by an accident at Colne in which the gallery had collapsed.
[27] "Large Minutes, 1749 edn." in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 265.
[28]Q.3,"Minutes of Conference 1765"*,* in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 304. From 1774, a separate list of assistants was discontinued, but they were still identified (with occasional exceptions) by being the first-named preacher in the lists of circuits.

time of Wesley. In correspondence between Jacob Grimshaw (local preacher) and Alfred Barrett (itinerant), Grimshaw wrote: ‘That the office of Assistant, under Mr. Wesley, was but a ministerial accident is evident from its being assignable, optional, subordinate and resumable’. [29] He went on to elaborate on each word and ended with a reference to Tertullian. ‘Those who advocate three clerical orders sometimes quote Tertullian, who blamed the heretics of his time for confounding the idea of ‘orders’; so that one was a bishop today, another tomorrow. One a deacon or presbyter today, tomorrow a reader or layman’. He, Grimshaw, ‘saw no heresy in the matter’.[30] He was on the side of those whose dismissal of the tradition of ‘orders’ Tertullian saw as heretical.

What prompted this detailed argument by Jacob Grimshaw is not known, but it is a useful contribution to the debate about the office of the Methodist assistant as being a temporary one. (See also later paragraph on the Lichfield proposals). William Myles wrote that the role of superintendent (the successor name for assistant): ‘… resembles that of Pastor, Elder, or Bishop in the Primitive Church, with this difference, the Primitive Bishops held their office for life, unless excommunicated; not so the Methodist Superintendents, being itinerants they are often changed’.[31]

6.3 The term ‘Superintendent’

After Wesley’s death in 1791, the term ‘assistant’ for the chief preacher in the circuit became inappropriate since there was no Wesley to assist, and in 1796 a replacement term ‘superintendent’ first appeared

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[29] *The Identity of Travelling and Local Preachers, discussed in a correspondence between Alfred Barrett, Travelling Preacher and Jacob Grimshaw, Local Preacher* (London: W. Dawson and Son, Leeds: Webb and Millington, 1841), 39. British Library 1508/1136(5).
[30] Ibid, 40.
[31] William Myles, *A Chronological History of the People called Methodists…* (Liverpool, [1799], 68.

in the *Minutes of Conference*.[32] However, no reason was given for choosing this term.

In his *Chronological History* (1799), William Myles wrote: 'They [the assistants] were first called Superintendents; and since Mr. Wesley's death, as the office is no longer a *relative* one, this name has been restored.'[33] There is no other evidence, thus far, that assistants were previously called superintendents and consequently that the name was 'restored'. Nevertheless, since Myles lived through the period of change, and was writing authoritatively only three years after the name change, his comment cannot be ignored. Further scholarship may clarify Myles' understanding.

The term 'superintendent' had been used before in Church history. Scholars refer to John Knox's 'First Book of Discipline' (1560) in which superintendents were given oversight of districts roughly corresponding to the old Scottish dioceses.[34] They were thought to be temporary office-bearers 'chosen, because of the dearth of ministers to settle and organise churches under their care.' Moffatt described the phase of having Presbyterian superintendents as 'an interesting experiment' but that they were found to be superfluous once presbyteries were fully established in 1590. He conceded that in disciplinary cases concerning presbyters, having a wise 'father in God' deal with the matter, rather than a group of reluctant peers, would be advantageous, but accepted that this was lost when the office of superintendent was lost. Vine made a point of saying that these superintendents were nevertheless

[32] 'Mr. Mather is requested to visit any societies to which he is invited by the Superintendents of the circuits respectively' "Minutes of Conference 1796" in *Minutes of Conference,* vol.1 (London: John Mason at the Conference Office, 1862), 384.

[33] Myles, *Chronological History*, 68.

[34] The Scottish superintendents had to preach at least three times a week as well as examining 'the life, diligence, and behaviour of the ministers, and also order of their churches and the manner of the people.' James Moffatt assumed to be quoting "The First Book of Discipline (1560)", in his *The Presbyterian Churches* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1928), 58.

strictly accountable to the General Assembly,[35] and 'JCN' noted that with one exception, they all spent time in their own parishes as well as engaging in tours of inspection.[36] These two comments suggest an effort by the authors in a Methodist journal to make connections with Methodist circuit superintendency. Vine considered, and this thesis concludes, that Wesley might well have known of the Presbyterian usage.

The term 'superintendent' was first used by Wesley in 1784 when, needing to arrange oversight for the Methodist societies in America,[37] he ordained Dr Thomas Coke as superintendent for America. [38] Why he did not simply use the existing term 'assistant' (my assistant in America) is not known, and not, as far as I can ascertain, discussed in any scholarly work on the subject. The conclusion to be drawn is that Coke was to be more that an 'assistant'. He was to be 'Wesley in America' and that meant being what Wesley always saw himself as: the *episcopos* of the Methodist people. [39]

The Greek word *episcopos* can be translated in three ways; as 'bishop', as 'overseer' and as 'superintendent'. Perhaps rather than choose the translation 'bishop', which had some negative associations in that period, Wesley chose an alternative translation, although the American Methodists soon changed Wesley's designation of superintendent to

[35] Victor Vine, "Episcope in Methodism" in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* [hereafter Proc.WHS] Vol. 30, 1955-6, 162-170.
[36] A footnote by 'JCN' to an article by Thomas E. Brigden entitled "Wesley's Ordinations at Bristol Sep. 1 and 2 1784" in *Proc.WHS* vol. 7, 1910.
[37] America was first listed in *Minutes of Conference 1784*, at the end of the list of 'home' circuits, and after the Isle of Jersey.
[38] 'I have this day set apart, as Superintendent, by the imposition of my hands and prayer, (being assisted by other ordained ministers,) Thomas Coke, Doctor of Law, a Presbyter of the Church of England…' Dr. Coke's Letters of Ordination quoted in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.4 (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 199.
[39] He wrote that he firmly believed that he was:'…a scriptural *episcopos* as much as any man in England or Europe…' but believed that this in no way interfered with his remaining in the Church of England. Letter to Charles Wesley dated August 19, 1785 in John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley,* vol.7, 1780-1787 (London: Epworth Press, 1931 reprinted 1960)), 284.

bishop, much to his disgust.[40] A great deal of scholarly effort has been put into examining Wesley's motive and justification for taking this step. Wesley, an Anglican priest, had taken upon himself to ordain someone as *episcopos,* justifying his actions by referring to Lord King's treatise in which King concluded that presbyters and bishops were of the same order, but of different responsibilities.[41] In his careful study of what took place and what Wesley considered he was doing, A. Raymond George wrote:

> To what did Wesley set [Coke] apart? Not, obviously, to a superior order, for as a follower of King, Wesley did not believe in that, but to the superior grade, which he called 'Superintendent', a word not previously used in Methodism.[42]

A.B. Lawson went further. He wrote that all Wesley had in mind was 'administrative episcopacy…to be exercised by a superior presbyter',[43] and this administrative episcopacy he defined as superintendence. In his enthusiasm to downgrade Coke's position Lawson invented a role which did justice neither to episcopacy nor superintendency.

As scholars have pointed out, Coke's ordination was full of contradictions.[44] If in Wesley's mind, presbyters and bishops were essentially of the same order and Coke was already an ordained presbyter of the Church of England, why did he need to be ordained again, rather than simply appointed? In providing a suitable ordinal for the American Methodists, Wesley included *The Form for Ordaining*

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[40] In "Minutes of Conference 1788" Thomas Coke is described as 'Superintendent' for the United States of America, but 'Bishop' in the "Minutes of Conference 1789", Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 652, 683.

[41] 'Lord King's account of the primitive church convinced me many years ago, that Bishops and Presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain'. John Wesley, Bristol, September 10 1784, excerpt in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.4, 197-8.

[42] A. Raymond George in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.2, Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp eds., (London: Epworth Press,1978), 148.

[43] A.B.Lawson, *John Wesley and the Christian Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1963), 155.

[44] This matter has been thoroughly investigated by many scholars and a bibliography on the subject (up to 1988) is given in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.4.

Superintendents which was a copy, with minimal changes, of the *Book of Common Prayer: Form for Ordaining or Consecrating Bishops.*[45] However, whatever Wesley thought he was doing in setting apart Coke as superintendent for America, or, when he ordained Alexander Mather in 1788, reputedly as superintendent to take over his *episcope* on his death,[46] there is no evidence to show why the post-Wesley conference chose the same term 'superintendent' as a replacement for 'assistant'. This is most unfortunate as a great deal of the later understanding of the role would rest on firmer ground had this been the case.

It can be argued that the term 'superintendent' when used after Wesley's death was simply a remembered word, previously used by Wesley (for America), and which seemed to be a reasonable choice for a new title for the assistants. The task of superintendent was the same as that of the previously-named assistant. The only change was that the travelling preachers as assistants had powers delegated from Wesley and as superintendents had powers delegated from the 'corporate Wesley', the annual conference.[47]

There have been arguments put forward however, (see below), to show that the term was used deliberately for the head of a circuit to limit the significance of the term and its association with personal episcope. These arguments were linked to moves made after Wesley's death to establish regional superintendency, the main one of which took shape in Lichfield in 1794.

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[45] See Lawson, *John Wesley and the Christian Ministry*, 192-198 for a comparison of the two forms.

[46] The evidence for this ordination being as superintendent rests on a letter of Pawson, relating to what Mather said to the conference of 1791 and given by George Smith *History of Wesleyan Methodism* (London: 1872), vol.2, 98. In the event, the conference took responsibility for ordinations. Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.2, 152.

[47] Robert Southey wrote that 'Wesley…designated as assistants those…who, for the duties which they discharge, have since been denominated superintendents'. Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism* (1846), vol.2, Maurice H. Fitzgerald, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 83.

6.3.1 The Lichfield Proposals

In 1794, three years after Wesley's death, a group of senior itinerants had met in Lichfield under conditions of secrecy. One of their purposes was to discuss the possibility of introducing a form of superintendency to British Methodism somewhat after the pattern of superintendency in American Methodism. They prepared a proposal to be presented as a full report to the following conference. The proposal was 'that there be an order of superintendents appointed by the conference' changed annually 'if it seems good'. Further, that 'the Connexion be formed into seven or eight general divisions[48] and that 'each Superintendent shall visit the principal societies in his division, at least once a year' and 'that he shall have authority to execute or see executed, all the branches of Methodist discipline…'. [49] The proposed divisional superintendents were named and each of those named was a member of the meeting.[50] When the Lichfield resolutions were presented to the conference, for acceptance or rejection, they were rejected 'as tending to create invidious and unhallowed distinctions among brethren'.[51] Quite what were the invidious distinctions the brethren had in mind is not clear as the existence of assistants already created distinctions. However, this may have been a disguised way of saying that these regional superintendents were a possible threat to the authority vested in the circuit superintendents.

Thomas Taylor recalled being present at the meeting in Lichfield. His own expectation was that the meeting could agree a scheme for Wesleyan preachers to administer the sacraments, where desired. He described however that 'another thing was started', the scheme for regional superintendents. He wrote:

[48] The eight divisions proposed were listed, together with the circuits included in each. The grouping was geographical and number 8 was Scotland and Ireland.
[49] Dr Adam Clarke's minutes of the Lichfield Meeting April 2 1794 (transcribed copy), MARM, 1977/489. The Lichfield resolutions also briefly covered separation from the Church of England and the administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper by Methodist preachers.
[50] This naming themselves seems rather naïve.
[51] Ms. Copy of minutes of meeting (see earlier note).

> …it was thought in many instances the Districts were not sufficient for the necessary discipline in certain cases, and therefore it was judged that some other mode should be thought on; which was that a number of superintendents should be appointed by the conference, to have the inspection of the whole connexion. [52]

He wrote that for himself, he was indifferent to the result, but does not sound very hopeful: '…the little conventicle, though very harmless, did no good'.[53] From Taylor's account it would seem that the intention had been to address the specific problem of administering Wesleyan discipline, considering it more effectively exercised through individuals than by the district committees.

Two years later, the term 'superintendent' appeared in the 1796 *Minutes of Conference*, but as a term used for those itinerants previously known as assistants. In an article written in the 1960's, Oliver Beckerlegge[54] made firm connections between the Lichfield resolutions[55] and the choice of the term superintendent for the previously termed assistants:

> Another significant step took place in 1796. In that year, the Minutes of Conference began to refer to the first preacher in a circuit as 'superintendent'. This can hardly be other than deliberate; a proclamation that there was to be neither one king nor half a dozen kings in Israel. When one man in three was "superintendent" he could have no exalted idea of his

[52] "The Life of Mr Thomas Taylor" in Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers chiefly written by themselves.* 3rd edn. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office) vol.5, 76-77.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Oliver Beckerlegge, Methodist Minister and scholar. "He was forthright in expressing his convictions, both as an evangelist and a controversialist…." *Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland online*, www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk accessed 14 October 2012.
[55] Oliver Beckerlegge, "Church Methodists", *Proc. WHS,* vol.34, 1963/4, 63-64.

own importance! Superintendency was to be a function, and not an order. [56]

Beckerlegge was suggesting here that in applying the term to all heads of circuits, the conference wanted to ensure that if superintendency was to exist in British Methodism, it was to be a role of limited power and status. This comment says more about Beckerlegge's own distaste for hierarchical church government than about the situation he was describing. The conference certainly had rejected the Lichfield resolutions and decided against having a hierarchy within the company of preachers. However, it does not follow, as Beckerlegge suggested, that the conference deliberately chose to apply the term 'superintendent' to every previously named 'assistant', just to prove its point about invidious distinctions. The opposite might also be true, that it affirmed a high view of the authority of the circuit superintendent. In any case, an exalted idea of one's own importance is not an inevitable characteristic of a bishop.

Beckerlegge's opinion was endorsed by Currie in his *Methodism Divided*. Currie wrote that after the rejection of the Lichfield proposals: '…the term 'superintendent' was rapidly downgraded to apply to the old "assistants" in charge of circuits. Collective leadership had won the day'.[57] This latter reference must be to the institution of district committees in 1791. There was no downgrading however, since the conference had never taken on the Lichfield concept of superintendency. Unless what Currie meant was that the term was downgraded from Wesley's use of it for Coke's 'episcopal' role in America. Both writers were clearly relieved that no regional superintendency was established, but their motives for focusing on this matter derive from a personal distaste for hierarchical church structures

[56] Ibid, 63-64.
[57] Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided : A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968),

as much as whether or not such a system would have worked in Great Britain. [58]

It is something of a mystery as to why, with such a bad reception of the term ‘superintendent’ when the Lichfield proposals were presented in conference, a completely different term was not decided upon. But the conference clearly had no problem with the word. It can be argued therefore that the conference simply divided off the acceptable aspects of the term as they saw it, from the unacceptable aspects (anything which suggested status and personal power) and adopted it. What cannot be known is if the term would have been chosen even if the Lichfield proposals had never been formulated, and the ‘regional’ idea of superintendency never put forward. This is where Beckerlegge’s conclusion stands or falls.

The 1794 Lichfield resolutions, with their proposal for ‘an order of superintendents’ having regional responsibilities, produced a fierce reaction. At the following conference Samuel Bradburn had moved the appointment of a number of ‘travelling bishops’ who should visit the circuits and superintend the affairs of the Connexion’. He also proposed ‘a committee of three…which should possess executive power, and that these three persons would reside in three parts of the kingdom, remote from each other, to give greater force and energy to the laws of Methodism’.[59] Both proposals were strongly rejected as was a scheme for twelve ministers to act as bishops, put forward by Thomas Coke in 1797.[60]

In his *Candid Examination of the London Methodistical Bull* (1796)[61] Alexander Kilham wrote, with reference to these proposals, ‘The *thing*

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[58] Currie used the term ’hierarchy’ liberally in his book to refer to the conference, the connexional ‘executive’ or to the preachers generally. Ibid, 77.
[59] Thomas W. Blanshard, *The Life of Samuel Bradburn, the Methodist Demosthenes* (London: Elliot Stock, 1871), 162.
[60] Vine, “Episcope in Methodism”, 162 – 170.
[61] Alexander Kilham, A *Candid Examination of the London Methodistical Bull,* (Anwick, 1796). A defence of his *Progress of Liberty.*

called Bishop, to be introduced among us, appeared so contemptible to me that I could not write seriously about it.'[62] Jonathan Crowther, who was usually an opponent of Kilham's ideas, nevertheless joined him in denouncing the Lichfield resolutions. He wrote that while he held in high esteem those who supported what he called the 'Bishop-Plan', he could not. Quoting another of his own pamphlets he wrote: 'I feel the greatest aversion to having the nation divided into seven large Districts…and to have a sort of wandering superintending bishop appointed for each' and considered it would be a 'black fatal day, pregnant with dire destructive consequences' for Methodism. [63] His reason was a fear of the amount of control these 'bishops' would exercise in combination, and that 'the widowed tribe of spies and informers might again find employment and encouragement'.[64] He even feared '…that liberty, truth and the Church of God, would be badly wounded and mangled'. [65] Unfortunately he gave no justification for his anxieties, but it would not be unreasonable to suppose they arose from experience of, or reports/myths about, the activities of some Anglican bishops of the period.

The superintendents of the Lichfield proposals did have the appearance of bishops since they were to have authority to ordain: '7) That all the preachers when admitted into full connexion shall receive their [admission] by being ordained deacon by the Superintendents appointed by the conference…' But again, this was still under the final authority of the conference. It is fascinating to note that the reference in the Lichfield proposals to 'deacons' and 'elders', orders also previously

[62] Kilham reflected a feeling held more generally about bishops. 'In the eighteenth century the bishops were …accused of state and great wealth and frequent absences from their dioceses'… 'In the nineteenth century they were regarded as an instrument of class government'. Cyril Garbett, *The Claims of the Church of England* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947), 114-115.
[63] Jonathan Crowther, *Christian order: or, liberty without anarchy; government without tyranny; and every man in his proper place…'* (Bristol: 1796), 19.
[64] Ibid, 19.
[65] Ibid, 19. It is possible that the 'spies and informers' were 'widowed' by the death of Wesley. In which case this reveals a side of Wesley's organisation not to my knowledge otherwise mentioned anywhere. It could however be more Crowther's personal feelings.

unknown in British Methodism, have been the subject of no comment at all, either by contemporary or modern commentators. It is as if even the hint of 'bishop-ness' within these wide-ranging proposals was a spark to ignite strong passions about the nature of episcopacy, to the exclusion of all else. It is reasonable to conclude that the proposers thought that their scheme was a better interpretation of Wesley's intentions than the scheme of districts with their district committees. However, the emotional reaction to the proposals for regional superintendents, both the Lichfield proposals and others suggests that the proposers were out of step with general Methodist opinion on episcopacy.

The *Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* records that: 'While the title [of superintendent] can be seen as the Latin translation of the Greek 'episcopos' i.e. 'bishop', there was no suggestion in English Methodism that the circuit Superintendent should be regarded as belonging to a different order and ordained or consecrated to their office'. [66] The 'no suggestion' betrays a need to express reassurance that nothing as undesirable as personal episcopacy was ever contemplated by the conference. British Methodists have continued to be both distrustful of, and disinterested in, any scheme for introducing bishops, despite a large section of world-wide Methodism having taken to episcopacy in one form or another. Nevertheless, it should be said that while personal episcopacy is uncongenial to British Methodism, *episcope* is not. Rather, *episcope* (oversight) is regarded as being something exercised jointly by every layer of the Connexion from society to conference and the responsibility of both lay and ordained.

6.4 Superintendency in Wesleyan Methodism

As has been noted, the superintendent inherited the assistant's duties. However, an additional role was added in 1797, in one of a series of developmental revisions of the original material. Under the heading of

[66] J.A. Vickers, entry for 'Superintendent' in *Dictionary of Methodism in Great Britain and Ireland,* www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk accessed 29.12.2010.

“The Peculiar Business of the Superintendent”, after reiterating the need to see that the other preachers behaved well and wanted nothing was added ‘He should consider these (especially if they are young men) as his pupils; into whose behaviour and studies he should frequently enquire…’.[67] This is followed by detailed guidance on how the enquiry was to be conducted and what kind of questions were to be asked. The phrase ‘consider these as his pupils’ is in one sense simply part of the function of oversight inherited from earlier days. However, there is the idea here that the superintendent was expected to function a little more as an Anglican incumbent training up curates, and also to be a kind of spiritual director to (especially younger) colleagues. It may be a small point, but a significant one, since this particular aspect of oversight appears not to have ‘taken off’ as one of the functions of superintendency to the extent described here. Later probationer ministers stationed in circuits were certainly under the supervision and guidance of their superintendents, but not quite in this way.

The 1797 guidance on the business of a superintendent included a very mixed collection of directives and advice, as had been the case when the role of assistant was first introduced. At one level it points out that the superintendent had a duty to see that ‘…the leaders be not only men of sound judgement, but men truly devoted to God..’ to which end the superintendent was required to ‘diligently examine’ each one at the quarterly visitation of the classes. This not only hints at high spiritual expectations of the local [lay] leaders, but also the high standard of competence expected of the superintendents. At a different level was a reiteration of the eighteenth century Methodist concern with dress: ‘Read thoughts upon dress once a year in every large society…In visiting classes be very mild but very strict. Give no ticket to any who follow the foolish fashions of the world’. (These ‘foolish fashions’ also included taking snuff, drams, tobacco and

[67] *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. John Wesley AM and the preachers in connection with him. Containing the form of discipline established among the preachers and people in the Methodist Societies.* London: 1779 [1797], ECCO.

wearing 'needless ornaments' against which the rule had to be 'calmly and vigorously' enforced.) [68]

On the matter of authority, in their time, the assistants had exercised considerable authority:

> 'The assistant *alias* superintendent, had but little difficulty in Mr Wesley's days of getting rid of a refractory member. He had the power of cutting off a stubborn or rotten branch without first having the opinion of a dozen other persons that the branch really was stubborn or rotten and therefore *needed* to be cut off.[69]

While this comment somewhat betrays Harwood's own feelings on the matter, the facts are correct. This level of autonomy however, did not last. From 1797 onwards, the now superintendents were required to first obtain the approval of the quarterly meeting before appointing leaders and admitting and expelling members. The 1797 conference "Address to the Methodist Societies" included the phrase:

> In short, brethren, out of our great love for peace and union, and our great desire to satisfy your minds, we have given up to you for the greatest part of the Superintendent's authority.[70]

This sounds very patronising and uttered through gritted teeth. The conference was, after all, composed of the very superintendents, with other preachers, who were giving up the powers. It was also not entirely true. The 1797 changes concerned only *consultation* with lay

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[68] This concern about 'plainness' cannot have lasted too much longer. Joseph Benton (travelling preacher) recorded 'ribbons for Isabella's and Ann's bonnets' and 'to Mr. Rankin for velvet' in his personal account book for May 1806. MARM, 1977/1209.
[69] George Harwood, *the History of Wesleyan Methodism* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1854), 133. Harwood's history was based on conference proceedings. He wrote in a rather dramatic manner.
[70] Part of the "Address to the Methodist Societies, Minutes of Conference 1797 "in *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences,* vol.1, 1744 – 1798 (London: John Mason, 1862), 394.

officers and only ‘temporal’ affairs were involved.[71] The superintendent’s authority in spiritual matters remained intact and was jealously guarded. The superintendents were also the means by which the authority of the conference was exercised in the circuits.

In a reflection on Wesleyanism in the nineteenth century J. Munsey Turner identified two types of Wesleyanism: ‘High’ and ‘Low’.[72] On ‘High Wesleyanism’, he wrote that ‘It was the minister (itinerant preacher) who was the linchpin of the system, the spokesman for the Conference, with the circuit superintendent an ’episcopal figure’ with power any Anglican diocesan would envy!’[73] Of course the ‘power’ of a superintendent was the same throughout Wesleyan Methodism although the way in which this power was exercised no doubt varied. Turner’s reference to episcopal power however, seems to be resurrecting the bishop/superintendent anxiety discussed earlier. Superintendents never did have the authority to ordain, although there was oversight of colleagues.

In a letter of 1828, written as President of the Conference, Jabez Bunting wrote:

> The superintendent in our economy is the man directly responsible to God, and to the Conference and to the Connexion, for every part of Methodistical service in the Circuit placed under his care. Having the whole ultimate responsibility he must have the corresponding authority; and that necessarily implies that the supreme direction of the whole work must be vested in his hands… He is the father of

[71] ‘…it is highly necessary to consult the rest of the leaders on such occasions’. ‘The peculiar business of the Superintendent’. Ibid.
[72] Throughout its history there have never been ‘parties’ in Methodism, as in the Church of England. In certain periods however, there have been strongly held preferences about that which best represented authentic Methodism. For a description of ‘High’ and ‘Low’ Methodism see W.R. Ward, Introduction to *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-1858* (London: Oxford University Press) xvi, xv.
[73]John Munsey Turner, ‘Years of tension and conflict’ in Geoffrey Milburn and Margaret Batty, eds., *Workaday Preachers* (Methodist Publishing House, 1995), 45.

> the family, and must have paternal rule over the whole household…[74]

This description of superintendency sounds very different from that temporary authority and collection of practical duties which Wesley had originally given to the assistant. It seems to be a justification for giving the lay people as little democratic involvement in running the circuit as possible, made on the grounds of answering '…the purposes of good and efficient government'.[75] It also illustrates the emphasis placed in the nineteenth century on the spiritual authority of, and to some extent the status accorded to, the superintendent. It could be argued that the especial emphasis on the spiritual authority of the superintendent was a means by which some superintendents compensated themselves for having given up autocratic power in 1797 in favour of a more consultative approach.

For some superintendents, the requirement of consultation before action was, it seems, intolerable. For example, according to Gregory, during the reforming agitations in the mid-nineteenth century: '…too many superintendents… did not trouble themselves at all with such trivial technicalities [as consultation]…they simply drew their pen across a "sympathiser's" name in a Class Book…'[76] This was entirely contrary to the direction of the 1797 "Address to the Methodist Societies" in which it was stated that: 'Our Societies have a full check on the Superintendant [*sic*]…The members of our Societies are delivered from every apprehension of clandestine expulsions'.[77]

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[74] Part of a letter written in 1828 when President of the Conference. Quoted by E.R. Taylor in a chapter on the primacy and policy of Jabez Bunting, *Methodism and Politics 1791 – 1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 122.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Benjamin Gregory, *Sidelights on the Conflicts of Methodism 1827 – 52* (London: Cassell and Co. Ltd., 1899), 471.
[77] "Address to the Methodist Societies , Minutes of Conference 1797" in *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from the first, held in London, by the late Rev. John Wesley AM in the year 1744* (London: Conference Office, 1812), 377.

Status also seems to have been an issue. William Smith, superintendent of the Hull West Circuit wrote to Jabez Bunting, Secretary of the Conference in 1841 concerning his objection to one of the travelling preachers, Mr Waddy, wearing 'clerical costume' consisting of a gown and preaching bands, as unconstitutional. His letter was lengthy and increasingly emotional. However, one phrase is worth noting: 'Ought not the wish of a superintendent to a helper clearly expressed be the equivalent to a command?' [78] Use of the archaic term 'helper' in this context helped to emphasise Mr Waddy's lowlier position. The word 'command' expresses very clearly how Smith understood the powers and authority of the superintendent at this time. Unfortunately there is no record of Jabez Bunting's reply to this letter. William Smith's comments might be considered the outpourings of a very insecure individual and not indicative of the views of superintendents in general. But they do offer a glimpse into an aspect of the Wesleyan superintendency mindset of the period.

The defence of the superintendent's authority in his circuit became a *cause celebre* in the nineteenth century and resulted in a serious split within Wesleyanism. Samuel Warren, superintendent of the Manchester Circuit was already in disagreement with the conference 'executive' over an appointment to a theological college. When he was suspended by the conference in 1834, he took legal action against the conference on the issue of whether or not the conference had the power to remove him from his superintendency, appealing to the Lord Chancellor. Was or was not the superintendent 'king in his own castle'? Warren's appeal was dismissed, but his campaign resulted in a breakaway movement led by Warren, and one which lost the Wesleyan Connexion thousands of members.[79] However, for Wesleyan Methodism, the lost Appeal did have the effect of affirming the nature of connexionalism and the ultimate authority of the conference, even over superintendents.

[78] Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism,* 257.
[79] The Wesleyan Association.

This issue of the status and authority vested in the superintendent was highlighted in a letter written by George Greenwood to Jabez Bunting in January 1850.[80] Greenwood had been a preacher in the New Connexion when he entered the Wesleyan ministry in 1838. The reference to the institution of superintendency in the Methodist New Connexion *Minutes* of 1798 read:

> 15Q: How shall they be appointed to their office?
>
> A: Let superintendents be nominated by the conference; but if the majority of the quarterly meeting are not satisfied with the nomination, they shall have power to set him aside, and appoint any other preacher in the circuit to that office.[81]

This clearly shows that despite having a conference, it was the people locally who had the 'last word' in the Methodist New Connexion. In his letter, Greenwood warned Bunting that if Wesleyan Methodism followed the pattern of the New Connexion 'We shall have superintendents *in* our circuits but not *of* our circuits – they will be such but in name.' He described how the superintendent would lose the automatic power to chair all quarterly and other meetings, make the preaching plan and have the automatic right to attend the conference. The superintendent would even have to submit to an annual review by lay people of varying ability and opinion. This he considered a disaster. Since Greenwood had become a 'convert' to Wesleyanism one can assume a certain bias. Nevertheless, the description of how things might be so different, should the New Connexion pattern be followed, must have strengthened Bunting's resolve to maintain the *status quo*. (In fact, lay participation did gradually come to Wesleyanism, without disaster.)

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[80] George Greenwood, letter to Jabez Bunting, Bingley, January 4 1850, letter 312 in Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism,* 391-392.

[81] *Minutes of conversations between preachers and delegates, late in connexion with Rev. Mr. Wesley, held in Sheffield, on the 28th &c. of May 1798* (Leeds, [1798]). ECCO.

In his letter, Greenwood considered that should such arrangements be adopted, 'the whole [Wesleyan Methodist] ecclesiastical superstructure will fall into ruins, and our present economy cease forever'. This fear of ecclesiastical collapse should lay participation be increased is a repeated theme in contemporary papers and early histories.

What people are paid in relation to others often says something about their status and responsibilities and superintendents did receive a little more than the other preachers in the circuit. For example, the December 1885 quarterly meeting of the Boston circuit approved an annual stipend of £180 for the superintendent, £160 for the second minister and £150 for the third, and this was common practice.[82] What is surprising is that this differentiation in stipend, albeit modest, was never challenged as making 'invidious distinctions' between the preachers.[83] It appears to have been taken for granted that greater responsibilities deserved some kind of bonus.

The nature of superintendency in Wesleyan Methodism was full of contradictions. On the one hand, the superintendent had significant powers of oversight. Even when consultation on temporal affairs was introduced, this did not affect the power of the superintendent to exercise spiritual discipline, oversee the activities of the other preachers in the circuit, or automatically be the chairman of every circuit meeting. The *Model Trust Deed (1832)* refers to the 'superintendent preacher' as one who shall have 'the direction and control' of Methodist worship in his circuit.[84] On the other hand he was and remained simply one of the preachers in the circuit, with his own pastoral responsibilities. Again, the circuit superintendent was (and still is) regarded as a key position in the Methodist connexional structure, yet he was not 'made' superintendent through consecration or any

[82] Ms. *Minutes of the Boston Wesleyan Methodist Circuit Quarterly Meeting 1861*and following. LINC Meth/B/Boston/9.
[83] See para. 3.2 for 'invidious distinctions'.
[84] *The Model Trust Deed,* 1832, extract in Henry Bettenson, (ed.), *Documents of the Christian Church* (London, New York, Toronto: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1956), 360.

other similar setting apart. It was a task allocated by the conference for the duration of his stationing in a particular circuit, and stationing was an annual procedure. The superintendent was ‘in charge’ of the circuit, yet he was but an agent of the conference’s corporate *episcope*, charged with ensuring that Conferences rules were implemented in his circuit.[85]

One avenue of exploration around the role is whether or not being stationed as a superintendent was regarded as ‘preferment’ and in what light being designated Superintendent was regarded. There is at least one piece of evidence to show that the conference considered it so, since its withdrawal was used as a ‘punishment’ : ‘ If any Superintendent does not use proper exertions in raising subscriptions for the Preachers Fund and in making all the other appointed collections he shall not be appointed a Superintendent for the ensuing year.’[86]

In attempting to ‘square the circle’, the notion of *primus inter pares* comes to mind. Petty used the notion with references to Primitive Methodist superintendents (see below) but it is not one used with reference to Wesleyan superintendents in the histories.[87] Its absence makes a significant point about Wesleyan understanding of superintendency. It says that the superintendent *was not* the first among equals. He might be no more than a travelling preacher like his colleagues, but the authority he was given to exercise set him apart in status and in office.

[85] ‘Let it be fully understood that no such person [a barber who shaves customers on the Lord’s Day] is to be suffered to remain in any of our societies. We charge all our Superintendents to execute this rule in every place without partiality’. Ms *Journal of Wesleyan Conference 1807*, miscellaneous regulations, 328, MARM1977 / 585.
[86] Ms *Journal of Wesleyan Conference* 1804, 271, MARM 1977 / 585.
[87] The term did however emerge in the British Methodist Conference report “Episkope and Episcopacy (2000): ‘The Superintendent is, among the ministers of the Circuit, first among equals’. *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order,* vol.2, 1984 – 2000 (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, [2000]), 393. The report provided a reflection on the subject of oversight at all levels in the British Methodist Connexion in 2000.

6.5 Superintendency in Primitive Methodism

Primitive Methodism followed the Wesleyans in taking the role of circuit superintendent into their system, but its origins in Primitive Methodism were somewhat different.

In his serialised history of the Primitive Methodists, Hugh Bourne wrote:

> …the travelling preachers were greatly attached to labouring in word and doctrine; to teaching publicly and from house to house; but were reluctant to the cares of society discipline and management. On this account, when any matter of the societies wanted adjusting…they frequently referred it from one to another till the societies had to complain of neglect. [88]

It seems that Primitive Methodism, born as an essentially evangelistic organisation, had not initially felt the need for the role of superintendent. However, the early travelling preachers were neglecting the steady work of nurturing and supervising existing members in the societies, because they found saving souls rather more spiritually exciting and rewarding. It was therefore decided in January 1814, to 'make an enlargement of the system of discipline', by 'forming the office of superintendent travelling preacher'.[89] Bourne significantly wrote that this was done 'solely' to cut off these neglects. In stressing the limited and practical nature of the role he seems to be making it clear that this was not the Wesleyan model as he perceived it to be developing.

In the same article, Hugh Bourne put forward another, different, reason for establishing the office of superintendent. This was that while the preachers were still expected to 'see to everything, and attend to every matter…the Quarter-Day Board must have some person to lay their

[88] Hugh Bourne's words quoted in the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1882, 75-76. Hugh Bourne, (1772-1852), Primitive Methodist preacher, one of the founders of Primitive Methodism and editor of the *Primitive Methodist Magazine*.
[89] ibid

hands on and whom they could regularly call to account'. [90] This latter description of the purpose of having a superintendent clearly shows where the balance of power was intended to lie within a Primitive Methodist circuit. It was the superintendent who was accountable to the lay members of the quarter-day board, not the other way round. This relationship can be further illustrated by a directive of the Hull PM quarterly meeting of September 1820, that: 'The superintendent preachers to bring in accounts of their respective branches drawn up as plain as possible'.[91] All preachers, including the superintendents were also expected to keep daily journals, to be regularly scrutinized by the circuit committee.

However, in John Petty's history of the denomination fifty years later (1864), he described how:

> Among the travelling preachers the leading minister is called "the superintendent", because he is especially required to *look over* the business of the circuit…He is not a "bishop" in the ordinary sense of the term, but simply "the first among equals", much the same as a senior pastor in a congregational church.[92]

Petty's description seems somewhat removed from the more practical considerations expressed by Bourne fifty years earlier and shows the influence of Wesleyan understanding. It also shows that he was aware of the inter-changeability of the terms overseer, bishop, and superintendent and of the anxieties this engendered among Methodists. The stress on not 'lording it over' colleagues (as bishops were presumed to do) is not surprising. But then to equate the superintendent with the senior pastor of a Congregational church is odd, since the congregational model was the very antithesis of

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[90] Hugh Bourne, 'History of the Primitive Methodists', chapter 3, *Primitive Methodist Magazine 1822*, 76.
[91] Ms. *Minutes of the Hull* [PM*] Quarterly Meeting, 1819 – 1829, entry for September 1820,* MARM 1986 / 003.
[92] John Petty*, The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London: R.Davies, Conference Offices, 1864), 569.

connexional Methodism. It does show however that Petty had contact with and interest in Congregational practice.

Information about Primitive Methodist superintendency can be gleaned from *The General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church (1912 revision)*, paragraph 410. They vary from ascertaining the state of the finances, trusts and lists of membership on arrival in a new circuit, to 'zealously and prudently' promoting the interests of Sunday Schools (by 1912 an important feature of circuit life), to seeing that each of his colleagues perform the duties assigned to him. In addition to his particular duties, the rules required a superintendent to visit at least thirty families a week; visits which had to include prayer and giving religious instruction 'where practicable'.[93] This was a concession to superintendents, whose colleagues were expected to visit forty families a week and preferably more. There is reference to the support of colleagues and lay officers in the performance of the superintendent's duties, but also heavy reminders that the responsibility for errors lay with him.

A distinctively Primitive Methodist approach to the position of the superintendent can be found under Rule 420. While colleagues were required to offer the superintendent 'reasonable assistance' in enforcing the rules:

> …when they deem the directions of the superintendent minister unreasonable, they may request him to alter them; and if he refuse they may appeal to the Committee or the Quarterly Meeting of the station.[94]

The idea of a superintendent potentially being taken to task by his own quarterly meeting would have been an anathema to Wesleyans.

[93] *General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church; revised by order of the ninety-third annual conference, held at Norwich, June 12 – 20 1912* (London: W.A. Hammond, 1912), General Books print on demand edn., para. 425.
[94] Ibid, para. 420.

Although admittedly the whole document is a book of ‘Rules’, the tone of the list of superintendent’s duties: keeping or ‘violating’ rules, and appeals and complaints concerning the keeping of rules, seems a far cry from the raw energy and emphasis on freedom usually associated with Primitive Methodism.[95] Such a conclusion should however be tempered by recalling that in the early days of Primitive Methodism, rules concerning dress and social behaviour were equally firmly laid down. Their quaintness in the eyes of modern readers simply makes them seem more endearing than later rules.

One of Kendall’s repeated assertions was that Primitive Methodism was ‘Presbyterian’ (as well as connexional) and became more so over the years. This would partly be about showing difference from the tendency to hierarchy in Wesleyanism, as he saw it, but there is also a connection with the early Presbyterian ‘experimental’ superintendents mentioned earlier. In the case of the Presbyterian Church, the decision was to abandon superintendency. Primitive Methodism however, managed to ‘have its cake and eat it’.

6.6 Conclusion

Examination of the pragmatic origins of the role of assistant / superintendent and the firm rejection of superintendency as being episcopal together show clearly show how Methodism understood this key role. Nevertheless, the role contained contradictions. ‘Invidious distinctions’ were unacceptable, yet the superintendent was given considerable authority. He had no distinctive setting apart, yet he had spiritual oversight. Noting the Primitive Methodist understanding and practice has highlighted the difference between Wesleyan reluctance to share decision-making with the lay leadership and the Primitive Methodist emphasis on the accountability of the superintendent to the lay people. For such a key feature of the Wesleyan and Primitive

[95] ‘But if he violate any of these rules, he must be held responsible…’ ibid, paragraph 416a.

Methodist structure, there has been surprisingly little written about superintendency in the histories.

In the conference report *Episcopacy in the Methodist Church* (1981) a majority of the working party voted in favour of the resolution that ‘a further development of the present superintendency represents the most acceptable method of receiving the historic episcopate’. [96] One feature of this proposed ‘further development’ involved the superintendent becoming a sign of unity: one of the roles of a bishop. This thesis has identified that part of the original eighteenth-century reason for designating the role of assistant was to establish greater unity.

[96] “Episcopacy in the Methodist Church (1981) in *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order* vol.1, 1933 – 1983 (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1984), The Report was presented to the 1981 Conference which commended it for study in the Church ‘without expressing and [*sic*] judgment on its conclusions’

Chapter Seven

Local Preachers, the Local Preachers' Meeting and the Preaching Plan.

7.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the origins, place and significance of local preaching and the local preachers' meeting within Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist circuits. The significance of the circuit 'preaching plan' to the local preachers is explored. The generally accepted narrative of the origins of local preaching is examined and a lack of clarity has been identified. While circuit preaching plans of the period have been thoroughly scrutinized [1] and local preaching researched,[2] a lack of scholarly attention to the subject of the local preachers' meeting has also been identified. Most of that which can be learnt about the circuit local preachers' meeting comes from minute books, quantities of which have been deposited in county archives.

7.2 Local Preachers

Local preaching was an authorised form of ministry in both the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist Connexions which was 'other than' the ministry of the itinerants. Local preachers conducted worship and preached, but they pursued secular employment and therefore were usually only available to do so on Sundays. They were circuit based and authorised at circuit level. The Primitive Methodist definition was:

> 'Local Preachers are members of our churches who possess suitable gifts and graces for such service, and who, while following secular employments, are properly

[1] In particular by the Society of Cirplanologists, founded in 1955 and producing a twice yearly bulletin: *Cirplan.*
[2] For example, Geoffrey Milburn and Margaret Batty, eds., *Workaday Preachers: The Story of Methodist Local Preaching* (Methodist Publishing House, 1995).

authorised to conduct public worship and preach the Gospel as time and opportunity may permit'[3].

Detailed study of the ministry and life of individual local preachers, Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist, men and women, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century is beyond the scope of this thesis. *Workaday Preachers – the story of Methodist Local Preaching* is one good source of material (see note 2).

Importantly, the title is not 'lay preacher'- although local preachers were 'lay' people in relation to itinerants. The roots of local preaching are found, not in the preachers being lay, but in being 'local' (see below) - and there is no evidence of a desire or need to change this title.[4] 'Local' in the title meant 'circuit', and the sphere of ministry of a local preacher was a specified circuit. But the circuit was also part of the Connexion. Therefore if a local preacher moved from one part of the country to another, his/her authorisation could be transferred (with suitable safeguards) to another circuit within the Connexion. In investigating the significance of the circuit in the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist Connexions, the existence of local preaching as an accredited form of ministry, specifically circuit-based and authorised, is an important factor.

7.2.1 Origins

In very early Methodism, the ministry of preaching[5] was exercised mainly by preachers who travelled (itinerants) but also by a smaller number of preachers who for one reason or another were not in a position to travel. The first reference to those preachers who did not travel is in the *Minutes of Conference 1747*: Q8: 'Who are they that

[3] Para. 438, *The General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church: revised by order of the ninety-third Annual Conference, held at Norwich, June 12-20 1912* (London: W.A. Hammond, 1912), General Books, print on demand edn., 61.
[4] Local preachers are sometimes referred to as lay preachers in ecumenical situations for reasons of simplicity, but this is not correct terminology.
[5] Methodists in this period still attended their parish church for the sacraments.

assist us only in one place? [6] There are further occasional references to these preachers in Wesley's lifetime, all of which reinforce the fact that there was only one category of 'preacher': most of whom travelled but some of whom did not. [7]

By the late eighteenth century, however, a change had occurred. The itinerants (travelling preachers) remained the same but the category of 'those who assist us only in one place' appears to have faded away. Instead, a new category of preacher, the 'local preacher', had emerged. Was this an evolutionary development of 'those who assist us in one place' or a newly established category, and is it possible to identify a point at which the change could be said to have been achieved or occurred? In looking for evidence Baker referred to a letter of November 1751 from Charles Wesley to John Wesley in which he outlines what Baker called 'the only clear-cut regulations which survive' but as Baker pointed out, these were suggested regulations 'urged' upon Wesley by his brother, not conference decisions. He quoted the following:

> With regard to the Preachers we agree:
> 1. That none shall be permitted to preach…till he be examined…at least by the Assistant, who sending word to us, may by our answer admit him to be a *local* Preacher'.[8]

It seems that Charles envisaged authorised preaching locally, as a stage toward possibly becoming a travelling preacher: a stage in which the person was not to abandon his trade, but develop skills and be

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[6] "Minutes of 1747 Conference" in Henry Rack ed., *The Works of John Wesley,* vol.10, The Methodist Societies and the Minutes of Conference (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 205. Here followed a list of thirty eight such preachers.

[7] See also Milburn and Batty, *Workaday Preachers,* 20-21. Batty established that there is no mention of persons named as 'local preacher' in Wesley's journal. Further, that there is no reference in the *Large Minutes,* despite these being six editions of detailed codified instructions on most other subjects: and none in the *Deed of Declaration.*

[8] Frank Baker, "Polity" in Rupert Davies, Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, vol.1 (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 237.The reference given is MS *Minutes,* 49*; Minutes,* 1.*171* and Whitehead*, Wesley, 2.269-70***.**

approved as suitable for itinerancy. This reference does not however suggest the instigation, at that date, of a category of preacher referred to as a ‘local preacher’ whose ministry was distinct from that of a travelling preacher. Nevertheless, in the *Minutes of Conference 1753*, there is reference to the possibility of an itinerant ‘returning to his temporal business and so become a local preacher’. [9] This seems to show a definite move in the direction of the category of ‘local preacher’ and strongly suggests a transition was taking place around that date.[10] A more specific date cannot be identified. Had an ‘order’ of local preachers been established, a date could have been identified, but no such ‘order’ was created: if what is meant is a set of regulations being laid down by the conference, after which, persons would be admitted to the ‘order’. [11] Nevertheless, a 1796 reference to the ‘admission’ of local preachers (implying that some form of admitting procedure now existed), shows that between 1747 and that date something had happened.[12] There was now a distinctive category of ministry within Methodism into which men could be ‘admitted’.

In one of the few articles on the history of local preaching, Duncan Coomer observed that between a reference to “many local preachers and stewards” being present at the 1767 conference (as visitors) to Wesley’s death in 1791, there is no mention of local preachers in the record.[13] This may be an indication that responsibility for their

[9] “Minutes of Conference 1753” in Henry Rack, ed., *Works,* vol.10.
[10] In John Wesley’s paper read to the conference August 4 1769, he spoke of himself as ‘...under God, a centre of union to all our *travelling* as well as *local* preachers’. “Large Minutes” in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 903. This also suggests a differentiation had developed, but not yet a separate order of ministry.
[11] Interestingly, William Robinson remarked in 1832 that they [the local preachers] cannot be considered as having a corporate existence…’ because they had ‘no government of their own, no public tribunals or functionaries’ [presumably as an Order would]. William Robinson, *An Essay on Lay Ministry, particularly on that of Wesleyan Local Preachers* (London: 1832), 173-174. The entry for ‘Local Preachers’ in John Vickers, ed., *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (Epworth Press, 2000), 209, reads: ‘There has been little formal organisation of local preachers [while also mentioning the existence of local preachers’ meetings]’.
[12] ‘If the assistant sent word to the conference that the applicant had the gifts and graces, the assistant might ‘by our answer admit him as a Local Preacher’’. ‘‘Minutes of Conference, November 25, 1751”, in Rack, *Works,* vol.10, 247.
[13] Duncan Coomer, “The Local Preachers in Early Methodism”, *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* (hereafter Proc.WHS), vol.25 (1945), 33-42. In the same

supervision and appointment was recognised as a strictly circuit matter, and thus of less interest to the conference. But it does highlight the oddity of a situation in which those who conducted the majority of Sunday services in the Connexion were, and largely continued to be, a subject of little concern to the conference.

In looking for origins, William Hatton, in his 1817 *Brief account of the rise and progress of the Local Preachers…*concluded that it was the invention and appointment of class leaders by Wesley, which 'almost necessarily, led the way to the introduction of the local preachers and of local preaching….' [14] This was because a class leader would be experienced in giving 'frequent extemporaneous exhortations'.[15] 'Necessarily' is putting it too strongly, but certainly experienced class leaders would have been a possible source of suitable candidates. Hatton could not also resist making a link with Wesley's original 'lay' preachers, who he described as '…afterwards named local preacher'.[16] He clearly wished to establish a starting point for local preaching but succeeded in demonstrating the difficulty of so doing.

It is generally assumed by scholars that the origins of local preaching as a distinct ministry must lie somewhere in 'those who assist us only in one place'. However there are two caveats. One is Duncan Coomer's theory of a 'double ancestry'.[17] He concluded that local preaching *also* grew out of the role of the 'exhorter': someone authorised to lead worship but not 'take a text', that is undertake expository preaching. Exhorters had existed from the earliest days of Methodism, alongside travelling preachers. Later, being an exhorter would be the first step in the process of becoming a local preacher. Coomer's theory also

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volume, Rev. J.W. Sellars pointed out that there was also a reference in Wesley's *Journal,* entry for 8 June 1781 referring to Wesley meeting with local preachers on a visit to the Isle of Man. "Notes and Queries", *Proc. WHS,*, vol.25 (1945), 64.

[14] William Hatton, *A brief account of the rise and progress of the Local Preachers, and of Local Preaching among the Methodists; with their abilities for the work, and general usefulness…* (Leeds: 1817).

[15] Ibid, 13.

[16] Ibid, 16.

[17] Duncan Coomer, "The Local Preachers in Early Methodism", 36

pointed to a tradition of people of humble circumstances and limited education leading worship, which may, it can be argued, have in some way influenced views of local preachers in later years. The other caveat is that while evolutionary change from ‘those who only assist us in one place’ is the most likely main *origin* of local preaching, something else is needed to account for the later clear differences between the role and particularly the status of the itinerant and the role and status of local preacher. A number of other factors came into play and are examined here.

7.2.2 Other Factors

One distinctive feature of the ministry of local preachers often cited was that these preachers knew the state and needs of the congregations and local communities in the circuit better than the itinerants. Further, since they continued in their secular employment, they were able to preach out of that experience, one shared with members of the societies. They were regarded as ‘of the people’.[18] Their preaching ministry was voluntary and they also had no responsibility for oversight, unlike the itinerants.[19] However, as Jacob Grimshaw pointed out in a correspondence discussion on this difference, ‘very little pastoral inspection’ actually fell to the travelling preachers because of their frequent removals, studious habits and other ‘less commendable’ reasons.[20] His point was that if responsibility for oversight was used to demonstrate a clear difference in role between travelling preachers and local preachers, it was an unconvincing example.

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[18] ‘They are born, brought up, live and die among the people to whom they preach’, Hatton *Brief account,* 51.

[19] In the early Primitive Methodist Connexion there was a category of ‘Hired local preacher’. These were regarded as a type of temporary travelling preacher. They received remuneration, but were not removable by the annual meeting (conference) from circuit to circuit. In 1819, John Dent was proposed to be ‘called out immediately as a hired local preacher, who shall travel on a single man’s allowance’. Ms. *Minutes of Hull Primitive Methodist Quarterly Meeting 13 September 1819.* MARM 1986 / 003.

[20] *The identity of Travelling and Local Preachers discussed in a correspondence between Alfred Barrett, Travelling Preacher and Jacob Grimshaw, Local Preacher* (London: W. Dawson and Son, 1841), 17.

Another less obvious factor concerned the enthusiasms of some of the locally-based preachers and later the local preachers. Batty pointed to the way in which the conference became concerned about the local preachers' apparent enthusiasm for supporting movements for connexional reform such as that stirred up by Alexander Kilham. [21] It can be argued that this enthusiasm was a natural, if not necessarily welcome, development from their lauded knowledge and understanding of local needs and concerns. Nevertheless, the unwelcome enthusiasm led to disciplinary measures: 'What can be done to bring certain local preachers more fully to observe our discipline?' [22] Although the minute refers to 'certain' local preachers, the rules laid down applied to all and were concerned with acting only with the superintendent's permission. Batty concluded that this attention may have been the trigger which set the local preachers on the path towards being identified as a separate group from the travelling preachers.

In addition, local preachers were often regarded as, and sometimes were, 'uneducated, of unpolished manners and of mean birth';[23] although moving into the nineteenth century, as Clive Field showed in his occupational analysis, the situation became more complex. [24] He cited a number of local studies and it can be seen that occupational background varied according to the part of the country and whether the preacher was Wesleyan or Primitive Methodist. Obelkevich worked out from circuit preaching plans that in Lindsey, Lincolnshire, between 1825 and 1875, over half the local preachers were farm labourers; but that was roughly the same as the general population.[25] However,

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[21] See Milburn and Batty, *Workaday Preachers,* 32.
[22] "Q&A 24, Minutes of Conference 1796", quoted in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church,* vol.4 (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 279.
[23] Arminian Magazine 1796, 368-9 quoted in Milburn and Batty, *Workaday Preachers,* 33. But this was often used in a positive way to show that despite cultural limitations, they had a depth of spirituality, and were powerful pray-ers and preachers.
[24] Clive D. Field, "The Methodist Local Preacher: An Occupational Analysis" in Milburn and Batty, *Workaday Preachers,* 223-239.
[25] J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 239. The others were farmers, 17%, and craftsmen 32%. By 1817, Hatton could refer to local preachers as occupying every station in life from

whatever the occupation of the local preachers, travelling preachers did become more educated (having time to read and study) and gain wider life experience through their travels. Some people also observed a shift in the social standing of the itinerants. In 1797, Joseph Entwistle, a travelling preacher himself, expressed concern about the itinerants being '…much respected by the people, frequently invited to the tables of the most opulent of their flocks, by whom they are treated as gentlemen'.[26] Education and social standing were becoming differentiating features in the period under study. Finally, one development which definitively confirmed the existence of the separate category 'local preacher' was the formal establishment of the circuit quarterly local preachers' meeting. Its role in selection, monitoring and authorisation of local preachers effectively separated the two streams of preaching ministry. This meeting will be the subject of paragraph 7.3.

7.2.3 The Place and Status of Local Preachers

Without the voluntary efforts of the local preachers, regular preaching services would not have happened in the Primitive Methodist and Wesleyan circuits.[27] There were far too many preaching places and chapels for the itinerants to cover regular Sunday worship. The pamphlet 'By an Old Methodist Preacher' (1820), *Thoughts on the Case of the Local Preachers in the Methodist Connexion* began by reflecting on this issue. He wrote:

> The Local Preachers may be considered as essentially necessary to the prosperity of the [Wesleyan] Methodist Connexion, as being the very sinews thereof, and without them it could not subsist as to the present extent of it; for it

'men of independence and men of business' through tradesmen, mechanics and labourers. Hatton, *Brief Account,* 37.

[26] Extract from Joseph Entwisle's journal in *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwisle, senior, fifty-four years a Wesleyan Minister, with copious extracts from his journals and correspondence – By his son,* 4th edn. (London: 1856), 161.

[27] Methodist worship was primarily focused on preaching. Members either attended the parish church for Holy Communion or (later) waited for the monthly or quarterly visit of the minister.

> is impossible for the Travelling Preachers to supply all the places on the one hand, and on the other hand, the societies cannot support such a number of Travelling Preachers as all the places would require:…[28]

The author went on to give the example of the Downend Circuit, which in 1815 had ten chapels and eleven 'houses for preaching on Sundays', which required at least twenty three sermons every Sunday. He pointed out that even if the two travelling preachers in the circuit preached three times every Sunday '…there are seventeen more sermons wanting every Sunday'. He argued that if it were not for the local preachers, preaching places would have to close and 'many of the people would either grow cold and dead in their souls through want of the means of grace, and go back into the world' or 'perhaps unite with the people of other denominations'. The whole pamphlet, written in quite moderate language for the period, was a plea for local preachers to be valued and their importance in the Methodist system recognised.[29] In a 2002 study of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire in the eighteenth century, Delia Garrett provided a useful detailed analysis of the numbers of preaching appointments undertaken by local preachers in one circuit - the Ludlow Circuit, from July – September 1867. [30] She was surprised by the fact that unpaid preachers fulfilled 75% of appointments on the plan.

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[28] Vicary Purdy, *Thoughts on the Case of the Local Preachers in the Methodist Connexion – by an Old Methodist Preacher* (Bristol: 1820). The pamphlet was written anonymously, but a later hand added in copperplate writing (Vicary Purdy). In 1909, Ritson was able to write that 'Today, four out of five pulpits in Primitive Methodism are occupied every Sunday by Local Preachers'. Joseph Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism – The Twelfth Hartley Lecture,* 2nd edn. (London: Edwin Dalton, Primitive Methodist Publishing House, 1909), 176.

[29] A similar point was made by Carr in John H. Carr, *The Local Ministry: its character, vocation, and position considered…'* (London: Kohn Kaye & Co., 1851). He described local preaching as an 'integral force' without which Methodism would be 'limited in range and deplorably crippled in its efforts', 105. In 2004 it was still possible to write: 'It is easy to overlook the importance and influence of local preachers…' Martin Wellings and Andrew Wood, "Theology through Training" in Clive Marsh et al., *Unmasking Methodist Theology* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 75.

[30] Delia Garratt, "Primitive Methodism in Shropshire, 1820-1900" (PhD thesis, Leicester University, 2002), 79, ETHOS. Hatton observed that in his day (c 1817)

The Methodist system of itinerancy was intentionally a system which was 'other than' the settled pastorates of the Independent tradition. However, what these Independent pastorates *did* generally provide was a regular preaching ministry by the pastor in the local chapel. When itinerancy is held up as an effective alternative (or better) model to the settled pastorate, its dependency on local preachers for the delivery of a preaching ministry must be taken into account.

Local preachers were numerous and in both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism, local preachers considerably outnumbered itinerants. The most dramatic difference was in the Primitive Methodist Connexion. In 1848, there were 511 recorded itinerants, but 8,056 local preachers, a ratio of 1:15.8.[31] Wesleyan Methodism did not record numbers until 1883, when there were 14,183 local preachers and 1545 itinerants.[32] In individual circuits, numbers varied according to the size of the circuit and other factors. However, proportions were roughly similar. Preaching plans show circuits with the ratio of local preachers to itinerants at the lower end about 7:1 and at the higher end 12:1 and more.[33] There was no 'gate-keeping' on the numbers of local preachers who could be accredited. But there appears to have been no need and since they were voluntary, there were no financial implications.

One longstanding issue with local preachers was a sense of not being valued. Hatton asked the question: 'How many thousands…have taken their nap, or taken their walk, on the Lord's Day, under the

forty out of the fifty Sunday sermons preached in the Leeds circuit by local preachers, and in the Chester Circuit, twenty-five out of thirty. Hatton, *Brief account*, 42.

31 Material abridged from the Primitive Methodist Magazine of 1848, azetc.victoria.ac.nz. Accessed 17/2/13.

32 The late start suggests a level of conference disinterest in local preachers.

33 Reports received by the Hull Primitive Methodist district meeting in April 1837 gave Lincoln (202 members), 2 Travelling Preachers and 23 Local Preachers, Grimsby (500 members), 2 TPs and 23 LPs and Louth (510 members), 4 TPs and 45 LPs. Scotter circuit had 1195 members, with 10 TPs and 77 LPs. 'Extracts from the Circuit Reports, *Primitive Methodist Magazine* for… 1837'. *Journal of the Lincolnshire Methodist History Society*, vol.4, no.10, autumn 1995.

apology it is *only* a local preacher this afternoon?'[34] They were also often regarded of lower status than the itinerants.[35] A prophetic comment came from the American travelling preacher attending the 1820 Liverpool Conference, following a conversation with a Samuel Drew. He wrote: 'The local preachers, Mr. D. thinks, are looked down on by the travelling and held in too much degradation, which is sorely felt and will in time cause an explosion.[36] Julia Stewart Werner described one particular expression of explosive thoughts in the same year as 'one of the most articulate statements of the [Wesleyan] local preachers' grievances'. [37] In the passage she quoted, references to subservience to 'hirelings' (the ministers), 'fine gentlemen' (the ministers), and 'priesthood and tyranny' suggest more bitterness than articulacy. Nevertheless, there was discontent among some local preachers concerning their status *vis-à-vis* the itinerants; a discontent which surfaced periodically. An example is given in para. 7.4.1. [38] It can be argued that in the likely origins of local preaching in the early single status of 'preacher' can be found a contributing factor to the issue of inferior status. Local preachers would be aware that they and the itinerants had originally come from common stock.

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[34] Hatton, *Brief Account,* page 5 of addenda.

[35] One of Alexander Kilham's concerns was that local preachers were less acceptable than travelling preachers even when the former were more able. 'How very often a very weak brother is followed and cried up because he has a horse with a pair of bags, and travels, while an old tried local preacher is neglected'. *Methodist Monitor,* II, 157, note 27, "Polity", Davies and Rupp, *History,* vol. 1, 307.

[36] Diary entry for Monday 14 August 1820, of the Rev. John Emory of the Methodist Episcopal Church on attending the Liverpool Conference of 1820, quoted in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol. 4, 367.

[37] *Lay Preaching Defended: A Few Plain Remarks for the Consideration of the People Called Methodists* (London, 1820) quoted in Julia Stewart Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion – Its Background and Early History* (Wisconsin and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 17.

[38] Hatton, in 1817, had a slightly more optimistic view: 'It is a pleasure to state that in many places, increasing respect is shown to the local preachers, and it is to be hoped, the time is not too far distant, when it will be universally so…' Hatton, *Brief Account,* 46.

7.3 The Local Preachers' Meeting

The quarterly local preachers' meeting was the official circuit meeting for monitoring and authorising their practice, and providing fellowship. These matters are expanded below.

7.3.1 Origins

It is not possible to ascertain for certain when the earliest local preachers' meetings were held**.** Coomer quoted Jabez Bunting writing to Dr. Beecham in 1828:

> It will be well to ascertain from Mr. James Wood, or some other aged preacher, whether Methodism, as Mr. Wesley left it, knew nothing of Local Preachers' Meetings. The rule quoted by you [1796 Minutes – see below] may be the first statute in our code on the subject of such meetings, and yet, in point of fact, they might be previously held and so, from usage, be part of our ancient common law.[39]

According to Beecham, some assistants had met the local preachers occasionally, especially around the time that the circuit plan was being made, but this was not universal practice because of the size of the circuits.[40] (This argument is not a strong one since members, including local preachers, were already travelling long distances to circuit quarterly meetings).

The first official reference to a circuit meeting specifically for local preachers appears in the *Minutes of Conference 1796*– the 'rule' referred to by Bunting:

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[39] Letter from Jabez Bunting to John Beecham 1828 in T.P. Bunting, *The Life of Jabez Bunting,* vol.2, 256, quoted in Duncan Coomer, "The Local Preachers in Early Methodism", *Proc. WHS,* vol.25 ((1945), 36.

[40] John Beecham, *An Essay on the Constitution of Wesleyan Methodism etc...*2nd edn. corrected and enlarged, (London: 1850), 11-12. Baker considered the reference in Wesley's journal for February 6 1789 to 'the quarterly day for meeting local preachers' as an isolated example in the metropolis. Frank Baker, "Polity", Davies and Rupp, *History,* vol.1, 238.

> Respecting the admission of persons to be local preachers, let the Assistant [41] regularly meet the local preachers once a quarter, and let none be admitted but those that are proposed and approved at that Meeting; and if in any Circuit this be not practicable, let them be proposed and approved at the Quarterly Meeting.[42]

Batty concluded, in agreement with Beecham, that some assistants may well have been meeting with their local preachers before 1796. But that it was the conference's anxiety to bring certain local preachers under firmer discipline which prompted 'the collective regulation of local preachers' in the form of a conference-directed circuit quarterly local preachers' meeting.[43] Whatever meetings of local preachers with assistants had taken place previously the 'new' meetings were of a different order.

The significance of the conference directive should not be underestimated. Up to this point, the assistants (later superintendents) could, on their own authority, take on anyone they saw fit, to be a local preacher.[44] Now, the circuit local preachers' meeting was to propose and approve those seeking admission as local preachers. The task of deciding who was fit to preach in the pulpits of the circuit was being given to a meeting of the local preachers' peers – other local preachers in the circuit (albeit under the chairmanship of the assistant/superintendent). The itinerants were approved and authorised by their peers[45] and the same was now the case for the local preachers. Although local preachers did not routinely offer pastoral care, or exercise oversight as did the itinerants; on Sunday they fulfilled

[41] 1796 was also the occasion of the first reference to the term 'superintendent' instead of 'assistant' in the *Minutes of Conference*, but presumably the proposed legislation for the admission of local preachers had been formulated before the term had common currency.
[42] "Minutes of Conference 1796" in *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences* vol.1, 1744-1798 (London: John Mason, 1862), 366.
[43] Milburn and Batty, *Workaday Preachers,* 33.
[44] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine 1888,* 451-452 referring to 'Kilham' time.
[45] At the conference.

the same role in the pulpit, free to promulgate their message (within the same bounds of doctrinal acceptability) and having the same opportunity and responsibility to influence for good or ill. That the suitability of the local preacher for his [46] role and the soundness of his sermons had been handed to a meeting of his peers shows a certain confidence in their ability to do this successfully, or simply the most practical way of doing things.

In considering the significance of the circuit in Methodism, this responsibility of the circuit local preachers' meeting is an important factor, yet not one in which scholars have shown much interest. References to the role of the local preachers' meeting, other than in minutes and constitutional material, are very sparse. [47] Considering the significant role that local preachers played in the Methodist scheme of things, and therefore the important place of the local preachers' meeting, this is somewhat surprising. Coomer commented in 1945 that his article was the first on local preaching since the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* were first published in 1897. There are only brief references to the local preachers' meeting in *Workaday Preachers*. This is despite the reason for publication being the two hundredth anniversary of its establishment.

7.3.2 Meeting Times

In the nineteenth century circuit meetings, including local preachers' meetings, were commonly held during the day. It has been suggested that this was so that members did not have to face the difficulties of unlit and unmade roads in the dark. However, timings do not change in

[46] In Wesleyan Methodism, women were not officially accepted as local preachers until 1918, but accepted from the beginning in Primitive Methodism.
[47] One early source which did mention the meeting was Jonathan Crowther. In a volume aimed at the 'many members of our Societies' who he felt knew little of 'our history, doctrine or discipline' he included a section: "Of the Local Preachers and their Meetings" giving a thorough description of the purpose and functioning of the local preachers' meeting of his day. Jonathan Crowther, *A true and complete portraiture of Methodism, or the History of the Wesleyan Methodists.* It was first published in Halifax, Yorks in 1811 but also in New York for the benefit of Methodists in the United States (New York: Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813), 230.

the months when the evenings would be light. In some cases there would have been a connection between the timing and the occupation of the members. An early twentieth-century example is from the Newark and Southwell circuit: a meeting held on half-day closing because many preachers were shopkeepers.[48] The timing of the local preachers' meeting was commonly linked to the timing of the quarterly meeting and circuit preaching plans provide the evidence. On Monday March 28 1853 for example, the Grantham circuit local preachers were to meet at 11am, followed by the quarterly meeting.[49] Plans from other areas note similar dates and timings. The link may have enabled matters of discipline and authorisation requiring quarterly meeting action to be attended to promptly. It also enabled local preachers who were members of both meetings to avoid losing further time from work.[50]

One intriguing directive in the Primitive Methodist *General Rules* (*1912 revision*) was that any business of the preachers' meeting remaining unsettled at the end of four hours was to be transferred to the quarterly meeting. 'No Preachers' Meeting can sit beyond this time'.[51] This rule must have been the product of experience. It suggests several possibilities. The most likely is that the number of local preachers in a circuit was often so many that it could take several hours simply to attend to the routine business. Another possibility is that since the quarterly meeting followed on, more than four hours would make the quarterly meeting very late in finishing.

7.3.3 Agenda and Constitutions

The circuit local preachers' meeting was not a committee meeting. The local preachers were under discipline, and the meeting was the agency

[48] Ian Matthews, letter to the editor, *Cirplan*, vol.14, no.7, issue 111, Michaelmas 2010.
[49]Grantham Wesleyan Circuit Preaching Plan 1853, LINC Meth/B/Grantham.
[50] There were other arrangements. In March 1899, the Coningsby Circuit Quarterly Meeting was timed for 3pm, tea at 5pm and the Local Preachers Meeting at 6pm. Ibid.
[51] Para. 207, *General Rules of Primitive Methodist Church (1912)*, print on demand edn., 28.

by which they were monitored, supervised, examined and authorised, as well as an occasion for mutual support and spiritual encouragement.

In looking for an original model for the meeting, Batty considered that this was probably the Sunderland circuit which had set up a local preachers' quarterly meeting as far back as 1754 '…with stringent rules for their examination and subsequent conduct'.[52] Frank Baker concluded that it 'could well be' that the inspiration was John Crook, the founder of Methodism in the Isle of Man, who as assistant, met with 45 local preachers at Peel on March 20 1780,and made the first entries in the 'Local Preachers Minute Book'.[53] There is no reason why both examples, and perhaps others, could not have fed into the production of the connexional model.

The local preachers' meeting in both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism had a formal structure, which ensured that the various elements of the meeting's responsibility were covered. A typical Wesleyan example is that taken from the preachers' meeting minute book of the Grantham Wesleyan Circuit for September 1853. The following questions formed the first part of the agenda:

Q1 Are there any objections to any of the brethren?
Q2 Are there any preachers on trial to be fully received on the Plan?
Q3 Are there any brethren in the circuit suitable to be received on trial?
Q4 Are there any alterations to be made to the Plan?
Q5 Are there any of the brethren to be fully received? [54]

This list of questions has the appearance of having been promulgated by the conference or its executive. It certainly follows the 'question and

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[52] ibid
[53] Baker, "Polity" in Davies and Rupp, *History,*vol.1, 238.
[54]Ms *Local Preachers Meeting Minute Book* [Grantham Wesleyan Circuit], entry for Sept. 26, 1853, LINC Meth/B/Grantham/18. A later, connexionally promoted format, with short history, can be found in Appendix XII, "Local Preachers' Meetings", *Minutes of Conference 1894* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Bookroom, 1895), 456-465. By this date there was a district local preachers' committee to which returns had to be made.

answer' method used in the conference. A similar list was still in operation in 1909. The only additions in these minutes were questions about the death or resignation of any preacher, any who had moved into or out of the circuit and any who had been 'given a note to preach' by the superintendent.[55]

In Primitive Methodism, the preachers' meeting was the first part of the two - part quarterly meeting, the quarterly meeting proper being the second. The order of business set out in the connexional Rules (1912)[56] included:

-Elect a President and Secretary[57]

-The President must read over the names of the preachers on the plan, and ask whether there be any complaint respecting their doctrine, pulpit talents, attention to appointments, moral or official conduct; and place a mark opposite the name of each one concerning whom it is intimated that a complaint exists, or an observation has to be made.

-Examine and decide on the cases of the persons that were marked in the previous course.

- Inquire whether any local preacher has come from another station properly credentialled.

-Inquire whether any local preachers on trial are to be raised to the list of the approved ones…and the raising of any of the exhorters to be preachers on trial.

-Inquire whether there are persons suitable to be put on the plan as exhorters or to be allowed to take appointments in company with other persons.

Plate 6 shows one page of the minutes of a Brigg PM Circuit local preachers' meeting, held in December 1836.[58] It shows local responses to the standard questions. For example item 6 refers to Bro. Andrews

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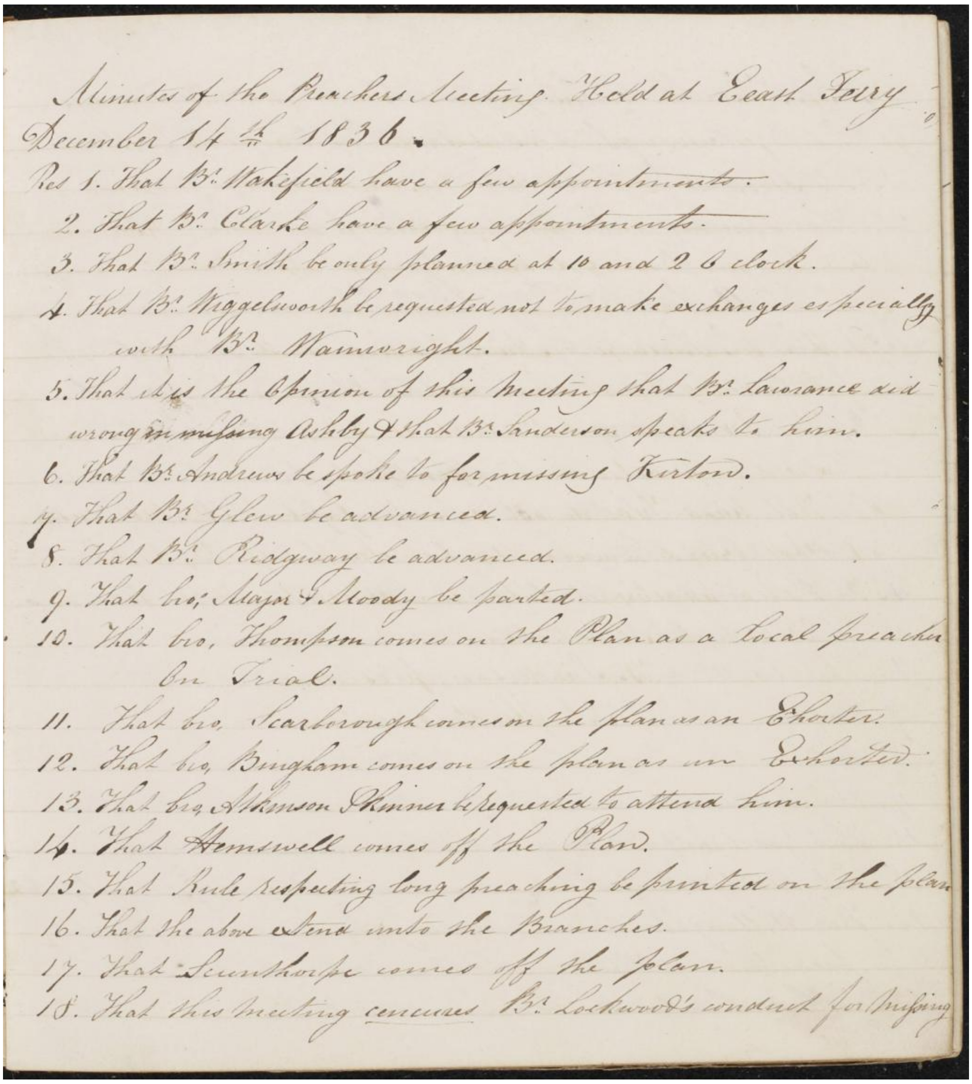
[55] A 'note to preach' was the initial permission of the superintendent to begin the process.

[56] *General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church (1912),* print on demand edn. 28.

[57] Unlike Wesleyan Methodism, the superintendent minister was not automatically the chairman/president of the meeting.

[58] Ms. *Minutes, Brigg Primitive Methodist Local Preachers' Meeting,*1836, LINC Meth/B/Brigg/48/1 Local Preachers Minutes 1832-1842 (Scotter Circuit).



Minutes of the Preachers Meeting Held at East Ferry December 14th 1836.

Res 1. That Br. Wakefield have a few appointments.

2. That Br. Clarke have a few appointments.

3. That Br. Smith be only planned at 10 and 2 O clock.

4. That Br. Wiggelsworth be requested not to make exchanges especially with Br. Wainwright.

5. That it is the Opinion of this Meeting that Br. Lawrance did wrong ~~in missing~~ Ashby & that Br. Sanderson speaks to him.

6. That Br. Andrews be spoke to for missing Kirton.

7. That Br. Glew be advanced.

8. That Br. Ridgway be advanced.

9. That bro; Major & Moody be parted.

10. That bro, Thompson comes on the Plan as a local preacher On Trial.

11. That bro, Scarborough comes on the plan as an Exhorter.

12. That bro, Bingham comes on the plan as an Exhorter.

13. That bro, Atkinson Skinner be requested to attend him.

14. That Hemswell comes off the Plan.

15. That Rule respecting long preaching be printed on the plan

16. That the above extend unto the Branches.

17. That Scunthorpe comes off the plan.

18. That this Meeting censures Br. Lockwood's conduct for missing

Plate 6

Brigg Primitive Methodist Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting Minute Book – minutes December 14 1836 ‘be spoke [*sic*] to for missing Kirkland’ and Item 11 refers to ‘Bro. Scarborough come on the Plan as an Exhorter’.

There was one difference in constitution between the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist preachers’ meetings. The PM constitution permitted the presence of the first station steward.[59] Although seemingly a small matter, this would make the dynamics of the meeting somewhat different. Here, the representative of the members in the circuit was privy to, and presumably contributed information concerning, ‘complaints’ about any of the local preachers. In Primitive Methodism, the scrutiny and approval of the general members had considerable weight. Petty wrote in 1860 that Primitive Methodist local preachers were ‘chosen to their office by the representatives of the united societies to whom they minister, [probably a reference to the quarterly meeting] and should their preaching prove unacceptable to the people generally, their services are discontinued’.[60] This comment shows the precariousness of the position of the local preachers in a more democratic denomination.

In both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism, behind the formal list of questions on the agenda lay the several purposes and functions of the meeting. The two main categories were discipline and authorisation. The rest of the meeting would be concerned with devotions, some routine local business such as which preaching places should be brought onto the plan and which removed, and perhaps some discussion of a spiritual nature.

7.3.4 Discipline

‘Everyone who fills the office of a local preacher or exhorter must adorn the Gospel of Christ in his life and conversation, be generally accepted

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[59] Q24 *General Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Connexion 1822* (Bemersley: 1822).The steward could speak but not vote.

[60] John Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion from its origin to the Conference of 1860, the first jubilee year of the Connexion. A new edn., revised and enlarged* (London: R.Davies, 1864), 596. Accessed at https: openlibrary.org/books/OL24152714M.

in his official labours, meet in class, and pay his contributions according to rule. He must uphold church discipline, and have his name printed on the preachers' plan of his station [circuit]…'[61] This Primitive Methodist statement was equally applicable to Wesleyan local preachers.

One aspect of discipline was that preachers were required to adhere to rules which Wesley had set up for the Connexion to prevent unauthorised persons preaching in Methodist preaching places without express permission. When in 1842, without permission, Bro. Walton [a local preacher] invited a Mr. Wright, from outside the Bourn circuit to preach: a man who had also been expelled elsewhere for 'unsoundness of doctrine', Mr. Walton broke connexional rules.[62] His punishment was to be suspended for six months by the unanimous decision of his preachers' meeting.[63] This rule and incident also demonstrates the connexional nature of Methodism. While local preachers were circuit based and authorised, they were nevertheless always within the scope of connexional rules laid down by the conference, and the local preachers' meeting was required to administer these rules.

A second aspect of discipline covered the preacher's performance of his or her duties. This included the matter of failing to appear at the correct time or at all, to conduct worship. The Bourn Wesleyan local preachers' meeting of March 1854 observed that among several preachers:' Bro. Bryan has neglected Billingboro [and] Bro. Collins, Thurlby and Baston'.[64] When local preachers mostly had to walk,

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[61] Para. 439, *General Minutes 1822.*

[62] 'Let no person that is not in connexion with us preach in any of our chapels or preaching houses without a note from Mr. Wesley, or from the Assistant of the circuit from whence he comes…' "Minutes of Conference 1788"**,** *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences,* vol.1.

[63] Entries for 1842, ms.*Minutes of the Bourn Circuit (Wesleyan) Local Preachers Meeting 1838* and following*,* LINC Meth/ B/ Bourne.

[64] Entry for March 1854, ibid. This was both a Wesleyan and a Primitive Methodist problem. The Sleaford Primitive Methodist meeting of December 1865 had cause to admonish four local preachers for each neglecting their appointments and not

(sometimes considerable distances), to their appointments, certain extenuating circumstances were allowed, such as severe weather, sudden illness, or difficulty in finding a remote preaching place. The reasons why Messrs Bryan and Collins neglected their appointments are not known, but extenuating circumstances were usually minuted, so one possibility is that unwise choices had been made as to the suitability of these men for local preaching.

Failing to arrive to preach was a surprisingly common occurrence; it was something which happened sufficiently often to require a regular notice on preaching plans. The Hull Circuit Plan for August to October 1819 bore the notice: 'It is particularly requested that every Preacher will strictly attend his appointments; and in any place where he cannot attend, that he will provide a proper substitute'. [65] When the Bourn preachers (above) failed to provide substitutes, the minutes recorded that '…under such circumstances it is not to be expected that the blessing of God will attend our work…unless the places are better supplied the preaching must be considerably limited and the consequences fatal to our existence as a circuit'. There is a hint here that if the local preachers failed in their duties, the very circuit itself might be under threat. Robinson devoted a whole chapter of his *Essay on Lay Ministry* to the subject of punctuality and attending appointments. He put some of the blame on 'the injudicious formation' of the plan by the superintendent and considered that local preachers should at least have a veto on 'places which [the preacher] may think unreasonably distant or seasons in which other engagements are foreseen to interfere'.[66] He gave several pages over to the damage

supplying an accredited substitute. Ms. *Minutes, Sleaford Primitive Methodist Circuit Quarterly Meeting, December 1865,* LINC Meth/B/Sleaford. There are many other examples.

[65] Reproduction of the Hull Circuit Plan August – October 1819, Holliday Bickerstaff Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, vol.1 (London: Edwin Dalton :) 48-50 Aldersgate Street, EC, n.d.) A notice reminding preachers to provide an accredited substitute appears on preaching plans to this day.

[66] Robinson, *Essay*, 161.

which non-attendance might do. Someone might have especially brought along a friend or neighbour.

A third aspect of discipline covered the preachers' personal lives, which were scrutinised very closely. A local preacher might be found inebriated. He might be found to have been brawling. The Boston minutes for 1848 recorded that Brother Coulson had been fined by the magistrates for assault.[67] Personal relationships were also under scrutiny. In c1835, Brother B. had his name removed from the plan for 'forsaking' a young lady 'without justifiable cause' having already promised to marry her. [68] Entries in minutes could be very bald: 'John Edwards to be dropped for immorality'.[69] The preacher's financial state was also a matter for scrutiny. Insolvency was a reason for resignation as a local preacher. Early Primitive Methodist meetings were particularly diligent in monitoring the personal behaviour of their members: 'That Bro. Hulme be requested not to harbour the young men at his house.'[70] What is clear from the minutes of meetings is that the scrutiny of personal behaviour was taken very seriously, although as the nineteenth century wore on, minutes became more bland. It cannot be ascertained whether this was because failings were no longer the subject of the same degree of attention, or because minute secretaries were becoming more diplomatic and succinct. The most likely answer is 'both'.

At first, matters of discipline were dealt with in the meeting by the preachers themselves – and openly recorded in the minutes. It can be argued that this mirrored the level of mutual trust, openness and spiritual rigour which was such a feature of the early class meetings.

[67] Ms. *Boston Circuit Local Preachers Meeting 1819-1849* entries for June 1848 and October 1848, LINC Meth/B/Boston.
[68] Doncaster Local Preachers Meeting Minutes 1835-1850 quoted in G. Selby Bell, "Doncaster Local Preachers' Meeting a Century ago", *Proc. WHS* vol. 28.4, December 1951, 65.
[69] Ms. *Boston Local Preachers Meeting Minute Book,* entry for June 6, 1848. LINC Meth/B /Boston
[70] Ms. *Shrewsbury Circuit Preachers Meeting June 22 1835***,** SHROP NM2123 / 433.

However, it is noticeable that in some quarters at least, by the end of the nineteenth century matters of discipline were being dealt with 'one step removed'. In a minute of 1886, 'The Meeting having heard that Bro. R […] is insolvent, the secretary was requested to write to him requesting him to resign his position as a Local Preacher'.[71] This trend appears to mirror the waning enthusiasm for intense class meetings.

7.3.5 Authorisation

Although the final approval for a local preacher to be authorised for his ministry was the stamp of the quarterly meeting, it was the preachers' meeting which undertook the process of examination and approval as a person moved from application to final authorisation. [72]

As has been previously mentioned, in the Wesleyan tradition, a man began his journey toward becoming a fully authorised local preacher by first becoming an 'exhorter'. If he proved acceptable in this limited role, the man was moved on to the next stage: 'on trial'. 'The following brethren having been placed on the Plan as exhorters, are now recommended to be put on trial as Local Preachers [names follow]'.[73] The term 'on trial' had no disciplinary connotations. Rather it was a period of probation, during which the potential local preacher gained experience and was monitored and supervised by accredited preachers and the preachers' meeting. The length of time taken to complete the 'on trial' stage varied and sometimes preachers appear to have been reluctant to move on. This may have been a reluctance to be examined (see below).

To move from being on trial to being fully fledged required an examination. The form of this examination developed over the years, but can be deduced from minutes. One or more 'trial sermons' formed

[71] Ms.*Sleaford Circuit Local Preachers Minute Book,* entry for March 25 1886. LINC Meth/B/Sleaford/18/1
[72] A useful description of the whole process in the early nineteenth century can be found in chapter 3, Hatton, *Brief Account,* 17
[73] Ms. *Minutes of the Local Preachers Meetings in the Louth [Wesleyan] Circuit 1852-1870,* entry for Oct. 19, 1852. LINC, Meth/B/Louth/18

part of the process. '[Resolved] that the following brethren be expected to preach trial sermons during the next Quarter [names follow]'.[74] There was also a procedure referred to as an 'examination' which involved being interviewed by the meeting: 'Bro. Bagley, having been examined on the subject of his Christian experience and knowledge of our doctrines was unanimously recommended to be put on the full Plan'.[75] Arrangements continued to be formalised. By 1902, the candidate, having given an account of his conversion, his present Christian experience and his call to preach, had to have read the fifty-three standard sermons of John Wesley and his Notes on the New Testament as well as being tested on 'the definitions and scripture proofs of the leading doctrines of Christianity as there explained'.[76] The recommendation to be 'put on full plan' would be followed by the stamp of the quarterly meeting and some form of recognition such as the presentation of an inscribed bible during a special service.

The Primitive Methodist method of authorisation was similar but not identical to the Wesleyan system. The *General Rules (1912 revision)* indicate that entry even into the role of exhorter was demanding. [77] This required being examined 'by the circuit as to his religious experience, devotional habits, and knowledge of the Scriptures'. In addition it was necessary to complete a form which asked questions such as 'how long have you been converted?' 'Have you read the Rules of our Church? If so what are your views of our form of government?' and 'If you knew a person to be under conviction of sin, what steps would you take to lead him to Christ?' Having been admitted as an exhorter, a period of 'probation' followed (strongly recommended as 18 months to 2 years) in which the candidate was

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[74] Entry for June 29 1854, ibid.
[75] Ms.*Minutes of the [Grantham Wesleyan Circuit] Local Preachers Meeting 1853 – 1864,* entry for April 1, 1861. LINC Meth/B/Grantham/18.
[76] *Wesleyan Methodist Church Compendium of Rules and Regulations relating to Local Preachers including the order and form of business for Local Preachers' Meetings* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Bookroom, 1902), 11.
[77] Para. 441, *General Rules of the Primitive Methodist Church (1912),* print on demand edn., 61.

required to undergo 'regular examination' in ' Theology, Homiletics, Biblical Introduction, Connexional Polity, Christian Evidences and English Grammar'.[78] Successful completion of the period of probation (equivalent to the Wesleyan 'on trial') led to formal recognition as a local preacher. These Rules give every indication of having been forged both by experiences of unsuitable people being taken on as exhorters too readily and a desire to demonstrate a serious commitment to learning. The requirement for examination in English grammar suggests the educational baseline for local preachers was still quite low.

The staged process of approval in both Connexions displays a level of organisation and seriousness about the task which, before the introduction of seminary training for itinerants, was the same for both. [79] Indeed this *was* all the training, other than a further period 'on trial' available to itinerants prior to being 'received into Full Connexion' at the conference. Qualification as a local preacher had been a prerequisite to becoming an itinerant since 1797 and remained the case into the twenty-first century. This does raise the issue again of how local preachers came to be regarded as 'second class' preachers when their rigorous (for the period) preparation was no different from that of the itinerants. One can only fall back on the social and cultural differentiating factors and the growing professionalization of the itinerant ministry.

7.3.6 Use of Terms

Earlier reference has been made to the way in which itinerants and local preachers became two separate streams of ministry (although all itinerants were required to be local preachers first). Terminology reinforced the distinction. Itinerants were both 'received into Full Connexion' and ordained, at the conference. Local preachers were

[78] Ibid.
[79] The first Wesleyan theological colleges were opened in 1842 – in Richmond (Surrey) and Didsbury (Manchester); the first Primitive Methodist, in Sunderland in

'fully accredited', 'admitted', 'recognised' or 'received onto full Plan' at circuit level only and never ordained. This important difference in terminology was not however strictly observed in the Primitive Methodist tradition. For example, in November 1819 and again in April 1820 two preachers in the Boston Primitive Methodist circuit were described as being 'admitted' into Full Connexion', '…provided they were first heard and approved by one of the travelling preachers'. It is possible that the person who wrote the minutes was unfamiliar with the significance of the term, but perhaps it was about putting down a marker that in Primitive Methodist eyes, there was not such a difference between local preachers and itinerants.[80] A note in *A History of the Methodist Church* also commented, if vaguely, that in the non-Wesleyan Churches, the recognition of local preachers 'was probably sometimes called 'ordination' in popular usage'.[81]

7.3.7 Local Preacher Training

Although the authorisation and monitoring of local preachers was circuit-based, the connexional nature of Methodism meant that the conference and the executive expected to promulgate standards to be applied across the Connexion. One such issue was the matter of local preacher training, both initial and on-going. Despite the careful combined process of 'apprenticeship' and local oral examination, until the late nineteenth century, local preachers received no formal training. The local preachers were volunteers and therefore could not be coerced. All that could be done was to offer or suggest, but the Wesleyan conference was unable to do even this. From 1873 to 1892 a number of connexional committees met unsuccessfully until finally in 1893, '…a scheme of voluntary study and annual examination has been carried out, greatly to the advantage of the men who have

[80] Ms. *Minutes of the Wesleyan Local Preachers Meeting of the Boston Circuit 1819 – 1849*.LINC Meth/B/Boston.
[81] Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.2, 159, note 40. Not only popular usage. The 'official' plate in a local preacher's presentation Bible of 1934 (after Methodist Union), from an ex-Primitive Methodist circuit describes the recipient as being 'Ordained into the lay ministry of the Methodist Church'. (Bible in author's possession).

presented themselves'.[82] Waddy Moss highlighted the delicate balance involved between expressing appreciation for the commitment of 'these faithful men' (as he described them) [83] and the need to maintain or improve standards of preaching; not least because they were largely the public face of Methodist worship. He commented that in the light of national trends towards training people for the work they did: '…it is very wasteful not to afford [the local preacher] an opportunity of obtaining some, even slight, teaching of a regular kind how to do his work'.[84] The reference to 'some, even slight' sounds very condescending, but it could simply have been a realistic assessment of what could be demanded.

A second reason, articulated by Sir Percy Bunting, was that 'they are the nursery of the regular Pastorate', [85] and perhaps Waddy meant that the local preachers who offered as candidates for the itinerancy would require less seminary training if their local preacher training had been thorough. Primitive Methodism had similar problems to Wesleyanism in attempting to provide further education for local preachers, although efforts were made to provide a form of in-service training through the denominational magazine. For example, in the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* of January 1870, under the general heading of "local preachers department" was an article by Rev. J. Ferguson on the "Fifth Ecumenical Council held at Constantinople AD 533".[86] There were several similar articles.

Further efforts toward training were made in 1912. The PM *General Rules (1912 revision)* stated that 'Station [circuit] Quarterly Meetings shall appoint a special Committee for the training of local preachers,

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[82] R. Waddy Moss, 'The Last Fifty Years' in W.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman and George Eayrs, eds., *A New History of Methodism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), vol.1, 464. This course of study was still voluntary.
[83] Ibid, 464,465.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Percy Bunting, "Methodism Today: development and reunion" in Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History,* vol. 1, 500.
[86] *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, vol.8 (new series), January 1870, 9-19.

consisting of the ministers, and not fewer than seven other officials…who shall take earnest and diligent oversight of the training and studies of local preachers on the station'.[87] These special committees were also to deal with trial sermons and examinations. What is surprising is that there is no mention of the local preachers' meeting, whose responsibility such matters were, and which would have also been the obvious meeting to deal with training. There is more than a hint here that the local preachers were considered incapable of dealing with training themselves. Perhaps it was an act of desperation to persuade some to accept that training, or further training was necessary.

7.4 The Circuit Preaching Plan

The plan at its most basic was a rota, in the form of a chart, prepared quarterly, four-monthly or sometimes six-monthly in advance, to indicate which preachers, both itinerant and local, had to be at which chapels or preaching places at what times.[88] As early as 1776, Wesley urged the assistant of the Dales Circuit to 'fix a regular plan for the local preachers, and see that they keep it'.[89] Quantities of circuit preaching plans survive in county and Methodist archives and the earliest surviving plan is from Leeds Circuit May-July 1777, handwritten.[90]

Plate 7 shows an 1821 Primitive Methodist preaching plan for a circuit of 45 chapels.[91] Although initially a simple chart for the preachers, the circuit preaching plan eventually also became a document available to all church members and a source of information not only concerning Sunday and midweek worship services, but also devotional and committee meetings, social events, class meeting visitations and more,

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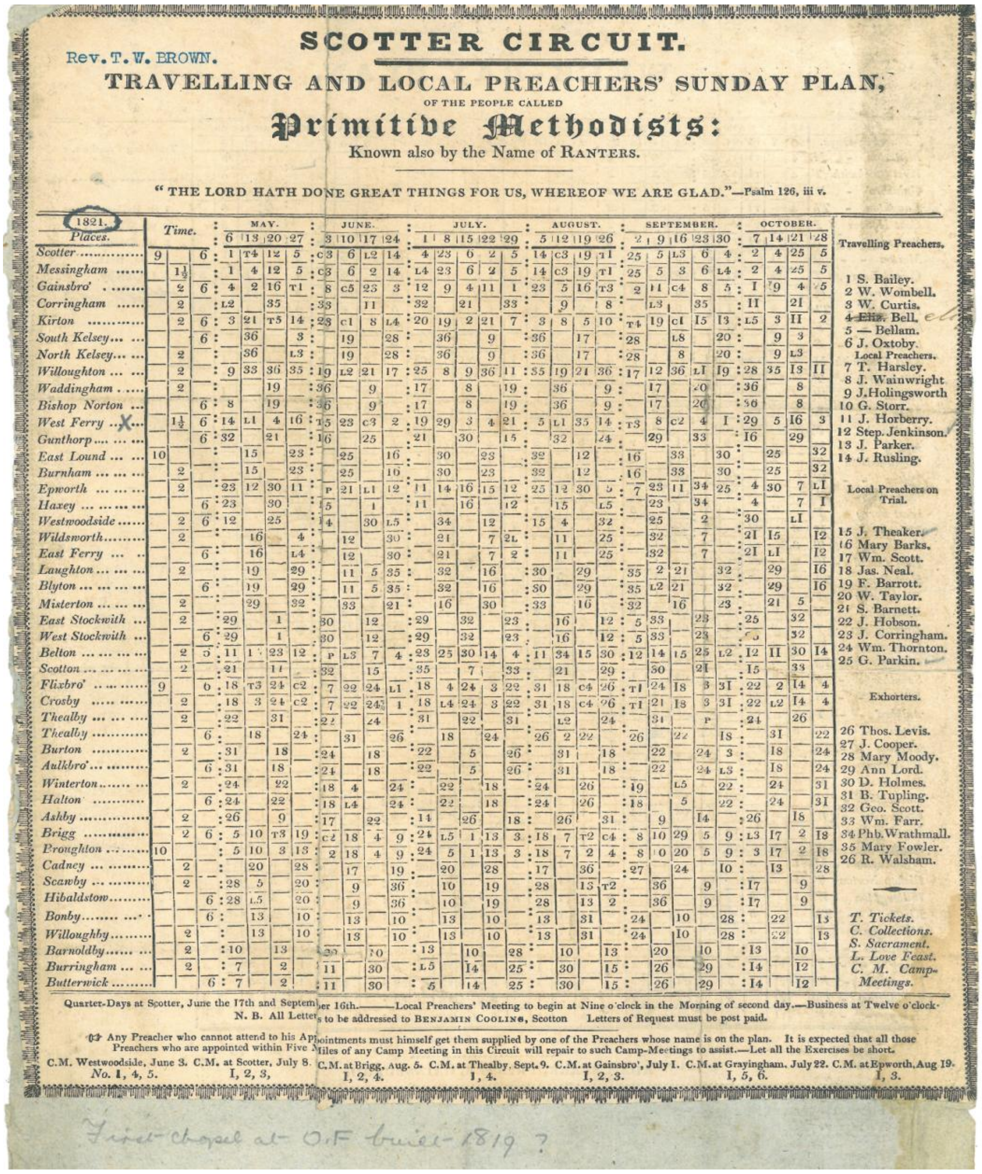
[87] Para. 452, *General Rules (1912),* print on demand edn., 63.
[88] The very earliest plans for Sunday appointments were for local preachers only. The travelling preachers had separate 'itineraries' but this soon changed. Milburn and Batty, *Workaday Preachers,* 143.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Reproduced in Milburn and Batty, *Workaday Preachers,* 145.
[91] Being a Primitive Methodist plan, the names of several women appear as exhorters and one as a local preacher 'on trial'. An 'Eliz. Bell' is shown as a travelling preacher, which presumably referred to an Elizabeth Bell. It is interesting to see that on the heading of the plan, the circuit was content to refer to the 'nickname' of Ranters.


Rev. T. W. BROWN.

SCOTTER CIRCUIT.

TRAVELLING AND LOCAL PREACHERS' SUNDAY PLAN,

OF THE PEOPLE CALLED

Primitive Methodists:

Known also by the Name of RANTERS.

" THE LORD HATH DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US, WHEREOF WE ARE GLAD."—Psalm 126, iii v.

1821.

Travelling Preachers.

1 S. Bailey.
2 W. Wombell.
3 W. Curtis.
4 ~~Eliz.~~ Bell.
5 — Bellam.
6 J. Oxtoby.

Local Preachers.

7 T. Harsley.
8 J. Wainwright
9 J. Holingsworth
10 G. Storr.
11 J. Horberry.
12 Step. Jenkinson.
13 J. Parker.
14 J. Rusling.

Local Preachers on Trial.

15 J. Theaker.
16 Mary Barks.
17 Wm. Scott.
18 Jas. Neal.
19 F. Barrott.
20 W. Taylor.
21 S. Barnett.
22 J. Hobson.
23 J. Corringham.
24 Wm. Thornton.
25 G. Parkin.

Exhorters.

26 Thos. Levis.
27 J. Cooper.
28 Mary Moody.
29 Ann Lord.
30 D. Holmes.
31 B. Tupling.
32 Geo. Scott.
33 Wm. Farr.
34 Phb. Wrathmall.
35 Mary Fowler.
26 R. Walsham.

T. Tickets.
C. Collections.
S. Sacrament.
L. Love Feast.
C. M. Camp-Meetings.

Quarter-Days at Scotter, June the 17th and September 16th.——Local Preachers' Meeting to begin at Nine o'clock in the Morning of second day.—Business at Twelve o'clock.
N. B. All Letters to be addressed to BENJAMIN COOLING, Scotton Letters of Request must be post paid.

☞ Any Preacher who cannot attend to his Appointments must himself get them supplied by one of the Preachers whose name is on the plan. It is expected that all those Preachers who are appointed within Five Miles of any Camp Meeting in this Circuit will repair to such Camp-Meetings to assist.—Let all the Exercises be short.

C.M. Westwoodside, June 3. No. 1, 4, 5. C.M. at Scotter, July 8. 1, 2, 3, C.M. at Brigg, Aug. 5. 1, 2, 4. C.M. at Thealby, Sept. 9. 1, 4. C.M. at Gainsbro', July 1. 1, 2, 3. C.M. at Grayingham, July 22. 1, 5, 6. C.M. at Epworth, Aug 19. 1, 3.

First chapel at O.F built 1819 ?

Plate 7

Scotter Primitive Methodist Circuit Preaching Plan (1821)

Reproduced by permission of Lincolnshire Archives to take place during the quarter. Plates 8 and 8a show the front and reverse of such a plan for the Stamford circuit for 1902. The detailed style of plans varied from circuit to circuit, between Wesleyans and Primitive Methodists and over the years, but the basic chart format remained unaltered (and does so to this day). The plan is an example of the continuity of a system established for practical purposes in the earliest days of Methodism which stood the test of time.

Circuit preaching plans are of great interest to researchers. Milburn and Batty[92] devoted a chapter to 'Local Preachers and the Preaching Plan' and Delia Garratt considered the subject in some detail in her study of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire.[93] There is a 'Society of Cirplanologists' which produces a regular bulletin (see note 1). The reason for such interest is that circuit plans are a rich mine of information. The geographical spread of a circuit can be gauged from the number of chapels and preaching places listed. Sometimes membership numbers for each society were recorded. The number and names of the itinerants and local preachers in the circuit were listed and, because the plans were clearly dated, the presence and activity of any particular preacher for any particular period can be ascertained. The allocation of preachers to places each Sunday reveals the balance between where the itinerants were mostly appointed, and where the local preachers were sent. Within and around the matrix, codes indicated when special services took place (S for sacrament, CA for chapel anniversary, for example) and when collections for certain funds were to take place. Much of this type of valuable information has been drawn upon in previous chapters.

7.4.1 The Significance of the Plan to Local Preachers

For the local preachers, the plan was clearly indispensible as a rota, and it was the responsibility of the superintendent to ensure the plan was made. Some superintendents interpreted this as meaning that no

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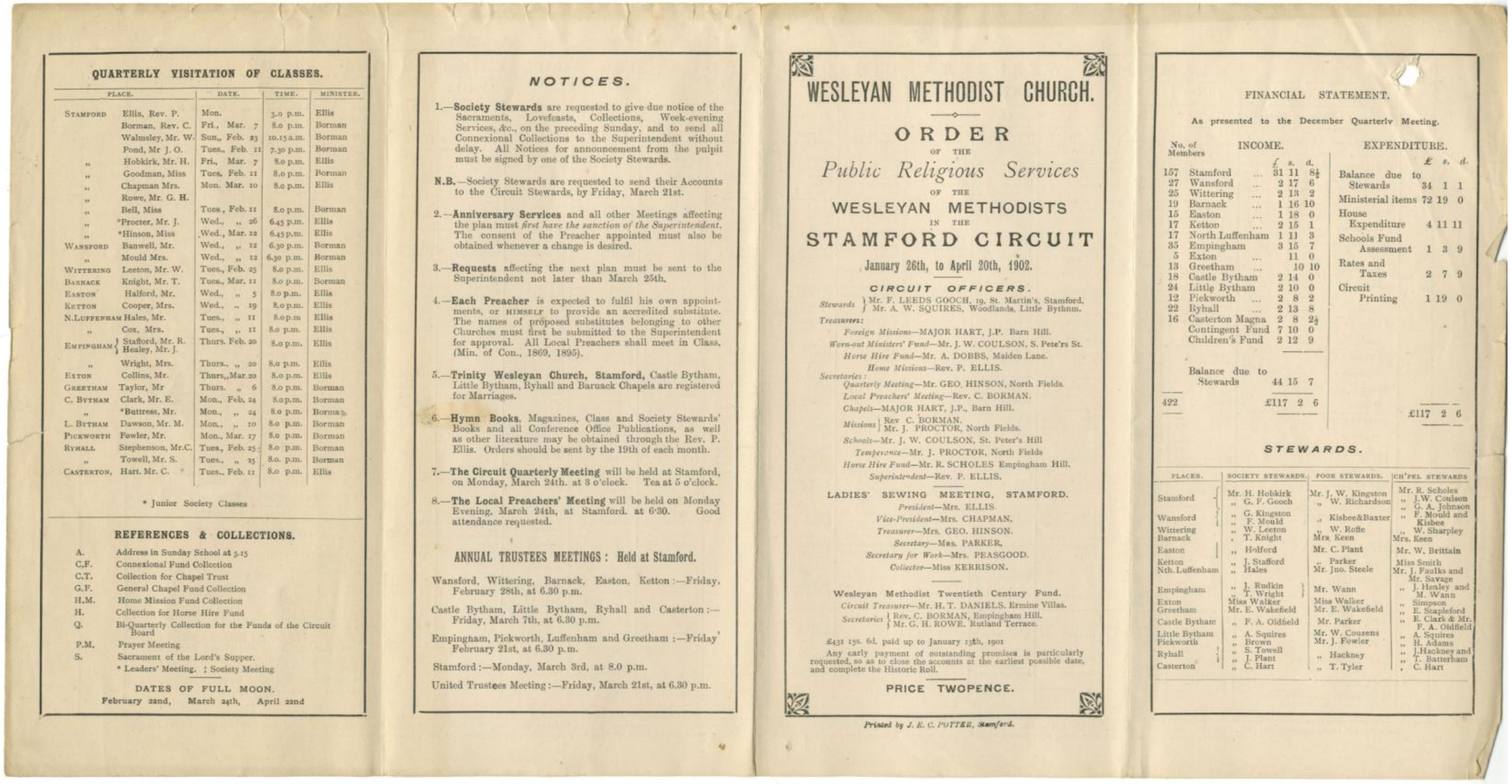
[92] Milburn and Batty, *Workaday Preachers.*
[93] Garrett, "Primitive Methodism in Shropshire, 1820-1900", 76ff.



QUARTERLY VISITATION OF CLASSES.

PLACE.		DATE.	TIME.	MINISTER.
STAMFORD	Ellis, Rev. P.	Mon.	3.0 p.m.	Ellis
	Borman, Rev. C.	Fri., Mar. 7	8.0 p.m.	Borman
	Walmsley, Mr. W.	Sun., Feb. 23	10.15 a.m.	Borman
	Pond, Mr J. O.	Tues., Feb. 11	7.30 p.m.	Borman
"	Hobkirk, Mr. H.	Fri., Mar. 7	8.0 p.m.	Ellis
"	Goodman, Miss	Tues. Feb. 11	8.0 p.m.	Borman
"	Chapman Mrs.	Mon. Mar. 10	8.0 p.m.	Ellis
"	Rowe, Mr. G. H.			
"	Bell, Miss	Tues., Feb. 11	8.0 p.m.	Borman
"	*Procter, Mr. J.	Wed., " 26	6.45 p.m.	Ellis
"	*Hinson, Miss	Wed., Mar. 12	6.45 p.m.	Ellis
WANSFORD	Banwell, Mr.	Wed., " 12	6.30 p.m.	Borman
"	Mould Mrs.	Wed., " 12	6.30 p.m.	Borman
WITTERING	Leeton, Mr. W.	Tues., Feb. 25	8.0 p.m.	Ellis
BARNACK	Knight, Mr. T.	Tues., Mar. 11	8.0 p.m.	Borman
EASTON	Halford, Mr.	Wed., " 5	8.0 p.m.	Ellis
KETTON	Cooper, Mrs.	Wed., " 19	8.0 p.m.	Ellis
N.LUFFENHAM	Hales, Mr.	Tues., " 11	8.0 p.m	Ellis
"	Cox, Mrs.	Tues., " 11	8.0 p.m.	Ellis
EMPINGHAM	Stafford, Mr. R. Healey, Mr. J.	Thurs. Feb. 20	8.0 p.m.	Ellis
"	Wright, Mrs.	Thurs., " 20	8.0 p.m.	Ellis
EXTON	Collins, Mr.	Thurs., Mar. 20	8.0 p.m.	Ellis
GREETHAM	Taylor, Mr	Thurs. " 6	8.0 p.m.	Borman
C. BYTHAM	Clark, Mr. E.	Mon., Feb. 24	8.0 p.m.	Borman
"	*Buttress, Mr.	Mon., " 24	8.0 p.m.	Borman
L. BYTHAM	Dawson, Mr. M.	Mon., " 10	8.0 p.m.	Borman
PICKWORTH	Fowler, Mr.	Mon., Mar. 17	8.0 p.m.	Borman
RYHALL	Stephenson, Mr. C.	Tues., Feb. 25	8.0 p.m.	Borman
"	Towell, Mr. S.	Tues., " 25	8.0. p.m.	Borman
CASTERTON,	Hart. Mr. C.	Tues., Feb. 11	8.0 p.m.	Ellis

* Junior Society Classes

REFERENCES & COLLECTIONS.

A. Address in Sunday School at 3.15
C.F. Connexional Fund Collection
C.T. Collection for Chapel Trust
G.F. General Chapel Fund Collection
H.M. Home Mission Fund Collection
H. Collection for Horse Hire Fund
Q. Bi-Quarterly Collection for the Funds of the Circuit Board
P.M. Prayer Meeting
S. Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
* Leaders' Meeting. ‡ Society Meeting

DATES OF FULL MOON.

February 22nd, March 24th, April 22nd

NOTICES.

1.—**Society Stewards** are requested to give due notice of the Sacraments, Lovefeasts, Collections, Week-evening Services, &c., on the preceding Sunday, and to send all Connexional Collections to the Superintendent without delay. All Notices for announcement from the pulpit must be signed by one of the Society Stewards.

N.B.—Society Stewards are requested to send their Accounts to the Circuit Stewards, by Friday, March 21st.

2.—**Anniversary Services** and all other Meetings affecting the plan must *first have the sanction of the Superintendent.* The consent of the Preacher appointed must also be obtained whenever a change is desired.

3.—**Requests** affecting the next plan must be sent to the Superintendent not later than March 25th.

4.—**Each Preacher** is expected to fulfil his own appointments, or HIMSELF to provide an accredited substitute. The names of proposed substitutes belonging to other Churches must first be submitted to the Superintendent for approval. All Local Preachers shall meet in Class, (Min. of Con., 1869, 1895).

5.—**Trinity Wesleyan Church, Stamford,** Castle Bytham, Little Bytham, Ryhall and Baruack Chapels are registered for Marriages.

6.—**Hymn Books**, Magazines, Class and Society Stewards' Books and all Conference Office Publications, as well as other literature may be obtained through the Rev. P. Ellis. Orders should be sent by the 19th of each month.

7.—**The Circuit Quarterly Meeting** will be held at Stamford, on Monday, March 24th. at 3 o'clock. Tea at 5 o'clock.

8.—**The Local Preachers' Meeting** will be held on Monday Evening, March 24th, at Stamford. at 6·30. Good attendance requested.

ANNUAL TRUSTEES MEETINGS: Held at Stamford.

Wansford, Wittering, Barnack, Easton, Ketton :—Friday, February 28th, at 6.30 p.m.

Castle Bytham, Little Bytham, Ryhall and Casterton :—Friday, March 7th, at 6.30 p.m.

Empingham, Pickworth, Luffenham and Greetham :—Friday, February 21st, at 6.30 p.m.

Stamford :—Monday, March 3rd, at 8.0 p.m.

United Trustees Meeting :—Friday, March 21st, at 6.30 p.m.

WESLEYAN METHODIST CHURCH.

ORDER

OF THE

Public Religious Services

OF THE

WESLEYAN METHODISTS

IN THE

STAMFORD CIRCUIT

January 26th, to April 20th, 1902.

CIRCUIT OFFICERS.

Stewards Mr. F. LEEDS GOOCH, 19, St. Martin's, Stamford.
Mr. A. W. SQUIRES, Woodlands, Little Bythnm.

Treasurers:
Foreign Missions—MAJOR HART, J.P. Barn Hill.
Worn-out Ministers' Fund—Mr. J. W. COULSON, S. Pete'rs St.
Horse Hire Fund—Mr. A. DOBBS, Maiden Lane.
Home Missions—Rev. P. ELLIS.

Secretaries:
Quarterly Meeting—Mr. GEO. HINSON, North Fields.
Local Preachers' Meeting—Rev. C. BORMAN.
Chapels—MAJOR HART, J.P., Barn Hill.
Missions Rev C. BORMAN.
Mr. J. PROCTOR, North Fields.
Schools—Mr. J. W. COULSON, St. Peter's Hill
Temperance—Mr. J. PROCTOR, North Fields
Horse Hire Fund—Mr. R. SCHOLES Empingham Hill.
Superintendent—Rev. P. ELLIS.

LADIES' SEWING MEETING, STAMFORD.

President—Mrs. ELLIS.
Vice-President—Mrs. CHAPMAN.
Treasurer—Mrs. GEO. HINSON.
Secretary—Mrs. PARKER.
Secretary for Work—Mrs. PEASGOOD.
Collector—Miss KERRISON.

Wesleyan Methodist Twentieth Century Fund.

Circuit Treasurer—Mr. H. T. DANIELS. Ermine Villas.
Secretaries Rev. C. BORMAN, Empingham Hill.
Mr. G. H. ROWE. Rutland Terrace.

£431 15s. 6d. paid up to January 13th, 1901

Any early payment of outstanding promises is particularly requested, so as to close the accounts at the earliest possible date, and complete the Historic Roll.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

Printed by J. E. C. POTTER, Stamford.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT.

As presented to the December Quarterly Meeting.

No. of Members	INCOME.	£	s.	d.
157	Stamford ...	31	11	8½
27	Wansford ...	2	17	6
25	Wittering ...	2	13	2
19	Barnack ...	1	16	10
15	Easton ...	1	18	0
17	Ketton ...	2	15	1
17	North Luffenham	1	11	3
35	Empingham	3	15	7
5	Exton ...		11	0
13	Greetham ...		10	10
18	Castle Bytham	2	14	0
24	Little Bytham	2	10	0
12	Pickworth ...	2	8	2
22	Ryhall ...	2	13	8
16	Casterton Magna	2	8	2½
	Contingent Fund	7	10	0
	Children's Fund	2	12	9
	Balance due to Stewards	44	15	7
422		£117	2	6

EXPENDITURE.	£	s.	d.
Balance due to Stewards	34	1	1
Ministerial items	72	19	0
House Expenditure	4	11	11
Schools Fund Assessment	1	3	9
Rates and Taxes	2	7	9
Circuit Printing	1	19	0
	£117	2	6

STEWARDS.

PLACES.	SOCIETY STEWARDS.	POOR STEWARDS.	CH'PEL STEWARDS
Stamford	Mr. H. Hobkirk " G. F. Gooch	Mr. J. W. Kingston " W. Richardson	Mr. R. Scholes " J.W. Coulson " G. A. Johnson
Wansford	" G. Kingston " F. Mould	" Kisbee&Baxter	" F. Mould and Kisbee
Wittering	" W. Leeton	" W. Roffe	" W. Sharpley
Barnack	" T. Knight	Mrs. Keen	Mrs. Keen
Easton	" Holford	Mr. C. Plant	Mr. W. Brittain
Ketton	" J. Stafford	" Parker	Miss Smith
Nth. Luffenham	" Hales	Mr. Jno. Steele	Mr. J. Faulks and Mr. Savage
Empingham	" J. Rudkin " T. Wright	Mr. Wann	" J. Henley and M. Wann
Exton	Miss Walker	Miss Walker	" Simpson
Greetham	Mr. E. Wakefield	Mr. E. Wakefield	" E. Stapleford
Castle Bytham	" F. A. Oldfield	Mr. Parker	" E. Clark & Mr. F. A. Oldfield
Little Bytham	" A. Squires	Mr. W. Couzens	" A. Squires
Pickworth	" Brown	Mr. J. Fowler	" H. Adams
Ryhall	" S. Towell " J. Plant	" Hackney	" J.Hackney and " T. Batterham
Casterton	" C. Hart	" T. Tyler	" C. Hart

Plate 8 Stamford Wesleyan Circuit Preaching Plan (1902) front
Reproduced by permission of Lincolnshire Archives

consultation with the local preachers was required beforehand. Local preachers were often 'planned' to be at least one appointment most Sundays. Villages only a few miles apart might have their services arranged so that the preacher could take one appointment in the morning and the second in the afternoon (with hospitality being provided for lunch). Evidence from plans shows that it was the local preachers who were most likely to be planned to preach in the rural and outlying parts of the circuits while the ministers focused on the town (and larger) congregations on Sundays.[94] Ministers did however also take preaching services in the villages during the week.[95] There are instances of local preachers having appointments in towns, but sometimes at what were probably regarded as less desirable places. An 1861 plan shows that it was only the local preachers of the Wesleyan Stockport North circuit who were planned to preach at the Stockport workhouse.[96]

The plan however had a significant role in relation to local preachers which made it far more than simply a rota. For the itinerants, their names on the circuit preaching plan simply showed where they had been stationed by the conference. But for the local preacher, to have one's name listed on the plan meant acceptance and authorisation by the circuit as exhorter or preacher 'on trial' or fully accredited local preacher. Final acceptance as a fully authorised local preacher was often referred to as being put onto 'full plan' (and it still is). The 1796 conference had ruled: 'let no one be permitted to preach, who will not meet in Class and who is not regularly planned by the Superintendent of the Circuit in which he resides.' [97]

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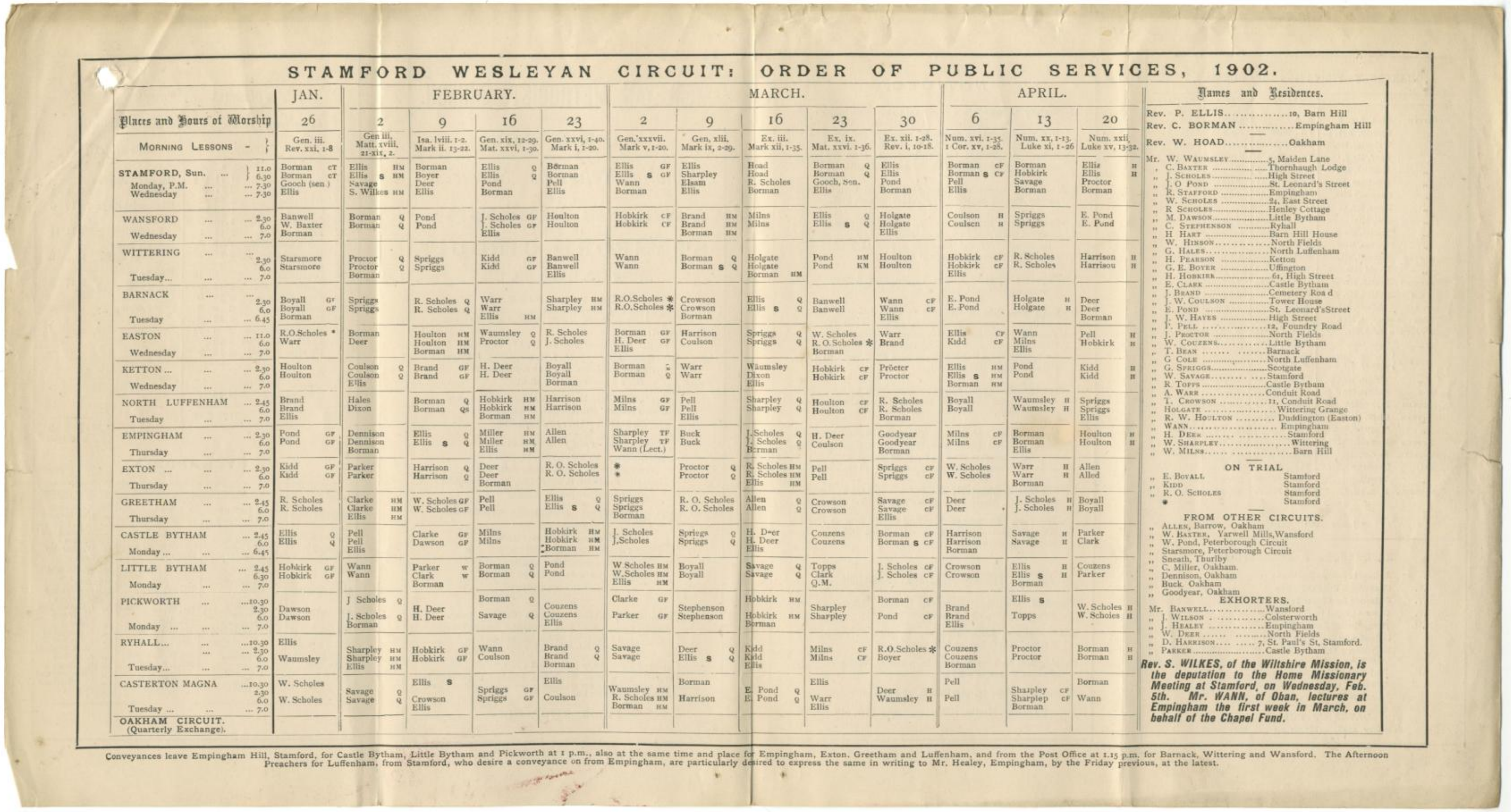
[94] Although Delia Garrett found evidence that 'it was generally understood that local preachers should not be expected to travel too far…' Garrett, "Primitive Methodism in Shropshire", 90. Some circuits may have been more sympathetic than others.
[95] E. Alan Rose, "Local Preachers and the Preaching Plan", Milburn and Batty, *Workaday Preachers,* 149.
[96] Stockport North Circuit Plan 1861, MARM.
[97] Quotation of *Minutes of Conference 1796* in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol. 4, 279.



STAMFORD WESLEYAN CIRCUIT: ORDER OF PUBLIC SERVICES, 1902.

Places and Hours of Worship		JAN. 26	FEBRUARY. 2	9	16	23	MARCH. 2	9	16	23	30	APRIL. 6	13	20
MORNING LESSONS -		Gen. iii. Rev. xxi, 1-8	Gen iii. Matt. xviii, 21-xix, 2.	Isa. lviii. 1-2. Mark ii. 13-22.	Gen. xix, 12-29. Mat. xxvi, 1-30.	Gen. xxvi, 1-40. Mark i, 1-20.	Gen. xxxvii. Mark v, 1-20.	Gen. xlii. Mark ix, 2-29.	Ex. iii. Mark xii, 1-35.	Ex. ix. Mat. xxvi. 1-36.	Ex. xii. 1-28. Rev. i, 10-18.	Num. xvi. 1-35. 1 Cor. xv, 1-28.	Num. xx, 1-13. Luke xi, 1-26	Num. xxii. Luke xv, 13-32.
STAMFORD, Sun. ... Monday, P.M. ... Wednesday ...	11.0 6.30 ... 7.30 ... 7.30	Borman CT Borman CT Gooch (sen.) Ellis	Ellis HM Ellis S HM Savage S. Wilkes HM	Borman Boyer Deer Ellis	Ellis Q Ellis Q Pond Borman	Borman Borman Pell Ellis	Ellis GF Ellis S GF Wann Borman	Ellis Sharpley Elsam Ellis	Hoad Hoad R. Scholes Borman	Borman Q Borman Q Gooch, Sen. Ellis	Ellis Ellis Pond Borman	Borman CF Borman S CF Pell Ellis	Borman Hobkirk Savage Borman	Ellis H Ellis H Proctor Borman
WANSFORD ... Wednesday ...	... 2.30 6.0 ... 7.0	Banwell W. Baxter Borman	Borman Q Borman Q	Pond Pond	J. Scholes GF J. Scholes GF Ellis	Houlton Houlton	Hobkirk CF Hobkirk CF	Brand HM Brand HM Borman HM	Milns Milns	Ellis Q Ellis S Q	Holgate Holgate Ellis	Coulson H Coulsen H	Spriggs Spriggs	E. Pond E. Pond
WITTERING ... Tuesday... ...	2.30 6.0 ... 7.0	Starsmore Starsmore	Proctor Q Proctor Q Borman	Spriggs Spriggs	Kidd GF Kidd GF	Banwell Banwell Ellis	Wann Wann	Borman Q Borman S Q	Holgate Holgate Borman HM	Pond HM Pond KM	Houlton Houlton	Hobkirk CF Hobkirk CF Ellis	R. Scholes R. Scholes	Harrison H Harrisou H
BARNACK ... Tuesday ...	2.30 6.0 ... 6.45	Boyall GF Boyall GF Borman	Spriggs Spriggs	R. Scholes Q R. Scholes Q	Warr Warr Ellis HM	Sharpley HM Sharpley HM	R.O.Scholes ✻ R.O.Scholes ✻	Crowson Crowson Borman	Ellis Q Ellis S Q	Banwell Banwell	Wann CF Wann CF Ellis	E. Pond E. Pond	Holgate H Holgate H	Deer Deer Borman
EASTON ... Wednesday ...	... 11.0 6.0 ... 7.0	R.O.Scholes * Warr	Borman Deer	Houlton HM Houlton HM Borman HM	Waumsley Q Proctor Q	R. Scholes J. Scholes	Borman GF H. Deer GF Ellis	Harrison Coulson	Spriggs Q Spriggs Q	W. Scholes R. O. Scholes ✻ Borman	Warr Brand	Ellis CF Kidd CF	Wann Milns Ellis	Pell H Hobkirk H
KETTON ... ... Wednesday ...	... 2.30 6.0 ... 7.0	Houlton Houlton	Coulson Q Coulson Q Ellis	Brand GF Brand GF	H. Deer H. Deer	Boyall Boyall Borman	Borman [illegible] Borman Q	Warr Warr	Waumsley Dixon Ellis	Hobkirk CF Hobkirk CF	Proctor Proctor	Ellis HM Ellis S HM Borman HM	Pond Pond	Kidd H Kidd H
NORTH LUFFENHAM Tuesday ...	... 2.45 6.0 ... 7.0	Brand Brand Ellis	Hales Dixon	Borman Q Borman QS	Hobkirk HM Hobkirk HM Borman HM	Harrison Harrison	Milns GF Milns GF	Pell Pell Ellis	Sharpley Q Sharpley Q	Houlton CF Houlton CF	R. Scholes R. Scholes Borman	Boyall Boyall	Waumsley H Waumsley H	Spriggs Spriggs Ellis
EMPINGHAM ... Thursday ...	... 2.30 6.0 ... 7.0	Pond GF Pond GF	Dennison Dennison Borman	Ellis Q Ellis S Q	Miller HM Miller HM Ellis HM	Allen Allen	Sharpley TF Sharpley TF Wann (Lect.)	Buck Buck	J. Scholes Q J. Scholes Q Borman	H. Deer Coulson	Goodyear Goodyear Borman	Milns CF Milns CF	Borman Borman Ellis	Houlton H Houlton H
EXTON ... ... Thursday ...	... 2.30 6.0 ... 7.0	Kidd GF Kidd GF	Parker Parker	Harrison Q Harrison Q	Deer Deer Borman	R. O. Scholes R. O. Scholes	✻ *	Proctor Q Proctor Q	R. Scholes HM R. Scholes HM Ellis HM	Pell Pell	Spriggs CF Spriggs CF	W. Scholes W. Scholes	Warr H Warr H Borman	Allen Alled
GREETHAM ... Thursday ...	... 2.45 6.0 ... 7.0	R. Scholes R. Scholes	Clarke HM Clarke HM Ellis HM	W. Scholes GF W. Scholes GF	Pell Pell	Ellis Q Ellis S Q	Spriggs Spriggs Borman	R. O. Scholes R. O. Scholes	Allen Q Allen Q	Crowson Crowson	Savage CF Savage CF Ellis	Deer Deer	J. Scholes H J. Scholes H	Boyall Boyall
CASTLE BYTHAM Monday	... 2.45 6.0 ... 6.45	Ellis Q Ellis Q	Pell Pell Ellis	Clarke GF Dawson GF	Milns Milns	Hobkirk HM Hobkirk HM Borman HM	J. Scholes J.Scholes	Spriggs Q Spriggs Q	H. Deer H. Deer Ellis	Couzens Couzens	Borman CF Borman S CF	Harrison Harrison Borman	Savage H Savage H	Parker Clark
LITTLE BYTHAM Monday ...	... 2.45 6.30 ... 7.0	Hobkirk GF Hobkirk GF	Wann Wann	Parker W Clark W Borman	Borman Q Borman Q	Pond Pond	W.Scholes HM W.Scholes HM Ellis HM	Boyall Boyall	Savage Q Savage Q	Topps Clark Q.M.	J. Scholes CF J. Scholes CF	Crowson Crowson	Ellis H Ellis S H Borman	Couzens Parker
PICKWORTH ... Monday	...10.30 2.30 6.0 ... 7.0	Dawson Dawson	J Scholes Q J. Scholes Q Borman	H. Deer H. Deer	Borman Q Savage Q	Couzens Couzens Ellis	Clarke GF Parker GF	Stephenson Stephenson	Hobkirk HM Hobkirk HM Borman	Sharpley Sharpley	Borman CF Pond CF	Brand Brand Ellis	Ellis S Topps	W. Scholes H W. Scholes H
RYHALL... ... Tuesday... ...	...10.30 ... 2.30 6.0 ... 7.0	Ellis Waumsley	Sharpley HM Sharpley HM Ellis HM	Hobkirk GF Hobkirk GF	Wann Coulson	Brand Q Brand Q Borman	Savage Savage	Deer Q Ellis S Q	Kidd Kidd Ellis	Milns CF Milns CF	R.O.Scholes ✻ Boyer	Couzens Couzens Borman	Proctor Proctor	Borman H Borman H
CASTERTON MAGNA Tuesday	...10.30 2.30 6.0 ... 7.0	W. Scholes W. Scholes	Savage Q Savage Q	Ellis S Crowson Ellis	Spriggs GF Spriggs GF	Ellis Coulson	Waumsley HM R. Scholes HM Borman HM	Borman Harrison	E. Pond Q E. Pond Q	Ellis Warr Ellis	Deer H Waumsley H	Pell Pell	Sharpley CF Sharplep CF Borman	Borman Wann
OAKHAM CIRCUIT. (Quarterly Exchange).														

Names and Residences.

Rev. P. ELLIS..............10, Barn Hill
Rev. C. BORMAN ....Empingham Hill

Rev. W. HOAD..................Oakham

Mr. W. WAUMSLEY..............5, Maiden Lane
" C. BAXTER ....Thornhaugh Lodge
" J. SCHOLES ....High Street
" J. O POND ....St. Leonard's Street
" R. STAFFORD ....Empingham
" W. SCHOLES ....24, East Street
" R SCHOLES.....................Henley Cottage
" M. DAWSON.....................Little Bytham
" C. STEPHENSON ....Ryhall
" H HART ....Barn Hill House
" W. HINSON......................North Fields
" G. HALES.........................North Luffenham
" H. PEARSON ....Ketton
" G. E. BOYER ....Uffington
" H. HOBKIRK.....................61, High Street
" E. CLARK ....Castle Bytham
" J. BRAND ....Cemetery Road
" J. W. COULSON ....Tower House
" E. POND ....St. Leonard's Street
" J. W. HAYES ....High Street
" F. PELL ....12, Foundry Road
" J. PROCTOR ....North Fields
" W. COUZENS.....................Little Bytham
" T. BEAN ....Barnack
" G COLE ....North Luffenham
" G. SPRIGGS.......................Scotgate
" W. SAVAGE.......................Stamford
" R TOPPS ....Castle Bytham
" A. WARR ....Conduit Road
" T. CROWSON ....11, Conduit Road
" HOLGATE ....Wittering Grange
" R. W. HOULTON ....Duddington (Easton)
" WANN..............................Empingham
" H. DEER ....Stamford
" W. SHARPLEY....................Wittering
" W. MILNS..........................Barn Hill

ON TRIAL

" E. BOYALL Stamford
" KIDD Stamford
" R. O. SCHOLES Stamford
✻ Stamford

FROM OTHER CIRCUITS.

" ALLEN, Barrow, Oakham
" W. BAXTER, Yarwell Mills, Wansford
" W. Pond, Peterborough Circuit
" Starsmore, Peterborough Circuit
" Sneath, Thurlby
" C. Miller, Oakham.
" Dennison, Oakham
" Buck Oakham
" Goodyear, Oakham

EXHORTERS.

Mr. BANWELL.....................Wansford
" J. WILSON ....Colsterworth
" J. HEALEY ....Empingham
" W. DEER ....North Fields
" D. HARRISON.......... 7, St. Paul's St, Stamford.
" PARKER ....Castle Bytham

Rev. S. WILKES, of the Wiltshire Mission, is the deputation to the Home Missionary Meeting at Stamford, on Wednesday, Feb. 5th. Mr. WANN, of Oban, lectures at Empingham the first week in March, on behalf of the Chapel Fund.

Conveyances leave Empingham Hill, Stamford, for Castle Bytham, Little Bytham and Pickworth at 1 p.m., also at the same time and place for Empingham, Exton, Greetham and Luffenham, and from the Post Office at 1.15 p.m. for Barnack, Wittering and Wansford. The Afternoon Preachers for Luffenham, from Stamford, who desire a conveyance on from Empingham, are particularly desired to express the same in writing to Mr. Healey, Empingham, by the Friday previous, at the latest.

Plate 8a Stamford Wesleyan Circuit Preaching Plan (1902) reverse

The plan was the tangible evidence of the local preacher's existence as an authorised person in the circuit. 'Their name on the local plan is their authority. This plan is made out by the Superintendent.'[98] When a preacher moved from one circuit to another, he/she was required to produce the plan from the previous circuit as evidence of good standing and approval before being allowed to preach. [99] A Manchester circuit plan of 1799 had the message 'The Bearer hereof…[space for name] is an approved local preacher here, and may be employed as such wherever he comes'.[100]This system is a further example of what it meant to be a connexional denomination, since accreditation in one circuit was accepted in any other. In rural counties where agricultural workers moved quite regularly, following the work available, this feature would have been particularly useful.

To come *off* the plan indicated either a forced or a voluntary withdrawal from preaching appointments in that particular circuit. The local preachers' meeting of the Alford Branch of the Louth Primitive Methodist Circuit agreed in 1855: 'That Bro. [?] name come off the Plan as he does not attend any of our meetings nor take a ticket [class ticket]'[101] During the height of the 'reform' movement, which greatly affected the Louth area, a number of local preachers had thrown in their lot with the reformers. After a time, they appear to have regretted their impulsive action and asked to be restored as local preachers in the Louth Wesleyan circuit. It was described in the minutes of the preachers' meeting thus:

> The following brethren having during a time of peculiar excitement withdrawn their names from the Plan, but now wishing to return – and having fully satisfied the meeting of

[98] Excerpt from the diary of the Rev. John Emory of the Methodist Episcopal Church attending the 1820 Wesleyan conference, quoted in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol. 4, 367.
[99] It could also be used to officially excuse the local preacher from paying tolls when travelling to appointments. Milburn and Batty, *Workaday Preachers,* 148.
[100] Reproduced in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.4, 298.
[101] Ms *Quarterly Meeting Minutes of the Alford Branch of the Louth Primitive Methodist Circuit 1848-1855,* entry for December 12 1855. LINC Meth/B/Alford – unlisted.

> their attachment to Wesleyan Methodism and their determination to uphold and support it to the uttermost – are now unanimously accepted, and restored to their former position. viz: [names followed].[102]

This was an act of generosity on behalf of the circuit, though probably in its interests, since it would have been difficult to cover the many preaching places in the circuit without them.[103]

The list of preachers on a plan not only affirmed a preacher's authorised existence but also made clear his or her status and seniority. This fact was utilised to provide a form of reprimand to preachers who failed in some way to meet expectations. A regular 'punishment' meted out to local preachers who neglected their appointments was to 'reduce' them by moving their name further down the list on the plan. Frequently, each name was numbered, and as local preachers became more senior, they moved up the list, and therefore being 'reduced' to a lower number was an exercise in humiliation. Since the plan could be scrutinized by ordinary members of the societies as well as the preachers, the failure in discipline would be obvious to all. In the Fulbeck PM circuit Sister E. Moore had to 'sink one No. on the next plan for neglecting Braceby and Azeby'[104] and in Shrewsbury, Thomas Gregory had to 'sink one figure for being too late at Uckington Heath if he does not send sufficient reasons, before the Plan is made.'[105] The PM Conference of 1831 ruled that continuing to preach at a camp meeting after the one minute signal had been given

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[102] Ms. *Minutes of the Local Preachers Meetings in the Louth Circuit 1852-1870*, entry for meeting at Mr. Brady's October 19 1852. LINC Meth/B/Louth/18. Their 'former position' refers to the position of their names in the list of preachers on the preaching plan.

[103] In a similar situation of discontent, the superintendent wrote:' Without the aid of at least some of these 'local ministers' as they affect to be styled, I shall be unable to supply the country chapels.' W.M. Harvard to Jabez Bunting, Letter 282, W.R. Ward, ed., *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-1858* (Oxford, London, New York: University Press, 1976), 356.

[104] Ms. *Fulbeck Circuit Quarter Day Account Book July 1833 - 1872,* entry for February 18 1839, LINC 1995/075.

[105] Ms. *Minutes Shrewsbury Primitive Methodist Circuit Preachers Meeting,* entry for June 23 1834, SHROP NM2123/433.

was also an offence for which ‘sinking’ was the punishment.[106] This was because it was regarded as extremely important that exhortations at camp meetings be short, brisk and relevant to the ‘seekers’ who were drawn to attend.

Because the plan had such a significant symbolic role, occasionally it provided fuel for expressions of discontent by the local preachers. When William Harvard, superintendent of the Wesleyan Maidstone circuit, 1847-49, ‘considered it desirable that we should gradually and uncontendingly introduce terms recently adopted by the Conference of ‘Church’ [for Connexion] and ‘Ministers’ [for travelling preachers]…’[107] into the heading of his circuit plan, it drew very strong criticism from the local preachers. The use of the terms, both by the conference and William Harvard, produced a sense of outrage that referring to the travelling preachers as ‘ministers’ was introducing ‘unscriptural distinctions’.[108] It is clear from the correspondence that Harvard strongly supported the notion of the pastoral office. It is also clear that the spirit of reform was already simmering in his circuit. Nevertheless the strong reaction to his legitimate, if provocative action does demonstrate how disturbing even the heading of the plan also disturbed the local preachers in themselves. It was perceived as a personal attack and provided a focus for bringing simmering discontent to the surface; a discontent which reached back to the origins of local preaching.

7.5 Conclusion

Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism could not have functioned as it did without the ministry of local preachers. It was totally dependent on the local preachers to achieve the number of Sunday preaching appointments that so large a number of chapels and other preaching

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[106] Ms.*Journal of the Primitive Methodist Conference, 1831*, para. 38, MARM 1977/ 590.
[107] Letter from W. M. Harvard to Jabez Bunting, dated Maidstone January 26, 1848, Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism,* letter 282, 356.
[108] ibid, 357.

places required. It appears that the significant difference in numbers between itinerants and local preachers in both Connexions was assumed to be the way the Connexions were organised, as no policy statements on the matter of proportions have been identified. It may simply have come down to how many itinerants could be afforded. Despite the dependency on local preachers, it is concluded that throughout the period studied, there were numbers of local preachers who were unhappy about the way that the itinerants were given or took to themselves a higher status. Their common origin is identified as a likely source of the discontent, although later generations of local preachers may not have realised this.

The fact that local preaching was circuit based demonstrates a further aspect of the importance of the circuit in the structure of both Connexions. Identifying the significance of 'local' in 'local preacher' has shown the difference between Methodism and other Christian traditions. Identifying and examining the role of the circuit local preachers' meeting has revealed its importance and significance in Methodism; a matter previously neglected by scholars.

Chapter Eight

The Circuit and Wesleyan Home Missions

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to use Wesleyan 'home mission' work as a case study to explore the circumstances in which the deeply rooted tradition of circuit and itinerancy might be set aside through choice or necessity. Two phases of home mission activity – one in the early nineteenth century and the other in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries are examined. The rationale behind taking certain courses of action is explored, and conclusions are reached about what adopting these means said about understandings of the place, function and significance of the circuit and itinerancy at that time. A surprising readiness to acknowledge the inability of the circuit system to meet home mission needs is identified, but also a willingness to adopt Wesley's pragmatic approach to achieve results. The lack of long term impact which alternative methods had on the circuit and itinerancy system as a whole is noted. The chapter does not investigate or reach any conclusions on the pastoral, spiritual or social work of the home missions initiatives themselves.

In order to engage in evangelical outreach, John Wesley had broken out from traditional Church of England structures, creating his particular form of itinerant ministry. In the nineteenth century and first years of the twentieth century, when a further need for mission was perceived, the Connexion was faced with a similar challenge to that of Wesley: how to address this matter organisationally. Could the circuits and the itinerant system meet the requirements of this new challenge or would (after Wesley) an alternative approach be needed?

8.2 Early nineteenth-century Wesleyan Home Mission initiatives

Although in their origins, circuits were themselves an exercise in evangelical outreach, as they became units of oversight and administration within the Connexion, the outreach aspect was in danger of being neglected. As more circuits were formed and the numbers of members increased, 'the care of them became the first charge upon the time and energy of the preachers'.[1] To ensure continuing outreach, a connexional home missionary initiative was set up in 1805. This was largely the brainchild of Thomas Coke who had a passion for mission and who regarded home missions as being as important as, if not more important than, overseas missions.[2] He used his personal funds in some cases.[3] He was, however, insistent that home mission funds be spent on missioners, not buildings.[4] The missioners were drawn from the itinerants but listed separately in the *Minutes of Conference* from those on the regular stations [circuits] from 1806. This initiative, while re-energizing one of the original functions of the circuit, nevertheless further separated the circuit *from* this function. Organisationally, the mission stations were separate entities from the circuits. One interesting aspect of this particular home mission initiative is that it predated the rise of Primitive Methodism by a number of years. Thus Wesleyan Methodism had already recognised the tendency of circuits to become inward looking or at least to fail to be sufficiently outward-looking. However, recognition of the tendency resulted not in the review of circuit principles, or even a review of methods, but a parallel initiative which did not disturb the circuits – home missions. [5]

[1] J Robinson Gregory, and Arthur E. Gregory,"Wesleyan Methodism in the Middle Period" in W.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman, George Eayrs, eds., *A New History of Methodism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), vol. 1, 400.
[2] Thomas Coke – Wesleyan travelling preacher but also an ordained clergyman of the Church of England.
[3] The first attempt to establish a new home mission station is thought to have been Warminster in 1805. John A. Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1969), 304.
[4] 'You shall not want money for preachers' Copy of a letter from Coke dated Manchester May 26 1810, MARM, Coke Papers PLP 28.18.14.
[5] Primitive Methodism had grown partly out of an unwillingness of Wesleyanism to try new methods – such as camp meetings.

The home mission work in this period was chiefly directed toward 'the numerous small towns, villages and hamlets' where it was noted that 'a considerable part' of the inhabitants attended no place of worship other than for weddings and funerals.[6] Missionaries were appointed to this specific work and considerable success was reported. **'**Home mission stations' were established in areas previously untouched by Wesleyan Methodism. These were such places as the so-called Methodist wilderness of Hampshire, Surrey and Sussex. This was described by W.W. Pocock as: '…at the mercy of the contrasting evils of superstitious Anglicanism and of fatalistic and antinomian Dissent' together with smuggling, highwaymen and poaching.[7] Essex was also a mission target. Coke wrote to the Connexional Missionary Committee in 1810 recommending a certain Brother Phoenix of Stockport for the Essex mission. Phoenix was willing to walk all the way to Essex from Stockport; but Coke did suggest to the committee that he might be funded to travel on the top (the cheapest seat) of the coach instead.[8]

A home missions report for 1813 recorded that 'The missions which we have undertaken in this country are professedly with a design to carry the Gospel into those places which fall not within the reach of the regular circuits,[9] and where the real Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is not preached'.[10] (Reference to the 'real Gospel' not being preached

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[6] "The Home Missions in England", *The Annual Report of the State of the Missions carried out both at Home and Abroad…addressed in particular to those generous subscribers…and the benevolent public at large* (London: Conference Office, 1808), 27.

[7] W.W. Pocock, *History of Wesleyan Methodism in some of the Southern Counties of England* (London: The Wesleyan-Methodist Bookroom, 1885), introduction and 17.

[8] Copy letter from Coke dated 18 June 1810 from Stockport, Cheshire, to the [connexional] Missionary Committee of Finance and Advice. Thomas Coke Papers, MARM PLP 28.18.16.

[9] This is a reminder that there were still many geographical gaps between Wesleyan circuits, but also that these home missions were not 'missions to re-energise the converted' as the word 'mission' sometimes means; but outreach to the 'unconverted'.

[10] Quotation of a Home Missions Report for 1813 in [anonymous] *The Life of the Rev. Thomas Coke, LLD a clergyman of the Church of England but who laboured among the Wesleyan Methodists for the last thirty-eight years of his life – written by a person who was long and intimately acquainted with the Doctor* (Leeds: Alexander Cumming, 1815), 474.

would be a Methodist view on the quality of Church of England sermons and the Calvinism of those of the Dissenters.) This statement in the report confirmed the home mission activity as 'other than' the life and work of the regular circuits. But despite being a parallel activity to the circuits, it was said that the 'end' of these mission stations was to turn them into circuits. This 'end' can be interpreted in a positive way, in that the circuit system had proved itself as the best way of continuing the nurture and oversight of new converts and therefore the obvious next step. However, it can also point to the possibility that making circuits had become something of an end in itself. The more circuits on the list in the *Minutes of Conference,* the more demonstrable the success.

This last possibility seems very likely, as the report continued: 'It is a glorious fact, that no less than 50 circuits have been augmented, or wholly formed, by means of these missions'. [11] The glory of the fact was nevertheless open to challenge. The weakness of the hastily launched new circuits was the cause of great financial anxiety to the Connexion. Doubt was also cast on their spiritual strength. Jonathan Crowther wrote:

> Dr. Coke boasted that by these missions he had given us forty Circuits. But alas! In a temporal point of view, most of them have proved so many mill stones hung about the neck of the Connexion…And even in a spiritual sense, few of them have been very prosperous.[12]

Crowther however did not blame Coke, but 'a flagrant want of judgement, economy and prudence' in these circuits.[13] It might have been that in the rush to establish circuits (and therefore a Wesleyan organisational presence in an area) insufficient care was taken in identifying suitable people to hold office. It was an aspect from which

[11] Ibid, 475.
[12] Jonathan Crowther quoted in Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 306.
[13] Ibid.

Primitive Methodists would learn, and apply in their rules for establishing new circuits from branches.

The era of mission stations separate from the regular circuits did not last long. The concept was abandoned in 1815 in favour of attaching them to nearby circuits. One source attributed this to the membership being confused by the word 'missions' as applied to the home work rather than overseas missions.[14] However John Vickers put the blame on the missions outgrowing their strength, and being deprived of Coke's leadership after 1813 (When his attention was redirected to missions overseas).[15] It is also possible that there was confusion in handling two differing forms of Methodist work. Although many circuits were being created by division at this time, each new circuit created by division inherited experience in Wesleyan tradition and organisation as a basic strength. Mission stations did not have this strength. They had the aspect of evangelical outreach – an important element of the original rounds / circuits, and the one thing the established circuits were lacking. But circuits of the Wesleyan Connexion were quite sophisticated organisations by this date and a gathering of new converts could not readily turn into a mature circuit. It could also be argued that by separating out one element (evangelical outreach or home missions) neither the existing circuits nor the mission stations were best served.

8.3 Other early nineteenth-century home mission initiatives

Wesleyan Methodism was not alone in identifying a need for home missions in this period. In 1819, two London Congregationalists, Mr. Thomas Thompson and Mr Abraham, established the Home Missionary Society. In a pattern of thinking similar to that of the Wesleyan Methodists, there was concern that large tracts of the country and its inhabitants were outside the reach of the usual religious organisations. Out of 130,000 inhabitants of North Devon it was reckoned that 40,000

[14] Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History,* vol. 1, 401.
[15] Vickers, *Thomas Coke,* 306.

‘rarely if ever heard the gospel’. Dale commented that ‘if the Gospel were to reach them at all, it could not be through ordinary channels; and that they needed a special agency to deliver them from a condition that was one of practical paganism’.[16] Specialist ministers and lay evangelists were appointed, directed where possible by existing Congregational churches and ‘in many places the mission station developed into a Church with a settled pastor of its own’.[17] This earlier Home Missionary Society did have limited success in the villages, but when the Congregational Union was founded, the first Autumn Assembly of 1839 agreed a plan for a Home Missions ‘section’ of the Union because there was a pressing need which required a concerted effort in the face of ‘the awful extent of ignorance and irreligion which prevails in town and country’, ‘the spread of Popery’, and ‘the absolute necessity of revived and extended religion and multiplied Christian churches in our own country…’.[18] Looking at these two phases of Congregational home missions, it can be seen that there were strong similarities with the Methodist home mission initiative, but achieved in a non-connexional denomination.

To complete the picture of mission activity in the early nineteenth century, it should be remembered that the pattern of Primitive Methodist circuit growth was itself through what was described as missions – although these were actually extensions of existing circuits, often a considerable distance from the circuit itself. John Petty described how the Leeds Circuit, having some surplus funds, decided to send two missionaries, P. Sugden and W. Watson, to London in December 1822, naively assuming that they could establish societies there as readily as they had done in the North. Arriving with only one

[16] R. W. Dale, completed and edited by A.W.W. Dale, *History of English Congregationalism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), 604. Dale’s source of information on North Devon was John Waddington, *Congregational History*, five volumes published 1869-1880.
[17] Dale, *History,* 605.
[18] Albert Peel, *These Hundred Years: A History of the Congregational Union of England and Wales 1831-1931* (London: The Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1931), quoting the outline of a draft Plan for Home Missions in connection with the Union, 109-111.

shilling between them, which the coach driver took as a tip, it was only the kindness and hospitality of the coach guard, who was a Baptist, who saved them from disaster.[19] By the mid-nineteenth century, a connexional home missionary committee had taken over the supervision of the 'distant missions' of the circuits. Minutes of the quarterly committee meeting reveal that required reports from the missions were scrutinised for signs of insufficient effort, and finance was tightly controlled.[20]

8.4 Late nineteenth-century Wesleyan Home Mission initiatives

As the century progressed, staidness pervaded Wesleyan Methodism. This has been described as Wesleyan Methodism's 'mahogany period', a phrase conjuring up the image of a Victorian sideboard. Henry Rack wrote that one of the 'tragedies' of this period '…was that it fossilised [John Wesley's] pragmatism into a new ecclesiastical orthodoxy…'[21] Organisationally, this was probably inevitable; rounds/circuits, once a daring innovation to address an unmet need, could not help but have become organisational structures. Their very success led to the need for a system of management. However, there was also a sense in some quarters that the evangelical and creative energy of Methodism had also departed. The challenge provided by a rapid change in society (see below) offered an opportunity for Wesley's pragmatic approach to flourish once again. The question would be how the Connexion would use this opportunity. In the event, it rose to the challenge, but not through the traditional circuit system.

The populations of the industrial towns and cities were increasing rapidly, swelled by inward migration from the countryside. Between

[19] John Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion from its origins to the Conference of 1860,* new edn., revised and enlarged (London: R. Davies – Conference Offices,1864), 191-193.
[20] Ms.*Minute Book of the Home Missionary Committee 1859-1862.* MARM MAW MS 671 'The small amount of labour shewn for two preachers is no good omen… unless some better effort be made one of the preachers will have to be withdrawn'. Minute of meeting held December 19, 1859.
[21] Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast – John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1989), 250.

1801 and 1861 the population of London had increased from 959,310 to 2,808,494.[22] The populations of Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham were all rising rapidly. New industries offered the possibility of better work than could be found in the countryside; but the towns and cities became overwhelmed, and living, working and environmental conditions soon deteriorated. A telling entry in a Methodist itinerant's diary of 1865 described his first impression of Birmingham as: 'Fine buildings, but dreadfully thick atmosphere'.[23]

By the second half of the century, there was a general feeling within the religious world, encouraged by such publications as Thomas Guthrie's *The City, Its Sins and Sorrows* (1857) that aggressive evangelism was urgently needed to address the spiritual state of these populations. [24] Guthrie's sermons contrasted the visible pious attitude of the citizens on the Sabbath (he appears to be referring to Glasgow), with what was below the surface in the city: a world of vice, wretched poverty and drunkenness. This he described dramatically to shock his readers into a response. In 1864, it seemed to John Petty that:

> The rapid increase in their population, the multitudes who habitually neglect public worship, the awful desecration of the Lord's Day, the terrible amount of intemperance, licentiousness and other forms of vice, which alarmingly prevail, call loudly for increased efforts to arrest the progress of these fearful evils…and to spread evangelical truth and piety among these dense crowds of our fellow-men, deeply sunk in depravity and misery'.[25]

[22] Table of population of London 1801 – 1981 in Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert, eds., *The London Encyclopedia* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 614.
[23] Ms. *Diary of Rev. John Welford*, MARM MA648.
[24] Thomas Guthrie, *The City, its Sins and Sorrows – being a series of sermons from Luke XIX.41* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1857 and Scottish Temperance League 1859), accessed online, Google Books. The United Methodist Free Churches also set up a Home Mission initiative to the large towns and cities in 1863. "Summary of Annual Assemblies" in Edwin Askew, ed., *Free Methodist Manual* (London: Andrew Crombie, 1899).
[25] John Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, 578.

There is no doubting that in cities such as London, thousands of people were indeed living and working in squalid and miserable conditions. John Marriott gives a scholarly account in his *Beyond the Tower – A History of East London* (2011).[26] The Churches however saw this primarily in terms of morality – and their mission as rescuing people from irreligion and vice.

All the cities and major towns already had well-established Wesleyan circuits and therefore, theoretically, had the base upon which to begin a new programme of evangelical outreach or 'home mission' to their increasing populations. However, the response of the Wesleyan Connexion was often not to utilise and empower the existing circuits in these places, but to set up a system largely independent of the circuits.

This 'parallel' approach to mission was not confined to the cities. As Rigg mentioned, alongside a drive to evangelise the inner cities, rural areas were also the target of an aggressive Wesleyan evangelical drive launched in 1887. As with the towns and cities, the conference decided that 'in some cases it may be absolutely essential that provision should be made for the superintendency and discipline of new village causes, independently of existing circuit arrangements'.[27] The issue here is the conference's willingness to circumnavigate the circuit system. It is not made clear in what way some of the existing rural circuits were failing, although migration and emigration are very likely. But the choice to add another structure rather than boost the capacity of existing circuits suggests a lack of confidence on the part of the conference in the ability of the circuits to do what, in their origins, they were set up to do.

[26] John Marriott, *Beyond the Tower: A History of East London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).
[27] "Home Mission and Contingent Fund Report on Methodism in Villages", *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1887* (London: Methodist Bookroom, 1887), 216.

8.4.1 The method employed

The 1859 Wesleyan *Minutes of Conference* contain regulations pertaining to the employment of ministers specifically for home-missionary work so that 'specific attention may be given to the neglected and careless portion of the population of our large towns and the rural districts. Their appalling moral and social condition[28] [demanding] a much larger share of the practical sympathy of our Connexion':

> Any new enterprise of an aggressive character, although conducted in harmony with the working of our Circuits, requires separate arrangements, until the prosperity of the Mission shall make its incorporation practicable and desirable.[29]

The thinking behind this organisational statement requires further attention. Why should a new enterprise of an aggressive character require separate arrangements? Did this mean that existing circuits were considered unable to take on new enterprise and aggressive evangelism? If so, then part of their original reason for existence had failed. It would seem this might be one possible answer. Alternatively, could it mean that the subjects of the evangelism were in some way considered unsuitable to be mingling with the established members of the circuit? Or again, it might be thought that a mission would pull down a circuit financially and make too many demands on resources, had it been incorporated too early. It is also possible that the societies, particularly in the inner city circuits simply did not have the strength to embark on outreach and that even the 'mutual support' model of a circuit could not provide that strength.

[28] This record of an awareness of the need to address social as well as spiritual needs predates the *Forward Movement* by some years, although such awareness is often first credited to that movement.

[29] "Regulations for the Employment of Additional Ministers as Home-Missionaries" in *Minutes of Conference 1859*, 360ff .The fine detail of the form of ministry expected can be found on page 362 of these *Minutes.*

Although it was for a circuit to request such an appointment, the minister's work was to be 'devoted to a separate district or neighbourhood', and he was not to be diverted into the regular ministerial work of the circuit. [30] Positively, this did mean that energies could be focused on a much narrower area of responsibility in a way that was not possible for a circuit minister with the pastoral care and management of several societies. This was, however, a new development. Specialisation, other than for connexional and college appointments, was somewhat alien to previous Wesleyan practice, in which the circuit minister was a general practitioner.

The missionary minister was linked to, yet not part of, the circuit. On the one hand he was still under the oversight of the circuit superintendent, yet on the other hand, he had to send a three-monthly journal to the connexional committee responsible for this work. [31] He was pulled in both directions at once. A third party also had an interest in the missionary minister's endeavours: the financial and other supporters of Home Mission work. According to the *Regulations,* the journal was, among other things, to: '…note remarkable instances of ignorance, and social and moral degradation'.[32] As the next sentence begins 'The supporters of our Home-Mission movement are entitled to a full and particular account of the proceedings of the ministers employed as Home-Missionaries…', one cannot help but draw the conclusion that the interest of the supporters was being retained through a somewhat prurient interest in the circumstances of those targeted.

The work of the home missionary ministers in East London did achieve results. It was reported in 1885 that while 'there was not a vestige of organised Methodism' in Bethnal Green when such a minister arrived,

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[30] Ibid
[31] ibid
[32] ibid

by 1886 a large chapel and school had been built.[33] Similarly, Mile End, having been missioned for a number of years, became a circuit, then combined with Bethnal Green to provide 2,000 sittings, with over 1000 Sabbath-school scholars, although the actual adult membership was 538 (in 1885). As with the early nineteenth century home missions initiatives, these later examples were described in terms of being potential circuits. The Bethnal Green minister was described as having been 'sent to commence a circuit'. [34] There remained therefore, at this stage, an understanding that the point of home missions initiatives was to create new circuits – since circuits were the physical expression of Wesleyan Methodism and the locus of its life and activity.

8.4.2 The role of the Home Mission and Contingent Fund

One method of encouraging home missionary activity was the use of the connexional *Home Mission and Contingent Fund.* The Bethnal Green minister, for example, was sent at the cost of the Fund. It was the connexional means of supporting designated areas of home mission.[35] The 1885 Report lists these areas as 'mission-stations' but in the short annual report the stations were required to submit, they tended to refer to themselves as circuits. Some of their reports also refer to the building of new or replacement chapels. This suggests that these were established circuits.[36] It is possible that these circuits were originally completely new circuits needing considerable support, but which had succeeded in remaining 'on the books' of the Fund long after they had become more or less self-sustaining.

From these short reports it is possible to work out where the mission stations were and how they functioned, and they varied widely from the relatively prosperous south of England to inner cities. For example,

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[33] *The Thirtieth Report of the Wesleyan Home Mission and Contingent Fund for the support and spread of the Gospel in Great Britain and Ireland* (Leeds, 1885), 2.
[34] Ibid, 2.
[35] The Fund also supported mission work among the military based at home.
[36] The Kingston-on-Thames circuit reported obtaining a central site for a new chapel to replace one which was too small '…and ill-adapted for aggressive work....'. Ibid, 29.

there were reports from Alton and Petersfield in Hampshire and Saffron Walden (Essex), but also Kingston-on-Thames and Woking. Then there were London locations such as Canning Town, Mile End and Spitalfields.[37] There were other mission stations in the North of England. The South of England stations appear to be similar to those areas which W.W. Pocock had described as being a Wesleyan wilderness earlier in the century, so it would seem that these were still not thriving. This was despite much work by missionary ministers, 'lay agents' and 'mission bands'. In these areas, membership appears to have remained relatively static. However, success varied. Kingston-on-Thames (describing itself as a circuit) was able to report considerable progress in 1885 and put a case for a second minister; but reports from Spitalfields and from Mile End, show struggling communities. Spitalfields had a 'small and despairing' church membership and Mile End, though having 'good congregations' and a 40-strong mission-band, was suffering from an 'unusual number of removals' among church members due to the 'severe depression of trade in the East End'.[38] Both had problems with debt on buildings. Plainly all the mission stations listed in the reports benefitted, in one way or another, from being part of a connexional Church. They were supported by the contributions of the other circuits in the Connexion fed into the central Fund. It could be argued however that this infantilised some (those outside the inner cities) and sustained circuits in the inner cities which in truth were unsuitable vehicles for the work and the population in which they were situated.

8.4.3 Wesleyan Methodist London missions

In 1886, a significant move took place which further distanced the Wesleyan Home Mission initiative from regular circuit life. That year, the conference set up the London Wesleyan-Methodist Mission.[39] The

[37] *Thirtieth Report of the Wesleyan Home Mission and Contingent Fund* 29-31.
[38] Ibid 30, 31.
[39] Sigrid Werner described this action as a direct result of the challenging publication *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London,* produced by the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1883. If so, then Methodism was following the trend set by another Free

“Object” of the mission was ‘to carry the Gospel to such regions of London, and especially central London, as are most spiritually destitute and degraded’[40]. Under the sub-heading “Missions not worked by circuits”, these districts were to be identified and then detached from their circuits. It is of significance that the reason given for detachment was not the facilitation of the work of mission but ‘to prevent friction’.[41] One possible reason could have been tension between the expectations of regular congregations of their ministers and the amount of time these ministers might want to give to the target populations. As the boundaries of these mission districts were also required to be well defined, there is a strong feeling that the connexional committee expected disputes to arise, whether these be concerning finance or the sort of people any ‘converts’ were likely to be. There is a sense that while it was recognised that attention to the spiritually destitute and degraded was an essential purpose of Wesleyan Methodism, at the same time, there was great nervousness about taking the plunge and what the implications might be for regular circuits. Detachment of certain districts would be a way of both fulfilling a missionary obligation and keeping ordinary circuit life on a steady course.

The inner city circuits, especially in London, were however in a state of decay as many members, having ‘improved’ themselves, had moved out to the suburbs.[42] Despondency was unlikely to attract worshippers and yet there was a rapidly rising population whose spiritual needs had to be met. One example of the kind of change which took place was the origin of the London Wesleyan Mission established in the East End of London in 1885. St. George’s Chapel had been a prosperous church, attended by ‘well-to-do sea captains and city merchants’ living

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Church denomination. Sigrid Werner, ‘Claremont, Islington, the first Congregational Central Mission (1902)’ in *Genealogists’ Magazine,* vol.31, no.1, March 2013, 16.

[40] *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1886* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Bookroom, 1886), 241.

[41] Ibid, 242.

[42] A Report to the Conference of 1886 referred openly to ‘decay’ taking place. ‘Nothing is more injurious to the spirit of our people than that they should witness such failures of Methodism as are exhibited in some of these localities’, “Old chapels in Large Towns”, Ms. *Conference Journal* 1886, 58.

in the …'salubrious suburb of Stepney'.[43] However, Stepney had decayed to become an area of slums and St. George's Chapel was said to be virtually derelict. A later supporter of London Missions described this chapel in the 1880's as attended by a handful of 'loyal, but for the most part, unimaginative and self-satisfied people' who regarded themselves as 'superior to the "creatures" of the slums'.[44] These members were said not to see that there was as much need for mission in their neighbourhood as there was in the African missions they supported.[45] This judgement was harsh but probably contained an element of truth.

The annual report - *Record of Work of the London Wesleyan Mission East* included reports from such as the Mothers Meeting, Young Mens' Guild, Temperance Society, Medical Mission, Country Holiday Fund, Sunningdale Mothers Home (sickly mothers) and other forms of social work, together with a financial statement and list of donors.[46] It described a substantial and wide-ranging evangelical and charitable operation: quite beyond the capacity and probably the imagination of an individual chapel or circuit. Accounts of activities and levels of success in meeting social needs and attracting converts show that this form of home mission did work.

In *The Religious Life of London* (1904), a publication based on a census of attendance at places of worship in the greater London area, arranged by the *Daily News* from November 1902 to November 1903, there are some useful reflections on the Wesleyan inner city initiative and its effect on the circuit chapels.[47] The editor was Richard Mudie-Smith, a journalist on the *Daily News,* and he and other contributors

[43] R.G. Burnett, *These My Brethren: The Story of the London East End Mission* (London: The Epworth Press, 1946), 46.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] [Peter Thompson], *London Wesleyan Mission, East. Records of work for 1892-3, with facts an incidents. September 1893* (London: [1893]).
[47] Richard Mudie-Smith, ed., *The Religious Life of London,* 2 parts (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904).

offered considerable comment on the results of the census.[48] Reflecting on the census figures for South London, Charles Masterman, one of the contributors, referred to 'Mr. Meakin's great hall in Bermondsey' with a Sunday evening attendance of 1,217 which 'presents a sharp contrast to adjacent Wesleyan churches with congregations of 12, 130, and 19'.[49] It is possible that the situation would have been even worse in the chapels, had it not been for what William Allen described as '…the constant supply of earnest devoted young Methodists' who had gone up to London from the country circuits in search of employment and who he declared 'kept Methodism from dying out in London'. [50]

At the time of a previous census in 1886, by the *British Weekly* newspaper, it had been thought that re-ordering and refocusing the worship of chapels *within* existing circuits might be effective where the 'diminishing congregations' of inner-city London were said to 'fail under ordinary methods to attract the multitudes living around them'.[51] One suggestion was that if the trustees of these chapels were willing to 'throw open' these chapels for mission services, 'some portion of the expenses incident to such service' might be provided from the Home Mission Fund.[52] There is nothing to explain what 'throwing open' for mission services might involve, but one suspects it could have seemed rather threatening to the few regular members, especially those accustomed to liturgical worship. This scheme was not effective. When they were introduced, the missions and central halls were found to be

[48] He drew 'lessons' from the statistics. 'Wherever there is the right man in the pulpit there are few if any empty seats'. This seems to imply that in Wesleyanism, the struggling small circuit chapels never received attention from good preachers. Mudie-Smith, *The Religious Life of London,* 7.
[49] Charles Masterman, "The Problems of South London" in Mudie-Smith, *The Religious Life of London.* p. 202 ff.
[50] William Shepherd Allen, *The Itinerant System Considered in reference to the future of Wesleyan Methodism and the Forward Movement* (*Manchester*: Brook and Chrystal, 1892), 19. It can reasonably be assumed that he meant it was *circuit* Methodism they prevented from dying out, not the new initiative of missions.
[51] "London Wesleyan Methodist Mission", *Minutes of Conference 1886,* 241.
[52] Ibid, 241.

far more successful, not least because they offered social, educational and recreational facilities as well as pastoral care and worship.

In another chapter of *The Religious Life of London*, Jane Stoddart compared the *Daily News* census figures of 1902-3 with those of the *British Weekly* census of 1886. She concluded that 'If the Wesleyan Methodists, in the seventeen years under review, had been quietly carrying on the work of their regular churches, the grand total of their figures would have been as disappointing as those of the Church of England. [53] She was led to conclude that, for example, the need for the 'new' Wesleyan Deptford Methodist mission was clearly demonstrated by the comparative attendance figures of New Cross Chapel and Harefield Road Chapel, these having fallen respectively from 1,196 to 483 and 1,038 to 550. [54] She did not address the possibility that the new mission had 'poached' members from the other churches.[55] She recorded that attendance at Wesley's Chapel in City Road had fallen from 1221 to 699; but an attendance of 699 hardly suggests that traditional circuit Methodism was becoming extinct. This shift of worshipping population seems to be largely a matter of fashions in styles of worship. Mudie-Smith's view was that the statistics 'amply substantiated' the claim that central halls attracted worshippers while the figures for conventional circuit churches provided a 'sombre record'.[56]

8.4.4 The inner city missions at work

One name particularly associated with the style of home mission initiatives for the cities at the turn of the twentieth century was Hugh

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[53] Jane Stoddart, "The *Daily News* census of 1902-3 compared with the *British Weekly* census of 1886" in Mudie-Smith, *The Religious Life of London*, part 2, 292-293.
[54]Ibid.
[55] Henry Rack, in noting the increase of membership of the Manchester and Salford Mission from 123 in 1888 to 1,357 in 1902, cautioned that the Mission had 'cannibalized' other churches. Henry Rack, "Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902", in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, Gordon Rupp eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.3 (London: Epworth Press, 1983), 141.
[56] Mudie-Smith, *The Religious Life of London,* 10.

Price Hughes: an instigator of the Forward Movement. [57] A quotation from one of his many obituaries gives a clue to the way in which he (and his supporters) saw the settled pattern of circuit and connexional life of his youth. It referred to: '…the ease and dignity of a superannuated religious system…' [58] Hugh Price Hughes, along with others, concluded that in London at least, the circuit system and traditional forms of worship were a hindrance to reaching out to the masses, and he took on the task of leadership in a new approach to Methodist evangelisation. Christopher Oldstone-Moore covered Hughes' contribution in detail in his 1999 biography.[59]

Jane Stoddart wrote:' The Forward Movement has saved London Methodism. A new world has been called into existence to redress the balance of the old'.[60] Part of that new world was the invention of the Wesleyan 'Central Hall' (in the 1880's), with its entirely new concept of worship space, linked to extensive premises for educational, recreational and social service provision. Here, the core of the building was arranged as an auditorium with 'tip-up' seats without pew rent and a stage, seen as 'user-friendly' to attract those who would not enter a conventional church. Plate 9 shows the auditorium of Manchester Central Hall in 1894. Around this core were rooms for various kinds of meetings, groups, advisory and clinical services. The London Mission (East Ham) opened in 1906 with seating for two thousand. The worship services were crowded out, the Men's Brotherhood had a membership of nearly 3,000 and that of the Sunday School 1,700. It

[57] Henry Rack described The Forward Movement as '…an attempt to bring Wesleyanism up to date, to relate it more positively to contemporary thought and society. It manifested itself in a change of theological outlook, method and style of presentation of Christianity'. Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.3, 139.
[58] A quotation from the *Daily News* obituary of Hugh Price Hughes in the *Methodist Times*, November 20 1902, MARM. The *Methodist Times* described itself as 'A Journal of Religious and Social Movement'. It is an exaggeration to attribute most of the new development in mission to Hugh Price Hughes, but his Forward Movement was certainly part of it.
[59] Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999).
[60] Jane T. Stoddart, "The Daily News Census of 1902-3 compared with the British Weekly census of 1886", in Mudie-Smith, *The Religious Life of London,* part 2, 293. She went as far as to describe Wesleyan Methodism as being 'revolutionised in the past 17 years', 292.

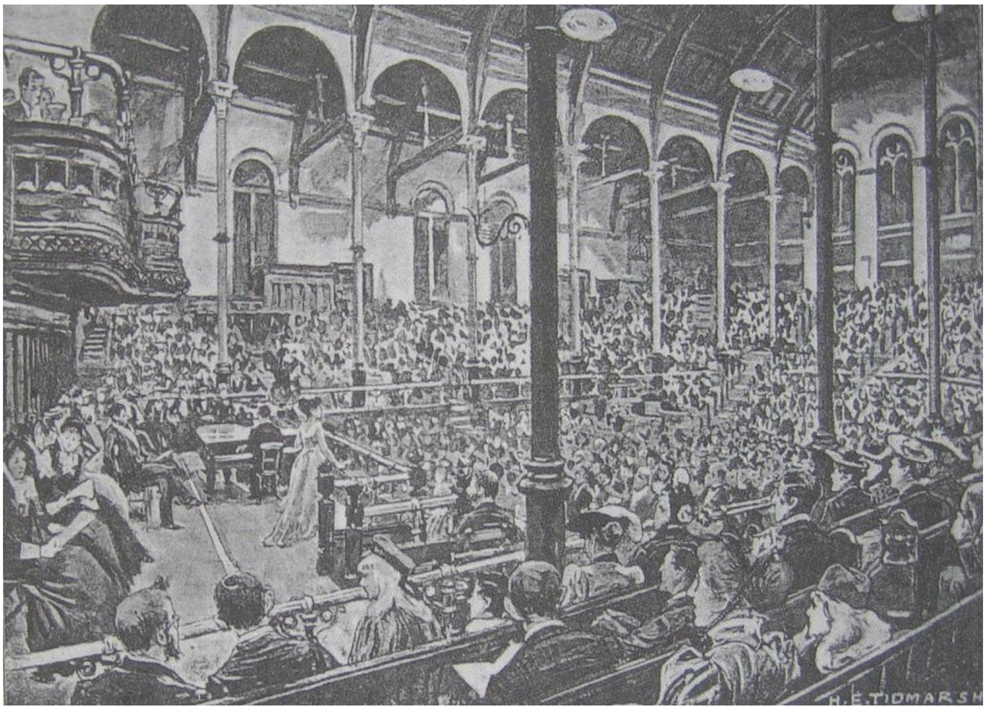

Plate 9

“Saturday Night at the Central Hall, Manchester”

W.A. Shaw, *Manchester Old and New*, vol.2, c.1894.
Reproduced in *A` History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* vol.4, 594

seems that this form of being church did meet the needs at the time, although sixty years later the same building was demolished as no longer serving its purpose.[61] Dews and Vickers commented that while 'much effective work' was done through the central halls, 'the impact began to wane as their novelty wore off in the twentieth century.'[62]

Methodism was not the only nonconformist tradition to set out to address the moral and spiritual state of the poor by means of 'missions'. William Booth had established a Christian mission to London's East End in the 1860's and early 70's before remodelling it as the Salvation Army around 1878. Norman Murdoch's history of the origins of the Salvation Army showed that addressing people's spiritual state alone was not a resounding success, until in the 1880's others persuaded Booth to combine evangelism with practical social service.[63] However, from a structural point of view, (with which this thesis is concerned), Wesleyan initiatives came from a different practical starting point. While Booth had to establish a presence in East London, Wesleyan circuits, with churches, already existed. The question was rather, were these appropriate for the purpose? Something more akin to the Methodist situation was the transformation of the (Congregational) Claremont Chapel. In 1899, the London Congregational Union remodelled the non-viable Claremont Chapel, a traditional church in Islington, recognising that there was a great need for 'all that a gospel agency can accomplish'. It was reopened in 1902 as a mission: 'Claremont Hall, Central Mission of the LCU'.[64] The facilities and outreach activities were very similar to the Wesleyan Missions, and similar success was achieved. In concept, the initiative was described as '…a bold attempt to grasp the problem of our weak

[61] http://british-history.ac.uk/report, Methodists in East Ham. Accessed 20/09/2010.
[62] D. Colin Dews and John A. Vickers, entry for 'Central Halls' in *Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk.
[63] Norman H. Murdoch, *Origins of the Salvation Army* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1994).
[64] An example of a list of a week's meetings and events is shown in Sigrid Werner, "Claremont, Islington – The first Congregational Central Mission (1902)", *Journal of the Society of Genealogists,* vol.31, no.1, March 2013, 24.

Churches as a whole, and to devise some means by which they might be made to contribute to a comprehensive evangelical movement on lines suggested by modern conditions'.[65] This is a Congregational version of the Wesleyan 'St. Georges Chapel' example given in paragraph 8.4.3. Being Congregational, the church had never been part of a circuit or a connexion, so there was no source of possible friction there. However, because the mission came under the auspices of the London Congregational Union, it did have the advantage of support and oversight beyond itself.[66]

In Primitive Methodism, the kind of missions described above came about when in 1876, Thomas Jackson, recently accredited for the ministry, was sent by the General Missionary Committee from Sheffield to open up a mission in Walthamstow and also act as temporary superintendent to the Bethnal Green mission, it being without a minister. While following his rule to visit house-to-house and to pray with the inhabitants, it became clear to Jackson that it was impossible to pray with starving people without also helping them. He therefore committed himself, at considerable personal cost, to this ministry which involved both the practical relief of distress among the poor in the form of meals, clothing and so on, and evangelistic services. In due course this became the celebrated Whitechapel Mission which lasted long after Methodist union in 1932. This initiative of Thomas Jackson appears to have changed a mission into a Mission, but it is far from clear how this fitted into the Primitive Methodist circuit system and whether it was a challenge.[67]

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[65] Report of the Special Committee on London Congregationalism (1900), quoted in "Claremont, Islington", 19.

[66] Although Inwood concluded that 'their lack of central organisation and funding made it difficult for them to support chapels in areas without a strong middle-class'. Stephen Inwood, *A History of London* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 681.

[67] Holliday Bickerstaff Kendal, *The Origins and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (London: Joseph Toulson, [1890]), General Books, Print on Demand edn. 376-377.

By the turn of the twentieth century, establishing missions had become the development of choice for Wesleyan Methodism in larger conurbations, and one method was to separate off a chapel from its original circuit and re-designate it as a mission. For example, in 1900, the Wesleyan Conference approved separating Ebenezer Chapel from the rest of the Ebenezer Circuit, Sheffield, to become the Sheffield Mission and set up a committee to enable this to take place the following year.[68] This setting up of committees of oversight was also a new development in Wesleyan practice. The quarterly meeting, which oversaw the temporal affairs of a circuit, was made up of representatives of the circuit societies, circuit officers and ministers. Mission committees were a different format – people, often from outside the mission, overseeing its temporal affairs. The differing formats had the potential for tension between the two sorts of bodies. There are hints of some anticipated tension in the record of setting up the Manchester and Salford Mission. The conference of 1908, having appointed a committee of about ninety people to oversee the work of this mission, directed that the quarterly meeting of the Manchester (Oldham Street) Circuit 'should act in harmony with the committee of the Mission herein appointed'.[69] The quarterly meeting was the historical constitutional meeting of the circuit and yet here was a very large committee being appointed to oversee the mission. The question of authority and lines of accountability became more complex and, it seems, more hazardous. Despite potential difficulties however, it cannot be denied that city missions were rapidly becoming established and successful. In 1908, favourable reports were received from missions established in Hull, Nottingham, Birmingham, Bolton and Sheffield, as well as Manchester and Salford.

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[68] *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1900* (London: Wesleyan – Methodist Bookroom, 1900), 262. The work of these missions is beyond the scope of this thesis, but there have been many histories written of the individual missions and the work undertaken. One example is: Caulfield Grant (compiler), *You have nothing to do but to save souls – The Evolution of the Nottingham Central Methodist Mission (*Nottingham: Grant, 2001).

[69] "Home Mission Fund Report", *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1908* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1908), 49.

Into the twentieth century, it appears that an attempt was made to introduce the terminology of 'mission' into the regular circuit system outside the cities. To do this, a number of existing circuits were amalgamated and renamed. In 1900 for example, approval was given for the St. Columb, Newlyn East and St. Agnes circuits to be united and become 'The North Cornwall Mission'. Another example would be the Guildford, Alton, Petersfield and Basingstoke circuits being amalgamated to form the 'Surrey and North Hampshire Mission'. [70] This development may indicate a positive move from maintenance to mission, but it could be argued that renaming circuits 'mission' was simply a fashionable thing to do or, equally possibly, that it was a 'cover' for falling numbers.

8.5 The matter of itinerancy and inner city missions

Henry Rack concluded that in the late nineteenth century Wesleyans were slower to initiate new evangelical methods than other denominations because 'They were hindered by the Connexional system and the itinerancy'.[71] Rack, consciously or not, was reiterating the sentiments of Hugh Price Hughes' *Methodist Times* which declared that the itinerant system '…is now one of the principal hindrances to the spiritual prosperity of Methodism in Great Britain.'[72] In the same context, Stephen Inwood also saw the circuit system as a 'handicap' to Wesleyans in London who 'had once been so effective in conquering new territories'.[73] Ironically, it was itinerancy, the origins of the circuit, which had been the means of that effectiveness.

The conference had been constrained by *The Deed of Declaration* (1784), to limit a minister's stay to three years in any circuit; but those who wanted to develop new forms of outreach ministry considered so

[70] "Home Mission Fund Report", *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1900* (London: Wesleyan–Methodist Bookroom, 1900), 261-262.
[71] Henry Rack in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.3, 133.
[72] Quoted (without date reference) in Allen, *The Itinerant System considered*.
[73] Inwood, *History of London*, 681.

short a stay as counterproductive.[74] Against this, some could not envisage itinerancy that involved periods of stay longer than three years, because extending the stay would mean abandoning itinerancy. However, the Miscellaneous Resolutions of the 1895 Wesleyan conference reiterated that:

> The Conference declares its hearty adhesion to the principle of Itinerancy and to the three-years limit as a general rule; but it repeats its conviction that there are cases – in circuits as well as missions – when the interests of the work of God demand that, under careful regulations and restriction [unspecified], the term of ministerial residence should be extended beyond three years'.[75]

While some extension of stay could thus be applied, with great caution, to circuits as well as missions, those supporting the central missions' movement were given much more freedom. Ministers of these innovative establishments, taken away from ordinary circuit work, were permitted to stay much longer. Rev. Charles Garrett was head of the Liverpool Mission for 17 years.

This challenged the notion that the Wesleyan Methodist basic structure and method of circuits and itinerancy was the best of all possible worlds in all circumstances. Yet according to Allen '…These missions are being carried on…in perfect harmony with, and without any degree changing, the present itinerant system in our circuits'.[76] Two systems had been developed – both intended to be relevant to their circumstances, both Wesleyan Methodist, but one was itinerant and the other was not. It may well be that this was the most sensible thing to

[74] '…The Conference shall not appoint any person, *for more than three years successively,* to the use and enjoyment of any chapels and premises…except ordained ministers of the Church of England'.
[75] "Miscellaneous Resolutions", *Minutes of Conference 1895* (London: Wesleyan Conference, 1895), 323.
[76] Ibid, 13

do in the changed circumstances, but it was a major change of position.

One of the purposes of itinerancy in Wesleyan Methodism had been to ensure that the preachers did not grow stale, and that the congregations benefitted from a range of abilities and gifts. The establishment of inner-city missions however, turned this justification on its head. According to Charles Booth, now it was that: ‘the persistent efforts of one man are essential and three years is too short a time’.[77] Booth also considered that the minister needed to stay longer because the establishment of a central mission did not have the strength of a committed membership base as did the traditional circuit described earlier. One can add that there would also be insufficient numbers of able and spiritually mature class leaders to maintain spiritual and pastoral continuity, an essential ingredient in an itinerant ministry.

Stoddart described missions as being ‘under’ the care of the able superintendency of named individuals. These men were clearly not passing through and became something of an institution themselves. Peter Thompson, for example, was superintendent of the Wesleyan East End Mission from 1885 when he arrived to establish it until 1909 when he died. Men such as Lax of Poplar (referred to in this way), were the subject of popular biographies.[78] The principle of itinerancy was that it was the minister who moved on, while the congregation was relatively static. In the missions it was the minister who was the static element.

It could be said that such an action was in the pragmatic spirit of Wesley, but was it in the spirit of the *movement* which Wesley set in motion? If itinerancy could be, in the case of the central missions, set

[77] Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London,* third series: religious influences and summary (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1903), 131.
[78] Lax, William Henry, *Lax of Poplar: the Story of a wonderful quarter of a century* (Epworth Press, 1935).

aside, was it no more than a ‘sacred cow’? Or was it that the long residencies associated with the missions were a justifiable exception to the rule, as Wesley’s ‘exception’ to standard Church of England practice? History tells us that the long-stay practice for the missions did not spread through the rest of Methodism.[79] The principle of itinerancy was never threatened. It continues to be firmly held, although extensions to the basic five-year stay are now common. Long-stay ministry in the city missions stands out as something Methodism experimented with, outside the characteristic format. It was Methodist because Methodists did it, but perhaps not Methodist if circuits and itinerancy were indeed of the essence of its organisation and life.

In 1909, Wesleyan R. Waddy Moss expressed some concern about the future of Wesleyan Methodism. Among other aspects, he wrote that ‘Complaints may be heard that the circuit system is weakening’.[80] He did not say why the circuit system might be thought to be weakening, but the associated references to the missions (or central halls) which by his day were established in several large towns and cities and seeming to thrive (see below) suggest that this initiative was felt by some to be a threat to the circuit’s very existence. Here there was a feeling that the ‘usual’ arrangement was failing to function effectively, and yet new initiatives, when they came, were a threat not only to the usual system but to Wesleyan Methodism itself. The matter of itinerancy provides a relevant illustration of the issues and tensions involved.

8.6 The suitability of the circuit system for inner city work

There is a question over whether or not the circuit system was ever suitable for the needs of the cities. John Petty, Primitive Methodist, writing c1859 about the lack of effective connexional presence in cities asked the question ‘Cannot the ecclesiastical system of the community

[79] Although the ‘three year rule’ was extended generally in the 1890’s – after considerable legal difficulties. Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.3, 132, note 27.
[80] R. Waddy Moss, “Wesleyan Methodism – The Last Fifty Years”, Townsend, Workman and Eayrs, *New History,* vol.1, 479.

[the Connexion] be made to work with as much efficiency [in the cities] as in smaller towns and villages?' [81] He was concerned that even in the large towns the societies are 'few and feeble …its chapels small and uninviting compared with the amount of the population'. [82] This was an early expression of a question which hovered over Wesleyan Methodism in the following decades. Importantly, the concept of circuit, societies and itinerancy were not simply useful structures. They were regarded as of the very essence of its Wesleyan Methodist being.

It has been suggested that perhaps the circuit system was at heart a rural concept. [83] William Allen quoted a leading article in the *Methodist Times* as saying that it was 'admirably adapted to the England of Wesley's time – which was an England of small towns and villages' – implying that things were different then. [84] Allen replied that England mostly still was rural [in 1892]. It is true that at the time of the first mention of circuits in the *Minutes of Conference 1746* there were few cities of any size and no conurbations. Other than London and Bristol, there were no cities to take into account; although these cities were the birthplace of the first Methodist societies and London, York, Bristol and Newcastle were named among the first circuits. However, while Allen was right about towns and villages, the cities did pose a challenge. Charles Booth wrote of the Wesleyan Methodist system that 'The whole scheme savours strongly of the exigencies of country life' and then proceeded to give a summary of what this constituted:

> We think of small village groups of people filled with a common religious spirit, bound together in Wesleyan society classes, making sacrifices to build themselves a chapel, receiving assistance from similar groups, or giving help to others: prepared to conduct the service of God themselves, but recognising the need for an educated ministry. To

[81] Petty, *History,* new revised edn., 579.
[82] Ibid
[83] By my Supervisor, Dr. Frances Knight.
[84] But without reference.

> provide this want they combine, and all the rest follows naturally.[85]

This is a reasonably accurate description of a Methodist circuit of that period and earlier, and from this description it is clear that there was likely to be a mismatch between that format and the requirements of inner city London. Booth's very perceptive reasoning was that the mismatch would occur because 'The [circuit] system…springs from the congregations, not the congregations from the system'.[86] In other words, the initiative came from and was sustained by the people, whereas in the city, no such initiative and sustaining could be expected from the 'un-churched' masses it was hoped to draw in. Booth described the necessity of reversing the order in 'the great centres of population'.[87] A building should be constructed first and the people drawn in to the building, with the funding and moral support of existing members in the suburbs. This new church he described as either becoming attached to an existing circuit or a new circuit may be formed. However, although a new church might have become part of the circuit *structural* system, it would not have had the *nature* of a circuit as previously understood.

Following up Booth's comment, is one from Kendall concerning a Primitive Methodist approach. He commented on the value of the Connexion having obtained a freehold site in a town at an early stage, so that when developments were needed to meet a growing population and 'present day requirements' [of mission-style buildings], both an existing building and '…a number of families and officials of proved loyalty' would provide a core congregation and leadership and '…give continuity to the churches history and solidity and effectiveness to its operations'.[88]

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[85] Booth, *Life and Labour,* Third Series: Religious Influences - Summary, 130.
[86] Ibid, 130.
[87] Ibid, 130.
[88] Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, print on demand edn., 349.

It may also be that as well as the issue being about the adaptation of a system originating in the pastoral eighteenth century, this was an issue about mindset. It could be argued that many of the existing members of the societies in the inner cities of that time were long-term residents. They were a settled community of religious people feeling threatened by the alien thousands pouring in from the countryside. People under threat go into self-preservation mode. An attitude of ‘us and them’ may also have prevailed. The circuit system of the eighteenth century was essentially one of mutual support and encouragement, that is, it was for ‘us’. However, the masses flooding into the cities, described in the most lurid terms by religious people, were ‘them’ who needed to be saved from themselves and from ‘the imminent peril of endless perdition’. [89]

One feature of the missions already alluded to was the large amount of organised social, recreational, educational and medical work undertaken. In considering the suitability of the circuit system for work in inner cities, it should be noted that these aspects were not a regular feature of the circuits. Leslie Griffiths pointed out in his paper on J.E. Rattenbury that the imperative which lay behind late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Wesleyan home mission initiatives was somewhat different from that of the early nineteenth century. [90] The latter had been concerned with individual personal salvation; the former spoke in terms of evangelism, social action and the relief of poverty going hand in hand. However, while this is certainly true, it is necessary to recall that in the mid-eighteenth century, John Wesley’s personal approach in the London he knew was both to preach a message of personal salvation *and* to undertake a programme of practical relief for the poor. Although it may appear that this combined approach was lost after Wesley, one answer may be that many of the early nineteenth century members of society were themselves the poor

[89] Petty, *History,* new edn. Revised and enlarged, 579.
[90] Leslie Griffiths, “The Importance of Being Ernest”, *Methodist Sacramental Fellowship Bulletin,* no.140, Epiphany 2013, 12.

who needed relief, so that this aspect became an internal rather than an outreach activity. The later nineteenth century missions were therefore something of a return to Wesley's pre-circuit method, albeit in a different form. In going back to eighteenth century basics however, it 'skipped' the establishment and development of the circuit as an organisational unit. It can be argued therefore that this may be one reason why, when faced with the 'sins and sorrows' of the city, it was a parallel outreach programme that was adopted, rather than the realignment of the circuit.

8.7 Conclusion

In 1905 J.H. Rigg wrote effusively of the success of the home mission initiative over the previous twenty years. He wrote of how 'the fame of [Wesleyan Methodism's] great and comprehensive home mission work in London had reached the ends of the earth' and 'Not less remarkable…the work of evangelising the spiritually dark…stretches of rural England…' which an earlier generation of Methodists had not reached. [91] If he was right in this last assertion, then it appears that the early nineteenth-century efforts in mission – the 'mission stations' in rural England - did not live up to expectations.

Rigg's reference to the effectiveness of home mission work in London has been challenged. In a commentary on evangelism and home mission work in the second half of the nineteenth century, Henry Rack concluded that the missions and central halls mostly failed to reach the people they had been set up to attract. In religious matters: 'The appeal… seems to have been more to established and middle class than to unattached and working-class worshippers'. [92] This is not to say that the social, recreational and educational aspect of the missions work failed. Much pioneering work was done in these respects. It does

[91] R. H. Rigg, *The Living Wesley,* third edition (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1891), 236-7.
[92] Henry Rack, "Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902" in Davies, George and Rupp, *History,* vol.3, 140. He noted that it was difficult to be certain of this analysis, but contemporary reports tend to support it.

however suggest that while the style of worship and sermons had become the attraction for regular Methodists, those perceived to be in need of spiritual rescue no longer responded as they had done in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Later nineteenth-century city missions and central halls provided a wide range of social and other services. As no chapel or even an entire ordinary circuit could have managed to have offered these services to the poor and needy on such a scale, it was inevitable that to do this, extra-circuit means had to be instituted. Circuits were primarily places for spiritual nurture and mutual support. Nevertheless, that the circuit chapels were also found to be unable or unsuitable to meet the identified *spiritual* needs of the 'un-churched' inhabitants of the towns and cities reveals their limitations.

The fact that home missions initiatives in each era were, (until the advent of central halls), ultimately about founding circuits, can be regarded as a strength. Independent evangelists sometimes failed to make long term gains because they had no supportive structures to offer, whereas circuits supplied that need. Nevertheless, over-enthusiasm for establishing the traditional Wesleyan format as a sign of presence did not take account of how sophisticated the circuit system had become, and how needful was experienced leadership.

In the matter of both rural and city missions, it can be argued that the conference was simply following Wesley's way of seeing a need (spiritual deprivation, as he saw it, in the Church of England). It was implementing whatever system was needed to meet that need. If so, then the developments described above can legitimately be classed as part of the Methodist way of doing things – part of the Methodist 'system'. This however means that any justification and appreciation of Wesleyan Methodist organisation which dwells solely on, and depends entirely on, the regular circuit system and itinerancy is at best inadequate and at worst misleading. If the 'extra-standard circuit' mission initiatives – ranging from the early nineteenth century mission stations to the central halls of the turn of the twentieth century - were a genuine development to meet need and not an organisational aberration, then they too must be brought within the scope of recognised features of regular Methodist organisation.

Conclusion

Although originating in the 1740's as Wesley's practical method by which preachers connected to him travelled on 'rounds', preaching and establishing and sustaining societies, the circuit became within about ten years an institution in a Connexion. This thesis has concluded that this transition was evolutionary, not a predetermined plan by Wesley, but that the creation of the quarterly meeting (c1748) and the role of assistant (c1749) (later, superintendent) were significant factors in establishing the new institutional identity.

The circuit as institution nevertheless remained true to its origins, in that its form continued to be that of a dynamic grouping of societies, as opposed to a geographical area with boundaries such as the parish. In size and shape, it was able to develop and change. Revivals, Methodist radical movements, emigration and the movement of labour from villages to towns, all had an impact on the membership of circuits in the period, causing societies to be established, grow, shrink or fail completely. But in the absence of rigid boundaries there was flexibility to accommodate all this, and the circuit adjusted accordingly. Circuits were divided to deal with unworkable distances and membership numbers, but division was also used as a means of dealing with problems such as dissident local preachers. This thesis has examined but rejected theories on shape based on connections with Union boundaries or on choice of a particular shape, such as hexagonal. Also rejected has been the idea that the 'town plus villages' arrangement was intentionally planned as the best model. Rather, it simply developed from the 'base and tour' model of the earliest preachers. As the circuits shrank in size, the travelling preacher's base evolved into the 'circuit town' and the tour into the rest of the circuit. The notion of the largest societies helping the smaller in an individual circuit was a fortuitous by-product of the 'town plus villages' configuration. While Primitive Methodism (1812) adopted the concept of the circuit, it added an element not used in Wesleyan Methodism:

the system of subdividing a circuit into 'branches' (semi-autonomous sub-divisions of circuits which were then matured into new circuits). This was a successful system which became a permanent feature of Primitive Methodist circuit organisation and again illustrates the flexibility of the circuit model. The feature of branches may have something to offer to the twenty-first century development of larger and larger circuits. For a period, Primitive Methodism also used a method of circuit extension through evangelisation of unconnected and distant parts of the country, although this eventually proved unworkable. It nevertheless demonstrated a more risk-taking and outward looking approach of Primitive Methodist circuits than that of Wesleyan circuits. In view of these differences, any reference to the structure of the circuit in the nineteenth century must take Primitive Methodist practice into account, as well as the practice of the Wesleyans.

The significance of the circuit quarterly meeting in establishing the institutional identity of the circuit has already been mentioned. It demonstrated by its authority that individual societies could not be autonomous and it reinforced the relatedness of the societies within the circuit. The quarterly meeting was a permanent feature of the circuit from about 1748. However, examination of the business of the circuit quarterly meeting has demonstrated how change in focus existed alongside continuity. In temporal affairs such as managing the financial aspects of having itinerants and remunerating them, the task remained unchanged. Yet in matters of religion the focus altered significantly. By the end of the nineteenth century, the eighteenth-century concern for personal piety and 'plain dress' had been replaced by a concern for social morality, exemplified by enthusiastic support for the temperance movement.

John Wesley saw the original purpose of the quarterly meeting as the assistant's means of oversight and enquiry: giving dominance to the authority of the assistant. After Wesley's death in 1791, Alexander Kilham promoted a more democratic arrangement, but his ideas were rejected by the conference. This could be described as the beginning of a power struggle between the Wesleyan conference (composed entirely of itinerants) and the lay membership in the circuits. This thesis has identified the quarterly meeting and its agenda as the place in which lay discontent could be expressed. Investigation of features such as sending 'memorials' to conference reveal the to and fro of tense relationships between quarterly meetings and the conference. Power struggles were a feature of the relationship between the Wesleyan conference with its representatives the superintendents, and the lay members of quarterly meetings, until the late nineteenth century. These sometimes led to major events such as breakaway movements and the loss of thousands of members, but they also took the form of lower-level expressions of dissatisfaction in the circuits. One such issue was the matter of preachers' wives and families. Despite the Methodist position that itinerants were free to marry (something never questioned), there was ambivalence and at times hostility in the Wesleyan circuits to receiving married itinerants because of the cost to circuits of supporting wives and children. This example also illustrates the tension created in a situation in which the body which made policy decisions and directed stationing (the conference) was not the body responsible for remuneration and expenses, which was the circuit. The mid-nineteenth century was a period of heavy-handed control by the conference and the executive. However, this thesis has shown that at the same time, the circuits were quite capable of both resisting pressure and 'playing the system' to their own benefit, particularly in matters of finance.

The first half of the nineteenth century was a period during which there was also agitation in the country at large and lay discontent in Methodism mirrored concerns in the wider community. Events outside Methodism had an effect on language used to express internal anxieties. Accusations of 'popery' directed at the conference, for example, reflected anxiety about the emergence of the Oxford

Movement in the Church of England from 1833 and the setting up of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in 1850.

The second significant factor in establishing the circuit as an institution within a connexion was the role of ‘assistant’, as meaning the chief preacher of the circuit, first recorded in the *Minutes of Conference 1749*. When, with the death of Wesley, the term ‘assistant’ was no longer appropriate, the same role was given the title ‘superintendent’, a title also adopted by Primitive Methodism. The reasons for choosing the title ‘superintendent’ have been explored in this thesis, but no reason can be established. Research has revealed a confused picture over what level of authority and status was variously considered appropriate to the title ‘superintendent’. Examining use, or attempted use, of the title in other contexts, ranging from Wesley’s ordination of Coke for America, through the Lichfield proposals, has shown a continuing concern over how much authority the title should imply. The origins of the role in early Methodism show largely practical reasons for its establishment; but status became an additional factor for Wesleyans in the mid-nineteenth century. The Primitive Methodist justification for the role was the need for someone to do the administrative tasks which the other preachers found unrewarding. This thesis concludes that the designation and role of the circuit superintendent was an essential part of Methodist organisation and system of oversight, but with contradictory features. In many ways, its combination of being raised up for a limited period, with being given authority and responsibility for oversight of a community, is reminiscent of the position of the abbot of a monastery. This is not a conclusion I have seen previously drawn.

The circuit local preachers’ meeting, first mentioned in the *Minutes of Conference* in 1796, was the last major component of the circuit to be established. This thesis has identified very inadequate recognition by scholars of the existence and importance of this meeting and in researching this feature has added to the body of knowledge on the role of the circuit in Methodism. In identifying the significance of a body of peers (lay) having the authority to supervise, discipline, train and authorise[1] (as did the conference for travelling preachers), this thesis adds a corrective to views of the Wesleyan Connexion as being entirely opposed to lay people having a degree of authority. The positioning of this process at circuit level also adds considerable weight to recognising the importance of the circuit in the Connexion. Examination of minutes through the nineteenth century has revealed a gradual abandonment of attention to personal failings in the disciplinary element of the meeting. This observation, while not 'organisational' in itself, shows how an organisational approach for this thesis has provided evidence on a broader front.

The factors contributing to the development of local preaching as a distinctive form of ministry, and its status within the Methodist community, have also received little scholarly attention.[2] This thesis has uncovered a more faceted development than a 'one step' development from 'those who serve in one place'. Further, possible reasons for local preachers playing a leading role in the Methodist reform movements of the nineteenth century have been revealed. Positively, because they were regarded as 'of the people' and negatively, because of a building resentment at being treated as 'second-class' by the travelling preachers. The weight of the fact that local preaching, the main means of providing Sunday worship in both Connexions was circuit-based, contributes significantly to identifying the circuit as a key element in both Connexions. Identifying this also shows that there were two distinct systems of authorisation for preachers: the conference for itinerants and the circuit for local preachers. It is concluded that local preachers were an indispensible element of the Methodist scheme. It would have been impossible at any time in the study period to operate the provision of Sunday worship without them. The ratio of local preachers to itinerants in both Connexions also shows them to be in vastly superior numbers to the

[1] Albeit under the chairmanship of the superintendent.
[2] With the notable exception of Milburn and Batty, *Workaday Preachers.*

itinerants. Nevertheless, local preachers did not have commensurate status and recognition.

The district is a feature of the Wesleyan connexional structure which this thesis has identified as requiring further research. Such research might attempt to find the reasons for choosing geographical division, the relatively uncontested introduction of district committees and the impact on the circuits. Related to this, examination of attempts in Wesleyan Methodism to have regional superintendency with bishop-like responsibilities revealed an issue of great emotional significance in the Methodist tradition. Anxieties over the adoption of the episcopal role, at any level, must have had some basis in experience of or myths about some episcopal practice in the Church of England at that time. Yet one is forced to conclude that this cannot be the whole story. Further research into the anxiety itself may be fruitful.

Central to Methodist connexional polity was itinerancy: originally John Wesley's practical means of 'spreading scriptural holiness' backed by a belief in 'connectedness' and the need to nurture converts. When circuits ceased to be the rounds of itinerants, becoming instead structural features of a Connexion, itinerating continued both within and between circuits. This thesis has identified that justification for continuing itinerancy was based on both polity and practicality. The former was about maintaining the 'connectedness' of the societies and circuits to one other and to the conference, with itinerants a shared resource, but directed by the conference. The latter was about distributing the variety of gifts and abilities (or limitations) of the itinerants across the Connexion - understood as requiring short stays and frequent moves. It is concluded that when inner city missions were introduced and the policy of short stays challenged, it was this two-part understanding of itinerancy which allowed longer incumbencies to be introduced at the missions (practicality) without threatening the concept of itinerancy in relation to connexionalism (polity).

Lay people played a significant role in supporting itinerancy: a role somewhat underplayed when itinerancy is lauded as a system. It is concluded that the system only worked effectively because of the continuity of spiritual care and guidance provided by class and other leaders in the local societies. This was especially true in the earliest days when rounds were long and the visits of the travelling preachers infrequent. This dependency on lay people for spiritual care and teaching was somewhat at odds with the policy that spiritual matters were firmly the preserve of the itinerants, something which the notion of the "pastoral office" served to emphasise. This thesis concludes that this situation was one source of disaffection among members, especially lay leaders. One particular feature of itinerancy was the way in which it was attributed with an iconic status, one to be defended at all costs. This meant that itinerancy could be described as *being* Methodism. As the body of itinerants could also be described as 'the itinerancy', this provided an opportunity for reinforcing the status of the itinerants.

Examining Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism in parallel has contributed to a more rounded and in-depth understanding of the history of the Methodist circuit in organisational terms than might otherwise be the case. Examples have already been given of internal structural differences and similarities. There were also differences in their sense of purpose. Early Primitive Methodist circuits saw themselves as a unit of pro-action in a way that a Wesleyan circuit was not. Foreign mission initiatives by individual Primitive Methodist circuits also suggest a greater sense of circuit autonomy while retaining a connexional polity. One significant difference was the place of lay people in each of the connexional 'layers'. In Primitive Methodism the acceptance of women as local preachers and lay representation at the conference for example, showed a willingness to give lay people a higher profile. A reaction to a perception of too much authority being given to the itinerants in Wesleyanism ensured that in Primitive Methodism, the balance of 'power' between lay people and itinerants tilted in favour of lay people. The extent to which the inheritance of the differences still affects Methodism today cannot be lightly dismissed.

It is concluded that the significance of the circuit is built on an amalgam of factors. The role of the circuit as the locus of ministry is a key element. Itinerants in both Connexions were allocated by the conference to circuits, not to individual societies. In the case of local preachers, these were based in, and also served, the circuit as a whole. The circuit was also a statement about Methodism being of connexional, not Independent tradition: no society existed as an autonomous unit. Another factor was the practical one of the circuit being an effective and manageable unit of oversight and administration at sub-regional level. The role of circuit superintendent as overseer (under the conference) reinforced the fact of the circuit as having a spiritual as well as a temporal responsibility and identity. The preaching plan provided documentary evidence of these factors and reinforced the position of the circuit as a unit of oversight, ministry and administration. John Wesley introduced the concept of itinerants on circuits as a method of Christian outreach and also as a means of sustaining and nurturing the 'converts'. However, studying the introduction of the city 'missions' has shown that the circuit, as it developed as an institution, was better adapted to the latter than the former.

That a particular structural element in a Church should survive intact despite changes in practice is not unique to Methodism. The Church of England still has parishes despite centuries of change. Again, the weight of significance that the circuit bore is not unique. While the term 'circuit' has been shown to carry considerable significance, the word 'parish' also bears a weight of meaning; one which nonconformists do not always comprehend. However, survival lies in the fact that the circuit was and is the 'primary unit'. A circuit of one chapel was still a circuit. It is therefore likely that the absence of any challenge to the concept of the circuit is because doing things differently (if that were possible) simply did not occur to anyone, including scholars. For a word so quickly obsolete in its original meaning, the continued use of the *term* ‘circuit’ does however seem strange. The reason for the continued use, and an element in its perceived significance, may lie in its origins in itinerancy. Itinerancy was not only a practical matter, but a concept which went to the heart of both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist identity. ‘Circuit’ was where it all started and to abandon that term would suggest a betrayal of origins and identity.

As a *unit of organisation* in the connexional structure, the circuit could and does justify its position and usefulness, although certain scholars have expressed reservations over the extent to which the circuit as *a community* still holds meaning for many Methodists. It is concluded that a less inward-looking approach to Christian relationships need not be feared as a sign of connexional disintegration, because organisation and a sense of community are two different things. Shier-Jones mixed these up when she proposed that the Methodist Church was becoming a connexion of societies rather than circuits because ‘circuit-mindedness’ was waning.

The basic Methodist connexional structure has changed little since the various elements were established. There are still circuits made up of groups of societies / local churches, with the equivalent of quarterly meetings and local preachers’ meetings. There are still districts and an annual conference. For these reasons, the history of the organisational aspects of British Methodism is of more than antiquarian interest. It has a contribution to make to any discussions on future organisational developments in the Methodist Church. The question has been raised in recent years that in the light of the Covenant with the Church of England, what place would the circuit have and what contribution would it offer to an integrated Church? In many places, Church of England parishes are already grouped into “united benefices”, thus giving them the outward appearance of small circuits. However, although this basic pattern may seem quite ‘Methodist’, the origins, development and significant internal features of the Methodist circuit and its place in a connexional polity suggest that grouping alone does not make a circuit. To be a circuit in the Methodist tradition, there would need to be devolved oversight to a ‘superintendent’, a quarterly meeting equivalent, a cadre of local preachers, and a connectedness to other circuits and to a body of ultimate authority, through ministerial itinerancy.

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