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Proceedings

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THE ARMINIAN BIBLE CHRISTIANS

The Arminian Bible Christians were seceders (1829 - 1835) from the Bible Christians (1815 - 1907), the small Methodist body that was founded and always based in the South West of England. This article assumes that the secession was that way round although the small band that left were actually following the founder himself! Very little is known of this short lived secession and denominational historians have treated the episode as best forgotten. This article looks at some existing evidence, describes a new source and compiles a tentative list of some of the seceders' travelling preachers.

Disruption

William O'Bryan was the founder in 1815 of the Bible Christians, smallest of the five major nineteenth-century Methodist denominations. For nine years from their first annual conference in 1819, O'Bryan assumed or was elected to the presidency but eventually his autocracy led to dissension. William Reed, a minister born in Buckland Brewer in Devon, was at the 1827 conference and wrote about it to Mary Cottle, his wife to be,

I am sorry to state that our Conference has not been of the most comfortable kind; nevertheless it affords me pleasure to state that all the Preachers and Representatives were of the same mind. Our difficulties arose from the old source, the authority claimed by Mr. O'Bryan. We had much disputing and contention; but the Preachers and Representatives came to the determination that they would go no further on the old system. A new system has been proposed, on which we are at present acting, and which will be submitted to the Christmas Quarterly Meetings.¹

With the gift of hindsight, James Thorne continues, 'If the correspondence of all the Brethren [i. e. ministers] and friends throughout

¹ Thorne, J., *Memoir of William Reed Bible Christian Minister*. Shebbear (1869) pp 79- 80

the Connexion could all be examined, for about seven years from this date, I suppose a large portion of it would be found to have reference to this subject. Thank God that peace was again restored after that interval.'

At the 1828 conference dissatisfaction took a public form in the election of William Mason as president and a new denominational name was adopted and printed on the title page of the *Minutes*: 'The People denominated BIBLE CHRISTIANS, (Formerly termed Arminian Bible Christians).' O'Bryan's resentment at this humiliation led to a crisis a year later at a preliminary meeting at Shebbear, on 23 July 1829. There O'Bryan announced 'I will do no more business with you, I adjourn this conference to Liskeard next Monday'² and walked out. Without their founder and first leader the conference of 'Ministers and Representatives' had to cope as best they could with the situation facing them and their tiny denomination. In 1865 James Thorne remembered 'All the Itinerant Preachers remained together, except Richard Mollon and John Parkyn, jun.; the latter was travelling in Northumberland, a young man, William Patterson, assisting him. ... shortly after [they] came into the West of England and united with those who joined Mr. O'Bryan.'³ We shall come across John Parkyn again.

News of events spread, and some members and preachers rallied to O'Bryan, but his leadership was inadequate and he spent much of the next six years in America! Despite this, a recognisable but tiny denomination came into being, adopting the name *Arminian Bible Christians*, the original name of the main denomination.

Numbers

The membership statistics printed annually in the Bible Christian *Minutes* show how serious was the effect of this separation. Membership had been dropping since 1827 but between the Conferences of 1829 and 1830 the connexional membership dropped by 17% from 7600 to 6300.⁴ This must be largely attributed to the disruption although emigration from the South West was also significant. In terms of membership the eleven circuits in Cornwall were by far the largest county group and here the drop was more than 25%, from 4360 to 3250, a catastrophic situation. In these twelve months every Cornish circuit showed a loss with Breage circuit particularly badly hit, dropping from 300 to a mere 40. Kilkhampton had the largest Cornish membership of 730 and saw this slashed to 440. Thorne permits himself a few reflections about the effect of the disruption on the main denomination, 'Perhaps the worst evil it produced was the strife and contention which followed, in the older stations where Mr. O'Bryan was best known and had been rendered most

² *BC Minutes* 1829, p. 3

³ Thorne, J. et al, *Jubilee Memorial of Incidents in the Rise and Progress of the Bible Christian Connexion*. Shebbear and London (1865) p. 111

⁴ In this article membership numbers are rounded.

useful⁵ - a high proportion of the older stations, of course, were in Cornwall. In the view of Tom Shaw, the modern historian of the Bible Christians, the seceders established one or more circuits in Cornwall⁶ and the figures quoted above suggest Breage and Kilkhampton as possibilities. The total number of their circuits can only be guessed at but was probably well into double figures.

In 1829 the seven Devon circuits had 1100 members and the four Somerset circuits 600. Proportionally these counties suffered less for in 1830 Devon's losses amounted to 13% although Brentor circuit went up. The total of the Somerset circuits actually went up by 4%, due to increases in Crewkerne/Chard and Somerton.

New Evidence

Tom Shaw comments that the seceders 'with their uncertain leadership and short history left no records of their progress'⁷ and his unique knowledge of Cornish Methodism makes it virtually certain that this is true of Cornwall. Ironically records that have recently been identified come from the Devon/Somerset borderland, remote from the heart land of Cornwall and North-West Devon. In 1829 there were two small circuits in this area, based on Kingsbrompton, (150 members) and Crewkerne, (85 members) both being places in Somerset.

In the 1980s the writer examined a collection of circuit plans in the Devon Record Office,⁸ covering the period 1831 to 1855. These belonged to George Woodbury Cockram⁹ of Tiverton, who appeared as a local preacher on most of them. The writer contributed an article to *Cirplan*¹⁰ describing how these plans chart Cockram's progress as a local preacher through three denominations, Bible Christian, Wesleyan and Wesleyan Reform, while still living in Tiverton. The six earliest plans are 'Bible Christian' plans, the first two being headed 'The Arminian Bible Christian's Lord's Day Plan'. At that time the writer assumed this was an anachronistic use of the earlier name.

More recently the writer examined these plans again and his analysis of the names of people and preaching places made it clear that these 'Bible Christian' plans were in fact issued by the seceders. The six plans form an unbroken sequence from August 1831 to June 1833. Nine class tickets issued by the seceders are stuck to the reverse of one of the plans and form an incomplete series from 1831 to 1834. Further information about Cockram suggests that his career as a Methodist and a leading citizen of Tiverton was more involved and interesting than the writer

⁵ Op cit p. 112

⁶ Shaw, T., *The Bible Christians 1815 - 1907*. (1965) p. 46

⁷ Op cit p. 47

⁸ Devon Record Office, Tiverton Methodist Circuit deposit ref. 2514D/143.

⁹ Baptised 1818. Died 1885.

¹⁰ *Cirplan* Volume 9 1988, pp. 52-57

previously realised, not least the early age at which he started preaching. However his life cannot be further explored in the present article.

Cockram's first five plans are for the 'Tiverton and Kingsbrompton Circuits' and the sixth is for the 'Tiverton and Chard Missions'. Each plan refers only to a single quarterly meeting so the widespread list of places on each plan must have operated as a single circuit. 'Kingsbrompton' is the village of Brompton Regis in Somerset but appears on none of the plans. Tiverton in Devon appears in Plans 3 to 6 but with weekday preaching only. Chard in Somerset appears in Plans 5 and 6. At this period the main stream Bible Christians had a Kingsbrompton circuit, which included Tiverton in Devon. Their Crewkerne circuit near Chard dated from 1824 and was renamed Chard from 1830. Between 1829 and 1830 the membership of neither circuit was greatly affected by the secession - Kingsbrompton dropped slightly but Chard/Crewkerne went up equally slightly.

The Seceders As Methodists

O'Bryan had been a Wesleyan local preacher and his original Bible Christian connexion, tiny though it was, was organised on Wesleyan lines with an annual conference, circuit plans, class tickets and itinerant and local preachers. The seceders formed a body that was tinier still but they too attempted to adopt the Methodist pattern.

The seceders' printed preaching plans mentioned above refer to typical Methodist services and events such as love feast, 'sacrament' (i. e. communion), quarterly meeting (sometimes with a preaching service), local preachers' meeting and quarterly collection. Plan 5 announces, 'The Quarterly Meeting will be held at Dunkerswell [*sic*], on Wednesday the 2nd of January; business to begin at Two O'Clock, P. M. Preaching at Seven. Love Feast after.' There are lists of itinerant and local preachers. The Plans 2 to 6 include the 'Sacrament' a total of sixteen times at eight places, but only Bury, [in Brompton Regis parish] has it each quarter. The Love Feast is observed nineteen times at seven places and both Bury and Skilgate have it each quarter. Class meetings are referred to on Plan 4, 'The Brethren [i. e. the appointed preachers] are requested to lead the class at Uppincott [in Cadbury parish] and Skilgate after preaching.' The class tickets have a variety of borders and in appearance follow the traditional Methodist pattern.

The 1835 Bible Christian *Minutes*¹¹, in referring to the negotiations for a reunion with the seceders, mention that the seceders formed a connexion, with a conference, ministers, including three who were married, societies, leaders and a small number of members. They also had heavy Missionary and General Account debts but there is no indication of who had assumed the responsibility for these debts and on what security.

¹¹ *BC Minutes* 1835, pp.II-13

The Ministry

Some of the seceders' unmarried travelling preachers were received back into the Bible Christian ministry at the reunion and some obituaries refer to their days as seceders. John Hicks became a local preacher soon after 1828 and 'in the year 1832 gave himself wholly to the work of the ministry... For three years he laboured in connection with Mr O'Bryan ...'¹² In 1835 he was received by the Bible Christians and appointed to St. Austell, where he presided over a revival which added over 400 members. James Roberts became a local preacher by 1828. 'The rupture in the young denomination in 1829 greatly bewildered and pained him. He cast in his lot with Mr O'Bryan ...'¹³ Nicholas Rodd joined the Bible Christian ministry but left in 1844 and has no obituary. Richard Rodd's obituary says 'He was taken out to travel by Mr O'Bryan in 1829...'¹⁴ At the reconciliation of 1835 he was appointed to the Kingsbrompton Circuit. William Rodd was a BC minister who had left in 1821 to become a farmer. His obituary says 'At the lamented separation, which took place ten years ago, he united himself with Mr O'Bryan, and laboured with him for some time as an Itinerant Preacher, ... after some preliminary proceedings by the friends in the Shebbear Circuit, he was received into our itinerant work, under a special agreement as to salary and allowances, at the Conference 1835.'¹⁵ He appears in the list in the 1835 *Minutes* of those received into full, connexion but without the asterisk indicating that he had been an Arminian. Possibly he had left O'Bryan earlier and was working in a full time capacity in the Shebbear circuit.

Class Tickets

Nine printed class tickets are stuck on the reverse of Plan 3. The letter 'E' is used for September 1830, so 'A' would have been September 1829, only two months after the disruption. Most texts are optimistic, 'If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Numbers 14 v. 8.' (September 1832). One is enigmatic, 'What be these two Olive Branches which through the two Golden Pipes empty the Golden Oil out of themselves? Zechariah iv. 12.' (December 1834).

These class tickets extend beyond the period covered by the plans and so give a little more information about the travelling preachers who signed them. William Parkyn is already in the circuit by January 1831 and N. Parkyn is there in June 1831. Plan 4 starts in July 1832 and does not include Richard Rodd but he initials a ticket in the September. N. Parkyn is still there in December 1834.

¹² *BC Minutes* 1891, p. 10

¹³ *BC Minutes* 1887, p. 9

¹⁴ *BC Minutes* 1876, p. 9

¹⁵ *BC Minutes* 1839, p. 6

Preaching Places

The six plans mentioned above list thirty-three places in West and South Somerset and East and Mid Devon in an area 36 miles east to west and 23 miles north to south. Apart from Bampton, Chard and Tiverton the places were the size of villages or smaller. Eleven places appear only once, eight twice, two three times, two four times, three five times and seven six times. This coming and going in a deeply rural area was typical of the early days of the parent body. Of the ten places that appeared at least five times, four were clustered around Dunkeswell in Devon and three around Brompton Regis in Somerset, places some twenty miles apart.

The secession was short lived and possibly was confined to the South West, especially Cornwall. Probably the seceders built few if any new chapels for themselves, mostly using rented rooms or the cottages of sympathisers. In areas where they had substantial support they may have been able to control and use existing chapels. Shaw quotes an example of this happening at Burlawn near Wadebridge where personal loyalty to O'Bryan caused the congregation and chapel to go over to the seceders from 1830 to 1836, then returning to the main denomination.¹⁶

To obtain the protection of the law places of worship could be registered and some licences obtained by the seceders from the Bishop's Court licences survive in the Devon Record Office, Exeter.

Statistics

The only known membership statistics for the seceders are given in the 1835 *Minutes*¹⁷ in connection with the negotiations for their reception back into the Bible Christian fold. There were reckoned to be seven hundred of them and they had a General Account debt of £135. 11s. 2d. The larger body would take over the whole debt if all the members joined and a proportionate amount if only some did. A year later the *Minutes*¹⁸ reported that 545 members had returned. For whatever reasons the Bible Christians were already enjoying a remarkable numerical resurgence, far beyond that attributable to the 545. In 1830 the connexional home membership given in the *Minutes* had fallen to 6300 from 7600. In 1835 this had gone back to 7800 and the next year it was a remarkable 10500. Most of this increase was attributable to Cornwall, where the original loss had been heaviest. In 1830 membership in Cornwall had fallen to 3250 from 4360; it rose to 3700 in 1835 and shot up to 5510 in 1836.

¹⁶ Shaw, T., *Methodism in the Camelford and Wadebridge Circuit 1743 - 1963*. Privately (1963) p. 197

¹⁷ *BC Minutes* 1835, p. 13

¹⁸ *BC Minutes* 1836, p. 9

In the End, Failure

The absence of O'Bryan in America, an absence of money, an absence of people and an absence of prospects lay behind this report in the 1835 *Minutes*, in effect the obituary of the secessionist denomination: 'A Deputation from the Arminian Bible Christian Conference, attended the Conference, for the purpose of effecting a union with us; and after a protracted discussion for nearly three days, the Conference adopted the following Resolutions respecting the union of their Connexion with our own.'¹⁹

William Reed had a hand in this reconciliation, 'At the Conference, 1835, he rendered most valuable service in the very prominent part he took in reuniting those friends who had sided with Mr. O'Bryan in the separation of 1829.'²⁰

The resolutions in the 1835 *Minutes* were about financial claims from O'Bryan, the seceders' debts and receiving back the single but not the married preachers. The conditions wrapped around the Bible Christians' olive branch made it a bitter pill, to mix metaphors, and after protracted discussions the deputation of seceders could only reach agreement amongst themselves when several of their number had gone home to attend to their businesses. Realistically they had to accept what was offered but George W. Cockram the owner of the plans and class ticket had taken himself off already. In December 1834 he joined the Wesleys, his first class ticket from them overlapping his last Arminian Bible Christian one. His moves to the Free Methodists and eventually back to the Wesleys, lay in the future.

Cockram's last surviving plan is dated 1833 when the future was already clear. Even at this late stage the plan contains a poem couched in optimistic terms, the last verse being,

'Our Zerubbabel is strong
He shall be our theme our song,
We the top stone laid shall see,
And shout grace and victory.'

Retrospect

The plans, class tickets and licences described above are the only known records generated by the seceding Arminian Bible Christians and apart from these and what is mentioned above we know very little indeed about their administration, organisation and officers. We do not know when and where they held their annual conference or how their tiny connexion was organised. A rare insight is given in the 1835 *Minutes* referring to the proposed conditions for reconciliation, '... in those places where each Denomination has a Society, when the two Societies are

¹⁹ *BC Minutes* 1835, p. 11

²⁰ *Memoir*, 1869, p. 110

uniting, each Society to remain under their respective Leaders if they choose to do so; ...²¹ It is clear that the seceders' influence and numbers must have been greatest in Cornwall where the 'older stations' were. This was in contrast to their halting progress in the poor, sparsely populated hill country on the borders of Devon and Somerset, where the establishment of a new denomination was difficult indeed.

This article is a modest attempt to explore the little-known history of the Arminian Bible Christians. It is unlikely that there is a major cache of denominational documents waiting to be discovered so a fuller picture of the short-lived secessionist denomination will need to be patiently pieced together, mostly from local records. Possible lines of enquiry include 1) Re-examination of known records that are thought to be Bible Christian. 2) Assessment of the strength and locations of secession by a detailed analysis of quarterly membership returns in Bible Christian circuit books, especially in Cornwall. 3) Examination of non-Methodist records such as newspaper reports and meeting house licences. In all this serendipity will play a major part!

ROGER F. S. THORNE

(Roger Thorne is a retired civil engineer and a lay worker in the Exeter circuit)

²¹ *BC Minutes* 1835, p. 11

APPENDICES

Circuit Preaching Plans

The six preaching plans mentioned above are single sided with the appointed preachers indicated by numbers, related to the list of preachers' names. The number of places in each plan is given below in brackets [] and each plan includes chapels from both Devon and Somerset. Plan 1 has this title, with the punctuation slightly improved on Plan 2, 'The Arminian Bible, Christian's Lords Day Plan for the Preachers on the Tiverton and Kingsbrompton Circuits [*sic*].' Plans 3 to 5 are titled, 'Tiverton and Kingsbrompton Circuits'. Plan 6 is titled, 'Tiverton and Chard Missions'. Despite the change in title a significant number of places are common to each plan. .

Plan 1) 1831 (August to October) [14 places]

Plan 2) 1831- 1832 (November to February) [17 places]

Plan 3) 1832 (March to June) [18 places]. Poem by J. Parkyn.

Plan 4) 1832 (July to October) [17 places]

Plan 5) 1832- 1833 (November to February) [15 places]. Poem by N. R.

Plan 6) 1833 (March to June) [17 places]. Poem without attribution.

Class Tickets

As the recipient of the tickets Cockram's name is written on each followed by the name or initials of the minister.

Ticket 1) Admitted on trial Jan. 14th 1831 George Cockeram.

By me Wm. Parkyn

Ticket 2) E. Sept. 1830. [Date crossed out and March 1831 written in] . George Cockeram. W.R.Parkyn

Ticket 3) H. June 1831. Geo. Cockram. N.P. [N. Parkyn]

Ticket 4) J. Sept. 1831. Geo. Cockram. N.P.

Ticket 5) K. Dec. 1831. George Cockram. J. P. [John Parkyn]

Ticket 6) L. March 1832. George Cockram. W.R.P. [William R. Parkyn]

Ticket 7) M. June 1832. G. W. Cockram. W.R.P.

Ticket 8) N. Sept. 1832. George W. Cockram. R. R. [Richard Rodd]

Ticket 9) W. Dec. 1834. Geo. Cockram. [?]N.P. [N. Parkyn]

Meeting House Licences

The writer has identified a number of Devon licences issued by the Bishop of Exeter, which appear to relate to the seceders. These are held in the Devon Record Office. Further examination of the Devon licences/as well as those from Cornwall and Somerset may well identify further congregations of the seceders. Here are some examples from Devon:

January 1830. A house at Morchard Bishop licensed by Robert Elliott, Minister with the Bible Christians. [Elliott did not appear as a travelling preacher in the BC *Minutes*]

July 1830. A chapel at Thorverton licensed by Rev. Charles Elliott, Thorverton. (Elliott was listed as minister in 1829 BC *Minutes* but disappeared next year.)

September 1830. A house at Cheriton Fitzpaine licensed by Rev. William Parkyn, Arminian Bible Christian. ['Cheriton' appears in several of Cockram's plans]

September 1830. A house at Crediton licensed by William Parkyn, minister of the Arminian Meeting at Thorverton.

March 1834. A house at Monk Okehampton licensed by Rev. William Rodd of Whitstone.

March 1834. At Punchards, Shebbear, a house licensed by John Parkyn, Minister.

March 1834. A house at Shebbear licensed by Rev. Richard Rodd.

Preachers On The Plan

On Plans 1 and 2 no names in the list of preachers are distinguished by capitals but it is certain that the names at the top of the list, as given below, are travelling preachers. On Plans 3 to 6 one or more of the names at the top of the list are in

capitals, as given below, indicating they were travelling preachers. J. Hicks and J. Roberts also appear as shown below.

Plan 1) W. R. Parkyn, N. Parkyn

Plan 4) W. R. PARKYN, J. Roberts

Plan 2) J. Parkyn, W. R. Parkyn, N. Rodd

Plan 5) R. RODD, N. RODD, J. Hicks

Plan 3) W. R. PARKYN, J. Hicks

Plan 6) R. RODD, N. RODD, J. HICKS

The remainder of the names in the lists of preachers were Local Preachers. On some plans a few names at the end of the list are Local Preachers, either 'On Trial' or 'Probationers'.

Travelling Preachers

The following is a partial list of the seceders' travelling preachers, derived from the evidence of the plans, class tickets, obituaries, meeting house licences and *Minutes* discussed above. The names underlined were on trial. Asterisks indicate the preachers who were received by the Bible Christian conference and listed in their 1835 *Minutes*.

Charles Elliott, Robert Elliott, *Mary Elson**, John Hicks*, *John Ishmael Augustus James**. Richard Mollon, John Parkyn [? same as next], John Parkyn junior, N. Parkyn, William Parkyn [? same as next], William R. Parkyn, *William Patterson*. Absalom Pickings*, James Roberts*, Nicholas Rodd*, Richard Rodd, William Rodd*.

NOTES & QUERIES

1560 'THE BARDS OF EPWORTH'

The Library of the New Room in Bristol has just received a copy of *The Bards of Epworth* or poetic gems by the Wesley family, being a companion volume to the poetic works of the Revs John and Charles Wesley.' 263pp. London: Printed for the Booksellers and W. Bunny, Nottingham, 1876.

There is no indication of the name of the compiler. It contains selections from both Samuel Wesleys, Charles, John (one poem: 'God's Greatness') and Mehetabel Wesley. William Bunny (or Bunney) is listed in Nottingham directories from 1844 - 1879 as a bookseller and printer. From 1844 - 1866 he is in Bridlesmithgate and later at 20 Wheeler Gate. Did he have any local Methodist connections?

Information identifying the compiler or any comment on the volume from anyone possessing another copy would be welcome.

JEFFREY SPITTAL

1561 WESLEY ANCESTORS

I am currently researching the ancestors of the Wesleys and am in touch with some in various parts of the world. If any reader has further information, or has contact with any of the Wesleys, I would be keen to exchange notes.

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RELIGION IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

Dark Satanic Mills? Religion and Irreligion in Birmingham and the Black Country, by Geoff Robson (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002; pp.294; £19.99. ISBN 0-84227 -102-4)

On the map, the West Midlands conurbation resembles a large inkblot; from the air it appears as a rather characterless sprawl of houses, industrial buildings and waterways. But peer more closely and you will find fascinating variety, and communities which are, defiantly, the very reverse of monochrome. Where religion and 'irreligion' are concerned, few have peered more closely than Geoff Robson, whose viewing spectacles are of the historical-cum-sociological sort. He is very much at home with tables (of which there are thirty-nine) and statistics; his analyses of a mass of data are perceptive, and his criticisms of other investigators of the scene are acute; his occasional comparisons with findings in other regions are illuminating.

He would have got off on quite the wrong foot (and risked at least a verbal drubbing had he strayed west of Ocker Bonk [aka Hill]) if he had not made very clear the distinction in character, industrial activity and denominational spread as between Birmingham and the Black Country. If the former is the city of a thousand trades, with brass, jewellery and guns prominent, the latter is a constellation of smaller towns and villages, with Walsall (don't yo fergitit) having a much older charter than England's second city. There were nail makers here, saddlers there, locksmiths a mile away, and miners under the ground.

Robson's objective is to account as far as he can for the 'striking difference' in church attendance as between Birmingham and the Black Country, as revealed by the 1851 Census returns. First, however, he sets his discussion in its context. He discusses the economic and social setting of the region: its mineral resources, industrial development, and unusually rapid population growth during the first half of the nineteenth century. He rightly draws attention to the considerable amount of domestic outworking which took place, much of it done by women. The situation regarding parliamentary and local government is described, with Anglican clergy being prominent in the latter. The poor relief system is explained, as are the ecclesiastical arrangements of the Church of England. The Dissenters and Methodists are introduced. Of the latter, the Wesleyans, Primitive Methodists and New Connexion Methodists took root in the Black Country, whereas the Wesleyans alone came to have a significant numerical presence in Birmingham. The advance of the Roman Catholics is marked by new churches across the Black Country, and by the rebuilding of an older Birmingham church as St Chad's

Cathedral in 1841.

The heart of the book comprises Robson's discussion of the 1851 Census. This is an intricate matter which defies summary here. Two samples will illustrate the kind of information gleaned: church attendances were (untypically) highest in Sedgley and Tipton, where there was the highest proportion of unskilled labourers; and the Black Country had a larger proportion of under twenty year-olds in Sunday School than Birmingham.

The impact of the 1832 and 1849 cholera epidemics upon church attendance is next assessed. Some preachers employed the epidemics as a homiletic device to prompt individual repentance or to 'demonstrate' the Almighty's displeasure with Socinianism, or at moves towards Catholic emancipation. During the panics congregations increased; afterwards they declined, though there was still a net gain of attenders, most noticeable among the Primitive Methodists.

A chapter follows on the methods and messages of evangelism. We learn that John Gent Brooks, clearly a victim of attempted 'sheep stealing', was moved to write, 'You must not think that because I am a Unitarian my soul is bound up in ice...[The orthodox] have not been able to draw my people away from me, but I do feel pained at their want of Christian love' (p. 157). If mass evangelism was attempted only by the Black Country Methodists, Birmingham was notable for the number of its denominationally diverse home missionaries, whose achievements, subjected to close scrutiny, elicit Robson's driest remark: 'Death bed conversions...were regularly reported by missionaries with the advantage that their reality was not easily denied; (p. 176). More might have been made of methods by which the messages were proclaimed, not least in the rising press. One thinks of the first successful newspaper in Walsall, founded by Edward Myers, the Unitarian minister in the town. Those who were drawn into the churches faced varying degrees of stringency. The Congregationalists of Birmingham thought that the Methodists were too lenient in receiving members, their leading minister, John Angell James, though he was stricter than many, regretting that there were 'many, very many' whom he ought to have rejected.

A chapter on popular religion and the religion of the people follows, which has to do with credulity, ghosts, and superstitions, and in which the Methodist situation is to the fore. Robson here betrays his knowledge of 'Aynock and Ayli' jokes (as well he might - though he resists the temptation to tell us some); and so we come to a summary of his findings and a bibliography, between which are sandwiched all those statistical tables. There are indexes of persons and of places (which might have been fuller) but, sadly, not of subjects.

Within its carefully defined parameters this is a most valuable study. Robson's explanation that he could not analyse the church membership lists and baptismal registers for a region as large as this is quite

understandable. He also says that he could not trace the history of every denomination. But in this connection I think that he could have done a little more than he has. We should not expect an amalgam of local chapel and parish histories, but there are readily accessible writings which do not appear in Robson's bibliography which would have helped him to say a little more about the religious beliefs of those he discusses - and this without delving into sermons, biographies, diaries and the like. He does note the inter-Methodist fluidity of membership, and he mentions a few individuals who migrated between other denominations. But entire churches 'came out', sometimes - at least ostensibly - on doctrinal grounds. Thus, for example, while we are reminded that the Rev. Theodosius Theodosius of Ruiton Congregational church strove to take his members into the Church of England, and failed; the fact that the prominent Robert Street Baptist church came out of the same congregation is passed over. And what of the puzzle concerning the passage of the Independent chapel in Cradley to the Church of England? We are left with the impression that Robson is more adept at counting the religious and describing their social status and conditions than at getting under their convictional skins; yet some of the Birmingham and Black Country saints did some of the things they did because of what they believed.

Robson writes, 'The Birmingham evidence indicates that there was little doctrinal difference between the moderate Calvinism of Anglican, Independent and Baptist and the Arminian theology of the Methodists...' (p. 185). A strong case could be made for saying that in the Black Country doctrinal antennae were more sensitive than this, not only in the first half of the nineteenth century but for generations afterwards. Indeed, in the memory of those still living an allegorical interpretation was given to the geographical fact that at the top of a certain Black Country hill were the hyper-Calvinists, half-way down were the high Calvinists, and at the bottom of the hill were the benighted Arminians. In the midst of such piety, some of it highly introspective, some of it uncomfortably judgmental, there was a certain comfort to be derived from the reminder in the nickname of the Cradley Heath Speedway Club that there were also Heathens around.

Geoff Robson has served us well with this stimulating, carefully argued, study. Thanks are also due to his publisher, who is more prepared than some to take the risk of publishing important specialist studies in British Christian thought and history.

Anyone for pork scratchings?

ALAN P. F. SELL

A lecture on 'Hugh Price Hughes' by Christopher Oldstone-Moore will be delivered at Hinde Street Methodist Church, West London on Tuesday, 30 March 2004 at 7.30pm

BOOK REVIEWS

Sufficient Saving Grace. John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism by Herbert Boyd McGonigle (Studies in Evangelical History and Thought, Paternoster Press, 2001, pp.xvi, 350, £24.99 ISBN 1-84227-045-1)

This interesting series is reaping the benefit of the efflorescence of scholarly study of the history of evangelicalism and readers of the *Proceedings* may be pleased to see that a rare study of the Tent Methodists will be included.

Dr McGonigle's subject is one which is essential for understanding the nature of the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival and conflicts within it, at least in Britain. Indeed the division between what are loosely called 'Calvinism' and 'Arminianism' was in reality only a version of one which has repeatedly divided the western Christian world since the early centuries. The 'Arminian' nature of Wesley's theology was one of the major differences between his brand of Methodism and the 'Calvinist' beliefs, however moderate, of most of the other evangelical groups of his time. This was at least as important as Wesley's ecclesiastical irregularities in dividing him from Evangelical Anglicans. Curiously, this ancient dispute seems no longer to be of much interest today, even in traditionally 'Calvinist' branches of Christianity, apart from historians and some minority conservative groups. Yet it raises fundamental issues for Christian belief, for behind the Calvinist belief that God has elected only some indefeasibly to salvation and the Arminian belief that salvation is open to all, even if all do not choose to accept it, there lie deeper questions about the nature of God, of humanity, of freewill and of the role of divine grace and human effort in the process of salvation.

Dr McGonigle gives what is probably the most comprehensive and clearest account so far of the history and characteristics of this dispute between Wesley and the Calvinists. There is a careful explanation of how Arminius (1559-1609), steeped in the scholastic theology of Calvinism, differed from his opponents by crucially allowing that God gave power to all to receive or reject salvation, rather than confining it to those previously elected, the rest being left to a deserved damnation for their sin inherited from Adam. English 'Arminianism', however, is confirmed as originating in the 1590s from Cambridge critics of Calvinism, independently of the Dutch. By the end of the seventeenth century it had become the prevailing creed of Anglicans. Wesley seems instinctively to have been against predestination, inheriting his views from his parents, strengthened by his study of anti-Calvinist high church advocates of 'holy living'. From 1725 he developed a passion for the pursuit of perfection. Even his famous conversion in 1738 seems to have convinced him above all that he had found a more effective way through salvation by grace through faith to achieve this elusive goal. Important though justification was for his teaching, it did not drive him to

predestinarian views; and here he was strikingly unlike many of his evangelical contemporaries like Whitefield, whose early piety was very similar to Wesley's. It seems as though Wesley's early rejection of Calvinism settled that issue for life though for a time he compromised by allowing that some might be predestined to salvation though everyone else still had the option left open to them .

Dr McGonigle then traces Wesley's increasing hostility to Calvinism, especially in three major controversies: with Whitefield in 1739-41; over James Hervey's notion of 'imputed' rather an 'imparted' righteousness; and over the 1770 *Minutes* of Wesley's Conference which seemed to Calvinists to come close to undermining justification by faith in favour of salvation at least partly by 'works'. Added to Wesley's offence in Calvinist eyes was his ardent pursuit of perfection which seemed to them to underrate the persistence of sin in believers as well as allowing too much to human effort. For Wesley, however, predestination seemed not only to deny God's justice and love but also to encourage antinomianism - theoretical if not practical neglect of moral law. In the course of his exposition Dr McGonigle adds two interesting 'discoveries'. Wesley's definition of sin as 'a voluntary transgression of a known law of God' appears to derive from a reading of Richard Lucas's *An Enquiry after Happiness* as early as 1730. Doubts have been expressed over whether Wesley knew Arminius's works at first hand but it appears that he had read substantial extracts in Latin in 1731, embodied in Thomas Bennet's *Directions for Study of the Thirty-Nine Articles*.

Dr McGonigle expounds the views of Wesley and his opponents with clarity. He states the Calvinist case fairly, allows that the exegesis of crucial (and controversial) biblical passages are not always clearly in Wesley's favour, and that the 1770 *Minutes* were at least carelessly worded in a way that was understandably suspicious to Calvinists. Still, on the whole Wesley's case seems on this presentation to come down in his favour.

Certainly in terms of his sermons and formal presentations of doctrine Wesley, like Arminius, can be shown to have avoided the extremes of Calvinism and Pelagian salvation dependent largely on human effort, notably by invoking the idea of 'preventive grace' through which God enables fallen humanity to make a free choice of salvation which would be impossible without divine aid. Dr McGonigle certainly gives an excellent defence of Wesley in these terms but some doubts may remain. Wesley went well beyond Arminius and the evangelicals of his own day as well as his Catholic and Anglican mentors in his claims about 'perfection'. Furthermore, some of his public and private reflections on justification show that in his pursuit of perfection he reduced the centrality of justification common to the early Reformation and later evangelicalism to a 'door' (as he put it as early as 1746) into the path to holiness, seen as 'religion itself'. He showed irritation with scholastic language and arguments about the finer points of 'merit' and

justification. He even thought those unclear about the latter, indeed those denying the doctrine might be saved. What matters is the attainment of love of God and humanity 'by whatever means'. His and Fletcher's talk of a 'second justification' by works as the basis of acceptance on the day of judgement was bound to arouse suspicion from evangelicals, let alone Calvinists. Though he insisted that grace and faith underpinned the whole process of salvation from repentance to perfection, his impatience with traditional language and concepts, which reflected an eclectic eighteenth-century mind, did not fit easily into more conventional evangelicalism. Wesley's perfectionist legacy continued to trouble Methodism later and parts of it fed into the rather different world of holiness revivalism and Pentecostalism.

HENRY D. RACK

Wesley and Men Who Followed by Iain H. Murray, (Banner of Truth Trust, 2003 pp. xv, 272, £14.95 ISBN 085151 8354).

The Banner of Truth Trust is best known for making available to the modern reader the major and minor classics of Reformed theology: Calvin's biblical commentaries, doctrinal and devotional works by the Puritans, Spurgeon's sermons, J.C. Ryle's tracts and the expository discourses of Martyn Lloyd Jones. Iain Murray, author of the standard biography of Lloyd Jones, has also produced studies of Spurgeon and Jonathan Edwards, and he has written critical assessments from a Reformed perspective of hyper-Calvinism, North American revivalism and the 'New Evangelicalism' which developed in the second half of the twentieth century. As Mr Murray and the Banner of Truth turn their attention to John Wesley and to the Wesleys' Methodism, Methodists might perhaps expect a reprise of the Calvinist controversy of the 1740s and 1770s. This clearly written, well-produced and remarkably inexpensive book, however, has much more to offer than revamped Reformed polemic, and there is much of interest here to the Methodist and to the historian of Methodism.

Iain Murray divides his work into four parts. The first and third parts, taking up about three fifths of the book, offer a broadly sympathetic though not uncritical survey of John Wesley's life, work and thought. Murray's principal sources are Wesley's *Works* and older biographies (particularly Tyerman), although there are references to Henry Rack's magisterial study and to Charles Wallace's *Susanna Wesley*. Wesley emerges from this part of the book as a dynamic spiritual leader, motivated as preacher and evangelist by love of God. The familiar flaws of character are recognised (for instance, his susceptibility to 'charming female company' - page 7) but the overall picture is very positive, as is the assessment of the broader impact of the Evangelical Revival. For Murray, Wesley's main weakness was the lack of a proper theological system: his divinity was too 'practical', 'a loose synthesis, an

amalgam, rather than a coherent system' (page 76). This deficiency coupled with an undue reliance on experience (particularly the unverified spiritual experiences of others in the infant Methodist movement) and the residual legacy of High Church piety and the teaching of the mystics, led him into theological inconsistencies and contradictions. Chief among these were his almost wilful misunderstanding of Calvinism, his confusion of the fact of justification with the experience of assurance and his unscriptural teaching on Christian perfection. These theological criticisms are picked up and developed further in the third part of the book, entitled 'Against Unquestioning Following'. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Mr Murray regrets that Wesley was not an orthodox Calvinist. The reader misses any engagement here with more sympathetic expositors of the Wesleyan theological tradition, such as Randy Maddox in *Responsible Grace* and Herbert McGonigle in his recent study of Wesley's evangelical Arminianism, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, works which argue that Wesley was both coherent and consistent.

If parts one and three of *Wesley and Men Who Followed* tread fairly familiar ground, parts two and four present quite different material. Part two consists of biographies of three eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Methodists: William Bramwell (1759-1818), Gideon Ouseley (1762-1839) and Thomas Collins (1810-64). Each was a powerful evangelist, and their stories are told here almost entirely on the basis of nineteenth-century hagiographies (by Thomas Harris, James Sigston, William Arthur and Samuel Coley). As edifying lives, these chapters are moving and inspiring, but the historian will regret the absence of more recent contextual studies, notably David Hempton's sensitive discussion of Ouseley in *The Religion of the People*.

Part four of Mr Murray's book, 'Methodism, with and without the Holy Spirit', comprises a single chapter, 'The Holy Spirit and Scripture' and asserts a simple case: Methodism flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries not because of the gifts of its leaders, nor because of its strength of organisation, but because it adhered to and proclaimed a Bible-based faith and enforced Christian discipline. The twentieth century saw a turn away from biblical authority, and a corresponding loss of spiritual power. This claim is garnished with an unsourced remark by Donald Soper, a couple of quotations from Leslie Weatherhead and, predictably, a critical reference to A.S. Peake and his famous (or notorious) *Commentary*. (One almost hears Graham Scroggie's dismissal of the *Commentary* as 'sodden with infidelity').

Interesting as this case is, particularly to the student of contemporary evangelicalism, it rests on two methodological flaws and two assumptions which are historically false. Taking the history first, it is simply untrue that twentieth-century Methodists rejected the authority of the Bible. Some remained as conservative in their theology as Mr Murray. More important, those like Peake who welcomed modern biblical scholarship did so precisely because they believed that it strengthened the authority of the Bible, not that it undermined it. Loyalty to Scripture is not the exclusive preserve of

adherents of a particular doctrine of inspiration, as if they are the only Christians who take the Bible seriously, or the only ones who can justifiably call themselves evangelicals. Moreover, arguably the inerrantist/infallibilist positions which have so vexed and divided twentieth-century conservative evangelicals were not part of historic evangelicalism but, rather, late nineteenth-century responses to new intellectual and cultural challenges. Awareness of the cultural sensitivities and adaptability of evangelicalism, and its corresponding complexity, makes the major methodological point: it is a bold historian who invokes a single cause to explain a religious and social phenomenon spanning the best part of a century. The question of the rise and fall of faiths and denominations, and the place and relative weight of 'spiritual' and 'secular' causes in this process, is a large one. This reviewer would not wish to disregard the work of social and cultural historians and rely solely on an interpretation of history driven by apparently 'spiritual' causes, nor would he regard such a reading of history as theologically sound. The minor point of methodology concerns quotation without attribution or out of context to make a case: the developed views of Soper and Weatherhead on the Bible cannot be extracted from single phrases, and although such quotations may play well to audiences eager for evidence of apostasy, historical credibility requires a more rigorous approach.

All in all, then, an interesting piece of work: nothing new for the Wesley specialist; a welcome reminder of some nineteenth-century heroes; and a telling sidelight on twentieth-century debates about evangelical identity .

MARTIN WELLINGS

The Quickening Land by Hayden Gabriel (Pan Books 2002 pp.426 £6.99 Paperback. ISBN 0 330 48966 6)

Pulp Methodism. The Lives & Literature of Silas, Joseph & Salome Hocking, Three Cornish Novelists by A. M. Kent (Cornish Hillside Publications 2002 pp.240 £14.99 Paperback. ISBN 1900 147 246)

W. H. Y. Titcomb. A Newlynier from St Ives. by David Tovey (Wilson Books, Tewkesbury, 2003, pp.147, £18.50 Paperback. ISBN 0 9538363 1 2)

Cornwall is special, for it shares with Devon a narrowing peninsula, dramatic scenery, beaches, cliffs and moors and a remoteness from civilisation. Within those of us, whose ancestry and birth lie within this peninsula, there is a compelling consciousness of place, a consciousness sometimes shared by those from beyond the Celtic fringe. In the Victorian period Cornwall, with an independent and idiosyncratic population, had a great variety of Methodism, which despite its fractured character was collectively almost the established religion.

A fascination with Cornwall and its Methodism is evident in three recent books. The 'quickenning land' of Hayden Gabriel's first novel is the far west of Cornwall and she makes it the setting for the cleverly interwoven love stories of two women who lived a century apart. Unconventional Clairra was the first and she married a Wesleyan farmer from near Newlyn in the 1880s. Despite the prompting of the reviewer, Gabriel's references to Methodism are very sparing, perhaps inevitably in a paperback novel intended for a wide readership.

Dr. Kent's very welcome book is about a family of popular novelists, who were anything but sparing in their Methodist references, yet writing for an earlier age their books sold by the hundreds of thousands. The two Hocking brothers and their sister were born into a Free Methodist family, in mid Cornwall - Silas (1850- 1935), Joseph (1860- 1937) and sister Salome (1859 - 1927). The two brothers became successful Methodist ministers for a time and their sister married a rich socialist, Arthur Fifield. The sales of the brothers' prodigious output were enormous although the content was less than inspired, hence Kent's title for his book and his inelegant comment [page 143] 'They wrote novels the way most people eat hot dinners'. Dr Kent's writing style drifts into the conversational and betrays a too - intense perspective by expressions like 'Anglo-Cornish', 'Celticity' and even 'Cornu-English.' However his book brings together probably most of what we may ever know about the Hockings and his text is heavily footnoted, with references particularly to newspapers and articles. He includes excellent photographs but gives no locations. At the end is a simple handlist of works and a bibliography. Joseph and Silas are credited with over a century each but Salome with less than a dozen. Joseph's daughter Anne (1890- 1966) was also a successful novelist with some 50 books but Kent lists only a very few, to which the reviewer might add *Candidates for Murder* - his copy being inscribed to him by Anne's daughter.

After a chapter about the family background, Kent gives Joseph and Silas a biographical chapter each which are crucial to the book although Kent admits that surviving sources are patchy. We know that Joseph was minister at Woodford Union Church, 1900 to 1909, and a new building was filled by his preaching but Kent says that his earlier ministry of nine years in London is undocumented, although it was then that he started writing in earnest. Silas, Kent says, was the first novelist in the world to sell a million copies of one title - it was of course *Her Benny*. Like Joseph, he became a Free Methodist minister and he grew a long beard to look older. His grandest and last church appointment was at comfortable Southport for thirteen years. Like Joseph he resigned from the Free Methodist ministry to concentrate on writing and like Joseph he had managed to write prolifically during his ministry.

Dr Kent's book is too discursive, quotes available sources too lengthily and takes Cornwall's insularity too seriously. That aside, *Pulp Methodism* is a major work about major Methodist figures and is the best biographical account we are ever likely to have about the Hockings. We should be grateful

to the author and publisher.

Turning from prolific pen to prolific brush, David Tovey has written an excellent illustrated account of his great grandfather, William Holt Yates Titcomb (1858-1930). This book, covering Titcomb's life and work up to 1908, was published to accompany the exhibition of his work at Penzance in 2003. A companion volume covers the later period. From the late 1880s to 1905 Titcomb was based in St Ives and was regarded as a leading member of the Newlyn School of artists, with their concentration on atmosphere and light. In this period Titcomb painted local scenes and people, including fishermen's religious observances - both Methodist and Anglican. His three well known works with Methodist subjects are 'Piloting her home,' 'A mariner's Sunday school' and best known of all, 'Primitive Methodists at prayer.'

ROGER THORNE

John Scott Lidgett Archbishop of British Methodism? by Alan Turberfield (Epworth Press Peterborough pb 2003 pp xx, 490, £25 ISBN 07162 05718)

John Scott Lidgett (1854-1953) was a most unusual Methodist minister, a real man of contrasts. A wide-ranging politician who made an important contribution to local government and a pioneer in education, he was the ecumenical leader of his church, guiding it into the 1932 Union, being rewarded by being elected the first President of the Methodist Conference. A theologian of note, concentrating on the Fatherhood of God, he did not serve in a theological college like so many others but instead was a pioneer of social action, being the founder and for 50 years minister of the Bermondsey Settlement in the slums of South London. He took over from his uncle Percy Bunting as editor of the *Methodist Times* (founded by Hugh Price Hughes as the chief organ of the Forward Movement) in 1907 and continued to 1918. Vice-Chancellor of London University and Companion of Honour, he outlived all his contemporaries. He was the leader of the younger ministers for long after he had ceased to be young himself. Stories about him are legion (and sometimes legendary). Yet he was unable to make friends easily and he found it difficult to talk to his daughter. His sermons and addresses were logical and lengthy but not easy to listen to because of their long sentence structure. He remained active, for example as Chairman of his District, too long (39 years). His energy, even in old age, was remarkable. He had no interest in his own material welfare, refusing to leave Bermondsey in the Blitz. He deserves this well-written book.

Turberfield has done a difficult job ably. He understands the complex family ramifications, brought up as Lidgett was among the elite of Wesleyanism after Bunting, being named after his maternal grandfather, John Scott, first Principal of Westminster College. He prints the will, the death certificate, 17 pages of bibliography and 43 pages of notes. Previous works

were either autobiographies, or the collected tributes edited by Rupert Davies soon after Lidgett's death. This is much better than either, providing a judicious summary of his life, writings and other labours and provides material for others to quarry, such as a couple of pages of lists of Settlement activities at Bermondsey and much genealogical material. He has had much help from members of the family and has collected a surprising number of reminiscences, considering Lidgett's death was 50 years ago.

Turberfield is good on Lidgett's response to the challenges of the period having a sure touch on the complex ecumenical negotiations. Lidgett had few close friends, but one was Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury. As official leader of the Free Churches he was for long Davidson's equivalent and was treated by him as such. Turberfield also points out his successes, such as his involvement in so many fields other Methodists did not dare touch. Lidgett's failure to securely settle the Bermondsey Settlement is made clear. He was never able to raise enough money to secure its long term future. This reviewer would have liked more on his early circuits as a minister, which I feel had a larger influence on him than Turberfield allows. Also his relationship with his wife lacks detail. However in a book of this size something has to give. Turberfield's mastery of the widely different fields, theological, political, educational, Methodist, ecumenical, and social, in which Lidgett acted, deserves the highest praise. If you wish to understand the catholicity of the concerns of Methodism in the century before 1950 buy and read this book. You will find it a valuable tool for reference.

JOHN H. LENTON

Primitive Methodism by Geoffrey Milburn (Epworth Press, Peterborough 2002, pp. xi, 112). £10.95. ISBN 0 7162 0554 8).

This is the fifth volume in Epworth's 'Exploring Methodism' series and tells the story of Primitive Methodism from its origins in north Staffordshire at the beginning of the nineteenth century through to the Uniting Conference of 1932. Written in an extremely readable style and with unashamed affection, the structure of the story is taken largely from Kendall, with the history of the Prims presented as basically falling into two phases, an age of heroic expansion and an age of institutional development.

This is a good book that deserves to find a place on church bookstalls and on the reading lists of church membership classes but it is also a disconcerting reminder of how much work is yet to be done on the history of Primitive Methodism. The format of the 'Exploring Methodism' series mirrors that of many contemporary A-level textbooks: a double columned narrative, boxed quotes from primary sources, and questions for discussion at the end of each chapter (though curiously no pictures). Similar looking books on the Chartists, or Victorian welfare reform, or the rise of the Nazi Party would be

expected to focus on issues and interpretation, but what are the key issues in Primitive Methodist history that this book could have highlighted and what are the hot debates? The sad truth is that the study of Primitive Methodism, and indeed so many other aspects of Methodist history, seems not yet to have matured to that point. We are still storytelling.

Primitive Methodism was not the only new sect to emerge in the early nineteenth century, why was it so much more successful than the Brethren, the Irvingites, the Mormons or, for that matter, the Methodist New Connexion? We are used to saying that it attracted the working classes but why then was it not strong in the large towns and cities where a self-conscious working class was emerging? Is it significant that Primitive Methodism never thrived outside the context of English society? In the late nineteenth century Primitive Methodist chapels were still being built at great effort and expense in communities that already had a Wesleyan one, but within a few years the Prims were meekly accepting union. Did they lose confidence, and if so why? Were the two connexions ever really that different, and if they were, when did they cease to be so? There is a lot of work to be done, so it is disappointing that some of the work that has been - most notably, James Obelkevich's *Religion and Rural Society* - seems to have gone largely unnoticed.

JONATHAN RODELL

Methodism in Wales. A Short History of the Wesley Tradition. Edited by Lionel Madden. (Conference arrangement committee 2003 Llandudno. 2003. pp 137. Available from 10 Woosnam Close, Penylan, Cardiff CF23 9DN, £7.00 ISBN 0 86381 8463

As a product of the Welsh 'diaspora' in the Midlands, I read this book with expectation, for since A.H. Williams, Derec Llwyd Morgan and the short chapter in Volume 3 of *The History of Methodism in Great Britain* little has been written on Methodism in Wales, despite the recent renaissance of studies of Welsh history.

The division of the Methodism of 'the Arminianism of the heart' into English speaking and Welsh speaking segments is at the centre of this book of essays. Donald Knighton takes us from Wesley's preaching near Chepstow in 1739 and the first 'society' in Cardiff in 1740 to the modern developments of *Churches Together in Wales* (Cytun), the *Commission of Covenanted Churches* (Enfys) and the 1997 *Assembly* (Y Gymanfa). He stresses the strength of Methodism in parts of South Wales and the areas bordering England in towns like Wrexham, Welshpool and Newtown and the great growth of Methodism in the seaside places of North Wales like Llandudno and Colwyn Bay including Rydal School. Glyn Tegai Hughes takes us to the very different

Welsh speaking world including a fine chapter on spirituality and preaching. Men almost unknown in England like Tegla Davies are brought to life. The architecture of 'chapel' is set out with illustrations. It is fascinating to realize how dominant William Williams Pantycelyn is in Welsh hymnody. Dr Hughes is realistic about the future - 'in terms of numbers Welsh Wesleyanism is where it was in 1805' - a 'calamitous decline'. Another story is the contest with the Church in Wales over land law, education and Disestablishment. The contribution of Methodism to social reform, radical Liberalism and the Labour Party is outlined - David Gwynfryn Jones, David Thomas and Robert Richards need remembering along with George Thomas and his mentor Reginald Barker in Tonypandy.

Are there still gaps? The general reader needs a book like John Davies' *A History of Wales* (Penguin 1994) to sketch demographic changes due to industrial growth and depression. Did the Welsh Revival of 1904-5 affect Methodism? It is not mentioned. A map would have been helpful for those who would not know where Llanidloes or Abermule are. The Welsh 'diaspora' gave English Methodism Hugh Price Hughes, Maldwyn Hughes and Harold Roberts to name three mentioned here.

So Lionel Madden has edited a pioneering and readable book. We can only ask for more, for here is a culture easily forgotten.

JOHN MUNSEY TURNER.

An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Eastern England by Christopher Stell (English Heritage, Swindon, 2002, pp xix, 380, £65 ISBN 1 873592 50 7)

This is the fourth and final volume of a series begun in 1986 which has only progressed beyond the first because of the author's own tenacity and well directed 'political' pressure. This volume which includes Lincolnshire, East Anglia, Greater London, the Home Counties and the South-east, is, like the other volumes, delightfully illustrated but sadly also acts as a reminder of what has been lost. Perhaps more than any other, this volume demonstrates the wide contrast in chapel styles, from metropolitan 'cathedrals' such as Union and Westminster Chapels to the humble, almost insignificant buildings of the agricultural labourers of East Anglia. That finally the series has been successfully completed gives a source for the Nonconformist historian that will never again be possible. Surely Wales now needs to produce a similar series.

D. COLIN DEWS

NOTES & QUERIES

1562 BETHESDA METHODIST CHURCH HANLEY, STOKE-ON-TRENT.

There has long been a general acknowledgment of the value of 'Bethesda' both in Stoke and in the country at large, and this was reflected in the response from viewers to the BBC's 'Restoration' programme last summer. Bethesda came fourth in the viewers vote, and what is more the second, third and fourth places were very close indeed. There were fears that the programme would produce only one winner and 29 losers, but as far as Bethesda is concerned the publicity generated by the programme has made participation more than worthwhile. I think it also true to say that those of us fighting the uphill battle of caring for historic chapels can be encouraged that a chapel made it into the last five at all. The public support has been encouraging and the public meeting held in Stoke-on-Trent on 13 October was attended by over eighty people.

The present building dating from 1819, was erected by members of the Methodist New Connexion and replaced an earlier structure of 1798. The chequered brickwork with a curved end to the south west was enhanced by the handsome new frontage in the fashionable Italianate stuccoed manner, with a portico of eight Corinthian columns in 1859. The rich interior has been called 'at once simple and elegant, the mouldings bold and chaste, the impression made on the mind after review of the whole, is the perfect unison with those feelings which a place of public worship ought at all times to inspire. . . .'

The building has lain empty and disused since its closure on 29 December 1985, and its condition has steadily deteriorated. The Historic Chapels Trust acquired the building from the Bethesda Heritage Trust in October 2002, with the view of repairing and modernising the building and vestry block and putting it back into viable public use. Repairs are expected to cost in excess of two million pounds.

At the public meeting, chaired by Alan Beith, the architect's plans were displayed and a programme outlined for the restoration. An application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Project Development Grant has been made, this will enable the HCT to define future uses for the building and obtain detailed cost estimates for the project. Stoke City Council appear to be very supportive of the initiative, as are neighbours and many former members of the congregation.

The Historic Chapels Trust now cares for 16 churches and chapels throughout England, of which Bethesda is the largest, both in size and in financial commitment. If you feel you would like to know more about the work of the Historic Chapels Trust or join its subscribing Friends, please contact; Historic Chapels Trust, 29 Thurloe Street, London SW7 2LQ. Telephone 020-7584-6072

JENNIFER FREEMAN
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