

**PRIMITIVE METHODISM IN SHROPSHIRE, 1820-1900**

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# **Primitive Methodism in Shropshire, 1820-1900**

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This thesis extends our understanding of the history of the Primitive Methodist Connexion by examining the denomination in a part of the country – Shropshire - in which it enjoyed considerable success during the nineteenth century, but on which there has been very little research. It takes as its starting point the relative lack of historical research on the Methodist circuit, a crucial innovation in religious provision, which gave Wesleyan Methodism and its subsequent offshoots considerable flexibility to co-ordinate their work in a highly effective way.

To expand our understanding of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire, the structure and organisation of the Primitive Methodist circuit is outlined, and the nature of the experience provided for its followers is examined. The socio-economic profile of Primitive Methodist followers is explored and a close correlation between the social background of the preachers and their congregations is established. The factors underlying the denomination's success in the county are examined, and its progress in relation to other religious bodies is analysed. The effects of changing missionary tactics, internal dissension, sub-division and chapel building are investigated. Particular attention is paid to denominational administration, local governance, and changes in the spatial structures of circuits, as Primitive Methodism moved from early evangelistic enthusiasm towards consolidation as a major denomination.

Approximately 100,000 words.



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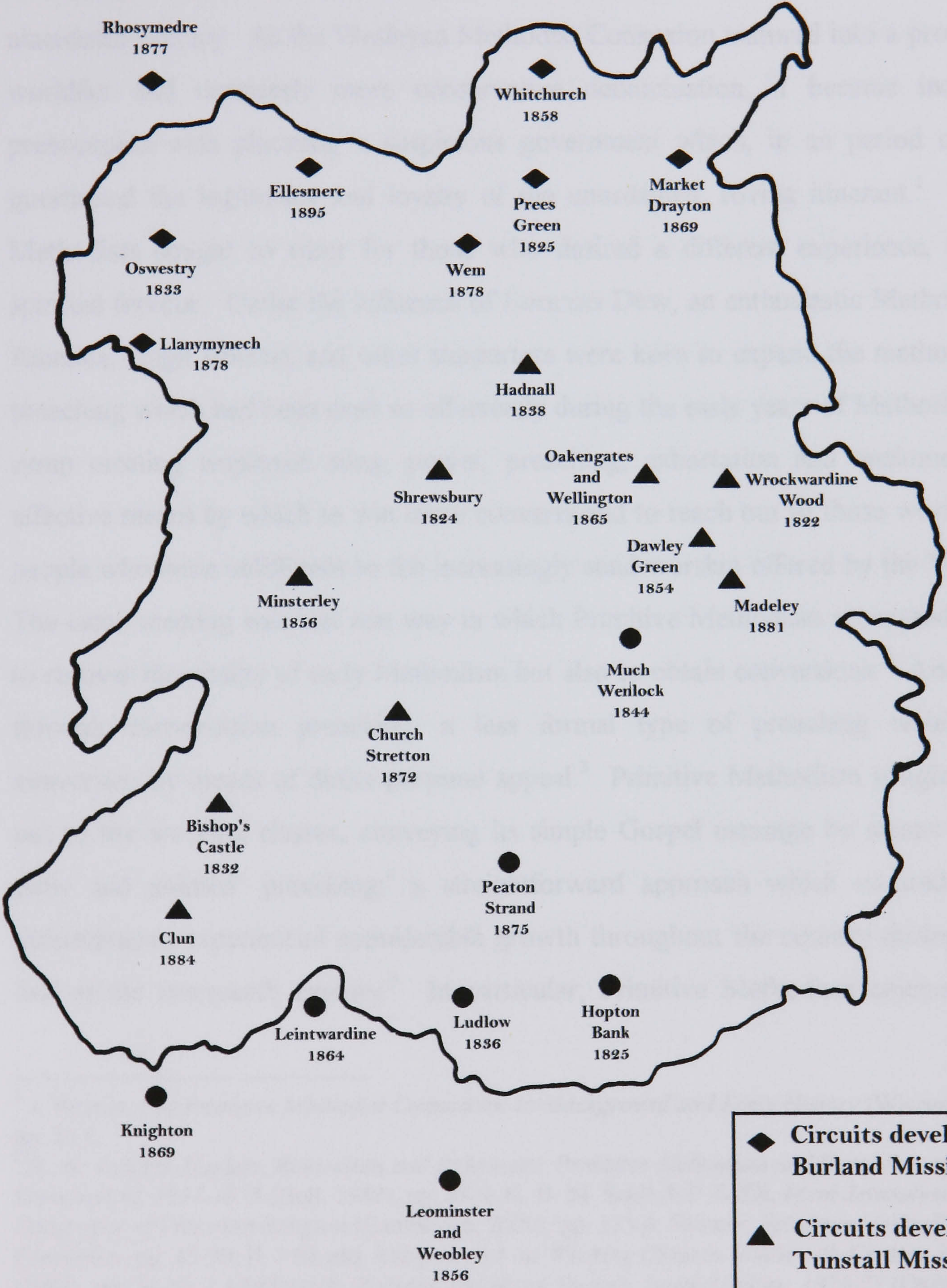
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# SHROPSHIRE PRIMITIVE METHODIST CIRCUITS



Scale: 0 2 4 6 8 10 Miles

- ◆ Circuits developing from Burland Mission of 1822
- ▲ Circuits developing from Tunstall Mission of 1821
- Circuits developing from Darlaston Mission of 1823



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Formed by the north Staffordshire men Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, the Primitive Methodist Connexion was the culmination of an expanding evangelistic movement which had been gathering strength and support during the first decade of the nineteenth century. As the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion matured into a professional, worldlier and ultimately more conservative denomination, it became increasingly preoccupied with placating a suspicious government which, in an period of unrest, questioned the legitimacy and loyalty of the unordained, roving itinerant.<sup>1</sup> Primitive Methodists sought to cater for those who desired a different experience, a greater spiritual fervour. Under the influence of Lorenzo Dow, an enthusiastic Methodist from America, Hugh Bourne, and other supporters were keen to expand the method of field preaching which had been used so effectively during the early years of Methodism. The camp meeting employed song, prayer, preaching, exhortation and testimony, as an effective means by which to win more converts and to reach out to those working-class people who were indifferent to the increasingly staid worship offered by the Wesleyans. The camp meeting was just one way in which Primitive Methodism attempted not only to recover the vitality of early Methodism but also to obtain conversions.<sup>2</sup> Another was through conversation preaching, a less formal type of preaching which sought conversion by means of direct personal appeal.<sup>3</sup> Primitive Methodism sought to reach out to the working classes, conveying its simple Gospel message by means of ‘plain, pithy and pointed’ preaching;<sup>4</sup> a straightforward approach which ensured that the denomination experienced considerable growth throughout the country during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> In particular, Primitive Methodism enjoyed success

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<sup>1</sup> J. Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: its Background and Early History* (Wisconsin, 1984), pp. 14-6

<sup>2</sup> R. W. Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire, 1817-1875* (Hull, 1989), pp. 28-9; K. D. M. Snell & P. S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 135-6; Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 45-50; H. McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1984), pp. 26-30; J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825-75* (Oxford, 1976), p. 227; W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850* (London, 1972), pp. 75-6.

<sup>3</sup> H. B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, vol. 1 (London, c. 1905), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 223-4.

<sup>5</sup> R. Colls, *The Collier's Rant. Song and Culture in the Industrial Village* (London, 1977), p. 77; Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 135.



among the agricultural labourers of rural districts, and was also eagerly embraced by colliers in certain mining communities.<sup>6</sup> Hempton has argued that in the nation's mining villages Primitive Methodism

‘helped create a sense of community and reassurance for people experiencing profound economic and social changes, and for whom scarcity and disaster were ever present threats. Choirs, classes, chapels and Sunday schools were not simply imposed from above, but were appropriated from below, by people searching for cohesion, security and a lively alternative to local tavern culture.’<sup>7</sup>

The historiography of Primitive Methodism fits into three different phases, each providing a vast array of material which expands our understanding about the denomination. The first phase includes the work of contemporaries who sought to establish the origins of the movement of which they were a part, and those who wished to celebrate the lives of the early pioneers. There is an extensive range of material dating from the early nineteenth century which not only provides considerable information about the progress of Primitive Methodism but also an invaluable insight into the lives of its earliest members, much of which has been referenced throughout this thesis. This first phase of writing was initiated by Hugh Bourne who wrote several works cataloguing his own personal journey to conversion, the evangelistic movement which led to the birth of Primitive Methodism, and the progress made by the new denomination in the period up to 1823.<sup>8</sup> Bourne also made regular contributions to the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* telling of his experiences during his extensive national travels, citing material from his journal.<sup>9</sup> William Clowes, the other founding member, also made an important contribution to our understanding about the early phase of

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<sup>6</sup> J. Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (London, 1909), pp. 278-9; E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London, 1957), p. 132; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester, 1863), pp. 137-8; R. Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield. Work, Culture, Protest, 1790-1850* (Manchester, 1987), pp. 118-202; Colls, *The Collier's Rant*, pp. 76-101; A. Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England. A Social History, 1850-1925* (London, 1991), pp. 182-5; Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 142.

<sup>7</sup> D. Hempton, *The Religion of the People. Methodism and Popular Religion, c. 1750-1900* (London, 1996), p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> See H. Bourne, *Notices of the Life of Hugh Bourne* (Bemmersley, 1834); *History of the Progress of the Primitive Methodists, Giving an Account of their Rise and Progress up to the Year 1823* (Bemmersley, 1835).

<sup>9</sup> For example see *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (PMM), Sept 1832, pp. 352-4; May 1836, pp. 189-90 and Apr 1840, pp. 137-9.

Primitive Methodism when his journals were published in 1844.<sup>10</sup> Another important author writing during the first half of the nineteenth century was Thomas Church, who sought to commemorate in print the early developments and achievements of the denomination of which he was a member.<sup>11</sup> When the founding members Bourne and Clowes died, several authors saw fit to memorialise their life and work. Davison wrote a biography about Clowes in 1854, and in 1855 Walford published *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne* (edited by W. Antliff), two volumes which covered the whole of Bourne's life and which included extensive material from his journals.<sup>12</sup> Other Primitive Methodist pioneers were also celebrated in print during the middle decade of the nineteenth century. In 1857, George Herod examined the contribution made by several key figures, paying considerable attention to the work of Lorenzo Dow.<sup>13</sup> In other works, Charles Kendall examined the life of Atkinson Smith, John Petty the work of Thomas Batty, and William Garner that of his brother John Garner.<sup>14</sup> Female Primitive Methodist pioneers were also remembered by authors such as Russell and Lightfoot.<sup>15</sup>

The second phase of Primitive Methodist historiography was written around the turn of the century by the denomination's own historians; authors such as Petty, Kendall, Ritson examined its progress on a national scale, while others such as Patterson, Tonks and Myers celebrated its development in the local setting. Petty provided the first extensive history of the Primitive Methodist Connexion in 1864 (later revised and enlarged by Macpherson).<sup>16</sup> However, while Petty's work is very wide-ranging, by far

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<sup>10</sup> W. Clowes, *The Journals of William Clowes, a Primitive Methodist Preacher* (London, 1844)

<sup>11</sup> T. Church, *Sketches of Primitive Methodism* (London, 1847); *Popular Sketches of Primitive Methodism: Being a Link in the Chain of British Ecclesiastical History* (London, 1850).

<sup>12</sup> J. Davison, *The Life of the Venerable William Clowes, one of the Founders of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, (London, 1854); J. Walford, (ed. by W. Antliff) *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, 2 vols. (Burslem, 1855-6).

<sup>13</sup> G. Herod, *Historical and Biographical Sketches, Forming a Compendium of the Primitive Methodist Connexion. Up to the Year 1823*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, 1857).

<sup>14</sup> C. Kendall, *The Christian Minister in Earnest; or the Life of Atkinson Smith* (London, 1854); J. Petty, *Memoir of the Life and Labours of Thomas Batty: One of the Early Pioneers of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London, 1857); W. Garner, *The Life of Mr John Garner, Senior., One of the Early Ministers of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, and an Original Deed Poll Member of the Conference* (London, 1856).

<sup>15</sup> T. Russell, *The Life and Labours of Elizabeth Russell..Primitive Methodist Preacher* (Bemmersley, 1838); J. Lightfoot, *The Life and Labours of Mrs Mary Porteous, Late of Durham, Who for Fourteen Years was a Travelling Preacher and Twenty-Two Years a Local Preacher in the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London, 1862).

<sup>16</sup> J. Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, revised and enlarged by J. Macpherson (London, 1880).



the most comprehensive examination of Primitive Methodism ever written is Kendall's work *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*. In two volumes, Kendall examined the progress of Primitive Methodism throughout the country, providing many vivid illustrations about its society and spiritual life in a broad range of different localities, surveying its work in agricultural villages, fishing communities and mining districts. Kendall also presented a clear insight into the various ways in which the denomination matured in institutional terms during the nineteenth century. It is fair to claim that without his work our understanding of Primitive Methodism would be severely limited.<sup>17</sup> Another invaluable book written in the first decade of the twentieth century is that by Ritson. *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* offers a fascinating insight into various aspects of life within the denomination, including the harsh realities of the Primitive Methodist itinerancy, the organisation and work of a local circuit, and also the struggles faced by societies attempting to build their own chapel.<sup>18</sup> Many local studies were also published by those who wished to convey something of the origins and successes of the Church of which they had been a part. An extensive collection of studies provide valuable material which enables the historian of Primitive Methodism to compare the experience of the denomination in various different local settings. Such works include *Piety Among the Peasantry* by Woodcock, who wished to 'give a true description of Primitive Methodism on the Wolds as it existed sixty or seventy years ago', and *Northern Primitive Methodism* by Patterson, which documented the rise and progress of the movement in the old Sunderland district.<sup>19</sup>

The third phase of work about the Primitive Methodist Connexion includes an array of different authors. Some have studied the birth and early development of Primitive Methodism, some have attempted to assess its general appeal and to establish the location of its success, while others have looked at its role within wider religious developments and have examined its impact upon different aspects of British society.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vols. 1 & 2.

<sup>18</sup> J. Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (London, 1909).

<sup>19</sup> H. Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry: Being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* (London, 1889); W. M. Patterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism. A Record of the Rise and Progress of the Circuits in the Old Sunderland District* (London, 1909). Other local studies of Primitive Methodism written in the first decade of the twentieth century include: C. Tonks, *Victory in the Villages: the History of the Brinkworth Circuit* (Aberdare, 1907) and J. Myers, *A History of Primitive Methodism in Guiseley* (Guiseley, 1910).

<sup>20</sup> Certain historians have examined the influence of Primitive Methodism upon the agricultural trade union movement. In particular see N. Scotland, *Methodism and the Revolt of the Field* (Gloucester,

In 1984, Werner provided the first study which exclusively examined the birth and early years of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, a unique work which adds much to our understanding about the origins of the denomination. Explaining its rise in relation to tensions within Wesleyan Methodism and the social environment of its time and situation, Werner analyses the features which combined to create the Primitive Methodist experience. Werner also investigates the geographical progress made as Primitive Methodist missionaries penetrated the counties of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and east Yorkshire, and looks at the difficulties experienced in relation to the Tunstall non-missioning law which impeded its advance in other directions.<sup>21</sup>

If we look at the significance and progress of Primitive Methodism in the local setting we see that there have been several important studies. In their recent work *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion*, Snell and Ell have identified the locations of Primitive Methodist strength on a national scale. They note that by 1851, Primitive Methodism had become strongly entrenched in large regions of the country, notably in the north-east, in parts of the north midlands and industrial north, in highly agricultural counties such as Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Wiltshire and Hampshire, and in the band of English counties along the Welsh border.<sup>22</sup> Figure 1 is a reproduction of a map presented in their comprehensive study, and clearly establishes the areas of relative Primitive Methodist strength as revealed by the 1851 Census of Religious Worship.<sup>23</sup>

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1981) and P. Horn, *Joseph Arch, 1826-1919. The Farm Worker's Leader* (Kineton, 1971). Others such as Moore have explored the influence of Primitive Methodism upon politics. For example, see R. Moore, *Pit-men, Preachers and Politics. The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community*. (Cambridge, 1974) which examines the effects of Methodism on the political life of four Durham mining villages during a significant phase of trade union and political history. Other areas of research include the relationship between Primitive Methodism and folk religion, on which see D. Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew. Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge, 1982), and also Primitive Methodism and the ecumenical movement, see R. Currie, *Methodism Divided. A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London, 1968).

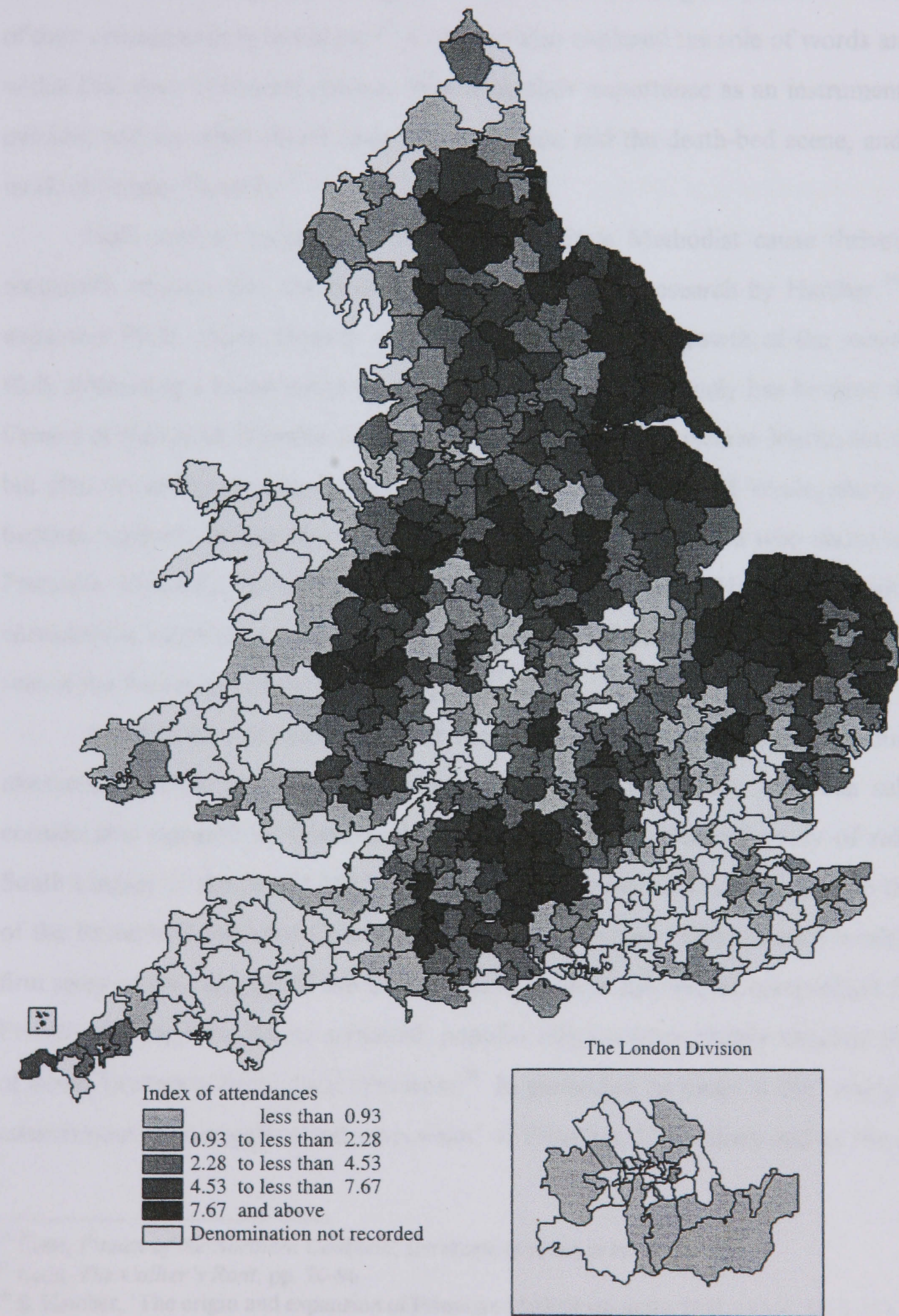
<sup>21</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*. One of the most recent publications which is exclusively about Primitive Methodism is that by Lysons which in two parts examines the origins of the movement and then explores life in a Lancashire circuit in the inter-war years. See K. Lysons, *A Little Primitive. Primitive Methodism from Macro and Micro Perspectives* (Buxton, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 137-44.

<sup>23</sup> Reproduced with permission. K. D. M. Snell & P. S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 138.



Figure 1: Primitive Methodist index of attendances in 1851





Many of the areas of Primitive Methodist strength as highlighted by Snell and Ell have been subject to extensive research. For example, Colls has examined the collieries of Northumberland and Durham where the Primitive Methodists found strong support among the mining communities. In particular, he has established the cultural influence of Primitive Methodism upon the miners in these areas, noting the positive consequences of their commitment to the cause.<sup>24</sup> Colls has also explored the role of words and music within Primitive Methodist culture, examining their importance as an instrument for the mission, and also their significance for conversion and the death-bed scene, and for the work of Sunday Schools.<sup>25</sup>

Hull, another location in which the Primitive Methodist cause thrived in the nineteenth century, has also been subject to substantial research by Hatcher.<sup>26</sup> In his expansive Ph.D. thesis, Hatcher examined the origins and growth of the movement in Hull, addressing a broad range of questions and issues. Not only has he used the 1851 Census of Religious Worship to establish the locations of Primitive Methodist worship, but also preaching plans to compare these with the presence of Wesleyanism. Using baptism registers, he has also examined the social profile of those who chose to attend Primitive Methodist worship in the Hull circuit. Finally, Hatcher's work places considerable emphasis upon theological questions and pays particular attention to the role of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.<sup>27</sup>

Another area of importance for the Primitive Methodist Connexion during the nineteenth century was in Lincolnshire. This is a county which has been subject to considerable research by Obelkevich and Ambler. In his detailed study of religion in South Lindsey in the period 1825-75, Obelkevich provides a vivid insight into the work of the Primitive Methodist Connexion in the local setting. Obelkevich's work gives a firm sense of the struggle of the Established Church in the face of competition from the Primitive Methodists, whose animated, populist religion more closely matched the needs of South Lindsey's agricultural labourers.<sup>28</sup> In particular, he looks at the 'single-minded commitment to evangelism and revivalism' of Primitive Methodism and at the spiritual

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<sup>24</sup> Colls, *Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, see chapters seven to twelve.

<sup>25</sup> Colls, *The Collier's Rant*, pp. 76-96.

<sup>26</sup> S. Hatcher, 'The origin and expansion of Primitive Methodism in the Hull circuit, 1819-1851', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Manchester University, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Hatcher, 'The origin and expansion', see chapters five and seven.

<sup>28</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, see chapter five.

significance and appeal of its various means of grace.<sup>29</sup> Obelkevich also examines the institutional development of the denomination, looking at the ways in which Primitive Methodism matured during the course of the nineteenth century, moving ‘from local diversity to national unity, ascending through successive levels of church government and organisation’.<sup>30</sup>

Ambler has also extended our understanding about Primitive Methodism in this part of the country; in several articles and books he has examined themes such as preachers’ plans, chapel building and the social profile of trustees.<sup>31</sup> However, by far the most comprehensive of his work on the denomination in this area is *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire 1817-1875*.<sup>32</sup> In this work, Ambler assesses the impact of Primitive Methodism in a predominantly agricultural setting, an environment which experienced considerable economic and social development during the nineteenth century. He argues that the Primitive Methodists were able to provide a religious experience appropriate to the needs of a people caught up in a ‘web of change’, and suggests that Primitive Methodism provided ‘new opportunities and ultimately a sense of security’.<sup>33</sup> Ambler also examines the process of institutionalisation that was apparent as Primitive Methodism created the necessary mechanisms by which it could sustain and consolidate its efforts, and thereby develop and become a central part of village life. In particular, he notes the changing nature of revivalism, as Primitive Methodism became increasingly focused upon maintaining institutional life.

Finally, another rural area in which the Primitive Methodist cause thrived, and which has been highlighted by the research of Snell and Ell, is in Norfolk. Again, the progress of Primitive Methodism in this county has also been subject to research. Howkins has examined the penetration of Primitive Methodists such as Robert Key into

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<sup>29</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 224-30.

<sup>30</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 248-9.

<sup>31</sup> See R. W. Ambler, ‘From Ranters to chapel builders: Primitive Methodism in the south Lincolnshire fenland, c. 1820-1875’, W. J. Sheils & D. Wood (eds.), *Voluntary Religion*, Studies in Church History 23 (Oxford, 1986); ‘Preachers and the plan – patterns of activity in early Primitive Methodism’, *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* XLVI (May, 1987); ‘The social composition of church leadership: nonconformist trustees in Lincolnshire, 1800-70’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 75 (1993); *Churches, Chapels and the Parish Communities of Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> R. W. Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire, 1817-1875* (Hull, 1989).

<sup>33</sup> Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, p. 4.



Norfolk, a rural area where other Nonconformist denominations had previously failed to attract much support. In particular, he looks at the role of Primitive Methodism within the trade union movement in this area, and notes the continued tendency towards radicalism within certain chapels until the close of the century.<sup>34</sup>

However, as one surveys this literature it is clear that one major area of importance for the Primitive Methodist Connexion has been neglected. Snell and Ell's study reveals that the Primitive Methodists enjoyed considerable success in the counties of the English-Welsh borderland; in particular, Primitive Methodism was strong in almost all registration districts of Shropshire. Figure 1 shows the band of registration districts down the Welsh border with very strong Primitive Methodist strength, a feature of the denomination that has often not been appreciated. While certain historians have touched upon the Primitive Methodist cause in this area as part of their work, there has been very little study of the movement here. In his thesis on religious provision and practice in the parts of the Lowland Marches, Burrows pays attention to seven of the 15 Shropshire registration districts, examining levels of Primitive Methodist membership in these and calculating the number of attendances made at their places of worship on Census Sunday. Burrows also explores the process of chapel building in these districts, noting the low costs involved in Primitive Methodist building compared to other denominations.<sup>35</sup> Yalden has also studied the Primitive Methodist movement as part of his research on the evolution of chapel communities in rural Shropshire. In contrast with Burrows, Yalden concentrates entirely on the four northern registration districts of Oswestry, Ellesmere, Wem and Market Drayton where Primitive Methodism was the largest of the Nonconformist denominations during the nineteenth century. In particular, Yalden addresses the question of why the Primitive Methodist Connexion was so prevalent in this part of Shropshire, examining the ways in which the flexibility of the cottage meeting and itinerant ministry system contributed to its success.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> A. Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men. Rural Radicalism in Norfolk, 1870-1923* (London, 1985), see chapter three, particularly p. 48; Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, pp. 179-186.

<sup>35</sup> H. Burrows, 'Religious provision and practice in some mainly rural poor law districts of the Lowland Marches, 1815-1914' (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 1991).

<sup>36</sup> P. J. Yalden, 'Nonconformity in north Shropshire: the evolution of chapel communities in a rural society, c. 1650-1900' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of New South Wales, 1997).

Considering how little study there has been of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire and the English-Welsh borderland, it is my intention to enhance our understanding of the Connexion by providing a detailed study of the denomination in this important but neglected area. As we shall see, while the county of Shropshire was predominantly agricultural in nature, there were pockets of industrial activity throughout its limits; mining of coal and lead providing an important source of employment during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Clearly, this helped to ensure that Shropshire was fertile ground for the Primitive Methodist Connexion, and the denomination quickly took hold during the 1820s. As a result of the Connexion's success in the county, there is an abundance of source material. An extensive range of different circuit records has been employed for this thesis, providing much insight into the work of the Primitive Methodist circuits in Shropshire. In particular, I have relied upon quarterly preachers' plans to provide an understanding of the geography of a circuit and the organisation of its internal work. Chapel schedules have been used to establish information about chapel building activity. Roll books, annual returns and quarterly accounts have been examined to ascertain changing levels of both circuit and society membership, while minutes of the various circuit meetings have provided much evidence about the organisation of the work of the circuit, including the problems faced and the decisions made. Providing information about occupation, baptism registers have also been used extensively in this work to establish the economic and social profile of the Primitive Methodist congregations. In addition to local Primitive Methodist records, other material such as the minutes of the Annual Primitive Methodist Conference, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, and a vast array of contemporary literature has also been used to obtain a broader picture of the development of the denomination. Another important source is the Religious Census of 1851. The evidence of the enumerators' returns and the tables compiled in the national report provide considerable information not only about the success of Primitive Methodism in 1851, but also that of the Established Church and the other Nonconformist denominations. Finally, the *Imperial Gazetteer* and local directories have been used to establish structures of landownership in the county.

In general terms the main objective of this thesis is to examine the experience of Shropshire Primitive Methodist circuits, looking in particular at the nature of worship they provided for their membership, their geographical successes and failures, and at the



progress made as they developed in institutional terms during the nineteenth century. The creation of the 'circuit' during the eighteenth century was an important administrative innovation in religious provision, which provided the Methodists with 'the most flexible organisation of all the Nonconformist denominations'.<sup>37</sup> The circuit system not only enabled the Methodists to co-ordinate the movement of their preachers in a highly effective way, but also to organise and consolidate their efforts at the local level. This development was of considerable significance, providing as it did the crucial framework by which the Methodist movement adapted to different geographical regions, and thereby expanded throughout the country. The flexibility of the circuit system ensured that it was particularly well adapted to regions where the traditional parochial structure was inadequate and the Church of England was weak, for example in areas of widely dispersed settlement. Many different secessions took place from the Original Connexion, but each of the new Methodist denominations maintained the circuit system, bearing witness to its advantage and utility. Although historians have stressed the key importance of the Methodist circuit as an alternative mode of religious organisation, there has been little discussion of the spatial geography of circuits. With few exceptions, there has been almost no analysis of the ways in which Methodist circuits developed, as they evolved from areas of fresh missionary territory, into mature stations with a core of well-established societies. Nor has the relation between the geography of a circuit and its internal work been much considered. How did the shifts in the geographical focus and organisation of circuits impact upon the nature of worship provided by the denomination in the local setting?

In order to answer these questions it will first be necessary to examine the nature of the organisation and structure of a Primitive Methodist circuit. In particular, this thesis addresses the question of lay participation and pays special attention to the considerable influence of the layman not only in the structures of government, but also in the provision of the Primitive Methodist experience. Using the quarterly preachers' plans, it will be possible to demonstrate the extent to which Primitive Methodism relied upon its local preachers during the first half of the nineteenth century when circuits were composed of many societies and spanned expansive areas of territory. However as we

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<sup>37</sup> M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters. The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity, 1791-1859*, vol. 2, (Oxford, 1995), p. 133.



shall see, the nature of worship offered by the Primitive Methodists changed as circuits contracted and the itinerant minister became increasingly tied to specific locations. In order to learn more about the Primitive Methodist experience, it is important that we not only establish the character of those who accepted the call to preach, but also ascertain the hardships they endured to fulfil this destiny. Using obituaries printed in the connexional magazine it is possible to discover much about the people that chose to dedicate their lives to the Primitive Methodist cause, while contemporary literature records their struggles to survive on the limited resources provided. Moreover, it will also be necessary to compare the economic and social background of the Primitive Methodist preacher with that of the membership. As we will see, the evidence of baptism registers enables us to establish a close correlation between these two groups, and therefore helps to explain the relevance of Primitive Methodist doctrine and practice for its working class hearers.

Once we have examined the organisation and structure of the Primitive Methodist circuit and the nature of the experience it offered its membership, we must explore the geographical progress of Shropshire circuits, looking at the extent to which Primitive Methodism penetrated the county during the nineteenth century. Paying particular attention to the findings of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship, it will be possible to ascertain a clear picture of those areas in which the denomination flourished, while connexional membership figures will enable us to compare the experience of individual circuits throughout the whole period. Having established the geographical successes and failures of Primitive Methodism, it will then be necessary to question why the denomination thrived in certain locations and barely made an impact in others. For example, we must ask whether it is possible to establish a particular type of parish in which the Primitive Methodists were able to set up worship or to build a chapel? Furthermore, how was the advance of the denomination affected by structures of landownership, or by the presence of other religious denominations?

While success in a particular location played a significant role in determining the changing spatial structure of a Primitive Methodist circuit, we must also determine what other factors shaped the geography of circuits. To address this question it will be necessary to examine the methods used by the denomination to penetrate the county during the first half of the nineteenth century, and the ways in which circuits evolved out of missionary territory, solidifying into mature stations with a core of well-established

societies. We must also explore how changing missionary tactics, internal dissension, sub-division and chapel building affected the geography of a circuit. It has been argued that one of the most important ways in which the circuit became consolidated geographically during the nineteenth century was by means of chapel building.<sup>38</sup> In the final chapter, the effect of chapel building upon the Primitive Methodist circuit will be considered. In particular, we will examine how attempts to provide a permanent place of worship impacted upon the often-delicate finances of a circuit? Did the nature of the Primitive Methodist experience change as a result of greater chapel building? We must determine the ways in which the building of larger and more permanent chapels affected the Primitive Methodist community at large, as it turned into an ever more stable, staid and 'respectable' denomination.

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<sup>38</sup> A. D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914* (London, 1976), p. 160.



## **Chapter 2: The Economic and Social Setting**

### **The Physical Environment.**

Located between the Midland plain and the Welsh mountains and culturally between the nations of England and Wales, Shropshire epitomises the diversity of the rural landscape of the English-Welsh borderland. Bounded on the north-west by Denbighshire, on the north by Flintshire and Cheshire, on the east by Staffordshire, on the south by Worcestershire, Herefordshire, and Radnorshire and on the west by Montgomeryshire, Shropshire is the largest inland county in Great Britain, spanning a total of 48 miles from north to south and 41 miles from east to west. It can be naturally divided into two halves.<sup>1</sup> The river Severn forms a boundary between the plains of the east and north, which extend into mid-Staffordshire, and Cheshire, forming 'one of the principal interruptions of highland Britain' and the upland country of the south and west.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of relief, the northern plain forms a distinct region of Shropshire, encompassing both arable and pastoral areas as well as expanses of heath and moorland. From the seventeenth century, the northern-most arc of the county, from Oswestry to Market Drayton and centring on Whitchurch, became increasingly known as a dairying district; while the area around Ellesmere, Cockshutt and Welshampton, with its richer clay soils, was predominantly arable. Settlement on the northern plain was characterised by small hamlets, scattered farms and occasional cottages.<sup>3</sup> In the extreme north-west the county boundary extends into the Denbigh hills, as the character of the region becomes increasingly Welsh, and pastoral farming and limestone quarrying dominate the landscape.<sup>4</sup> To the east of the county lie Wellington and the Shropshire coalfield, where coal-mining, iron and pottery manufacture transformed the scene into the only extensive industrial landscape in the region. However, away from the centre of the industrial activity agriculture survived, and as an era of industrial prosperity waned after the 1840s, farming returned to many parts of the coalfield. In the south-east beyond the river Severn is the eastern sandstone plain. During the

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<sup>1</sup> J. M. Wilson, *The Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales* (Edinburgh, 1874), vol. IV, p. 806.

<sup>2</sup> G. C. Baugh (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England. A History of Shropshire*. vol. IV (Oxford, 1989), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, pp. 17-18; D. Sylvester, *The Rural Landscape of the Welsh Borderland. A Study in Historical Geography* (London, 1969), p. 300.

<sup>4</sup> T. Rowley, *The Shropshire Landscape* (London, 1972), p. 22.

eighteenth century this region became known as the Ryeland, as the light sandy soils were perfect for the production of rye and barley.<sup>5</sup>

To the south and west of the Severn there are two principal landscape types. The sandstone and limestone escarpments of Wenlock Edge contrast with the more highland areas of wild, open heath and moorland of the Stiperstones and Stretton Hills, where the villages tend to be small and scattered. During the nineteenth century the open moorland was used for the grazing of hill flocks, while in other parts the mining of lead scarred the hillsides.<sup>6</sup> Finally, in the southern extremes of the county are two further areas, both isolated and remote although quite different in nature. In the east lie the sandstone hills of Clee, the highest in the county and the centre of various hillside settlements. On Brown Clee, common moorland gave rise to scattered farmhouses and the small cottages of squatters, while on Titterstone a significant transformation of the agricultural setting occurred, as extensive quarrying of dolerite and limestone encouraged a proliferation of cheap houses.<sup>7</sup> In the extreme south-west of the county lies the Clun Forest, a completely rural area of low population where tiny hamlets and isolated farmhouse dominate the landscape.<sup>8</sup> As we shall see, the great diversity of Shropshire communities provided the ideal breeding ground for the Primitive Methodist movement during the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

### **Agriculture.**

The considerable differences in the physical characteristics of the county inevitably determined what agricultural regimes were possible. Even within the broad divisions described above there were many smaller sub-regions which had particular soils or landscapes; for example, the weald moors to the west of Newport or the Teme Valley to the south of Ludlow and Cleobury Mortimer.<sup>10</sup>

From the mid-eighteenth century until about 1815, and from about 1840 until the final quarter of the nineteenth century, British agriculture enjoyed relative prosperity. Population expansion and war not only led to increased domestic demand

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<sup>5</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, pp. 7-11.

<sup>6</sup> Rowley, *The Shropshire Landscape*, pp. 22-4; Sylvester, *Rural Landscape*, pp. 336-7.

<sup>7</sup> B. Trinder, *The Industrial Archaeology of Shropshire* (West Sussex, 1996), p. 93; Sylvester, *Rural Landscape*, pp. 341-3.

<sup>8</sup> Rowley, *The Shropshire Landscape*, pp. 24-25; Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, p. 13-4; Sylvester, *Rural Landscape*, pp. 328-9.

<sup>9</sup> Rowley, *The Shropshire Landscape*, p. 21; Sylvester, *Rural Landscape*, p. 145.

<sup>10</sup> R. Hill & P. Stamper, *The Working Countryside* (Shrewsbury, 1993), p. 10.



for food, but also to raised prices and land values. As the amount of enclosed, arable farming land expanded and the adoption of new farming techniques spread, agriculture experienced something of a 'revolution', which further increased productivity. While the adoption of new farming methods in Shropshire was somewhat slower than in other counties, particularly in parishes which largely consisted of small freeholdings and had no dominant landowner, by the mid-nineteenth century many farmers in the county were earning a good livelihood. This was also the 'high summer' for the landed gentry, the most prominent of whom had a controlling influence in both local and national government. However, in contrast the farm labourer endured a low standard of living and the threat of the workhouse.<sup>11</sup>

Parliamentary enclosure had relatively little impact upon Shropshire, a considerable area of the county having been already enclosed by the middle of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless enclosure, particularly of common waste, continued by means of private agreement and parliamentary Acts. In the period between 1760 and 1820, by far the greatest amount of enclosure was carried out in the north of the county. In order to take advantage of their fertile potential the heavier clay soils and the peat mosses were enclosed first; for example Baggy Moor, an extensive area of land regularly submerged by water each winter, was enclosed and drained in 1777 and thereby made valuable. In the later period, it was the less fertile heathlands that were enclosed. By 1820, approximately 24,000 acres of north Shropshire had been enclosed by an Act of parliament and relatively little common land remained. In the years that followed, the possibility of considerable profits led to the enclosure of the hills of the south-east and south-west; during the 1840s approximately 11,000 acres of land in the south was enclosed by parliamentary means. It is clear from the evidence that the expectations of profit after enclosure were well founded. Land enclosed in the Clun Forest increased in value from 2-3s. an acre when it was used as open pasture, to 10-12s. an acre when oats, rye, turnips or wheat were grown. Similarly, in other parts of the southern uplands, even in the hilly regions such as the Long Mynd, newly enclosed common land was used for cultivation or conversion to meadow.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, pp. 168-171; J. P. Dodd, 'The state of agriculture in Shropshire, 1775-1825', in *Transactions of Shropshire Archaeological Society*, vol. LV (1954-56), p. 2; B. Trinder, 'The agricultural community in Shropshire: the last hundred years', *Salop County Museums Sheet 2*, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, pp. 171-5; Sylvester, *Rural Landscape*, p. 300.



Enclosure of land was a fundamental step in the development of new farming techniques, for without enclosure the farmer often could not improve his livestock, apply new fertilisers or implement new crop rotations. In Shropshire, the increase in the amount of enclosed land led to a considerable extension of the arable acreage; in the north, barley was grown on the newly enclosed heathlands, and even former waste land as high as 200 metres or more, now yielded good crops of wheat and oats. In the parish of Ford, the arable acreage almost tripled in the period between 1801 and 1847. Baugh argues that this rate of expansion was by no means untypical, for example at Woolstaston, the acreage of arable land more than tripled during the final quarter of the eighteenth century, and almost doubled again between 1801 and 1840.<sup>13</sup>

The 1801 crop returns reveal that wheat was by far the most important cereal crop in Shropshire, occupying considerable areas in the parishes of the south-east, the Cleve Hills forming the heart of the wheatlands throughout the nineteenth century. Oats were also grown in south-eastern parts of the county, but were cultivated in particularly significant amounts in the north-west too.<sup>14</sup> Dodd has noted that the importance of oats in the northern borders of the county 'was related as much to economic considerations as to those of soils and climate'. The incentive to grow oats not only derived from demand for fodder for the north-west haulage industry, but also from the relatively high price of oatmeal in the northern counties where oats were the staple grain used for bread, cakes and puddings.<sup>15</sup> As the second-most important cereal crop, barley was cultivated in increasing amounts throughout the nineteenth century in the north and south-east of the county. The 1801 crop returns reveal that the cultivation of barley took place in a clear stretch of the county, which extended from Oswestry in the north-west to Alveley in the south-east. The chief use of barley in Shropshire was in the production of beer, and while all echelons of society consumed beer it was an element of considerable importance in the wages contract of farm labourers. Dodd has noted that Oswestry was a 'notable malting centre', and has suggested that

'the importance of the crop in the local farm economy can be gathered from the high feeling engendered by the contemporary practice of tolling barley in kind at Oswestry market.'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, pp. 177 & 181.

<sup>14</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, pp. 179 & 246; Dodd, 'The state of agriculture in Shropshire', pp. 3-4; J. Plymley, *A General View of the Agriculture of Shropshire* (London, 1803), p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> Dodd, 'The State of Agriculture in Shropshire', p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Dodd, 'The State of Agriculture in Shropshire', pp. 26-7.

Finally, although rye was grown in the eastern, central and northern parts of the county this was the least important cereal in Shropshire during the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

In the final quarter of the nineteenth century, farming in Shropshire, as throughout the country, was affected by a variety of influences which reflected changes in both the domestic and international economy. As competitive imports of cheap food from locations such as North America threatened the British farming industry and led to a major decline in cereal prices, there was a significant shift in the use of land within Shropshire. Many farmers chose to replace wheat with oats and barley which were used as animal feed, while others gave up cereal farming altogether in favour of livestock rearing. As thousands of acres were converted to permanent grass, emphasis on arable farming within Shropshire became focused upon the central and eastern regions of the county, and while the cultivation of barley helped to alleviate some of the economic pressures, it was in this area that the decline of wheat growing after 1870 had its greatest impact.<sup>18</sup>

While livestock rearing in the county was predominantly to the south-west of the river Severn, there was also a smaller area in the north-west uplands. The majority of the locations were above 122 metres; however, in places such as the Clun Forest, on the Long Mynd, Wenlock Edge and Clee Hills, the height was above 366 metres. Cattle grazing took place upon the lower slopes, while sheep were reared on the higher parts.<sup>19</sup> Although there were small areas of dairying in other parts of the county, for the greater part of the nineteenth century dairy farming in Shropshire was predominantly situated north of a line which began just south of Market Drayton, extending west through the parishes of Shawbury, Stanwardine and West Felton. In contrast with the west, the heavier soil and the slightly higher average annual rainfall of the north-eastern extremes was much more suited to permanent pasture than to arable. Apart from a small proportion of milk, which was transported to the local towns and also to Shrewsbury, the lack of rail links to the larger centres of population ensured that the vast majority of produce was used in the farmhouse dairies to manufacture butter and

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<sup>17</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, p. 181.

<sup>18</sup> R. Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 6-7; P. Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation. An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914*, (London, 1983), p. 317; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 198-9; T. May, *An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1760-1970* (Essex, 1987), pp. 108-111; Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, p. 232-7; Hill & Stamper, *The Working Countryside*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, p. 246; Sylvester, *Rural Landscape*, pp. 327-36.



cheese. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the importance of the cheese trade began to grow as increased demand for milk from the south Lancashire towns propelled the centre of the Cheshire cheese making region southwards into the county of Shropshire. By the 1920s, Shropshire had become one of the four largest cheese making counties in the country.<sup>20</sup>

### **Industrial Background.**

While it is clear from the above that Shropshire was predominantly agricultural in nature during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the county is scarred throughout its limits by quarrying, mining and the activities of other isolated industries. With certain exceptions, the majority of industrial activity within nineteenth-century Shropshire was located within the limits of five distinct, but relatively small coalfields. These were the Clee Hill coalfield, the Coalbrookdale coalfield, the Oswestry coalfield, the Shrewsbury coalfield, and the Wyre Forest coalfield. While those at Shrewsbury, Clee Hill and the Wyre Forest contained very few large or medium-sized mines; in contrast the Coalbrookdale coalfield was of major importance both historically and economically.<sup>21</sup> As we have seen, mining communities were particularly receptive to Primitive Methodism and those in Shropshire were no exception, the denomination taking root and developing in each of the above coalfields during the nineteenth century. In particular, Primitive Methodism along with the Wesleyan Methodists and the Methodist New Connexion enjoyed considerable success in the East Shropshire coalfield. Trinder has noted that in many ways Methodism was ‘the established church’ of the coalfield, fulfilling ‘so perfectly the deep-seated emotional needs of those accustomed to a dangerous and violent working environment’.<sup>22</sup> It was here that Primitive Methodism achieved some of its highest levels of attendance on Census Sunday.

Located in the north of the county, the Oswestry coalfield is really an extension of the Denbighshire coalfield, covering in Shropshire an area of approximately 16 square miles. However, although it is only a small part of the coalfield Brown argues that it is ‘proportionally quite productive’, being more closely associated with industry

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<sup>20</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, pp. 241-2; Sylvester, *Rural Landscape*, p. 300.

<sup>21</sup> I. J. Brown, *The Mines of Shropshire* (Nottingham, 1976), p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> B. Trinder, *The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire* (London, 1981), pp. 166-7.

in North Wales than the English Midlands.<sup>23</sup> Mining of the Oswestry coalfield began in the late eighteenth century, and was stimulated by new markets which opened up as a result of the construction of the Ellesmere canal during the Napoleonic Wars. The majority of mines in the southern part of the coalfield were located in the townships of Trefonen, Sweeney and Trefarclawdd in an area less than 4km from north to south and 4km from east to west. The peak of mining activity in this part of the coalfield came during the 1790s when approximately 200 miners were employed. In this period the turnpike road from Trefonen to Oswestry was lined with coalworkings; however by 1830 most of these had closed and by 1861 the number of colliers employed in this part of the coalfield had fallen to 99. Despite a minor revival in the industry in the decade between 1861 and 1871, the general downward trend continued till the end of the nineteenth century, when coal mining in Trefonen ceased completely.<sup>24</sup>

While the coal industry in the northern part of the Oswestry coalfield also experienced a downturn after a period of considerable prosperity during the Napoleonic Wars, in contrast with the south this phase of decline was not sustained. As a result of stimulus from the Shrewsbury and Chester railway, the number of miners employed in the northern regions of the Oswestry coalfield steadily expanded during the second half of the nineteenth century, increasing from 97 to 405 between 1851 and 1891. However, by far the greatest expansion was experienced in the eastern townships of St Martin's. During the mid-nineteenth century mining had been on a relatively small scale, but from the 1880s activity in this area began to increase, and it was here that Primitive Methodist membership enjoyed continued expansion into the twentieth century. In 1912, a new mine was sunk at Ifton Heath which linked underground with the Brynkinalt pit and by 1928 a total of 1,357 miners were employed, making this the largest mine ever worked in Shropshire.<sup>25</sup>

In the central regions of the county were two further coalfields. In the west was the Shrewsbury coalfield, which spanned 20 kilometres westwards from Uffington and Eaton Constantine to the Welsh border at Bragginton, and 15 kilometres from Shrewsbury to Leebotwood. As we shall see, Primitive Methodism thrived in this area as the Shrewsbury circuit established numerous preaching places and built chapels

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<sup>23</sup> Brown, *Mines of Shropshire*, pp. 6 & 82; S. Tomlins, 'Oswestry and Shrewsbury Coalfields', in A. Pearce (ed.) *Mining in Shropshire* (Shropshire, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, pp. 87-8.

<sup>25</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, pp. 90 & 92.



throughout the coalfield. Dispersed throughout, the mines of the Shrewsbury coalfield were generally small and worked by a handful of people. For example, mining operations at Pulverbatch were carried out at the home of George Fenn, a farmer who combined this activity with mining. In 1851, he employed a total of 10 miners, while in 1871, the number employed had grown to 28. The most productive of the pits in this area were located between Hanwood, Exford's Green, Pontesford and Westbury, the vast majority of coal produced being distributed by road just a short distance from the pits to various local lime burning, brick-making or lead smelting concerns.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast, the coal produced in the East Shropshire coalfield was transported by means of the river Severn throughout the entire county and to other parts of the country. For example, coal was shipped down along the Severn to Tewkesbury, and also upstream to Shrewsbury and mid-Wales. Later canals and then the railways further eased its transportation to other areas in the country.<sup>27</sup> The East Shropshire coalfield, also known as the Coalbrookdale coalfield, lies approximately 15 miles to the west of Shrewsbury, just east and north of the Wrekin. Extending across a relatively small area, the East Shropshire coalfield spans approximately 10 miles from north to south, and just 3 miles from east to west; however despite its size, the area was extremely rich in mineral deposits.<sup>28</sup> From the late sixteenth century, the economy of the Coalbrookdale coalfield began to grow as the transportation of coal by means of the river Severn provided the basis for the expansion of the trade. In the 1660s, approximately 100,000 tonnes of coal per year were conveyed along the Severn from the Ironbridge Gorge, and mines such as those located at Broseley and Benthall were rated among the greatest collieries in Britain.<sup>29</sup> As Trinder points out, their productivity was such that in the 1670s coal mined in these locations sold at Tewkesbury at 6s a ton; this was approximately one-third of the price of Newcastle coal sold in London.<sup>30</sup>

In the early eighteenth century several new coal-using industries began to spring up locally; industries such as lime-burning, brick making and clay pipe began to utilise increasing amounts of coal. The trend towards using coal locally, rather than exporting

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<sup>26</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, pp. 77-81.

<sup>27</sup> C. Clark, *Ironbridge Gorge* (London, 1993), p. 28; Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 3; Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, pp. 103-7.

<sup>28</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, p. 102; Clark, *Ironbridge Gorge*, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 8.

it, was most marked after 1750 when the erection of blast furnaces throughout the coalfield created a huge demand for coal.<sup>31</sup> However, at the end of eighteenth century the coal industry in this area began to decline, and as reserves of coal became exhausted on the south side of the river in Broseley ironmasters were forced to look to the north of the coalfield for new sources. Despite this decline, ironstone continued to be mined in this area, being dispatched to various ironworks in Staffordshire. Similarly, clay also continued to be used by local brick and tile manufacturers.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, on the north side of the river mining began to expand, as the deepest seams in the east were mined from the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Around 1800 approximately 50,000 tonnes per year was being sent out from Coalport alone. In 1830, this total peaked at 80,000 tonnes.<sup>34</sup> While the production of coal went into decline during the early nineteenth century, it is important to remember that without an established coal industry the necessary raw materials, capital investment and industrial workforce would not have been available to encourage the development of the iron industry.<sup>35</sup>

From 1700 the East Shropshire coalfield became the setting for considerable enterprise and innovation in the iron industry.<sup>36</sup> Between 1708 and 1753, the Darby family and their partners overcame many of the obstacles which had previously impeded the general expansion of the industry. They mastered important techniques such as the smelting of coke which removed the industry's reliance upon charcoal, and also worked upon the application of steam engines which enabled the maintenance of a steady flow of water to power the blast furnaces.<sup>37</sup> With the erection of nine blast furnaces during the 1750s, the economy of the East Shropshire coalfield underwent considerable expansion during the eighteenth century, and became the setting for innovations such as the Iron Bridge and the steam railway built by Trevithick. Moreover, the East Shropshire coalfield became the leading iron producer in the whole of the country.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Clark, *Ironbridge Gorge*, pp. 22 & 28-9.

<sup>32</sup> R. Hayman & W. Horton, *Ironbridge. History and Guide* (Stroud, 1999), p. 60; Clark, *Ironbridge Gorge*, pp. 28 & 33.

<sup>33</sup> Hayman & Horton, *Ironbridge*, p. 60.

<sup>34</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, p. 102.

<sup>35</sup> Clark, *Ironbridge Gorge*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> B. Trinder, *A History of Shropshire* (Chichester, 1983), pp. 76-7.

<sup>37</sup> J. Alfrey & C. Clark, *The Landscape of Industry. Patterns of change in the Ironbridge Gorge* (London, 1993), p. 62; Trinder, *History of Shropshire*, pp. 77-8; Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> Alfrey & Clark, *Landscape of Industry*, p. 21; Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, p. 98; Trinder, *History of Shropshire*, p. 78.



At the beginning of the French Wars in 1793, the iron works of the coalfield were at the forefront of technological advancement within the iron industry. However, the supremacy of the coalfield in this department was not to last, and throughout the nineteenth century its fortunes underwent considerable fluctuation. In 1805, the total output of iron in the Coalbrookdale coalfield was 50,000 tonnes per year, approximately one-fifth of the total national output.<sup>39</sup> The price of forge pig iron, which as Trinder notes is the most sensitive indicator of the state of the iron industry, was approximately £6 15s per ton in 1806. Trinder argues that this was probably the most prosperous period of the wartime years.<sup>40</sup> However, as the war ended and the demand for iron slumped, the fortunes of the industry began to change. Hayman and Horton point out that with the arrival of peace the industry had lost its technological supremacy and ‘had become an outlier of an economic district centred on the Black Country around Wolverhampton.’<sup>41</sup> By 1816, the price of forge pig iron had fallen to £3 15s, as many of the ironworks situated in isolated spots and relying upon old furnaces were unable to compete effectively with the newer works of the Black Country and South Wales.<sup>42</sup> The post war years were marked by considerable depression, and as many blast furnaces were blown out, coal mines and glassworks were also forced to suspend operations.<sup>43</sup> These economic developments inevitably impacted upon the local religious scene. Between the spring of 1821 and the summer of 1822 the coalfield became absorbed by a form of ‘religious hysteria’, as the despair of colliers and ironworkers who had experienced over five years of depression, was expressed in revival. Membership of the Methodist denominations soared, and Primitive Methodism capitalised on the emotions of inhabitants with a camp meeting at Coalpit Bank in May 1822.<sup>44</sup>

Trinder has highlighted a pattern of considerable disparity and fluctuation in the fortunes of the iron industry in the East Shropshire coalfield during the nineteenth century. While increasing amounts of iron ore were shipped out of the county, and the iron industry in the area south of the Severn began to contract, along the eastern edge of the coalfield the industry began to enjoy considerable expansion. In the east, more

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<sup>39</sup> Hayman & Horton, *Ironbridge*, p. 37; Trinder, *History of Shropshire*, p. 79.

<sup>40</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 137.

<sup>41</sup> Hayman & Horton, *Ironbridge*, pp. 37-8.

<sup>42</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 137.

<sup>43</sup> A. Raistrick, *Dynasty of Iron Founders. The Darbys and Coalbrookdale* (London, 1953), p. 257; Alfrey & Clark, *Landscape of Industry*, p. 25; Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, pp. 137-8.

<sup>44</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, pp. 168-170.



advanced mining techniques allowed the exploitation of previously unworked coal seams, providing the necessary raw materials for iron production.<sup>45</sup> In the period from 1822 to 1830, the iron industry in the East Shropshire coalfield experienced full recovery from its post-war depression, and as a consequence the 'heat of revival' abated.<sup>46</sup> However, although major iron-working partnerships continued to dominate the local economy, by 1830 the number of these partnerships had been reduced from 9 to 6. There had also been a contraction in their range of activities; for example the Madeley Wood company no longer produced wrought iron, but instead chose to export all output as pig. During the 1830s, a phase of bad trade was followed by a period of prosperity, and profits soared; however, the 1840s brought poor profits once more. Many ironworks continued production throughout the nineteenth century, often working well below capacity, relying upon the boom years to compensate for phases of decline and depression.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the decline in many parts of the coalfield, the highest annual production of pig iron was not achieved until 1869, when approximately 200,000 tonnes were made. However, this represented just 2 per cent of national output, and it is clear that the importance of the East Shropshire coalfield was dwindling. Although the levels of iron produced remained high, decline was inevitable. When new innovations such as Bessemer steel making arrived on the scene, ironmasters chose to undertake new ventures rather than restore old and often dilapidated premises.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the remoteness and lack of transport facilities exacerbated this drift away from the East Shropshire coalfield.<sup>49</sup> During the 1870s and 1880s, with the collapse of major iron producing sites in the coalfield, the industry was effectively destroyed. In 1885, companies working in the East Shropshire coalfield produced just 45,000 tonnes *per annum*.<sup>50</sup>

The range of coal-utilising manufactures that developed in the Coalbrookdale coalfield was much greater than in any other part of the county. Coal was not only used for the production of the iron, but also in the burning of lime, the manufacture of glass, clay pipes, ceramics, bricks and tiles. Limeburning was one of the oldest coal-

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<sup>45</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 146.

<sup>46</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 169.

<sup>47</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, pp. 144, 155 & 231; Alfrey & Clark, *Landscape of Industry*, p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> Alfrey & Clark, *Landscape of Industry*, p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 155.

<sup>50</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 239.



using industries located in the East Shropshire coalfield, taking place on a major scale until the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>51</sup> White clay tobacco pipes, made in Broseley on the south bank of the river during the seventeenth century, were smoked throughout Great Britain and as trade increased, the area around Broseley and Much Wenlock became one of the ‘most significant pipe making centres in the country’.<sup>52</sup> For the most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries pipes were made on a small scale by individuals or families; however by contrast, in the early nineteenth century pipes began to be produced in factories, approximately 10 million pipes being made by 100 workers each year.<sup>53</sup> The pottery trade was well established in the coalfield before the eighteenth century. The Thursfield family of Jackfield, next to the river in the parish of Broseley, first began producing coarse earthenware mugs, but from 1750 began to manufacture the famous ‘Jackfieldware’; a luxury product made from a highly vitrified black earthenware. Trinder argues that well before the production of porcelain began, potters in this district had already begun to specialise in luxury products.<sup>54</sup> As the eighteenth century closed, the pottery industry in Shropshire underwent a phase of considerable innovation and expansion as demand for fine blue and white porcelains imported from China increased. In particular, it was in the ceramic industry at locations such as Caughley and Coalport that the greatest developments took place.<sup>55</sup> By the 1820s, the entire manufacture of porcelain in the area was concentrated at a combined works at Coalport, employing a total of 400 people.<sup>56</sup>

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, brickmaking was carried out by individual builders and brickmakers who travelled the county in response to local demand. However, as a result of population growth, expansion in the iron industry and the introduction of the brick kiln, by the 1790s the manufacture of bricks had become a specialised process carried out in large-scale works. During the 1790s, there was a total of five brickworks on the south bank of the Severn, two on the north bank, and another at Coalport.<sup>57</sup> While other industries began to collapse, the number of

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<sup>51</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, p. 110.

<sup>52</sup> Clark, *Ironbridge Gorge*, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> Clark, *Ironbridge Gorge*, pp. 53-4.

<sup>54</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, pp. 125-6; Clark, *Ironbridge Gorge*, p. 57.

<sup>55</sup> Alfrey & Clark, *Landscape of Industry*, p. 21.

<sup>56</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 128.

<sup>57</sup> Clark, *Ironbridge Gorge*, pp. 66-8.



brickworks continued to grow and by the 1840s there were 13 located within the confines of the Ironbridge Gorge. However, as local demand for bricks had not increased, the key to the growth experienced during this period was diversification into the production of clay roof tiles, which were transported down the river Severn out of the East Shropshire coalfield and on to markets throughout the country. The Broseley roof tile was fired with bricks in the same kiln, but was made from a different clay, the final product being a dark purple tile renowned for its strength and durability. In 1862 the construction of the Severn Valley railway created a significant demand for tiles which could not be met by means of existing processes; moreover, the coming of the railway made Welsh slate much more competitive as it could now be transported from Wales to locations throughout the country. This placed considerable pressure upon the tile industry in the East Shropshire coalfield, as tile works were forced to implement new mechanical processes in order to produce more competitive goods. However, while the Broseley tile works were now able to meet demand, the new mechanised processes produced a much lower quality tile and they slowly began to lose their national reputation. Moreover, the heavy investment in specialised tile-making plant made it difficult for the works to diversify into the production of other goods. Inevitably, the close of the century was marked by a considerable number of closures, as the market for Broseley tiles steadily declined.<sup>58</sup>

In the southern regions of Shropshire were two further coalfields, the Clee Hill coalfield and the Wyre Forest coalfield. Trinder has argued that the Clee Hill coalfield was unusual not only for its 'situation' and 'longevity', but also for 'the variety of its products'. Coal mining in Clee Hill coalfield took place within an area which extends no more than 3km from north to south, and just 7km from Knowbury in the east to Catherton Common in the west.<sup>59</sup> The Clee Hill coalfield is made up of two small isolated coalfields centred on the Brown Clee and the Titterstone Clee Hill. The former extends across approximately two square miles and contains three principal coal seams, while the latter spans an area of four square miles, centring on the locations of Knowbury, Catherton, Cornbrook and Clee Hill village.<sup>60</sup> Here the Primitive Methodist cause thrived, as the village of Hopton Bank located on the edge of the

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<sup>58</sup> Alfrey & Clark, *Landscape of Industry*, p. 27; Clark, *Ironbridge Gorge*, pp. 68-73.

<sup>59</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, p. 93.

<sup>60</sup> Brown, *Mines of Shropshire*, p. 78.



coalfield, became the head of a massive circuit which spanned for miles across the southern extremes of Shropshire.

Lying immediately beneath the basalt cap of each of the hills, the coal seams in this location have been worked from early times. However, mining in this area did not begin on a major scale during the 1660s, and it was not until the opening of the turnpike road from Ludlow to Cleobury Mortimer in the 1750s that mining activity here really began to expand. Three main coal mining companies were working on Titterstone Clee Hill during the early nineteenth century, and in 1845 mines worked by the Botfield family, ironmasters of Dawley, reached a peak annual output of 20,983 tons. While some of the coal mined on Titterstone Clee Hill was conveyed as far as mid-Wales, much was used by the local brick and tile industry which flourished between 1841 and 1861. The production of iron was also an important coal-using industry, works at Cornbrook and Knowbury manufacturing iron from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. In contrast, although coal was excavated on Brown Clee, the mines there were more important as a source of high quality iron ore, which was from the mid-seventeenth to the early eighteenth century transported down the hill to a blast furnace at Bouldon. From the 1860s however, coal mining in the Clee Hills began to decline, as the quarrying of dhustone became the most important industry in the coalfield. While ironmaking was 'beyond revival, and brickmaking enjoyed only a brief spell of prosperity', quarrying in the Clee Hill coalfield flourished well into the twentieth century; by 1891, the amount of stone quarried annually totalled 90,000 tons.<sup>61</sup>

Located in the extreme south-east of the county on the western bank of the river Severn, the coalfield of the Wyre Forest extends down the Severn Valley from Bridgenorth in the north through Bewdley to the Abberley Hills in the south, and spans approximately 50 square miles.<sup>62</sup> Although mining took place on a modest scale throughout the nineteenth century, the Wyre Forest coalfield did not enjoy sustained prosperity but instead experienced two distinct periods of significant activity. The first of these was during the Napoleonic Wars, while the second came in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, extending into the early years of the twentieth century. In the

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<sup>61</sup> Brown, *Mines of Shropshire*, p. 78; Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, pp. 93-7; A. Jenkins, *Titterstone Clee Hills. Everyday Life, Industrial History and Dialect* (Orleton, 1982), p. 11; N. Chapman, R. Evans, D. Poyner & S. Powell, 'Forest of Wyre and Clee Hill coalfields', in A. Pearce (ed.) *Mining in Shropshire* (Shropshire, 1995), pp. 64-5.

<sup>62</sup> Brown, *Mines of Shropshire*, p. 68.



first phase of prosperity, coal was mined at the Stanley Colliery in Highley and transported along the Severn to supply various local forges, limeworks and brickworks. A second significant mining concern was situated at Billingsley; here the coal was used to fuel two blast furnaces. However, by the early 1820s, both of these ventures had closed. The second phase of activity occurred when coalmasters discovered that the Brooch seam located beneath the sulphur-rich seams could be mined, taking advantage of the new markets opened up by the Severn Valley Railway. Mines at Billingsley and Highley flourished once more, and in 1892 mines were sunk at Kinlet, supplying coal for a local brickworks. As new pits were sunk, the population of the coalfield began to expand. In the period between 1871 and 1921, the population of Highley rocketed from 293 to 1,985, while that of Billingsley increased from 119 to 148 and that of Kinlet from 432 to 501.<sup>63</sup>

While it is clear that the majority of industrial activity within Shropshire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was situated within the confines of the five distinct areas examined above, there were other locations where industry thrived. Perhaps the most significant of these was lead mining. The Shropshire lead mines are situated within the hilly country approximately 12 miles to the south-west of the county town of Shrewsbury, not far from the Montgomery border.<sup>64</sup> Occupying two separate strips to the west of the Stiperstones and south of Minsterley, the first of these strips stretches south from Snailbeach to the Bog, the second south from Hope through Shelve to the Grits. This part of Shropshire remains remote and isolated, however the Primitive Methodists who were willing to travel the furthest and preach to the least amount of people, enjoyed considerable success here among the lead mining community. Located close to the Shrewsbury coalfield, coal was vital for the development of the lead industry, providing cheap fuel for both use in the mines and for the smelting of ores. The two most important owners of lead mines were the Earls of Tankerville and the More family, the former owning most of the mines in the northern and eastern regions of the orefield, the latter those in the south and west. The richest mine Snailbeach in the area, was owned by the Marquis of Bath.<sup>65</sup> While the

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<sup>63</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, pp. 82-5; Chapman, Evans, Poyner & Powell, 'Forest of Wyre and Clee Hill coalfields', p. 56.

<sup>64</sup> R. Burt, P. Waite & R. Burnley, *The Mines of Shropshire, Montgomeryshire, with Cheshire and Staffordshire* (Exeter, 1990), p. xii; E. C. Wadlow, 'The Story of Shropshire's Leadmining Industry', in *The Metal Industry* 27 July 1934, p. 75.

<sup>65</sup> F. Brook & M. Allbutt, *The Shropshire Lead Mines* (Staffordshire, 1973), pp. 11-4; E. A. Turner, 'Leadmining in Shropshire', in *Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club. Transactions*, vol. 12 (1943-5), p.



height of some parts of the Stiperstones ridge, which is approximately 2,000 feet above sea level, formed an obstacle to the transportation of lead mined in the area, the height also proved advantageous for activity. The height enabled miners to drive along adits from low points in river valleys to meet the veins in the hills, therefore allowing excavation to a considerable depth without the aid of pumping machinery.<sup>66</sup>

Mining in this region had ancient origins, but it was not until the mid-eighteenth century that the first large-scale mining activity in this area began, and as Burt *et al* have noted,

‘It then took off in an accelerating burst of large-scale capital intensive operations which effectively looted all of the best deposits in just over a hundred years.’<sup>67</sup>

John Lawrence was by far the most successful entrepreneur at this point, gaining control over nearly every major mine in the orefield. Despite his power and influence, by 1835 Lawrence had lost possession of all mines. His successors did not fare well either; lead prices had declined steeply, and by the mid-1840s all of the new owners had also deserted their lead-mining operations.<sup>68</sup> A boom in the 1850s brought several new companies to the area to work existing lead mines and to sink new ones. Many of these companies, which were promoted on the stock market, brought with them Cornish engineers who constructed characteristic Cornish engine houses, and also miners from Wales. However, falling prices and competition from foreign producers led to the eventual failure of these new ventures, and saw the return of the ownership of the mines to local hands during the 1860s. Although lead prices were fairly low in this period, the 1860s were a time of moderate prosperity. As the decade came to a close, another boom occurred and the 1870s saw the years of maximum output in the region. Assisted by rising prices in the metal market during the early 1870s, the county’s lead ore output more than doubled, and by 1872 Shropshire was producing over 10 per cent of the nation’s total output of lead ore. Between 1865 and 1875 the mine at Snailbeach produced approximately 2,000 to 3,000 tons of lead and zinc ore annually. However, by the end of the decade when large discoveries of lead were made in the New World, lead ore prices began to fall once again. One by one the lead mines

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<sup>66</sup> Brook & Allbutt, *Shropshire Lead Mines*, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> Burt, Waite & Burnley, *Mines of Shropshire*, p. xii.

<sup>68</sup> Brook & Allbutt, *Shropshire Lead Mines*, pp. 13-5.



closed; in 1895, Snailbeach was the only mine still in operation, excavation continuing until 1911 when it was almost completely exhausted.<sup>69</sup>

### **Population.**

Although population growth was neither as great or as rapid in Shropshire as it was for the whole of the country - the population of England and Wales almost doubling during the first half of the nineteenth century - Shropshire did undergo considerable expansion in the period from 1801. Between 1801 and 1851 the population of the county grew from 167,639 to 229,341, an increase of approximately 37 per cent. The population of Shropshire continued to grow to 1871, when nineteenth-century levels peaked at 248,111.<sup>70</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century there had been a clear shift in the demographic profile of the county. By 1801, almost half of its population was no longer directly concerned with the production of food, and in this respect, Shropshire was well ahead of its time. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, 17 per cent of the total population lived and worked in the Shropshire coalfield, while a further 25 per cent lived in Shrewsbury and other market towns. Although these were not totally divorced from farming, there was a notable increase in the population that was no longer self-sufficient.<sup>71</sup>

As we have seen, by far the greatest area of industrial activity during the nineteenth century was in the east of Shropshire, in the coalfields around Coalbrookdale. Inevitably this ensured that parishes in this part of the county had some of the greatest population levels in the whole of Shropshire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The early prosperity generated as a result of the trade in coal had already encouraged significant levels of population growth in areas such as Broseley and Benthall. For example, the population of Broseley parish expanded from 150 in 1570 to 2000 in 1700. Similarly, the population of Benthall increased from 80 to 500 over the same period. Trinder has noted that in the 1660s the trade in coal supported around 2,500 families. In 1760, a decade after the beginning of iron production in the area, the population of the entire East Shropshire coalfield stood at 20,000. By 1801,

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<sup>69</sup> D. J. Merry, *The History of Minsterley* (Shrewsbury, 1996), pp. 41-2; Burt, Waite & Burnley, *Mines of Shropshire*, pp. xii-xiii; Brook & Allbutt, *Shropshire Lead Mines*, pp. 11 & 15-6; Turner, 'Leadmining in Shropshire', p. 50.

<sup>70</sup> A. T. Gaydon (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England. A History of Shropshire*, vol. II (Oxford, 1973), p. 219; Mathias, *First Industrial Nation*, p. 166.

<sup>71</sup> Rowley, *The Shropshire Landscape*, p. 146; Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p. 97.



this figure had risen to 34,000, and in 1851 the population of the coalfield was over 50,000.<sup>72</sup> By far the greatest levels of expansion in the East Shropshire coalfield occurred in the parishes of Dawley and Madeley. The population of Dawley expanded from 3,869 in 1801 to 11,254 in 1871, a massive increase of 191 per cent during the period. Similarly, the parish of Madeley, which encompasses the areas of Coalbrookdale, Coalport and Ironbridge also underwent considerable expansion during the same period, its population increasing from 4,758 to 9,475.<sup>73</sup>

Rowley has noted that the pattern of settlement in the East Shropshire coalfield was very different from that in other parts of the county. Scattered rows of terraced cottages were built wherever there was an area of flat land, whether alongside the river or a road, or in the middle of a field. A good example of this is the settlement of Holywell Lane, the largest of several groups of 'squatter-like' cottages to the west of Little Dawley. From the end of the eighteenth century Holywell Lane underwent rapid expansion. Between 1772 and 1825 the total number of cottages in this location increased from 6 to 26 and by 1882 the total had risen to 32 cottages, the majority of which were interlocking properties tightly crammed upon common land. Trinder has noted that shortages of accommodation in the coalfield led to severe overcrowding in many of its settlements. This was made clear by the 1851 census which revealed that 47 of the back-to-back houses in the settlement of Dark Lane had five or more occupants, and that 21 had seven or more. However, while there was considerable internal overcrowding in many locations, this was often compensated for by the fact that cottages were crowded together in relatively small groups, not in their hundreds as was the case in many other parts of the country.<sup>74</sup>

With the collapse of the iron trade, however, came a major exodus from the East Shropshire coalfield and a decline in its population levels, as ironworkers looked for employment in other centres of iron and steel production. Similarly, miners also migrated in search of employment, moving in particular to the edge of the south Staffordshire coalfield. Trinder has noted that a pattern of decline can be perceived in all aspects of life during the final quarter of the century, and as we shall see while the population the coalfield fell from 57,572 to 49,897 between 1881 and 1891, Primitive

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<sup>72</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, pp. 98 & 102.

<sup>73</sup> *1851 Census of Great Britain*, Population vol. 6 (I. U. P. Shannon 1970 edn), pp. 860-1; Gaydon, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. II, pp. 222 & 224, & G. Baugh (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England. A History of Shropshire*, vol. XI (Oxford, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>74</sup> Rowley, *The Shropshire Landscape*, p. 230; Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, pp. 189-190 & 195.



Methodism struggled to maintain its membership. Every individual parish experienced decline during this decade; however, it is clear from the census figures that in some places this pattern of decline actually began a decade earlier. For example, the population of Dawley fell from a peak of 11254 in 1871 to just 6996 in 1891. Similarly the population of Broseley also declined over the period falling from 4639 to 4033, while the population of Madeley fell from 9475 in 1871 to 8177 in 1891.<sup>75</sup>

In other parts of the county, population underwent rapid expansion during the nineteenth century as industrial activity expanded. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the population of Pontesbury in the Shrewsbury coalfield also underwent considerable expansion. The peak of activity in the Shrewsbury coalfield came during the 1850s and 1860s, when over 300 miners were employed. As there was a total of six coal pits within a short distance of the centre of Asterley in the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of these 300 miners lived in the parish of Pontesbury, at Asterley, Hanwood, Longden Common and in the large squatter settlement on Pontesbury Hill.<sup>76</sup> Between 1801 and 1861 the total population of Pontesbury increased by 69 per cent from 2053 to 3466.<sup>77</sup> The expansion of the lead mining industry also led to significant population growth at Minsterley. In the period between 1811 and 1851 the population of Minsterley increased from 705 to 988, a total of 40 per cent. However, in both Pontesbury and Minsterley the population growth experienced as a result of stimulus from industrial expansion was only short-lived, decline setting in before the end of the nineteenth century; by 1901, the population of Pontesbury had fallen to 2542, and that of Minsterley to 812.<sup>78</sup> In contrast, the parish of Oswestry in the north-west of the county enjoyed continued demographic expansion throughout the nineteenth century in line with sustained industrial success and expansion. Between 1801 and 1851 the population of the Oswestry parish grew from 5,839 to 8,796. By 1871, the population had risen to 11,652, an expansion which the Census Reports suggested was as a result of 'the development of quarries and collieries in the district and the establishment of

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<sup>75</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 241; Gaydon, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. II, pp. 221-4; Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. XI, p. 27.

<sup>76</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, pp. 78-81; Gaydon, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. II, p. 226; A. T. Gaydon (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England. A History of Shropshire*, vol. VIII (Oxford, 1968), p. 252.

<sup>77</sup> *1851 Census of Great Britain, Population* vol. 6, pp. 860-1; Gaydon, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. II, p. 226.

<sup>78</sup> During much of the nineteenth century Minsterley was a chapelry of Westbury parish, although its population was counted separately from 1811. *1851 Census of Great Britain, Population* vol. 6, pp. 860-1; Gaydon, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. II, p. 229; Merry, *The History of Minsterley*, pp. 41-5.



large works for the manufacture of railway rolling stock.’<sup>79</sup> By 1901, the population of Oswestry had expanded further to a total of 13,501: a total increase of 131 per cent during the whole of the nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup>

In contrast, there were parts of the county that supported very low levels of population. Parishes such as Hopton Castle in the extreme south-west, Ratlinghope in the upland country of the west, and Clee St Margaret in the south-east were all rural parishes with small populations. Of these parishes, Hopton Castle had by far the smallest population, and although it did experience some expansion in numbers during the first half of the nineteenth century, it did not exceed 164. Between 1801 and 1841 the population of Hopton Castle expanded by 19 per cent from 138 to a peak of 164. However, while this level was sustained until 1851, by 1861 its population had returned to its 1801 level, a decrease which the Census Reports recorded as being a result of demolition of cottages in the parish. By 1871 the population of Hopton Castle had fallen once more to a total of just 120. The Census Reports again attempted to explain this further decline, noting that it was caused by the departure of labourers temporarily employed in 1861 on the construction of the railway. With the exception of a slight upturn in the decade from 1891 to 1901, the population of Hopton Castle remained at a low throughout the final quarter of the nineteenth century, and experienced further decline in the twentieth century.<sup>81</sup> Clee St Margaret was another small Shropshire parish spanning just 1,589 acres, and although Clee St Margaret did experience some expansion in numbers throughout the nineteenth century its population levels remained low. Between 1801 and 1851 its population expanded from 249 to a peak of 303. However, from the mid-nineteenth century its population began to dwindle and by 1901 had fallen to 196.<sup>82</sup> Finally, if we examine the experience of Ratlinghope, we can see that while this was a much larger parish, spanning a total of 5,559 acres in the nineteenth century, it had in 1801 a population of just 223. By 1841, the population of the parish had risen to 315. Although this was not sustained, levels falling to a total of 270 in 1851, in the decades that followed its population remained fairly static fluctuating between 270 to 295. From 1881, in line with the experience of the other

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<sup>79</sup> *1851 Census of Great Britain, Population* vol. 6, pp. 862-3; Gaydon, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. II, pp. 225 & 233.

<sup>80</sup> Gaydon, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. II, p. 225.

<sup>81</sup> *1851 Census of Great Britain, Population* vol. 6, pp. 856-7; Gaydon, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. II, pp. 223 & 232-3.

<sup>82</sup> *1851 Census of Great Britain, Population* vol. 6, pp. 854-5; Gaydon, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. II, p. 221.



rural parishes examined here, the population of the parish began to decline. Between 1881 and 1901 the population of Ratlinghope fell from 270 to 197.<sup>83</sup>

As defined by their housing, the rural poor of Shropshire might be classified into two main groups. The first were the cottagers and small occupiers who lived on or near to the commons and who rarely gave anything more than an acknowledgement to the lord of the manor. In the parish of Clee St Margaret in 1793, 22 of the 50 cottages were amerced for as little as 8d a year. For this group of squatters, day labour was generally seen merely as an occasional supplement to their subsistence living. The second group was the full-time labourers who paid a market rent for their cottages and gardens. For the vast majority, farming provided a hard and precarious existence and while a labourer's wife and family could contribute to the total income, many could not survive without a regular handout from the parish authorities. In 1869, it was suggested that the living conditions of labourers in the south-west of the county were 'deplorably low', and even worse than those in Dorset. In the parish of Clun weekly wages were approximately 9 or 10s. However, although this did not include a cottage, labourers were given potato ground rent free, and at harvest time their income was further subsidised by the addition of daily food. Contemporaries regarded Shropshire cottages as 'infamous'; many were damp, in a state of disrepair and unfit for human habitation. On certain estates cottages which were demolished were not replaced, forcing farm labourers to live in neighbouring parishes and walk several miles to work. For example, those working in Lydham parish had no alternative but to live in cramped one-bedroom houses in the town of Bishop's Castle, ultimately 'combining the disadvantages of an urban slum with low agricultural wages.'<sup>84</sup>

As we have seen, by the end of the nineteenth century the population in each of the rural parishes examined above had fallen below 1801 levels, and throughout Shropshire many other parishes experienced a considerable decline in population levels as the nineteenth century came to a close. Holderness has noted that generally 'almost all villages reached their maximum populations at various dates between 1831 and 1871', thereafter experiencing a 'long downhill run to 1911 or later.'<sup>85</sup> Much of this decline was a result of changes in agriculture, as the total numbers employed in this

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<sup>83</sup> *1851 Census of Great Britain, Population* vol. 6, pp. 856-7; Gaydon, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. II, p. 226.

<sup>84</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. XI, pp. 223-230.

<sup>85</sup> B. A Holderness, 'Agriculture and industrialisation in the Victorian economy', in *Shropshire Agriculture, 1815-1914* (Local Studies Library, Shrewsbury), p. 2.



sector fell greatly in the final quarter of the century. The period of depression, which did much to exacerbate the poor situation of agricultural workers, along with the mechanisation of certain tasks, the general decrease in labour demands, and the increased employment opportunities in the towns and overseas encouraged many to desert the countryside.<sup>86</sup> In 1861, the total number of farmers working in Great Britain stood at 312,000, while the number of farm labourers stood at 1,362,000. By 1911 there had been a radical decline in the total employed in the agricultural sector, the number of farmers falling to 280,000 and labourers to 87,000.<sup>87</sup> If we look at Shropshire we see that there was a total of 21,165 agricultural labourers and 6,102 farmers working in the county in 1871. However by 1911 the number of labourers had declined to 13,497, while the number of farmers had fallen to 5,543, representing a decrease of 36 and 9 per cent respectively. Inevitably this decline along with the exodus of miners and ironworkers from the East Shropshire coalfield had a negative impact upon the population levels of the entire county, and between 1871 and 1901 Shropshire's population fell from 248,111 to 239,234.<sup>88</sup>

Across the country Primitive Methodism thrived in rural districts or in mining communities, and as we have seen while Shropshire was predominantly agricultural during the nineteenth century there were many pockets of industrial activity. This therefore provided the ideal breeding ground for Primitive Methodism, the denomination expanding across Shropshire and enjoying success in all parts of the county during the nineteenth century. As we shall see, being of the people Primitive Methodist preachers were able to provide an experience that was relevant for agricultural and industrial workers alike. Primitive Methodism created a community of equals and provided opportunities denied to the working classes in other areas of their lives.

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<sup>86</sup> G. E. Mingay, *A Social History of the English Countryside* (London, 1990), pp. 171-3; Holderness, 'Agriculture and industrialisation', p. 1; Hill & Stamper, *The Working Countryside*, p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> Mathias, *First Industrial Nation*, p. 308.

<sup>88</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, p. 257.



### **Chapter 3: The Advent of Primitive Methodism**

#### **Secession: The Progression away from Wesleyanism.**

It is remarkable that John Wesley created ‘a national connexion in a period of localised church life’, and was able to provide his itinerants with such ‘a considerable sense of common doctrine and purpose’ regardless of their different opinions on policy.<sup>1</sup> However, the death of John Wesley brought about a period of considerable upheaval for the Methodist Connexion, as the structure of discipline and piety he had organised came under increasing pressure from both internal and external forces, ultimately producing division and secession. In the years from 1795, many groups chose to break away from the main Wesleyan body. The ‘Quaker’ Methodists seceded in 1796, followed by the Methodist New Connexion in 1797. The Primitive Methodists were formed in 1812, and the Bible Christians in 1815. This list excludes many other groups which separated from the original Wesleyan Connexion as a result of other localised issues and conflicts.<sup>2</sup> Division occurred against a background of upheaval and anxiety; not only did the onset of war in the late eighteenth century lead to social, economic and political instability, but the evangelical movement became divided as two contrasting trends developed. While many of the lower classes yearned for a spiritual revolution through the means of spontaneous worship, this contrasted with the desire of many who sought

‘social harmony and political order through class-based morality, a strategy increasingly evident in Victorian institutional religion.’<sup>3</sup>

Without the leadership and guidance of John Wesley, Methodism struggled to contain the various tensions that rose to the surface in the period from 1791.

As Methodism became a denomination in its own right, the need to establish its own denominational life became imperative. Hatcher argues that this inevitably implied a duty to safeguard against any form of wildness and as a result the Wesleyan Conference introduced ever-conservative policies which ultimately stifled lay initiative

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<sup>1</sup> H. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast* (London, 1989), p. 551.

<sup>2</sup> D. M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters. Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 3; Valenze, *Prophetic Sons*, pp. 19-20; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1968), pp. 427-31.



and revivalism.<sup>4</sup> Growing conservatism within Methodist authorities acted to suppress and control its various constituents, encouraging a hierarchical form; and the changes that occurred as a result of these policies provoked popular disapproval. Valenze has noted that the leadership became increasingly similar to that of the Anglican Church, a feature which the Methodist movement had originally set out to challenge.<sup>5</sup> In the early days of Methodism, the majority of the itinerant ministry were laymen; after Wesley's death however, the itinerancy gradually developed into a distinct and separate clerical order. Although increasing membership of the Connexion ensured that the lay element continued to play an important role in the day-to-day functioning of circuit life, laymen were ultimately denied any real power.<sup>6</sup> Lay leaders grew frustrated as they witnessed ministers gaining a greater authority within the developing denomination, and division became inevitable 'as lay-preachers discovered the power of their own appeal'.<sup>7</sup> Tensions also arose over financial matters, as the burden of paying for the increasing wage demands and grander chapels fell directly upon society members. While many Wesleyans had prospered by their thrift, there were still many poor members who were unwilling or unable to pay their class and ticket money. In particular, rural Methodists were resistant to the idea of paying their dues on a regular basis, rejecting 'the obligatory coupling of worship and money'.<sup>8</sup>

The first schism to occur as the result of tensions between the increasingly professionalised, salaried Wesleyan ministry and the voluntary lay preachers was the Methodist New Connexion in 1797. Although leadership was actually provided by a travelling preacher, Alexander Kilham attempted to win a greater voice within the Methodist government for the lay element.<sup>9</sup> Further offshoots appeared and flourished as determined lay leaders gave voice to local discontent, and adopted alternative forms of worship. The sects that came into life during this period generally represented a backlash against the 'feeble evangelism and distrust of revivalism' displayed by Wesleyan governing bodies.<sup>10</sup> Wesleyan worship became 'increasingly staid, chapel centred and preacher dominated', as its authorities 'tried to halt the centrifugal

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<sup>4</sup> Hatcher, 'The origin and expansion', pp. 65-6; Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. xi.

<sup>5</sup> Valenze, *Prophetic Sons*, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Valenze, *Prophetic Sons*, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 10-15.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 433-4.

<sup>10</sup> Currie, *Methodism Divided*, pp. 55-6.



tendencies of lay evangelism' by outlawing unsupervised activities.<sup>11</sup> Unwilling to tolerate the revivalistic tendencies prevalent in many societies at the turn of the century, Wesleyan authorities adopted a reactionary stance ultimately forcing members, who would otherwise have remained faithful to the cause, to seek an alternative. However, Currie has argued that there are various misconceptions surrounding the history of these 'offshoots'. Although Wesleyan officials were criticised for their 'rigidity in dealing with evangelistic laymen', Currie points out that they were often,

'peculiarly tardy in acting against local revival leaders who ran their own denominations side by side with Wesleyan Methodism'.<sup>12</sup>

The Burslem Wesleyan circuit was initially willing to tolerate the revivalistic activities of Hugh Bourne, one of the co-founders of the Primitive Methodists, allowing him to raise and manage new societies until they had the means to take them into their own control.<sup>13</sup> However, the persistent open-air revivalism of Bourne and Clowes eventually became too much for a Wesleyan Conference so preoccupied with the desire to maintain decorum and society discipline.<sup>14</sup> Werner has argued that it was the Primitive Methodists 'who profited most from the negative aspects of Wesleyan modernism'; the fervent and unrestrained expression of faith through the means of camp meetings, along with a considerable emphasis on lay participation provided the firm foundations of the Primitive Methodist movement, and remained important features of the Connexion throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Origins of Primitive Methodism: Two Founding Members.**

In 1864, the Reverend J. Parrot summarised the historical development of Primitive Methodism stating that,

'The Primitive Methodist Connexion did not originate in what is generally understood by a split, secession or division from any other community. It was not formed of members drawn from other churches, nor of characters whose uneasy disposition prevented their settling long in any church without producing injurious commotion. Defamatory agitation was not resorted to in

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<sup>11</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Currie, *Methodism Divided*, pp. 55-6.

<sup>13</sup> Bourne, *Notices of the Life*, pp. 2-4.

<sup>14</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 20.



order to gain adherents or to enlist the public sympathy in its favour... As a body the Primitive Methodists have ever stood aloof from party strife, believing that God had called them into existence by a special Providence for the noble work of saving souls, reviving and promoting the best interests of pure religion...'<sup>16</sup>

This represents the traditional stance taken by those examining the rise of this movement, and is an interpretation that originates from the personal thoughts and actions of Hugh Bourne.

'I reposed under the Wesleyan authorities, but that repose being removed, I was necessitated to have no other head upon earth but Christ...I considered that if the Lord had anything for a person to do, he would open the way for him to do it; and the ten thousands of the gold of Ophir would not have induced me to attempt to make a split, and set up a party. My wish was to labour for the conversion of souls and have as little to do with management as I could.'<sup>17</sup>

Clearly however, although it was not their conscious intention to incite a cause for division, the actions of Hugh Bourne and William Clowes did eventually lead to the creation of the new denomination. Werner has argued that the power of these protagonists lay in their 'zeal for converting others', an attribute which ultimately ensured that the 'task of organising lay people who, like themselves, were not willing to march to the beat of the official Wesleyan drum' became thrust upon them.<sup>18</sup>

The precise origins of Primitive Methodism are difficult to pinpoint the Connexion being formed as a result of 'a chain of unexpected circumstances'.<sup>19</sup> Although it will become clear that Bourne and Clowes should be seen as the founders of the new movement, we shall see that others such as Crawfoot and Steele also played an important role not only in influencing the co-founders, but also in shaping events as they evolved. In order to establish the exact origins of the movement, it is necessary to examine the development of three separate groups, all of which had been pushed from their original home within Wesleyan Methodism. The union of the Camp Meeting

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<sup>16</sup> Rev. J. Parrot, *A Digest of the History, Polity and Doctrines of the Primitive Methodists* (London, 1864), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, p. 194.

<sup>18</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, p. 321; Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 23.



Methodists, the Clowesites, and the Steelites led to the birth of the ‘Primitive Methodist Connexion’ on 30 May 1811.

### **Hugh Bourne: Revival and the Emergence of the Camp-Meeting Movement**

Born 3 April 1772, Hugh Bourne was raised till the age of sixteen on Fordhays Farm located in the bleak and desolate moorland of Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire; and the ‘silence and seclusion’ of this deserted landscape remained apparent in his character till the end of his life.<sup>20</sup> Later his family moved to a larger farm in Bemersley in the parish of Norton-in-the-Moors, where Hugh learned the wheelwright’s trade, like his father and grandfather before him. His father Joseph was ‘a man of violent temper, and of somewhat dissolute habits’, despite being an ardent Churchman.<sup>21</sup> Hugh was a particularly serious young man, ‘in whom the deepest things moved towards silence rather than expression’, a characteristic which his own father ‘had neither the insight nor the sympathy to appreciate’.<sup>22</sup> It was Ellen Bourne however, Hugh’s mother, who was to impress upon him the ‘importance of religious truth’ and to provide through the means of reading, the capacity for religious growth. From an early age, Bourne acquired the habit of reading late into the night, often wrestling with the word of God, struggling for a spiritual insight.<sup>23</sup> Until 1799, Hugh regularly attended Sunday worship with his mother in the parish church of Biddulph; however it was in this year that he became acquainted with certain Methodist literature which ultimately led to his conversion.<sup>24</sup> Despite his shy character, from the moment of conversion Bourne became driven by the overwhelming need to share his experience with others. He remarks,

‘The Bible looked new; creation looked new; and I felt a love to all mankind; and my desire was that friends and enemies, and all the world, if possible, might be saved.’<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 12-3; T. Church, *A History of the Primitive Methodists* (London, 1869), p. 27; J. Ashworth, *The Life of the Venerable Hugh Bourne* (London, 1888), p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> B. Aquila Barber, *A Methodist Pageant. A Souvenir of the Primitive Methodist Church* (London, 1932), p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, pp. 25-30.

<sup>24</sup> W. E. Farndale, *The Secret of Mow Cop. A New Appraisal of Primitive Methodist Origins* (London, 1950), pp. 15-6; Church, *History*, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, p. 49.



Bourne was also heavily influenced during this period by the literature of the Quakers 'whose strong faith, patience in suffering, and zeal for open-air work he greatly admired';<sup>26</sup> and it was through the Quaker practice of 'Divine Guidance' that Bourne finally committed himself to the Methodist cause.<sup>27</sup> From his conversion Bourne began to attend the Methodist preaching services held at the house of John Birchenough, situated a quarter of a mile from Bemersley, and when encouraged to attend a love-feast by travelling itinerant John Brettall he accepted a ticket without realising that this was ultimately a passport to membership. The lovefeast was a decisive moment for Bourne and the following Sunday he joined a Methodist class at Ridgeway.<sup>28</sup>

Early in the year 1800, Bourne was established in his own business, when the purchase of a quantity of oak timber growing on a farm at Dales Green took him into the neighbourhood of Harriseahead, in the mountainous region of north Staffordshire. Situated at the highest point of the south-western ridge of the Pennine range, which stretches from the Cheviots to the Peak of Derbyshire, Mow Cop provided the setting for 'one of the great movements of English religious life in the nineteenth century'.<sup>29</sup> Kendall has argued that the northern part of Staffordshire

'epitomises many of the physical and industrial features amongst which so much of the success of the denomination was to be won.'<sup>30</sup>

A rugged and desolate region, the isolated community living there reflected the rough physical conditions; it was 'an enclave of heathendom', crimes of violence were common, and religious worship scant there being but one small chapel of ease for this entire area.<sup>31</sup> As further jobs arose, Bourne found that he had to remain in the vicinity of Harriseahead for quite some time. At the Ridgeway society, he had often felt that the means of grace were insufficient, but now he found himself entirely cut off from the fellowship of a Methodist class, and began to fear for his continued spiritual safety. Although an extremely shy character, he eventually found solace in the company of Thomas Maxfield, the local farrier and blacksmith, to whom he gave a written account of his conversion. Walford has argued that this represented the 'first link in the chain of

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<sup>26</sup> Barber, *Methodist Pageant*, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 16-7.

<sup>28</sup> Ashworth, *Life of the Venerable Hugh Bourne*, pp. 18-19; Farndale, *Secret of Mow Cop*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>29</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>30</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, pp. 19-20.



causes, which should produce a mighty revival of Primitive Methodism', as it led to the first and perhaps most important personal appeals of Bourne's spiritual career.<sup>32</sup> Daniel Shubotham, a cousin of Bourne, who worked as a miner at a local colliery, came to Hugh at the direction of Maxfield, for guidance about his immortal soul, and on Christmas day 1800, after a series of discussions regarding personal religion, Shubotham was converted. This marks the beginning of an episode which eventually led to revival of religion at Harriseahead. Shubotham's 'exuberant if erratic zeal to evangelise others' more than compensated for Bourne's reticent character, and together they began their converting work among the local colliers.<sup>33</sup>

Kendall has argued that the revival which broke out in Harriseahead and the local neighbourhood during this period merits close attention, representing a revival 'unlike any other within our knowledge and experience.' The revival that occurred in this locality at this time 'set a type', employing as it did its own unique features. Perhaps the most successful method of evangelism employed was 'conversation-preaching'. Bourne had set the example in his Christmas day conversation sermon with Shubotham, and the power of this technique soon became clear, as new converts 'talked religion' through the means of direct personal appeal.<sup>34</sup> Previous to the arrival of Hugh Bourne in Harriseahead, Jane Hall was the only Methodist in the locality, and it was at her cottage that a weekly meeting was initiated early in 1801. The inaugural meeting of this group was of particular significance for Bourne, representing the moment when he gained the confidence to pray in public for the first time. However, despite all efforts to obtain one of the Wesleyan itinerants stationed at Burslem, to conduct the Harriseahead prayer meetings, the group remained without guidance and inevitably developed a unique style of their own. One of the main differences was the considerable noise and confusion as 'new recruits were urged to adopt the method of personal appeal so successfully followed by Hugh Bourne and his conversation preachers'.<sup>35</sup>

This exuberant form of worship attracted many new converts as the movement gradually spread through all the villages around Mow Cop and other meetings were established. Daniel Shubotham was appointed the nominal leader of the Harriseahead

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<sup>32</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 56; Ashworth, *Life of the Venerable Hugh Bourne*, pp. 24-6.

<sup>34</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 31.

<sup>35</sup> Barber, *Methodist Pageant*, p. 7.



class and Bourne took control of the meeting at Kidsgrove. The refusal of Shubotham to become a permanent class leader, created the need for a shared responsibility of the position, and enabled many different members to benefit from the experience of leading a class. Moreover this variety in leadership ‘enhanced the vitality of the meetings’.<sup>36</sup> This represented a significant progression away from the traditional Methodist approach, and perhaps played an important part in the development of the revival in this area. However, although the evangelistic technique employed was styled as a ‘New Way’, Ritson has noted that it was in fact a simple ‘restoration of an old way which had fallen into desuetude’.<sup>37</sup>

Bourne was eager to acquaint his followers with Methodism of a more organised nature, and he therefore encouraged them to attend a Wesleyan class in the home of Joseph Pointon, approximately a mile and a half from Harriseahead. However as worship was held only once a fortnight, Hugh’s converts soon urged him to preach, and although Bourne was reluctant to do so, it was finally arranged that he should preach on 11th July, there being no other preacher scheduled for that day. The audience which gathered to hear him was too large to be accommodated within Pointon’s cottage, and Hugh found it necessary to go out into the open-air. However, the task of speaking so publicly placed a great strain upon Bourne; unable to look at his congregation, he spoke throughout with his hand in front of his face. While this was a difficult experience for Bourne, the uplifting response of the onlookers ‘proved to be a memorable experience in the unfolding’ of his character, convincing him that open-air preaching was the will of God. Werner argues that the spontaneous outpouring that followed his sermon led Bourne to conclude that extended prayer services should always play an integral part of the preaching process.<sup>38</sup>

As the revival continued to flourish, the miners at Harriseahead began to demand that a chapel be built in their village, and they looked to Bourne for his guidance in this matter. Daniel Shubotham had promised a corner of his garden for a site, and Hugh saw fit to offer whatever may be required in the way of timber. However, although the miners did as much as they could it soon became clear that they would require outside

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<sup>36</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 58.

<sup>37</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> Barber, *Methodist Pageant*, pp. 8-9; Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 28; Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 57; Ashworth, *Life of the Venerable Hugh Bourne*, p. 34.



help, and when the Wesleyans in the Burslem circuit refused to take on the project, Bourne took control, meeting most of the costs himself. The Burslem authorities also refused to accept responsibility for the three classes which Hugh had organised in Harriseahead, Mow Cop and Kids Grove; and it was not until the following year that these converts were placed on the membership roll and the chapel they had built was included on the preaching plan. Bourne found it difficult to comprehend why the Burslem circuit was so slow to accept these new members. However, as Werner argues, the luxury of hindsight

‘would eventually make the Wesleyan neglect of the colliers’ revival appear salutary because, by throwing the people back on their own resources, it laid the basis for a more democratic leadership and furthered the development of lay participation.’<sup>39</sup>

In 1802 the momentum of the revival began to slow and although no members were lost, no other converts were made. Bourne felt that the excessive amount of preaching had had a negative effect on these congregations used to a more relaxed atmosphere; too much preaching prevented ‘the people’s gifts from being sufficiently exercised in prayer-meetings.’<sup>40</sup> Another factor which acted to stifle the advance of the revival in this location came in the form of two potters from Goldhill, who ‘did what they could to stir up the young converts and the people’ against Bourne. They were angered by the methods employed in the meetings they attended and managed to persuade Daniel Shubotham and Matthias Bayley of their wrongdoing. Although it was not long before the men came to their senses once more, passing the Goldhill potters on to another society, the damage had been done and the movement had been temporarily halted.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting to note that the period between 1802 and 1804, when the revival remained at a low ebb, was also a difficult moment for Hugh Bourne. From his journal it is clear that he has been influenced by this depressive mood. In February 1803, he writes ‘This week I had greater trials than I have ever had since I set out for heaven.’<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 58.

<sup>40</sup> Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 13; Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 58-9.

<sup>41</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, p. 95; Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, pp. 37-8.

<sup>42</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, p. 108.



In the autumn of 1804 the revival became invigorated as a result of a new relationship formed by Bourne with a group of revivalistic Methodists from Stockport. These men impressed upon Hugh the necessity of 'full sanctification', and their considerable zeal was highly infectious.<sup>43</sup> From this moment the revival spread rapidly to other parts of the circuit including Tunstall and Burslem. Werner has argued that this renewed phase of revival was not only 'more potent and less localised than its predecessor', but also focused on the 'quest for entire sanctification' rather than on the urge to save the irreligious.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the most important consequence of the revival was the conversion of William Clowes, as

'it marks the entrance into the movement of a man, exceptionally endowed, who was destined to share the evangelical activities of Hugh Bourne and his fellow revivalists.'<sup>45</sup>

We will examine the conversion of Clowes and his subsequent religious development later; however, it is sufficient to note at this point that Bourne clearly admired Clowes and felt that he had found a kindred spirit,

'I was at Tunstall. William Clowes has become a labourer, and the Lord owns his work. He is one raised up immediately by God, -a man of uncommonly deep experience, of an unusual growth in grace, humility, steady zeal, and flaming love; such a man I scarcely ever met with.'<sup>46</sup>

James Nixon and Thomas Woodnorth were also two other important characters who were converted as the revival spread to Tunstall.

From 1806, the revival took a downward turn once more, encouraging Bourne and his followers to find alternative methods by which to keep their spiritual ardour alight. As early as 1801 there had been discussion about the possibility of an open-air meeting for extended prayer on Mow Cop, however the Burslem authorities had been keen to prevent such activities and the idea had been pushed to one side. In 1806 this interest resurfaced and became strengthened, as accounts of the American camp meetings stirred the imagination of those calling for open-air worship. The renewed interest also coincided with the second visit of Lorenzo Dow, who was making a tour of

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<sup>43</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>44</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>45</sup> Barber, *Methodist Pageant*, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, p. 122.



England, in order to publicise the merits of these unusual meetings.<sup>47</sup> An advocate of the revivalist techniques sweeping the United States, Lorenzo Dow chronicled the camp meetings 'which from 1797 had brought excitement, drama and religion to the frontier regions of Kentucky and Tennessee.'<sup>48</sup> The evangelistic methods employed at these Camp Meetings appealed to the Harriseahead revivalists, who were impressed by the 'fervid and flaming' character of Dow, whose 'eccentric personality flashed on the scene like a meteor'. In 1807, Bourne and Clowes attended Dow's farewell sermon in Congleton, and at the close of the sermon, Hugh purchased several pamphlets from Dow, *A Defence of Camp Meetings* by Rev. G. K. Jennings, and *An Account of the Origin and Progress of Camp Meetings and the Method of Conducting Them* by Dow himself.<sup>49</sup> This literature and the evidence of America convinced Bourne 'that Camp Meetings ought to be employed in England for the saving of the masses'.<sup>50</sup> Bourne's original intention was to organise a three day meeting in August which would counteract the evil influence of the annual parish wake at Norton-in-the-Moors; however such was the enthusiasm of the Harriseahead members that it was decided that a gathering be held on Mow Cop on May 31st.<sup>51</sup>

The birth the English camp meeting therefore occurred on 31 May 1807, in the field of Joseph Pointon, where Bourne had given his first sermon several years previously. Ritson has argued that the camp meeting that took place was striking in its informality,

'It had nothing conventional about it . Although no meeting quite like it had been held in England...there seems to have been no hesitancy as to what should be done next. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes, and it was right. Sermon, exhortation, testimony, prayer and singing followed in rapid succession.'<sup>52</sup>

The recent advocacy of Lorenzo Dow had created considerable interest, and it was estimated that between two and four thousand people had attended the meeting, a total

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<sup>47</sup> C. C. Sellers, *Lorenzo Dow. The Bearer of the Word* (New York, 1928), pp. 113-4; Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, pp. 139-140.

<sup>49</sup> A. Wilkes & J. Lovatt, *Mow Cop and the Camp Meeting Movement. Sketches of Primitive Methodism* (Leominster, 1942), p. 12; Barber, *Methodist Pageant*, pp. 16-7.

<sup>50</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 58.

<sup>51</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 58-9; Farndale, *Secret of Mow Cop*, p. 29.

<sup>52</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 64.



of four preaching stands being erected during the course of the day.<sup>53</sup> Judged by the 'criteria of numbers, good order and decorum, and spiritual results' the success of this first meeting was immediately apparent to its organisers.<sup>54</sup> Bourne therefore acted quickly to arrange further meetings, one to be held on Mow Cop in July and a second in the parish of Norton in August, as originally designed. However, this was too much for the itinerants at Burslem, who were eager to display their loyalty to the higher Methodist authorities.<sup>55</sup> In his work on Primitive Methodism in the Hull circuit, Hatcher has discussed the ambiguous role of Lorenzo Dow in the promotion of camp meetings in England. Although Dow is 'recognised as the catalyst who made English Camp Meetings happen', Hatcher argues that he could also have 'served as a catalyst in bringing about Wesleyan rejection of Camp Meetings'. Wesleyan officials had often been quick to form an opinion of camp meetings, by what they had seen of Lorenzo Dow's wild character.<sup>56</sup>

The second camp meeting held at Mow Cop in the face of growing disapproval, represented a further success for the adolescent movement. Many people, including those Wesleyans who had been warned not to attend by their circuit preachers, joined the gathering, and approximately sixty people were converted. However the organisation of this second camp meeting was to be more complicated than the first. Having been threatened that charges would be brought against them if a second camp meeting went ahead, Hugh and his brother James were faced with the task of securing a licence to preach. As neither the Conventicle nor the Five Mile Acts had been repealed at this time, either could be invoked to prevent the gathering of a large crowd. Under the Conventicle Act an unlicensed preacher could be fined as much as £20. The brothers also took the precaution of obtaining a license for the campground itself; however this required the erection of a building on the site, and a wooden tabernacle and two tents were raised in order to satisfy this demand. This second meeting represented a significant milestone in the development of the camp meeting movement. Werner has commented that

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<sup>53</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, pp. 130-6.

<sup>54</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 70.

<sup>55</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, pp. 74-5 & 80-2.

<sup>56</sup> Hatcher, 'The origin and expansion', p. 69.



‘Although their import was not recognised then, these actions really marked the beginnings of Camp-Meeting Methodism as a separate sect. The preaching permits were issued to “Protestant Dissenting ministers”; the site became, legally speaking, a Protestant place of worship.’<sup>57</sup>

The legal attack had been a failure, however opposition to the open-air meetings continued; and the third gathering planned at Norton proved to be another notable moment in the rise of Camp Meeting Methodism. However, despite the obvious success of the meetings held on Mow, the Burslem circuit authorities remained critical, and in 1807 they laid their case before the Conference. Rather inevitably the Conference declared,

‘It is our judgement that, even supposing such meetings to be allowable in America, they are highly improper in England, and likely to be productive of considerable mischief, and we disclaim all connection with them.’<sup>58</sup>

As Kendall points out, the ruling revealed an underlying concern to deter the ‘self-willedness and ecclesiastical do-as-we-likeness’, which had come to be associated with the revivalism of the period.<sup>59</sup> In the eyes of the Wesleyan Conference, the camp meeting had become the focus of ‘a wider struggle between ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’ Methodism.’<sup>60</sup> As the Norton camp meeting had been arranged before the Conference presented their judgement, followers of the open-air gatherings now faced a considerable dilemma. It appeared that the fate of the movement now hung in the balance.

Many, including William Clowes, bowed to the pressure deciding to withdraw their support. Hugh Bourne however remained undeterred, believing ‘himself called of God to stand by the camp meetings’, and the meeting went ahead as planned.<sup>61</sup> Surprisingly the numbers that attended were great, but the ruling of the Conference had ensured that the number of speakers at their disposal was small. Besides Hugh and his brother, there were only four other speakers. However, just as it became clear ‘how disproportionate they were in numbers and physical strength to the task before them’,

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<sup>57</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 62-3.

<sup>58</sup> Farndale, *Secret of Mow Cop*, p. 33.

<sup>59</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 77.

<sup>60</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 63.

<sup>61</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, p. 171.



help unexpectedly arrived in the form of Dr. Paul Johnson.<sup>62</sup> As a good friend of Lorenzo Dow, Johnson had participated in the recent revivals in Cheshire and Lancashire, and at once he captivated the gathered crowds. Once again success was achieved, and the fate of the open-air movement was sealed as

‘the unaccountable difficulties and oppositions were, in the end, only the means of more fully manifesting the wisdom and power of God, and his providential care over the Camp Meeting system.’<sup>63</sup>

However Bourne’s fate was also settled, although it was to be a further ten months before the Burslem Circuit Quarterly Meeting formerly excluded him.

During the period between the Norton meeting and Hugh’s expulsion from the Wesleyan Methodists, the Bourne brothers found themselves unwelcome in many places where they had previously laboured, and they became free to search for new openings for their work. Invitations to preach at new places were often delivered by those who had heard of the power of the camp-meetings, or by somebody who had witnessed this for themselves. Interest was not only shown by those who lived in villages where the Methodist cause had died out, but also by those who were adverse to ‘modern’ Methodism. Several neglected areas were missioned and new prayer meetings were established at Lask Edge, Tean, Farley and Wooton. Conversation-preaching and family visiting continued, and the brothers set about organising a new series of gatherings. The first was held in Shropshire in 1808. During previous journeys around the Wellington area, Bourne had learned of the traditional custom of holding revelries on the summit of the Wrekin, on the first Sunday of May. Inspired by the potential for good work he chose this as the location for the first camp-meeting of the year, therefore marking the beginning of the yearly camp meeting season. Further camp-meetings were held in Cheshire and Staffordshire acting to extend their missionary stations.<sup>64</sup>

At the Burslem Quarterly Meeting, 27 June 1808, Bourne’s name was finally removed from the membership roll. Although this was not unexpected, the charge brought against him was. The circuit ruled that he had failed to maintain regular attendance at his class meeting, a complaint which Bourne did not deny. Hugh later

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<sup>62</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 81.

<sup>63</sup> Bourne, *Notices of the Life*, p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> J. T. Wilkinson, *Hugh Bourne 1772-1852* (London, 1952), pp. 58-9; Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists*, pp. 24-7; Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 83-4; Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 68.



discovered from the President of the Quarterly Meeting that the real reason for his expulsion was indeed his involvement in activities ‘other than ordinary worship’.<sup>65</sup> Hugh Bourne offers his response to this ruling commenting that,

‘the Lord, contrary to my inclination, had kept me in the front, and by his terrors, he had compelled me to take the lead or the headship in the camp meeting course...the company kept united; and the Lord opened the way before them, and all attempts to stop them, by expulsion or otherwise, were like attempting to stop a river in its course. The decree of the Lord was gone forth to bring open-air worship and the converting work afresh; and every attempt to hedge up their way, or obstruct the course, appeared to have the contrary effect.’<sup>66</sup>

Bourne was now released to multiply his labours in his own unique style.

Hugh Bourne’s alienation from the Old Connexion was cemented during this period by his association with James Crawfoot and the Magic Methodists. In 1807 Bourne, accompanied by William Clowes, made his first visit to see Crawfoot preach at his cottage in the Delamere Forest. The Delamere meeting had originally attained notoriety as its attendants regularly had visions or fell into trances.<sup>67</sup> Although Bourne was initially cautious about Crawfoot’s activities, he soon began to look to the ‘old man of the forest’ for spiritual guidance, eventually experiencing his own dreams and visions. On 17 November 1809 James Crawfoot was engaged as a travelling preacher, the Bourne brothers promising him 10 shillings a week,

‘To follow the openings of Providence: and get as many as he could converted to the Lord, and advise them to join other connexions’.<sup>68</sup>

As Crawfoot was a poor man, Hugh was able to regard the small contribution as an act of charity, and therefore justify this deviation from his firm belief in Free Gospelism. Bourne and Crawfoot later parted company, as Hugh attempted to redeem ‘the Primitives from the excesses of Crawfoot and the visionaries’.<sup>69</sup> Rack has pointed out the importance of the early association between James Crawfoot and the Camp-Meeting Methodists. He argues that

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<sup>65</sup> Barber, *Methodist Pageant*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>66</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, pp. 194-5.

<sup>67</sup> Wilkinson, *Hugh Bourne*, pp. 48-50.

<sup>68</sup> Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists*, p. 32.

<sup>69</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 69-71.



‘Such experiences make the character of the Primitives especially close to that of early Methodism and had similar effects. They must have enhanced its appeal and reputation for spiritual power...Ephemeral though Magic Methodists were they certainly affected their own area, enhanced the reputation of some of the preachers, and taught some important lessons to Bourne.’<sup>70</sup>

The directions that Bourne gave to James Crawfoot when he was first taken out as a travelling preacher reveal his determination that missionary successes be accepted by a ‘formal’ religious association. This had been the case with many other societies formed through the efforts of Bourne and his followers; for example when a society was raised at Lask Edge, it was taken in by the Leek Wesleyan circuit.<sup>71</sup> Links with the Wesleyans had been maintained at many preaching places, despite Bourne having been expelled from his membership; however, in 1810 circumstances arose which forced Hugh to rethink his position. In March of 1810, Hugh and James Bourne visited the village of Standley, and a society was formed. Standley had been missioned on several previous occasions by the Wesleyans without success, however through Bourne’s influence a class of ten members was raised, which he hoped would be joined with the Old Connexion as was customary. When Hugh left the vicinity to make an excursion into Cheshire, the Burslem circuit intervened ruling that the society should submit itself entirely to Wesleyan authority, and that the members should have nothing further to do with the Bournes. The membership refused, and Hugh Bourne was therefore forced to ‘adopt a course to which hitherto he had been resolutely opposed’.<sup>72</sup> Although Bourne was dismayed that the Wesleyans were happy to ‘thrust away those that were the instruments of raising up the work’, he eventually accepted his fate as ‘the wonderful hand of God’, and proceeded as before in the extension of his labours.<sup>73</sup>

### **William Clowes: The Rise of the Clowesites**

The wild and dissipated character of William Clowes presents a considerable contrast to that of Hugh Bourne. Although both men were ultimately expelled over the camp meeting issue, they differed in nearly every other respect. For example, Hugh was

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<sup>70</sup> H. Rack, *How Primitive was Primitive Methodism?* (Englesea Brook, 1996), pp. 13-19; Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, p. 254.

<sup>71</sup> Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists*, p. 25.

<sup>72</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 92.

<sup>73</sup> Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists*, pp. 32-4; Wilkinson, *Hugh Bourne*, p. 76.



converted as a result of his reading, while William ‘came to faith in a noisy prayer meeting’.<sup>74</sup> Clowes’ exuberant personality was reflected in his considerable preaching skill.

‘When the subject fired him, and the spirit from on high urged him on, the shrillness and energy of his voice would pierce and thrill all hearts, and leave impressions not easily erased.’<sup>75</sup>

Clowes’ strength lay in his ability to interact with others. This contrasted with the plain speech and ‘tame’ style employed by Bourne, whose practical nature, and steadiness of purpose was reflected in his shy and serious character.<sup>76</sup> As a local preacher and a member of the Burslem Circuit Quarterly Meeting, Hatcher has argued that William Clowes ‘was far more evidently a part of the structure of Methodism, than Bourne’s freelance evangelism could ever permit him to be’, and he was therefore ultimately ‘more amenable to Wesleyan pressure than Bourne.’<sup>77</sup>

Born in Burslem on 12 March 1780, Clowes like Bourne was of Staffordshire descent. His father Samuel worked as a potter, and was a man of rather ‘reckless and dissolute habits’. His mother, Ann Wedgwood was a relation of John Wedgwood, illustrious potter and manufacturer of the famous Wedgwood-ware. Through his mother’s connections, William became apprenticed at the premature age of ten to his uncle, Joseph Wedgwood. From very early on William revealed ‘his proficiency in the potter’s art’.<sup>78</sup> However his lively, sociable nature inevitably ensured that he was never far from the centre of trouble. Fond of drinking, dancing and gambling, William followed in his father’s footsteps, displaying a reckless character. After Clowes’ apprenticeship finished in 1800, he continued with his career of wild abandon, and as Guttery has noted the first five years of the new century were eventful years for William ‘opening with a reckless marriage; closing with a spiritual birth.’<sup>79</sup> Eventually Clowes went to work at a new pottery establishment in Hull, where as a skilled workman he earned a considerable wage. However it is indicative of his character at this time, that

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<sup>74</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, p. 88.

<sup>75</sup> T. Church, *The Founders of the Primitive Methodist Connexion: their Life and Work* (London, 1882), p. 72.

<sup>76</sup> Church, *Founders*, pp. 40-5.

<sup>77</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, pp. 88-9.

<sup>78</sup> Barber, *Methodist Pageant*, pp. 10-1.

<sup>79</sup> T. Guttery, *The Venerable William Clowes. A Sketch* (London, n.d.), pp.14-22; W. Garner, *The Life of the Reverend and Venerable William Clowes* (London, 1868), pp.39-47; Church, *History of the Primitive Methodists*, p. 58.



despite such earnings, he regularly found himself in embarrassed circumstances. William's stay in Hull ended dramatically, narrowly escaping from the clutches of the Press Gang, after having been caught brawling in the 'Dog and Duck' public house.<sup>80</sup>

If we now examine the spiritual career of Clowes, it is clear that despite William's ungodly habits he was not without checks of conscience and powerful strivings of the Holy Spirit.<sup>81</sup> In his journal, William notes the extent to which he has wrestled with his soul.

'Before my conversion to God, the internal misery of which I was the victim was in many instances almost insupportable. Sometimes I used to walk in solitary and unfrequented places, wishing that I was a bird or a beast, or any thing else that was not accountable to the tribunal of Heaven. Sometimes in sleep in the night I have been agitated with dreams, and starting up, I have been afraid of looking out of my bed, supposing the room to be full of devils and damned spirits.'<sup>82</sup>

Converted 20 January 1805, as the result of 'illegal' attendance at a love-feast in Burslem, Clowes entered a new period of existence.<sup>83</sup> In this new state William quickly set about changing his life, undertaking a system of discipline which required that he labour from six in the morning till six at night, and also that his house be opened for various religious meetings. The meetings that he initiated as a result were regularly crowded and often witnessed the saving of souls; it was not long before Clowes found it necessary to move to a larger house in order to accommodate all those wishing to attend. Among the visitors to the house was Hugh Bourne.<sup>84</sup> As we have seen, Bourne clearly admired Clowes, and before long the pair became friends, sharing their spiritual experiences, together making the acquaintance of James Crawfoot, the 'old man of Delamere Forest', who instructed the men in a kind of 'practical mysticism'.<sup>85</sup>

William Clowes' 'professional' Methodist career began in 1806, when he was asked by the Superintendent minister of the Burslem circuit, to take the lead of the class

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<sup>80</sup> Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 6-7; J. Davison, *The Life of the Venerable William Clowes, one of the Founders of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, (London, 1854), pp. 7-9; Garner, *Life*, pp.47-9.

<sup>81</sup> Garner, *Life*, p. 51.

<sup>82</sup> Clowes, *Journals of William Clowes*, p. 17.

<sup>83</sup> Clowes, *Journals of William Clowes*, pp. 18-21; Guttery, *Venerable William Clowes*, pp. 25-28.

<sup>84</sup> Clowes, *Journals of William Clowes*, pp. 30-1; Davison, *Life of the Venerable William Clowes*, pp. 21-7.

<sup>85</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 66.



meeting at Kids Grove. Located in the heart of a colliery village, the class provided Clowes with a challenge as its members were of a particularly rough nature. William notes in his journal how on one occasion members of the class turned up drunk, commenting that he 'hardly knew what course to adopt'.<sup>86</sup> However, the class prospered and before long Clowes was offered the leadership of a second class at Tunstall. Again he enjoyed considerable success, doubling the members under his care in a single quarter.<sup>87</sup> Although William had attended the earliest camp-meetings, as a Wesleyan class leader, the conference ruling against them had made Clowes conscious of the impropriety of his actions, and he therefore decided to stay away in future. However in October 1808, William Clowes, persuaded by what he felt to be the will of God, attended the camp-meeting at Ramsor where he delivered his first sermon. It is indicative of the strength of William's character and gifts as a preacher, that the Burslem circuit authorities did not punish him for his disobedience, instead offering him the chance to become a local preacher.<sup>88</sup> Although Clowes put on the preacher's plan, his name did not remain on the list for long, as the Burslem circuit became increasingly concerned about his continuing attendance at camp-meetings. William's continued confidence in the power of the camp-meeting is made clear in his journal.

'At one of these camp-meetings a very extraordinary feeling came upon me, such as I never felt before nor since. I felt the word of God burn in my soul like the flame of fire, and I could not help crying out whilst the preacher was preaching: when he had done, I sprang up and cried out for sinners to flee immediately from the wrath to come...' <sup>89</sup>

In June 1810 his name was omitted on the preacher's plan, and in September his quarterly ticket as a member of society was withheld, and the matter was settled when Clowes reaffirmed his belief in the camp-meeting. Although his 'Methodist' career had been short-lived, William had inspired the members of his classes at Kids Grove and Tunstall, and between thirty and forty members chose to follow Clowes. Other

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<sup>86</sup> Clowes, *Journals of William Clowes*, p. 44.

<sup>87</sup> Davison, *Life of the Venerable William Clowes*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>88</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 66; Davison, *Life of the Venerable William Clowes*, p. 54; Garner, *Life*, p. 138.

<sup>89</sup> Clowes, *Journals of William Clowes*, pp. 80-1.



members of the Methodist society, including James Nixon and Thomas Woodnorth also joined them, and the 'Clowesites' were formed.<sup>90</sup>

Among the people who felt the injustice of Clowes' expulsion was John Smith of Tunstall, who offered his kitchen as a preaching-place for the new group. Regular preaching had commenced at this location in 1807, when disagreement over the employment of Mary Dannel, a female evangelist, caused Smith to call for secession, getting his house licenced for religious worship. Although Hugh Bourne felt strongly that secession should not occur, Smith's kitchen soon became

'an asylum for the camp-meeting fathers, and the revivalists, where they could worship God in their own way.'<sup>91</sup>

Clowes had been a regular attender of these meetings. However because he had obeyed the ruling against the camp-meeting movement for a period of time, Smith (who had the final choice over who preached in his kitchen) prevented him from taking a more active role in the worship carried out. After his expulsion, Smith changed his opinion about Clowes, and before long the kitchen at Tunstall became the regular home of Clowes and his followers.<sup>92</sup> Clowes did not confine his activities to John Smith's kitchen, but became involved in a wider field of labour, journeying with Bourne and Crawfoot to Derbyshire, and later heading to Lancashire on his own. James Nixon and Thomas Woodnorth, who had left the Methodist society along with Clowes, resolved that William should leave his secular employment, and become focussed on his missionary work. They each offered five shillings a week out of their wages for his maintenance. Although this was a generous offer on behalf of the two men, Clowes could only accept with considerable detriment to his own financial standing. At that time William could earn £1 2s. 0d in about three or four days; however deeming the sacrifice to be worth it, and believing it to be the will of God, he accepted. By the spring of 1811, Clowes had formed several societies which were located chiefly in north Staffordshire.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> J. T. Wilkinson, *William Clowes, 1780-1851* (London, 1951), pp. 28-9.

<sup>91</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, pp. 176-7.

<sup>92</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 67.

<sup>93</sup> Wilkinson, *William Clowes*, p. 29; Clowes, *Journals of William Clowes*, p. 87; Garner, *Life*, p. 147; Guttery, *Venerable William Clowes*, pp. 93-4; Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 67.



## **The Rise of Primitive Methodism: the Union of the Camp Meeting Methodists, the Clowesites and the Steelites.**

Although the work of Bourne and Clowes has formed the basis of traditional historiography, Hatcher argues that it is crucial to understand that

‘Primitive Methodism came into being through the convergence and coalescence of at least three centres of revivalistic activity, and not simply because of either the fact of Camp Meetings, or the conflict over them.’<sup>94</sup>

Many fail to explore fully the significance of James Steele and the role he played as the third component shaping the Primitive Methodist Connexion. Local contemporaries depicted Steele as the single-most important character in the developing Connexion, an interpretation which contrasts considerably with ‘the accepted Connexional estimate of the part he played’.<sup>95</sup> Despite this conflict in opinion, it cannot be denied that Steele was ‘one of the early master-builders’ of Primitive Methodism, and his entrance at this point in the narrative ultimately gave a ‘Tunstall focus’ to the developing movement.<sup>96</sup> Ritson argues that the ‘exceptional character and influence’ of James Steele ‘at once gave the Clowesites new prestige in the eyes of the community’.<sup>97</sup>

James Steele of Tunstall was expelled from membership of the Wesleyan Methodist society within a year of the ejection of William Clowes. As a local preacher, class leader, chapel trustee and superintendent of the Sunday school, Steele had been a significant member of the Burslem circuit for twenty-four years. Kendall has commented that

‘It was no light matter to unchurch such a man...he was a man of sense and unblemished character, and to who considerable deference was paid...he was a strong man, born to rule and to command, who wherever he might be, would have to be reckoned with.’<sup>98</sup>

James Steele’s downfall lay in the fact that he had been a regular attender of the services held in John Smith’s kitchen. His attendance at these meetings, despite his being a Methodist of considerable conviction, is not surprising when it is understood that Steele was a cousin of Smith’s. However this connection ultimately provided the circuit

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<sup>94</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, p. 89.

<sup>95</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 107.

<sup>96</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, p. 93.

<sup>97</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 91.

<sup>98</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 106.



authorities with the perfect reason to have him expelled in April 1811. Although Steele advised his two classes to find another leader, the majority of his members refused, maintaining that they still wanted to come to him for spiritual guidance. Others from the Sunday school also decided to follow Steele. The new group formed when the ‘Steelites’ joined with the ‘Clowesites’ for worship in Smith’s kitchen, was far too large to be accommodated comfortably, and so services began in an unoccupied room provided by John Boden. However, their residency in this room proved to be temporary; and the measures taken to secure a more permanent place of worship in the form of their own chapel, ultimately created the foundations for an entirely separate Connexion.<sup>99</sup> On 13 May an appropriate site was secured, and in just two months the first chapel in the Primitive Methodist Connexion was opened for worship. A plain and simple affair, the building erected was in the form of four houses; a cautionary measure in case the union between the various groups did not continue long.<sup>100</sup>

In his journal William Clowes reviews the events that led to the creation of a separate denomination. He comments,

‘Thus it will be seen that, at this period, we stood in separate and detached parties, without any particular bond of union or organisation, not having in any shape assumed the connexional form, or become a branch of the visible church. We thus, each and all of us, pressed after the salvation of sinners in separate lines of action, and pursued the mission work with the utmost of ardour... Thus we went forward, and as success attended all of our efforts in the classes and mission department, union and concentration gradually took place in carrying on the work of the Lord which had thus begun’.<sup>101</sup>

The union which occurred as a result of shared missionary endeavours, was cemented by the printing of class tickets on 30 May 1811. As we have seen various societies in both Cheshire and Staffordshire, had been formed through the efforts of the Bourne brothers, Crawfoot and Clowes; and as these societies flourished they began to implore the ‘necessity and propriety’ of introducing quarterly tickets throughout the connexion. Particular pressure came from the Ramsor society in Staffordshire; Francis Horobin a

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<sup>99</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, pp. 106-10; Wilkinson, *William Clowes*, pp. 29-30; Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 67.

<sup>100</sup> Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists*, pp. 40-1.

<sup>101</sup> Clowes, *Journals of William Clowes*, pp. 94-5; Ashworth, *Life*, p. 75; Farndale, *Secret of Mow Cop*, p. 42.



member of the society there, offered to cover the costs of having such tickets printed, and so the measure was soon adopted.<sup>102</sup> Kendall argues that these tickets were ‘the sign and seal of the union’.<sup>103</sup> Werner however, points to the significance of the first preaching plan which Bourne worked out while waiting for the tickets to be produced. Two salaried preachers, Clowes and Crawfoot, and thirteen local preachers were appointed to preach at eight different preaching places; this therefore provided ‘the nucleus of a full-time ministry’, and effectively joined the missionary successes of both the Camp Meeting Methodists and the Clowesites.<sup>104</sup>

The first gathering of the newly formed Connexion held on 26 July 1811, in the kitchen of John Smith, was to be a crucial moment for the organisation of the Primitive Methodists. Not only were preachers cautioned to follow carefully the preaching appointments laid out by the plan, but it was also decided that they would abandon the aim of Free-Gospelism. Depression in the pottery trade, coupled with the rapid growth of the Connexion, called for an alternative method of funding to be identified; moreover as members were keen to pay ticket money, as had been the custom among the Wesleyans, the meeting eventually agreed that the ministry be supported by regular collections. However, Bourne did not easily discard the idea of Free-Gospelism and it continued to influence his thoughts, often to the detriment of his own preachers. Although many important organisational matters were decided upon in the summer of 1811, it was nearly a year before the young sect gave itself a name. The question of a suitable name for the new Connexion arose as discussions about the preaching plan for the ensuing quarter were being carried out. Inspired by the words of Crawfoot, who spoke of John Wesley’s open-air evangelism, the name Primitive Methodist was selected as an appropriate title, reflecting precisely the original intentions of its founding members. On 13 February 1812 the ‘Society of the Primitive Methodists’ was born.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists*, p. 42.

<sup>103</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 111.

<sup>104</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>105</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, pp. 129-31; Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 96-7; Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 38; Garner, *Life*, p. 169; Ashworth, *Life*, pp. 76-77; Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 75-6; Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 140.



## **Origins of the Primitive Methodist Movement in Shropshire.**

Hugh Bourne visited the county of Shropshire on several occasions during the course of his early missionary excursions. As we have seen, even before he became excluded from his Methodist society and the 'Primitive Methodists' had begun to forge their own identity as a separate Connexion, the Wrekin in Shropshire became the location for one of the earliest camp meetings in 1808. A comprehensive attempt to mission the county was not made by the Primitive Methodists until the second decade of the nineteenth century, and when missionaries arrived they originated from three distinct locations. Over three consecutive years, beginning in 1821, missionaries from the Tunstall, Burland and Darlaston circuits were sent to different parts of Shropshire, ensuring that almost simultaneously the Primitive Methodists were able to gain a significant following throughout the county. As in all parts of the country, the early achievements of the Primitive Methodists in Shropshire were characterised by the work of particular individuals and by specific events.

The first mission to the county was begun by the Tunstall circuit in 1821. Through the work of the Tunstall mission, Primitive Methodism spread across a vast expanse of the county, as missionaries moved from east to west across the centre of the county, even venturing into Shropshire's south-westerly extremities. Led by James Bonsor, the missionaries began their efforts in and around the Newport area, meeting with very little success before they came upon the district of Oakengates and Wellington. Despite earlier activities in the area this was almost entirely fresh ground. In 1821, the area of Oakengates and Wellington was in the throes of economic depression. This economic downturn not only caused wages in the area to drop, but also provoked protest riots and marches. Primitive Methodist missionaries were able to take advantage of such 'highly charged' times, and by early 1822 had formed five classes in the area around Oakengates and Wrockwardine Wood.<sup>106</sup> By May of that year, the success of the Primitive Methodists in this location had been translated into formation of the 'Oakengates Branch' of the Tunstall circuit, and a second camp meeting was held.<sup>107</sup> In December 1822, the branch became a circuit in its own right, and only five years later

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<sup>106</sup> J. H. Lenton, *Methodism in Wellington, 1765-1982* (Telford, 1982), p. 33.

<sup>107</sup> It is important to note that H. B. Kendall in his work *Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, comments that this meeting was the first to be held in this part of the country. However the meeting held on the 19th May 1822 was situated not more than six miles from the meeting held on the Wrekin in 1808.



in 1827 a total of seven preachers were stationed in the circuit. However, being unable to secure a permanent place of worship in Oakengates, in the following year the name of the circuit was changed to Wrockwardine Wood where a suitable place of worship was available. From this location Primitive Methodism in eastern Shropshire progressed in various directions. Missionaries pushed westwards into the central regions of Shropshire, and the county town of Shrewsbury, the earliest missionaries arriving in Shrewsbury in June 1822.

The first missionary working in Shrewsbury whose name is recorded was Sarah Spittle who arrived at the end of that same month. As a result of her work in the area, the class which had been formed previous to her arrival totalled forty-four, and had further risen to sixty by the time James Bonsor arrived on the 4th of August. Despite such clear advances, the work of Bonsor was not easy. During the yearly event of hiring for harvest, Bonsor was so 'moved by this strange profanation of the Lord's Day', that he attempted to draw attention to the errors of this tradition by preaching to the gathered crowds. However, he had not long begun before he was taken still singing to the local prison. Prayers were said for him throughout the town's chapels, and although his ordeal was short and he was again to be found preaching the following evening, the incidence did much good for the cause of Primitive Methodism in Shrewsbury, evoking as it did the sympathy of many followers. Kendall has argued that Bonsor was one of the early 'heroes', a hero that 'Shrewsbury did not forget'. When he died in 1828, 'prematurely broken and worn-out with his excessive labours' the chapel at Shrewsbury went into a six week period of mourning.<sup>108</sup>

By 1823, the town had become the head of a branch of the Oakengates circuit, and was rapidly extending itself west towards Minsterley, and in 1824 Shrewsbury became a circuit in its own right.<sup>109</sup> At this time a revival was taking hold of the town, which not only acted to increase the numbers of members but also led to the building of a chapel which was opened in 1826. The circuit of Shrewsbury covered a vast area during this early period, and became a prolific mother-circuit, missionaries labouring with great success both in the adjoining county of Montgomeryshire, and as far south as

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<sup>108</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 278; Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 167-8.

<sup>109</sup> A branch has a distinct plan, quarterly accounts, committee and steward, but its transactions remain under the supervision of the parent circuit committee and general quarterly meeting.



Brinksworth in Wiltshire. Shrewsbury even oversaw the first mission to Ireland. Out of the Shrewsbury circuit no less than nine other circuits originated. These included Bishop's Castle to the south formed in 1832, Hadnall to the north, formed in 1838, Minsterley to the west formed in 1856, and out of each of these three circuits at least a one further circuit was created.<sup>110</sup>

The missioning of the Shropshire town of Bishop's Castle, located twenty miles to the south-west of Shrewsbury, presents an interesting insight into the hardships endured for the cause of Primitive Methodism in the county. Bishop's Castle was one of the first places to be visited by missionaries based in Shrewsbury. However, in a place notorious for 'wickedness, cruelty and hatred of the followers of Christ' and which was otherwise known as 'Little Sodom', it is unsurprising that these early missionaries met with little success and were stoned away from the area. A second attempt to enter the town was made by itinerant Richard Ward and local preacher Thomas Evans, in 1828. But once more the Primitive Methodist cause met with opposition as the two men were refused permission from the bailiff to preach in the market-hall; however, not deterred, they decided to take to the open-air instead. When they began singing old women and children gathered round to listen, and the two missionaries were allowed to pray without interruption. But this peace did not last, and as they began a second hymn, an angry mob descended upon them hurling stones and shouting abuse. Fortunately luck was on their side, and the crowd was quickly quietened into submission by the words of a 'great fighter' who stood amongst those wishing to listen to the men's preaching. Sensing that a breakthrough had been achieved, Richard Ward preached again in the evening to a large gathering, and similarly the following Sunday afternoon and evening, and before long the first Primitive Methodist society was established in the town.<sup>111</sup>

Similarly, Primitive Methodism also progressed both north and south from Wrockwardine Wood. To the south, Dawley Green and other places in the neighbourhood were successfully missioned at the end of 1839, with the result that two more circuits were eventually established at Dawley Green and Madeley in 1854 and 1881 respectively. To the north of Wrockwardine Wood, Stafford became a branch of the home circuit, and circuits were formed in Wellington in 1865, and Newport in

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<sup>110</sup> Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 200; Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 279.

<sup>111</sup> Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 253-8.



1893.<sup>112</sup> It is important to note that Wrockwardine Wood was also responsible for the establishment of three other circuits, Blaenavon, Cwm and Pillawell all originating from the early missionary labours of the 'Oakengates' circuit.

In the early 1820s, as the missionary efforts of the Tunstall circuit were gaining fruits in and around Oakengates, the Burland circuit was increasing its missionary activities in the northern regions of the county. It would be fair to comment that these extremities of Shropshire had already received reasonable amounts of attention from the likes of Hugh Bourne and various missionaries. The journal of Thomas Bateman confirms that the 'work was opening out' in Shropshire from as early as October 1820.<sup>113</sup> However, it was not until 1822 that a comprehensive mission to the county was made by the Huxley branch of the Burland circuit. On the March Quarter-Day of 1822, Huxley was made into a separate branch, the preaching being arranged so that one of its travelling preachers could concentrate his efforts on developing the mission in Shropshire.<sup>114</sup> Again we are made aware of how the acts of individuals could have important consequences for the development of the movement. Similarly, we again see the importance of the camp meeting for the introduction of Primitive Methodism into a particular area. News reached Burland in 1822 that some of the new Shropshire converts were arranging to hold a camp meeting at Waterloo that coming Whitsuntide. Fearful of the possibilities of a meeting directed solely by inexperienced members, Burland decided that it was necessary to send its own delegates to ensure that the proceedings went smoothly. However, although the camp meeting did not originate from the authority of the Burland circuit itself, the consequences of the meeting were considerable, leading to requests for preaching in locations far and wide. Bateman was particularly encouraged in his work by the claim that in many of these places the people were 'living in darkness and the shadow of death...no man caring for their souls, Methodism being but little known'<sup>115</sup> Kendall has suggested that it was

'one of the 'decisive' camp meetings of our early history', as it 'wonderfully opened up the way into this part of Cheshire and the borders of Wales.'<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, pp. 274-7.

<sup>113</sup> T. Bateman, *Reminiscences of the Early Days of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, PMM (1881), p.296.

<sup>114</sup> Bateman, *Reminiscences*, p. 469.

<sup>115</sup> Bateman, *Reminiscences*, p. 675.

<sup>116</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 284-5.



The significant headway made in these northern regions of Shropshire as a result of the camp meeting, led in September 1822 to the creation of the 'Shropshire Station'.

The name 'Shropshire Station' may seem a strange choice considering the names of other Primitive Methodist branches, however it was designed to prevent further conflict between the societies of Market Drayton and Prees Green, who both laid claim to the honour of being the head of the new branch. Although Market Drayton was missioned many years before Prees Green and was the most important of the two, its location close to the border of the county seemed to make it inappropriate as head of a circuit. Prees Green was much more central, but the powers that be were cautious and decided upon the more neutral title. It was however, only a short time before this matter was rectified, and when in June 1825, the branch became a circuit, the name Prees Green was taken.<sup>117</sup> Perhaps it is worth commenting here on the interesting practice of using seemingly insignificant locations as the head of circuits. Prees Green is a small village approximately six miles south of Whitchurch, seven miles west of Market Drayton, and five miles north of Wem, the Primitive Methodists nevertheless saw fit to appoint it as the head of a vast and important circuit. We have also seen how Minsterley, south west of Shrewsbury, was also chosen as the head of a circuit, despite being a very small village located several miles away from each of the surrounding towns. Similarly, Cwm a small rural community in Herefordshire was also chosen as the head of a circuit. It is easy however, to underestimate the significance of such villages for the local economy. Many small villages became the focus for vital activities such as the pay-days of local miners and rent-settling days. Clearly the Primitive Methodists were not afraid to choose a central location that suited their needs as well as those of their members. In 1833 the Prees Green circuit was divided, and the Oswestry circuit was formed, the home circuit being dramatically reduced in size by this process. Prees Green then continued almost unchanged until 1869 when Market Drayton was also separated. Finally Wem was also made into a circuit in 1878.

Missionaries first visited Oswestry in the second half of 1823, Mr William Doughty was one of these, and was to become a renowned character. On Mr Doughty's third visit to the town he was arrested by the constable for continuing to preach despite

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<sup>117</sup> It is interesting to note that the formation of this circuit was in fact against the wishes of the parent circuit, and even Bourne himself felt that this division had occurred too soon.



having been warned not to do so. On refusing to walk to Shrewsbury to serve his sentence of one month, Doughty was taken by tax-cart, proclaiming to the gathered crowds that he would return singing. This spectacle was to bear heavily upon the minds of onlookers, and from that point on, Primitive Methodism quickly gained a foothold in the town. In November 1823, Doughty wrote to James Bourne outlining their success at Oswestry, claiming that they were 'adding almost weekly'. Motivated by the bad experiences of other missionaries working in the area, Doughty sought the protection of a licence and therefore avoided further persecution. However, this was not the case in other places. On one occasion whilst on a visit to Tetchill, Doughty was savagely attacked by two men on horseback, receiving serious injuries to the head.<sup>118</sup>

In 1830, Oswestry became a separate branch and a circuit in its own right in 1833. Kendall has argued that the potential success of the Oswestry circuit was immense, and can 'fairly claim' to have been a missionary circuit. Located close to the extreme limits of Shropshire, the circuit was free to enlarge,

'indefinitely in certain directions, for its way lay open into the Welsh Counties of Flint, Denbigh and Montgomery.'<sup>119</sup>

Oswestry was a massive circuit which remained undivided until 1877 when Rhosymedre became a separate circuit. A second division occurred in the following year as Llanymynech was also formed into a circuit. The third and final division took place much later in 1895 when Ellesmere circuit was created.

Finally, we turn to the missionary efforts of the Darlaston circuit in the southern half of the county. Details about the first missionary efforts in this area are scarce. Kendall has however, presented the evidence of private journals to suggest that the early missionaries had journeyed as far as the county of Radnor by the autumn of 1821, passing through the southern extremes of Shropshire on their way from Kidderminster in Worcestershire.<sup>120</sup> The first definite date of missionary activity in the area derives from the journals of Thomas Norman who was labouring in the region in the spring of 1823. It is fair to comment that the Primitive Methodists must have been well established in the local community by this point, because in the following year the Hopton Bank circuit

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<sup>118</sup> Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 199; Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 285-90.

<sup>119</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 289.

<sup>120</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 282; Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 198.



was formed. Situated approximately half-way between Kidderminster in the west and Presteign in the east, 'in one of the wildest areas of squatter settlement on the Clee Hills'<sup>121</sup>, Hopton Bank was initially thought of as a convenient location for the head of the circuit. However this soon changed as Ludlow, a town five miles to the west became increasingly convenient for the residence of preachers and in 1836 the town became the head of the circuit. Kendall has commented that Ludlow circuit should not be thought of as 'a comparatively compact circuit of the modern type', but rather as a 'tract of country' that extended for many miles across southern Shropshire and into the surrounding counties.<sup>122</sup> At its peak in the mid-nineteenth century, Ludlow circuit had a total of seven branches and missions located in four different counties, and six separate circuits were eventually formed from the home branch. The earliest circuits to be created from Ludlow were Presteign formed in 1828, and Kidderminster in 1831. Leominster and Weobley circuit was formed in 1855, Leintwardine circuit in 1864, and Peaton Strand was the final circuit to be created out of Ludlow in 1875.

Simultaneously during the first three years of the 1820s, Primitive Methodism entered Shropshire as a result of the missionary labours of three separate circuits. As a consequence of these early efforts Primitive Methodism became a powerful Nonconformist presence in the county, and the connexion gained one of its greatest strongholds in the country.

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<sup>121</sup> Trinder, *History of Shropshire*, p. 83

<sup>122</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 282-3.



## **Chapter 4: The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Organisation and Structure**

In the method of organisation that it adopted, Primitive Methodism followed closely in the footsteps of its parent body; the experience of early Methodism had demonstrated how effectively the mechanisms of a 'circuit' co-ordinated the work of local societies. However, while the Wesleyans remained dominated by the Conference and gave authority to its ministers, the more 'democratic and decentralised' Primitive Methodists favoured the laity and gave considerable power to its local administration.<sup>1</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century individual circuits were given a significant level of freedom to dictate their own affairs:

‘A circuit...has a general meeting every quarter, to conduct the business; and the board of that meeting constitutes its local government; and that board may make such regulations as it thinks proper for the internal management of the circuit, providing such regulations do not interfere with general rules’.<sup>2</sup>

Obelkevich argued that local bias remained a persistent feature of Primitive Methodism even after ‘the circuits yielded their independent power to the districts, the next higher level of organisation’ in the mid-century.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century Primitive Methodism was effectively ruled by the laity. Laymen were not only able to control many aspects of local Primitive Methodist life, through their presence on the quarter-day board and circuit committee, but also the higher echelons of government through their considerable presence at both the Annual and District Meetings. Primitive Methodism gave those of the lowest social standing the opportunity to influence the decisions made and to take on responsibilities; men and women alike could become local preachers, class leaders or Sunday-school teachers.<sup>4</sup> In his work on rural religion in South Lindsey, Obelkevich noted that a high proportion of Primitive Methodists held office in society or circuit. In the mid-nineteenth century, the number of local preachers alone amounted to 8.1 per cent of the total membership of the Connexion. In his area of study, the figure was approximately ten per cent. Obelkevich comments that many of those who held office are obscured in the evidence, and that it is impossible to

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<sup>1</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 221-2.

<sup>2</sup> Primitive Methodist Annual Conference Minutes (PMACM), 1821, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 221-2.

<sup>4</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 140.



identify all of the many who gave their time to work for the cause.<sup>5</sup> In 1850, Thomas Church remarked that

‘The connexion and its discipline form a solid and well compacted fabric. Every man finds that he is something more than a mere attendant; that he is a component, fixed part of a definite, organised society, in which he enjoys privileges, and is bound to discharge duties – duties involving no small sacrifice of time, of labour and of property.’<sup>6</sup>

### **The Primitive Officials.**

Established in 1819, the Annual Meeting provided Primitive Methodism with a coherent system of government, and the means with which to create uniform connexional policy. However, the insistence that each individual circuit be given an opportunity to influence proceedings ensured that the yearly gathering remained faithful to its grass root support at the local level. Each circuit was requested to supply three delegates to act as its representative in the meeting. In order to safeguard the authority of the laity, and to curb the power of the ministry, it was decided that only one of these delegates could be a travelling preacher.<sup>7</sup> As Werner points out, the strength of feeling on this issue was reflected in the fact that

‘Even this much ministerial representation was challenged at first on the grounds that the laity would have less voice there than they did at other meetings.’<sup>8</sup>

In 1821, problems over the stationing of itinerants led Hugh Bourne to modify the mode of connexional organisation, and the twelve circuits in existence at that time were grouped into four separate districts. Each district was given the power to allocate its own travelling preachers and to decide which delegates it would send to the Annual Meeting, and this distinguished the Primitive Methodists from other Methodist denominations. Composed of lay and ministerial representatives from the circuit Quarterly Meetings, the District Meeting met annually to station the preachers within its jurisdiction, to inquire into the state of each circuit and finally to receive the membership returns and contributions to the various funds.<sup>9</sup> At the local level,

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<sup>5</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 244.

<sup>6</sup> Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> PMACM, 1819, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> PMACM, General Minutes 1821, p. 2; Consolidated Minutes 1836, p. 7.



supreme authority was given to the 'Quarter-Day Board'. Composed of the circuit ministers, local preachers, class leaders, stewards and delegates from individual societies, the quarter-day meeting was arranged in two parts. The 'Full Meeting' of the board dealt with all aspects of circuit life including the time of services, collection of society money, payment of the itinerant minister's salary and various disciplinary matters. The 'Preacher's Meeting' took care of all matters to do with the appointments and conduct of both the travelling and local preachers.<sup>10</sup> The laymen in the quarter-day board had considerable power over the itinerant ministers, as their meeting not only invited them to the circuit, but also paid their wages and dictated the length of their stay. The meeting also determined which representative would be sent to the District Meeting.<sup>11</sup> The 'Circuit Committee' was elected to manage the general affairs of the circuit until the ensuing quarter-day and to carry out the decisions made by the quarter-day board. The monthly meeting was composed of the travelling preachers, the circuit steward and other lay appointees named by the quarter-day board.<sup>12</sup> The circuit committee had all the same powers as the quarterly meeting, although it was not allowed to dispose of circuit money or property unless directed to do so, and it could not call out a travelling preacher.<sup>13</sup> The Superintendent minister, appointed by the Annual Meeting, supervised all circuit affairs. The various duties of the Superintendent covered a broad spectrum of activity and responsibility. He was not only expected to look after the financial and spiritual state of each of the societies and its classes, but also to examine the state of each chapel and rented room in the circuit. He supervised the organisation of all official circuit meetings, and saw to it that all colleagues were supplied with the necessary information to carry out their jobs. His role was vital for the effective co-ordination of circuit life.<sup>14</sup>

An individual circuit employed an array of local unpaid officials, providing the membership with considerable opportunity to get involved in the organisation of circuit life; in many cases such responsibilities gave them the chance to develop certain skills which could not be obtained anywhere else. However, as Obelkevich points out, it was not until late into the second half of the century that unions and other such

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<sup>10</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes 1836, pp. 9-15.

<sup>11</sup> Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 81; Currie, *Methodism Divided*, pp. 146-8.

<sup>12</sup> PMACM, General Minutes 1821, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> PMACM, General Minutes 1828, pp. 43-4.



organisations enabled them to put these new-found skills to secular use.<sup>15</sup> Currie has argued that ‘this vast officialdom’ also enabled men of all backgrounds to gain ‘respectability and prestige’ within their local community.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the most important of the local officials for the day-to-day life of a circuit were the various stewards, and the class leaders. Three stewards were chosen annually by the quarter-day board. The ‘principal steward’ was the circuit treasurer, who dealt with all circuit property. He not only took care of the quarterly minutes between meetings, but also carried out the resolutions contained therein. He also dealt with all communication concerning circuit affairs. The ‘second steward’ worked as the circuit secretary, conducting all correspondence and maintaining the circuit accounts. Finally, the ‘third steward’ was engaged as an assistant to the other stewards, and looked after the minor affairs. Besides these stewards there was also the array of society stewards who were appointed on a quarterly basis by the class leader’s meeting.<sup>17</sup> Society stewards were employed to ensure that a chapel or place of worship was properly lighted and cleaned, that its doors were open in time for service and that the pulpit was supplied with the necessary notices. They also had to ensure that all collections made were paid into the hands of the treasurer.<sup>18</sup>

On entering the Primitive Methodist Connexion, all members joined one of the classes in their local society. The number of classes in a neighbourhood depended upon the size of the society, the local membership being divided into groups of twelve to twenty people. Each class was put in the charge of a leader, whose role it was to guide the meetings by questioning each member in turn as to the state of their soul, offering them advice according to their individual situation. Outside the meeting the class leader was required to check on absent members, visit the sick and dying, and also encourage those in danger of backsliding.<sup>19</sup> The role of the leader in tending his flock was of fundamental importance for the ultimate success or failure of a class. In 1864, Parrot even went as far as to argue that the health of an entire society depended upon the competence of its class leaders. He noted that a class leader should be

‘a pattern of consistent piety...capable of sympathising with and being a helper of his members in their Christian welfare. A good efficient leader becomes a

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<sup>15</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 244.

<sup>16</sup> Currie, *Methodism Divided*, p. 46.

<sup>17</sup> PMACM, General Minutes 1821, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Parrot, *Digest of the History*, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 225-6; Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 158;



kind of moral signet, and stamps his own spirit and the measure of his own attainment in holiness...on those with whom he so frequently meets in audience with Deity'.<sup>20</sup>

The connexional magazine regularly provided advice for its class leaders, suggesting that they demonstrate wisdom and piety at all times. It recommended that leaders encourage all members to speak, but allow sufficient time for the timid to gain confidence. As meetings were to be 'instructive and useful' leaders should be quick to limit 'useless talk and all doctrinal controversy'.<sup>21</sup> Leaders should avoid creating unnecessary tension by speaking ill of the absent, and should deal impartially with all members irrespective of their age or station in life.<sup>22</sup> When an individual society had more than one class, rules of Conference dictated that a 'Leader's Meeting' be formed to inquire into the state of the society and to apply the necessary measures to ensure its future success.<sup>23</sup> The meeting was required to examine all class papers, ascertain the attendance of the members, and deal with all absentees. The meeting also had power over the individual leaders. All leaders that failed to attend to their classes more than three times were to be removed from the office; similarly, any leaders found to be unsatisfactory by their class were also asked to step down.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Preachers.**

In the nineteenth century there were four main types of Primitive Methodist preacher, the paid itinerant, the paid local preacher, the self-financed missionary and the unpaid local preacher. Werner argues that movement between the various categories was common, particularly between local and travelling preacher.<sup>25</sup> Obelkevich notes that the Primitive Methodist minister was not an 'authoritative superior' among his body of preachers; itinerants were less sharply distinguished from the local preachers than were their Wesleyan counterparts, who were much quicker to adopt the title of 'Reverend'.<sup>26</sup> The more equitable relationship between travelling and local preacher ensured that anybody could aspire to join the ministry, and indeed the

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Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 100.

<sup>20</sup> Parrot, *Digest of the History*, p. 138.

<sup>21</sup> PMM, Jul. 1845, pp. 334-5..

<sup>22</sup> PMM, Nov. 1833, pp. 413-5.

<sup>23</sup> PMACM, General Minutes 1821, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes 1836, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 141.

<sup>26</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 222-3.



great majority of Primitive Methodist itinerants came from the ranks of local preachers.<sup>27</sup> There were very few prerequisites for the itinerancy in the nineteenth century. Candidates for the ministry were to be no older than 45, and were not to engage in any other form of employment; however, the single-most important quality was the ability to save souls through the means of effective preaching. Each candidate was required to undergo a process of thorough examination before they were admitted to travel in the Primitive Methodist Connexion. Potential itinerants were first required to face the circuit committee in which they resided to answer questions concerning their doctrine and personal religious condition. Once the committee had made its decision, the matter was passed over to the quarter-day board, who further examined the case and made its recommendation to the district meeting. To aid the district in their decision, the quarter-day was required to furnish a precise account of the candidate's age and station in life, along with a description of their talents and usefulness. Finally the application was examined by the Annual Meeting, the only body with the actual 'power to receive preachers and take them out' as Primitive Methodist itinerants.<sup>28</sup> Once candidates had been successful in this process and had met the necessary requirements they became 'young preachers', and were expected to fulfil a four-year period of probation before being admitted to the annual list of travelling preachers.<sup>29</sup>

Itinerant preachers were stationed by the District Meeting to a particular circuit, for a period of one year commencing from midsummer. Alternatively, itinerants could be stationed in one circuit for six months and then in another for the second half of the year.<sup>30</sup> Figure 2 depicts two Primitive Methodist itinerants and catalogues their various stations in Shropshire during the nineteenth century. It is clear that itinerant preachers endured many moves during their working life; John Heath travelled in a total of 13 different Shropshire stations.

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<sup>27</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 176-7.

<sup>28</sup> PMACM, 1821, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> PMACM, 1823, p. 2; Shropshire Records and Research (SRR)/NM5166/1/7/1 - Ludlow Circuit: Questions to be answered by the Candidates for the Preachers' Plan, 1893.

<sup>30</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes 1836, p. 8.



Figure 2

## Shropshire Primitive Methodist Itinerant Ministers

### ***John Heath:***

**Prees Green - 1849**  
**Dawley - 1850**  
**Wrockwardine Wood - 1850**  
**Market Drayton - 1856**  
**Bishop's Castle - 1858**  
**Hadnall - 1861**  
**Minsterley - 1869**  
**Church Stretton - 1878**  
**Hadnall - 1882**  
**Peaton Strand - 1887**  
**Bishop's Castle - 1888**  
**Peaton Strand - 1890**  
**Clun - 1893**



### ***James Prosser:***

**Bishop's Castle - 1845**  
**Shrewsbury - 1846**  
**Oswestry - 1856**  
**Wrockwardine Wood - 1862**



In 1821, the Annual Meeting ruled that an exchange of preachers between circuits could be made for a period of three, six, or nine months. It was suggested that this could be of considerable advantage to smaller circuits with fewer preachers at its disposal. Any circuit that required a replacement or an additional itinerant between Annual Meetings, was allowed to hire one or more local preachers as a temporary solution; however, circuits were cautioned about receiving any preacher with a chargeable family which could become a burden upon the finances.<sup>31</sup> As local circuit committee minutes reveal, young preachers on probation were generally viewed as the ideal substitute, as the minutes of the Leintwardine circuit committee reveal:

‘That as Mr Harrison is unwell and not able to do all his work, that he be at liberty to employ a young man at his own expense.’<sup>32</sup>

Hired local preachers were often engaged by those circuits with sufficient funds, to take advantage of missionary opportunities; such preachers regularly appear alongside salaried ministers in local circuit records, but then disappear when their individual endeavours were complete.<sup>33</sup> Apart from settling disagreements, the Annual Meeting was not allowed to interfere in the stationing process, although it did have the power to ‘remove any travelling preacher from one district to another by way of exchange’.<sup>34</sup> Although rules of conference did not allow local circuits to choose their itinerants, they were able to reject one assigned to them, and it is clear from the minutes of committee meetings that the matter of stationing often involved a level of negotiation:

‘That it is the opinion of this meeting that the preacher recommended by the General Committee is not a suitable one to travel in the Hopton Bank circuit...That J. Preston write to the General Committee stating to them the decision of this meeting.’<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, local circuits were determined to retain a level of control over their affairs. However, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the district actually listened to the queries and complaints of the individual circuit in the stationing of its travelling preachers. The itinerant preachers however, had no say in the matter.

‘He must not refuse or omit to go to the circuit for which he has been stationed

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<sup>31</sup> PMACM, 1821, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Herefordshire Record Office (HRO)/K76/11: Leintwardine Circuit - Circuit Minute Book, 1850-62, 24 Nov 1855.

<sup>33</sup> E. D. Graham, ‘Women local preachers’ in G. Milburn & M. Batty (eds.), *Workaday Preachers. The Story of a Methodist Local Preacher* (Peterborough, 1995), p. 182.

<sup>34</sup> PMACM, 1821, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> SRR/NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit - Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 20 Aug 1828.



by the preceding conference, for if he do so he must cease to be a travelling preacher in our Connexion and must not be employed as such in any of our stations.’<sup>36</sup>

As we shall see, the workload of a Primitive Methodist itinerant was immense, particularly for those ministers stationed in rural circuits. Travelling preachers were regularly appointed to one or more village chapels, preaching two or sometimes three sermons on a Sunday, and were often planned to lead weeknight services in as many as five different locations.<sup>37</sup> Itinerant ministers not only had to fulfil their quarterly appointments, but were also expected to go out and visit families in their own homes. The task of family visiting was taken very seriously, and was viewed as an ideal training ground for young preachers; the connexional magazine advised ministers that family visiting not only benefited them ‘in their pulpit labours’, but also cleared their mind and assisted with their studies.<sup>38</sup> In 1824, the Annual Meeting ruled that all travelling preachers should visit at least five families each day unless fully employed in other church business, and an itinerant could only abstain from this task if he was ill or had to travel over ten miles for his appointments. The Conference also suggested that visiting duty be formed into a ‘regular system’ in order to prevent it being ‘left to time and chance’.<sup>39</sup> Although this ruling was later rescinded<sup>40</sup>, the emphasis on family visiting remained, and the number of families the itinerants were expected to visit each day was increased to ten. Often the number was much higher than this as the journal of Charles Dudley reveals,

‘I have visited 23 families in Willenhall today...I believe in the old saying ‘a house-going preacher makes a church-going congregation’.<sup>41</sup>

In order to monitor closely the activities of the ministers, circuit officials were required in their Annual Reports to state the number families visited by each itinerant during the course of the year. The 1849 annual report of the Oswestry circuit reveals the difficulties that many itinerants faced in this task:

‘Circuit business, wet weather, affliction, being out of the circuit and the people being in the harvest fields have deprived Brother Morton of 56 visiting days this

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<sup>36</sup> PMACM, Consolidated 1849, p. 77.

<sup>37</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 223.

<sup>38</sup> PMM, Apr. 1838, pp. 148-9.

<sup>39</sup> PMACM, Small Minutes, 1824, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> PMACM, Various Regulations, 1829, pp. 2-3.

<sup>41</sup> J. Pearce, *Burning and Shining Lights. A Souvenir of Primitive Methodist Radiant Personalities*.



year. Therefore he is not a general family visitor.’<sup>42</sup>

Although family visiting was thought to provide considerable benefits for the preachers, its fundamental role was to stimulate and inspire the members. The close relationships that were often formed by means of regular contact in the domestic setting enabled a minister to monitor closely the spiritual progress of his people. Family visiting not only encouraged regular attendance at worship because also provided considerable opportunity to seek out new members. Systematic visiting from door-to-door enabled ministers to meet new people. In 1829, John Petty noted in his journal,

‘Visited some people at Brown Edge. Those of the first house would not let me pray, though I promised to give some money to the children if they would. The people of the second house wanted to know what was amiss that I came to visit them. I replied ‘A great deal; for we are all sinners, and, if we die such, we shall miss heaven.’ They were willing for me to pray with them and seemed very much amazed while I was engaged.’<sup>43</sup>

The effort involved in this task were considerable, and the rewards were not always forthcoming,

‘Visited thirty families...But though we visited so many, we had only ten persons to preach to, besides a few children, one of whom belonged to the house’.<sup>44</sup>

However, although the returns were not always immediate this method of contact allowed ministers to learn more about the spiritual condition of the local people, and how best to encourage them to attend.

To support them in their work, Primitive Methodist salaried ministers had the assistance of a vast army of local preachers. The qualifications required to become a local preacher were few. Those wishing to offer their services were expected to provide evidence of conversion and a desire to save souls, and to demonstrate through the means of the ‘trial sermon’ an ability to convey the Gospel message.<sup>45</sup> Although itinerants were required to fulfil certain administrative responsibilities that local preachers were not, there was little other distinction between the two. Turner notes that

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(Halesowen, 1935), p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> SRR/NM4391/1/6: Oswestry Circuit – Annual Report, March 1849.

<sup>43</sup> J. Macpherson, *The Life and Labour of the Reverend John Petty. Late Minister of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, First Governor of the Jubilee School, York; and First Connexional Theological Tutor of Candidates for the Ministry* (London, 1870), p. 125.

<sup>44</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Labour*, pp. 317-8.

<sup>45</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 145.



local preachers could even preside at the Lord's Supper, although he points out that in reality this may not have occurred on a regular basis. However, local preachers frequently conducted the lovefeast which 'was for a time as significant, and sometimes more popular than Holy Communion'.<sup>46</sup> As we shall see, the role of the local preacher during the nineteenth century was vital to the success of the denomination, and without them Primitive Methodism would not have been able to make the considerable progress that it did.

### **Preaching the Gospel according to plan.**

The single-most important role of the preacher was to convey the gospel to the people, but this 'simple' task involved a considerable level of complex organisation. Each quarter, the circuit committee authorised certain members to construct the preacher's plan. (See appendix for various examples of nineteenth century Primitive Methodist preachers' plans.) These members usually formed part of the 'planning committee', who acted under the strict guidance of the quarter-day board, and were responsible for the organisation of all preaching services. The organisation of the quarterly appointments was not an easy process as the planning committee had a great many factors to take into consideration. Not only did they have to ensure that each of the societies had preaching according to the specific commands of the circuit officials:

'That Hampton Load go on the plan, and have preaching once a fortnight on Thursday evening and every Sunday at six in the evening',<sup>47</sup>

but they also had to plan each of the special services and financial collections for the following quarter:

'That the planning committee appoint Lovefeasts, Sacraments, collections, Watchnights and missionary meeting for the next quarter'.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly the planning committee also had to take into consideration the demands and requirements of the local preachers. If any local preacher believed they had special grounds for altering their workload they had to address the circuit committee meeting with their queries. Although strict about neglect of appointments, it appears that the

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<sup>46</sup> J. Munsey Turner, 'Years of tension and conflict' in G. Milburn & M. Batty (eds.), *Workaday Preachers. The Story of a Methodist Local Preacher* (Peterborough, 1995). p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> SRR/NM2941/2/2: Hopton Bank Circuit - Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1828-40, 22 Sept 1828.

<sup>48</sup> SRR/NM2941/2/2: Hopton Bank Circuit - Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1828-40, 20 Sept 1835.



committee was willing to take into consideration the other demands placed upon its members:

‘That Brother Garbutt in consequence of his employment on the Sabbath have no appointments at 6’ 0 Clock’.<sup>49</sup>

Generally it appears that the circuit committee had authority over the individual society, dictating as and when it would have preaching:

‘That if the society at Balaam’s Heath will not comply with rule that there be no preaching.’<sup>50</sup>

However in certain instances the circuit committee was much more flexible in its arrangements:

‘That our appointments be at Burrington to suit the inhabitants and Brother Harrison enquire about the time.’<sup>51</sup>

Circuit or preachers’ plans began life in the eighteenth century and continued to be used throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by each of the Methodist denominations.<sup>52</sup> The purpose of such plans was to organise the preaching to be carried out in the circuit during the following quarter. Each preacher was given a position on the plan according to experience, ability to preach, and perhaps most importantly reputation. The salaried ministers of the circuit filled the top positions on the plan, the local preachers then descended in numerical order, the bottom ranks being filled by those on trial, the exhorters, the prayer leaders and auxiliaries. The name of each society was printed down the left-hand side of the plan, with the date of each Sunday in the quarter appearing across the top. From this basic outline, preaching for the entire circuit would be worked out. Each preacher was given a certain number of appointments during the quarter when they were required to preach. Weeknight services were either incorporated into the plan alongside the Sunday appointments, or as became more common during the later nineteenth century, were organised in a separate table on the bottom of the plan.

As Ambler pointed out, the value of circuit plans has been recognised by Methodist historians who have used them to discover preaching places and to identify the preachers who attended to them. As one of the most important tools for the day-to-

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<sup>49</sup> SRR/NM3544/1/3: Ludlow Circuit - Circuit & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1860-66, 3 Sept 1866.

<sup>50</sup> SRR/NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit - Circuit & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1840-59, 21 Sept 1840.

<sup>51</sup> HRO/K76/10: Leintwardine Circuit - Circuit Minute Book, 1849-65, 15 Oct 1849.

<sup>52</sup> E. A. Rose, ‘Local preachers and the preaching plan’, in G. Milburn & M. Batty (eds.) *Workaday Preachers. The Story of a Methodist Local Preacher* (Peterborough/1995), pp. 143-63.



day organisation of a Methodist circuit, preacher's plans are an invaluable source for those interested in the mechanisms of Methodism at the local level. This is because plans not only reveal the exact dimensions of a circuit, but also provide such detail about the structure of activity within it.<sup>53</sup> Plans can allow us to determine the focal points for both preaching and other activities within a circuit, a key issue when assessing if a circuit was predominantly rural or urban in outlook.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, plans also provide information about the type and frequency of the various special services and financial collections, noting the time, place and the numbers of preachers whose responsibility it was to attend to each of the special services and collections. For example, camp meetings featured prominently on most preaching plans and played an important role in the life of a Primitive Methodist. Information provided by the plans show that local preachers were expected to attend to these meetings. Generally several of the local preachers and one of the travelling preachers were planned at each camp meeting, offering a combination of experience and youth.<sup>55</sup> However, camp meetings were not usually planned at all of the societies, only a select few being chosen each quarter, and rarely if ever being located at some of the smallest places.

Analysis of the frequency of services and the pattern of preacher's movements can enable us to discover much about the fundamental quality of Methodist activity in a specific location and at a given time.<sup>56</sup> However, although we can establish a great deal about a circuit from a single plan, a series of plans enables the Methodist historian to learn much more about the long-term successes and failures of a denomination in the local setting. For example, we can examine the ways in which circuits as a whole expanded and contracted over the nineteenth century. Similarly, we can discover the type and location of those societies that thrived, in comparison with those that failed. A series of plans can also enable us to track the ways in which circuit organisation itself developed over time. For example, we can see how the type and number of preachers employed reflected changes in the size and geographical focus of a circuit. Alternatively we can chart the changing financial priorities of a circuit by looking at the type and number of collections made over the course of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>53</sup> Ambler, 'Preachers and the plan', pp. 21-2.

<sup>54</sup> A. Rogers, 'When city speaks for county: the emergence of the town as the focus for religious activity in the nineteenth century', in D. Baker (ed.) *The Church in Town and Countryside*, Studies in Church History, 16 (Oxford, 1979), pp. 335-59; J. A. Vickers, 'Methodism in society in central Southern England, 1740-1851' (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Southampton, 1986), pp. 153-160.

<sup>55</sup> Rose, 'Local preachers and the preaching plan', p. 159

<sup>56</sup> Ambler, 'Preachers and the plan', pp. 21-2.



Moreover, as we shall see, preachers’ plans also enable us to gain an insight into the changing nature of worship provided as the nineteenth century progressed.

However, the use of circuit plans can have limitations. In particular, a single plan can only give an insight into a single moment in time. The dynamics of a Primitive Methodist circuit were subject to constant change; societies present on the plan in one quarter had often disappeared by the next, branches were regularly formed and circuits sub-divided. Perhaps the greatest limitation of preachers’ plans as a source for the historian is that they cannot explain why the circuit and the preaching within it was organised the way it was. Similarly, it is impossible from the plans alone to establish the extent to which preaching engagements were actually carried out. This is an important point because as we shall see circuit committees regularly found it necessary to deal with many missed appointments, therefore suggesting that the total number of services planned for the quarter was not the actual number that took place.

Despite the apparent hierarchical structure, as table 1 below reveals, quarterly appointments were in fact spread quite evenly across the entire list of preachers on plan. The Ludlow Circuit preaching plan for the quarter from July to September 1867 clearly demonstrates the extent to which the Primitive Methodist connexion was reliant on the work of its local preachers.

**Table 1 – Total preaching carried out by each Primitive Methodist preacher named on the Ludlow Circuit plan: July-Sept 1867<sup>57</sup>**

Preacher's Number on Plan	Occasions of Sunday Preaching (Total = 411)	% of Total Sunday Preaching	Occasions of Weekday Preaching (Total = 113)	% of Total Weekday Preaching	% of Total Preaching on the Plan (Total = 524)
1	21	5	43	38	12.2
2	20	4.9	45	40	12.4
3	6	1.5	0	0	1.1
4	0	0	0	0	0
5	8	1.9	0	0	1.5
6	0	0	0	0	0
7	4	1	0	0	0.8
8	3	0.7	0	0	0.6
9	4	1	1	0.9	1
10	0	0	0	0	0
11	4	1	0	0	0.8
12	10	2.4	0	0	1.9
13	2	0.5	0	0	0.4
14	3	0.7	1	0.9	0.8

<sup>57</sup> SRR/NM2612/44: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers’ Plan, 1867.



15	8	1.9	0	0	1.5
16	4	1	7	6	2.1
17	4	1	0	0	0.8
18	3	0.7	0	0	0.6
19	9	2.2	0	0	1.7
20	7	1.7	0	0	1.3
21	5	1.2	0	0	1
22	4	1	1	0.9	1
23	4	1	0	0	0.8
24	3	0.7	0	0	0.6
25	4	1	1	0.9	1
26	2	0.5	0	0	0.4
27	4	1	1	0.9	1
28	7	1.7	0	0	1.3
29	2	0.5	1	0.9	0.6
30	3	0.7	0	0	0.6
31	0	0	0	0	0
32	4	1	0	0	0.8
33	6	1.5	1	0.9	1.3
34	8	1.9	0	0	1.5
35	2	0.5	0	0	0.4
36	4	1	0	0	0.8
37	4	1	0	0	0.8
38	6	1.5	0	0	1.1
39	8	1.9	0	0	1.5
40	6	1.5	0	0	1.1
41	4	1	1	0.9	1
42	0	0	0	0	0
43	4	1	0	0	0.8
44	8	1.9	1	0.9	1.7
45	2	0.5	0	0	0.4
46	9	2.2	0	0	1.7
47	8	1.9	0	0	1.5
48	3	0.7	0	0	0.6
49	2	0.5	0	0	0.4
50	7	1.7	1	0.9	1.5
51	3	0.7	0	0	0.6
52	3	0.7	1	0.9	0.8
53	7	1.7	0	0	1.3
54	4	1	1	0.9	1
55	3	0.7	1	0.9	0.8
56	5	1.2	0	0	1
57	6	1.5	1	0.9	1.3
58	6	1.5	0	0	1.1
59	6	1.5	1	0.9	1.3
60	2	0.5	0	0	0.4
61	5	1.2	0	0	1
62	6	1.5	0	0	1.1
63	4	1	0	0	0.8
64	4	1	0	0	0.8
65	7	1.7	0	0	1.3
66	4	1	0	0	0.8



67	5	1.2	0	0	1
68	3	0.7	1	0.9	0.8
69	3	0.7	0	0	0.6
70	7	1.7	0	0	1.3
71	4	1	0	0	0.8
72	5	1.2	0	0	0.9
73	1	0.2	0	0	0.2
74	7	1.7	1	0.9	1.5
75	0	0	0	0	0
76	7	1.7	0	0	1.3
77	6	1.5	0	0	1.1
78	2	0.5	0	0	0.4
79	0	0	0	0	0
80	0	0	0	0	0
81	6	1.5	0	0	1.1
82	7	1.7	1	0.9	1.5
83	7	1.7	0	0	1.3
84	5	1.2	0	0	1
85	6	1.5	0	0	1.1
86	2	0.5	0	0	0.4
87	0	0	0	0	0
88	0	0	0	0	0
89	0	0	0	0	0
90	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>100.2</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>100.2</b>	<b>100.4</b>

During this quarter there were two travelling and eighty-eight ‘other’ preachers listed. Together, they were responsible for five hundred and twenty-four preaching engagements over the course of thirteen weeks. The two travelling preachers of the Ludlow circuit were planned for approximately 25 per cent, or one quarter of the total number of appointments, a significant workload considering that preaching was just one of several tasks they were expected to carry out. However, what is striking is the extent to which the local and ‘other’ preachers were employed; unpaid preachers fulfilled 75 per cent of the appointments on the plan.<sup>58</sup> Each local preacher was responsible for between one and ten engagements over the course of thirteen weeks, or between 0.2 and 1.9 per cent of the total number; however, the level of responsibility accorded to each preacher did not directly correspond with the position they held on the plan. Local preachers positioned on the top half did not necessarily have more preaching appointments than those below them. In 1867, Brother H. Maund, an Exhorter, placed at number eighty-five on the plan, was given the same number of

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<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to note that eleven of the local preachers had no appointments during this quarter. Therefore the responsibility for carrying out the quarterly preaching actually fell to just seventy-seven of the local preachers.



appointments as Brother Chubb positioned at number three.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly the apparent reliance on status for the formation of the list of preachers is not reflected in the distribution of appointments. In his work on the 1821 Lincoln Primitive Methodist circuit plan, Ambler has discovered a similar pattern, noting that even the local preachers on trial could have as many appointments as the itinerant ministers. He argues that this ‘fitted a stage in the connexion’s development when ideas of status and position were not fully developed.’<sup>60</sup> Although this may be particularly true of the early period of the connexion’s history, analysis of the plans for the Ludlow circuit reveal that even in the second half of the nineteenth century Primitive Methodism did not apply a practical hierarchy to its preacher’s plans. The Ludlow circuit plan for January to March 1878 again reveals a similar pattern of organisation to that of 1867.

**Table 2 – Total preaching carried out by each Primitive Methodist preacher named on the Ludlow Circuit plan: Jan-Mar 1878.**<sup>61</sup>

Preacher's Number on Plan	Occasions of Sunday Preaching (Total = 565)	% of Total Sunday Preaching	Occasions of Weekday Preaching (Total = 145)	% of Total Weekday Preaching	% of Total Preaching on the Plan (Total = 710)
1	28	5	49	33.7	10.8
2	29	5.1	46	31.7	10.5
3	20	3.5	21	14.4	5.7
4	9	1.6	0	0	1.3
5	0	0	0	0	0
6	7	1.2	0	0	1
7	8	1.4	0	0	1.1
8	12	2.1	1	0.7	1.8
9	2	0.4	0	0	0.3
10	8	1.4	1	0.7	1.3
11	3	0.5	0	0	0.4
12	7	1.2	0	0	1
13	8	1.4	0	0	1.1
14	6	1.1	0	0	0.9
15	0	0	0	0	0
16	13	2.3	1	0.7	2
17	8	1.4	1	0.7	1.3
18	0	0	0	0	0
19	9	1.6	1	0.7	1.4
20	2	0.4	1	0.7	0.4
21	5	0.9	0	0	0.7

<sup>59</sup> SRR/NM2612/44: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers’ Plan, 1867.  
<sup>60</sup> Ambler, ‘Preachers and the plan’, p. 29.  
<sup>61</sup> SRR/NM5166/1/6/32/1: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers’ Plan, 1878.



22	4	0.7	0	0	0.6
23	10	1.8	0	0	1.4
24	1	0.2	1	0.7	0.3
25	6	1.1	0	0	0.9
26	1	0.2	0	0	0.1
27	2	0.4	0	0	0.3
28	0	0	0	0	0
29	8	1.4	2	1.4	1.4
30	2	0.4	0	0	0.3
31	5	0.9	0	0	0.7
32	2	0.4	0	0	0.3
33	12	2.1	1	0.7	1.7
34	8	1.4	0	0	1.3
35	6	1.1	0	0	0.9
36	3	0.5	1	0.7	0.6
37	13	2.3	1	0.7	2
38	10	1.8	1	0.7	1.5
39	14	2.5	0	0	2
40	0	0	0	0	0
41	12	2.1	0	0	1.7
42	12	2.1	1	0.7	1.8
43	3	0.5	0	0	0.4
44	2	0.4	1	0.7	0.4
45	5	0.9	0	0	0.7
46	1	0.2	0	0	0.1
47	5	0.9	0	0	0.7
48	4	0.7	0	0	0.6
49	14	2.5	0	0	2
50	8	1.4	0	0	1.1
51	11	2	1	0.7	1.7
52	9	1.6	0	0	1.3
53	7	1.2	1	0.7	1.1
54	8	1.4	0	0	1.1
55	19	3.4	1	0.7	2.8
56	1	0.2	1	0.7	0.3
57	7	1.2	1	0.7	1.1
58	9	1.6	1	0.7	1.4
59	14	2.5	1	0.7	2.1
60	3	0.5	0	0	0.4
61	5	0.9	1	0.7	0.9
62	8	1.4	1	0.7	1.3
63	9	1.6	0	0	1.3
64	8	1.4	0	0	1.1
65	7	1.2	1	0.7	1.1
66	1	0.2	0	0	0.1
67	12	2.1	0	0	1.7
68	8	1.4	0	0	1.1
69	6	1.1	0	0	0.9
70	7	1.2	0	0	1
71	9	1.6	0	0	1.3
72	5	0.9	1	0.7	0.9
73	4	0.7	1	0.7	0.7



74	6	1.1	1	0.7	1
75	7	1.2	0	0	1
76	0	0	0	0	0
77	2	0.4	0	0	0.3
78	0	0	0	0	0
79	10	1.8	1	0.7	1.5
80	2	0.4	0	0	0.3
81	2	0.4	0	0	0.3
82	2	0.4	0	0	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>565</b>	<b>100.4</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.2</b>

During the quarter, 565 Sunday and 145 weeknight services were carried out by 81 preachers. In 1878, the Ludlow circuit employed three itinerant ministers, 71 local preachers, one preacher 'On Trial', three auxiliaries and three 'occasional' preachers. The three travelling preachers were planned for approximately 27 per cent of the 710 preaching engagements. Once again the local preachers carried out approximately three-quarters of the appointments, the engagements being distributed throughout the list of preachers irrespective of their overall position. Brother Green placed at number 55 had a total of 19 Sunday preaching appointments during the quarter from January to March, a figure almost identical to that of the third itinerant minister who had 20.<sup>62</sup>

Although the unpaid preachers of the circuit had a considerable workload, and played a vital role in serving the local societies with preaching during the course of the quarter, it is important to note that the vast majority of the weeknight services were taken by the itinerants. Local preachers were generally only planned on a Sunday when they were free from their other work commitments, and were rarely expected to enter the pulpit during the week. The Ludlow preachers' plan for the quarter from July to October 1850 reveals that the two circuit itinerant preachers were planned for all of the 175 weeknight engagements, a formidable schedule.<sup>63</sup> By 1867 some of the responsibility for the weeknight services had been passed over to the local preachers, although the itinerants were still planned for 88 (or 78 per cent) of the total, while the other appointments were distributed through the ranks of the unpaid preachers.<sup>64</sup> This remained the pattern until 1878 when the travelling preachers continued to fulfil 80 per cent of the weeknight preaching engagements.<sup>65</sup>

The itinerant ministers were expected to maintain a relationship with each of the

<sup>62</sup> SRR/NM5166/1/6/32/1: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers' Plan, 1878.

<sup>63</sup> SRR/NM3212/12/1/1: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers' Plan, 1850.

<sup>64</sup> SRR/NM2612/44: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers' Plan, 1867.

<sup>65</sup> SRR/NM5166/1/6/32/1: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers' Plan, 1878.



preaching places through the weeknight appointment. The attention given to each society on the preaching plan can reveal much about its perceived importance within the circuit, and as suggested earlier can emphasise any focal points that a circuit may have. The number of Sunday and weeknight services varied considerably from place to place. Each society within a circuit would generally have at least one weekly Sunday service, and one weeknight appointment during the quarter. Clearly, this was the minimum external contact a society would require in order to maintain a healthy membership. However, the Ludlow circuit plan for 1867 reveals that on occasions societies were made to forego contact during the week, even though it appears that the authorities were very conscious of the need to nurture all societies:

‘That the planning committee be very attentive to the little places’.<sup>66</sup>

The Ludlow circuit plans reveal that the number of services planned at each of the societies did indeed vary considerably. In 1850, only two societies had three Sunday services and a weeknight service every week of the quarter. Seven societies had two Sunday services, with fortnightly weeknight appointments. All other places on the plan had a single Sunday service each week, and a weeknight appointment either once a fortnight, once every four weeks or once every eight weeks.<sup>67</sup>

Not only were there great disparities in the level of worship provided at each society, it is clear that there was considerable inequality in the attention they received from the salaried preachers. Circuit officials clearly had their own agenda, and often ordered that itinerant ministers be required to pay more attention to certain locations:

‘That Ludlow, Leominster, Aston and Twitchen have as many Travelling preachers as can be spared them’.<sup>68</sup>

However, what is not evident is the motivation behind these demands. Of the 39 places on the Ludlow plan in 1850, only five societies were visited by an itinerant on a Sunday more once during the quarter. 12 had a single Sunday visit and 22, well over half the societies, did not see one of the travelling preachers during the whole thirteen-week period. Milburn has argued that in many instances it must have appeared that the visiting itinerants were merely assistants to the band of unpaid preachers that faithfully served the local congregations.<sup>69</sup> During the quarter from October to January 1850, the

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<sup>66</sup> SRR/NM3544/1/4: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1866-79, Dec 1867.

<sup>67</sup> SRR/NM3212/12/1/1: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers' Plan, 1850.

<sup>68</sup> SRR/NM2941/2/2: Hopton Bank Circuit Minutes, Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1828-40. 17 Sept 1832

<sup>69</sup> G. E. Milburn, 'The local preacher's role and status in divided Methodism, 1850-1932', in G. Milburn



responsibility of the Ludlow circuit and its branch in Leominster fell to just three travelling preachers.<sup>70</sup> However, as the circuit became more compact and the number of societies declined the level of contact between the itinerant ministers and the local membership began to improve. Of the 22 societies on plan in 1867, five saw an itinerant on a Sunday more than once during the quarter, 10 had a single visit, and only seven societies (or 32 per cent of the total) did not see them on a Sunday at all.<sup>71</sup> By 1878, only 25 per cent of the societies on plan did not have a Sunday service taken by a travelling preacher during the quarter.<sup>72</sup>

Although certain societies within the circuit received much more attention from the itinerant preachers, it is clear that there was a general desire to ensure that all places on the plan had contact with a variety of different people during the course of the quarter. Ambler has noted a similar pattern in the Lincoln circuit of 1821. He suggests that the Primitive Methodists had an ‘extremely varied religious life measured in terms of the number of preachers who took services there’. He goes on to argue that those places which had an array of different men in their pulpit were ‘vigorous centres’, that contrasted significantly with those which received more of the itinerant minister’s time.<sup>73</sup> The organisation of preaching appointments reveals a clear desire on behalf of the planning committee to ensure variety of contact; none of the 22 preaching places on the Ludlow circuit plan of 1867 was ever visited by the same local preacher twice in the quarter.<sup>74</sup> Circuits often worked together, pooling their resources to ensure that the societies received visits from a greater variety of preachers:

‘That a note be sent to Leominster requesting the occasional labours of some of their local preachers in exchange of ours’.<sup>75</sup>

It may be argued that efforts to fill the pulpits with different characters each week also reflects a desire to prevent any one preacher becoming more popular than another. As the journal of Richard Ward published in the connexional magazine reveals, many preachers were indeed held in particularly high regard by their congregations. In 1840, he wrote that he

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& M. Batty (eds.), *Workaday Preachers. The Story of a Methodist Local Preacher* (Peterborough, 1995), pp. 65-6.

<sup>70</sup> SRR/NM3212/12/1/1: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers’ Plan, 1850.

<sup>71</sup> SRR/NM2612/44: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers’ Plan, 1867.

<sup>72</sup> SRR/NM5166/1/6/32/1: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers’ Plan, 1878.

<sup>73</sup> Ambler, ‘Preachers and the plan’, pp. 28-9.

<sup>74</sup> SRR/NM2612/44: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers’ Plan, 1867.

<sup>75</sup> SRR/NM3544/1/2: Ludlow Circuit - Circuit Minutes, 1855-60, 10 Dec 1855.



‘Preached at Exford’s Green and Longden Common in the Shrewsbury Circuit. Here I found that a period of nine years had not obliterated the friendship of this affectionate people.’<sup>76</sup>

Ministers often became considerably attached to their congregations, making the stationing process a difficult and wrenching experience:

‘When I had to leave it was a great trial both to me and the people. I exhorted them to watch and pray, and, with weeping eyes bid them farewell. Oh! that God may keep us all faithful unto death, that we may all meet together at the right hand of God’.<sup>77</sup>

In 1860, the Annual Conference expressed its concern about the ‘evils which result from preachers remaining too long on stations’. Rules of Conference allowed that any circuit with more than one itinerant could have a superintendent restationed to it for a period of three years, or any other preacher for two years. However, after this the circuit had to prepare a ‘peculiar case’ to justify such a request.<sup>78</sup>

Besides enabling us to ascertain exactly how the quarterly appointments were distributed among the preachers, circuit plans also allow one to gain further insight into the way in which preaching was structured. By examining the location and time of appointments each week, regular patterns of activity emerge. In order to organise the engagements of the itinerant ministers the planning committee made use of regular preaching patterns known as ‘rounds’. These were basic patterns of movement, followed by the salaried preachers in their travels. Generally, several rounds were employed, each covering different areas and being repeated throughout the quarter. Each round was composed of a core of weeknight preaching appointments, and Sunday services were then organised to correspond with the weekly movements of the itinerants.

The 1850 preachers’ plan for the Ludlow circuit reveals a very precise pattern of movement which the three travelling preachers had to follow. The 39 societies on plan were incorporated into six distinct rounds which effectively divided the circuit into manageable geographical areas; these rounds were then rotated over the thirteen week period of the quarter, each itinerant beginning at different stages of the cycle. Each

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<sup>76</sup> PMM, 1840, pp. 431–4.

<sup>77</sup> PMM, 1823, p. 189.

<sup>78</sup> PMACM, Consolidated 1860, pp. 29–31.



round included several societies which formed the core of the weekly activity. For example, round one dictated that the itinerant minister preach at Ludlow on the Monday, followed at Hope on Tuesday, at Hayton's Bent on Wednesday, Bouldon on Thursday, and to finish the week, Friday weeknight services were held either at Vernold's Common or Shaw Bank. Similarly, round two began with a weeknight service at Sutton's Hill on Monday, followed by preaching at Stoke St. Milborough on Tuesday. On Wednesday evenings, worship was held at either Primrose Bank or Brookhampton, on Thursdays at Netchwood or Bent's Lane, and the Friday service was held at Blackford. The application of such a precise cycle of activity made the process of organising the quarterly appointments easier for the planning committee, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century when Primitive Methodist circuits often spanned massive geographical areas. These rounds not only fulfilled geographical considerations, but also provided the means by which the circuit officials could effectively control activities at the local level. Ambler has argued that the 'well-ordered and tight pattern' of weeknight worship enabled the travelling preachers to serve the 'solid inner-core of Primitive Methodist membership'. It also allowed them to maintain a relationship with local preachers, stewards and class leaders, which in turn ensured that they remained in touch with 'the spiritual heart of Primitive Methodism'.<sup>79</sup>

By 1867, the method of organising weeknight preaching appointments had changed. Not only do we see the employment of local preachers to assist with the weeknight rounds, but we also witness the inclusion of a weekly class meeting at Ludlow, and a fortnightly prayer meeting at Cleobury Mortimer into the weeknight plan. However, one of the most important developments in the organisation of the quarterly preaching was the attempt to limit the distance travelled by itinerant preachers, dividing their workload according to geographical considerations. In 1850 all three itinerants lived in Ludlow enabling the planning committee to construct one cycle of activity to suit them all; however in 1867 only one itinerant lived in Ludlow, while the second was located to the east in Cleobury Mortimer. The rounds employed during the course of the quarter from July to September 1867 reflected this new residency, as both itinerants were planned to follow their own individual pattern of movement. Although there was a degree of overlap, some societies receiving attention

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<sup>79</sup> SRR/NM3212/12/1/1: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers' Plan, 1850; Ambler, 'Preachers and the plan', p. 30.



from both, the first travelling preacher on plan generally carried out the weeknight appointments to the south and west of Ludlow, while the second visited those societies to the north and east. It is clear that the travelling preachers were becoming increasingly tied to specific localities. For example, all weeknight services at Cleobury Mortimer, Hill Houses, Hince, Cleestanton Gate, Bedlam and Hopton Bank were carried out by the second itinerant, and both of the ministers had sole responsibility for weeknight worship in the town in which they resided.<sup>80</sup> Milburn has argued that the role of Primitive Methodist ministers was changing from that of a 'roving evangelist' to that of a 'resident pastor'. As circuits became increasingly sub-divided and compact, the power of the travelling preachers inevitably became concentrated and the relationship between minister and congregation grew stronger.<sup>81</sup>

By 1878, the organisation of the weeknight appointments had changed once more. Although we still see the regular employment of local preachers to assist in carrying out services during the week, the most obvious development was the increased number of other official appointments which now encroached upon the regular weeknight plan. Certain patterns of activity can still be identified from the preacher's plan; however, it appears that there was no longer the need to divide the workload of the itinerant preachers into specific rounds. The itinerant preachers were still expected to use the weeknight plan to form and maintain a close relationship with certain societies within the circuit. For example, the societies at Onibury and Cleestanton Gate were only visited during the week by itinerant number one, while the societies at Whitton, Hince, Little Isle and Bickley were only visited by itinerant number two.<sup>82</sup>

Finally, by following the movements of the travelling preachers during each week, it is possible to estimate the mileage they were expected to cover. Using the Ludlow circuit plan for July to September 1850, we can see that each of the three itinerant preachers covered a considerable distance over the thirteen-week period. The first travelling preacher covered approximately 307 miles, or an average of 24 per week. The second travelled approximately 305 miles over the quarter, and the third slightly less covering 291 miles or an average of 22 per week.<sup>83</sup> Preaching patterns devised by the planning committee were not always as kind to the travelling preachers

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<sup>80</sup> SRR/NM2612/44: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers' Plan, 1867.

<sup>81</sup> G. E. Milburn, 'Tensions in Primitive Methodism in the eighteen-seventies and the origins of the Christian lay churches in the north-east', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, XL (1976), p. 96.

<sup>82</sup> SRR/NM5166/1/6/32/1: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers' Plan, 1878.

<sup>83</sup> SRR/NM3212/12/1/1: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers' Plan, 1850.



as they could have been, and itinerants regularly had to cover a distance of ten miles or more between appointments. However, it is important to understand that it was not uncommon, particularly in the early nineteenth century, for preachers to cover such long distances on foot. Watts comments upon the number of men that died early after having had a brief, but exhausting career as a Primitive Methodist itinerant; however, the hardships endured and the mileage travelled became a source of great pride for those that survived to old age.<sup>84</sup>

It was not only the travelling preachers that were expected to cover considerable distances in order to carry out their appointments, as the memoir of Thomas Bowen, local preacher in the Bishop's Castle circuit reveals.

'I once walked from Bishop's Castle to Knowbury, four miles beyond Ludlow, and preached; and then walked to Ludlow, and preached at night: altogether a distance of nearly thirty miles.'<sup>85</sup>

It was generally understood that local preachers should not be expected to travel too far to fulfil their appointments, and planning committees often endeavoured to provide local preachers with final Sunday engagements as near to their home as possible.<sup>86</sup> However, as the minutes of the Prees Green circuit committee meeting reveal, in large rural circuits there was often no other alternative:

'A Local Preacher's appointment that does not exceed ten miles shall be in future considered a reasonable appointment.'<sup>87</sup>

The distance that local preachers were expected to travel was of particular importance during the week, when the vast majority had work commitments the following day, and certain circuits were keen to enforce limits whenever possible:

'That Sedgley and Gornal be exempt from the rule which says no local preacher shall be responsible for a week night appointment that is more than one mile and a half from his home.'<sup>88</sup>

Despite being able to use the circuit plans to make quite precise calculations about the amount of preaching carried out by each preacher, it is important to note that these are calculations based upon engagements to preach and not actual services carried

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<sup>84</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, pp. 150-2.

<sup>85</sup> PMM, 1878, p. 563.

<sup>86</sup> Dudley Archives and Local History (DALH)/9066: Dudley Circuit - Committee Meeting Minutes, 1836-41, 29 Jun. 1840.

<sup>87</sup> SRR/NM2775/1-5: Prees Green Circuit – Committee Meeting Minute Book, 1837-1910, 16 Sept 1850.

<sup>88</sup> DALH/9066: Dudley Circuit - Committee Meeting Minutes, 1836-41, 1 Apr 1839.



out. The extent to which circuit officials had to deal with missed appointments clearly suggests that the total services planned each quarter was not the actual number that took place. Circuit committee meeting minutes reveal that the neglect of appointments was considered a serious offence. It is clear that making preachers attend to their engagements was a constant battle; each quarter, the committee found it necessary to deal with many cases of missed appointments. Preachers who were unable to carry out a service as planned were required to obtain an 'authorised' replacement if disciplinary action was to be avoided.

'That in case any preacher through sickness, or any other emergency be unable to attend to his or her appointments they shall first endeavour to get them supplied by some preacher on plan, if that be impracticable then they shall apply (by Note) to either the Circuit Steward or the Itinerant preachers as soon as possible.'<sup>89</sup>

The fact that local preachers often used travelling preachers as their replacement is made clear by the minutes of the Leintwardine branch committee meeting:

'That each preacher be requested to take his own appointments, extraordinary cases excepted and that in no case give them in to the travelling preachers'.<sup>90</sup>

Various different forms of disciplinary methods were adopted over the course of the nineteenth century to combat the problem of neglect of appointments. For example, those travelling preachers who neglected their engagements could expect to lose one day's salary. The Annual Meeting of 1831 ruled that itinerants would also forfeit eighteen pence for each individual appointment they failed to attend to; this sum would then be paid into the Charitable Fund, a source of help for preachers working in 'run out' circuits.<sup>91</sup> The most common forms of 'punishment' for the local preacher was that of a drop in position on the plan, or the withholding of appointments in the following quarter.

'That Brother James sink two figures on plan for neglecting Leominster... That Brother J. Jones have no appointments next quarter for neglecting Wyson'.<sup>92</sup>

It is impossible to determine the precise effect of 'neglect' upon the members. However circuit authorities were obviously aware of the problems that it could cause:

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<sup>89</sup> SRR/NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit - Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 2 Aug 1834.

<sup>90</sup> HRO/K76/10: Leintwardine Circuit - Circuit Minute Book, 1849-65, 12 Sept 1849.

<sup>91</sup> PMACM - Various Regulations, 1831, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> SRR/NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit - Committee Meeting Minutes, 1844-59, 9 Dec 1844.



‘As much harm has been done to several Societies in this circuit through neglecting Appointments, the Quarterly Meeting resolved that ‘If any Brother be found guilty of having wilfully neglected an Appointment, or Appointments; he shall have no more work on the Plan until he gives a written pledge that he will in future take the work assigned to him’ and if the Pledge be not sent to the next Quarterly Meeting, his name will be removed from the Plan.’<sup>93</sup>

In 1836, the Oswestry circuit blamed the ‘very frequent neglect of appointments by local preachers’ for its lack of success in that year.<sup>94</sup> In his work on the 1821 preachers’ plan for Lincoln, Ambler has also noted the disparity between the engagements to preach on plan and the actual number that took place. Using the journal of William Fieldsend, an itinerant minister employed by the circuit during the quarter covered by the 1821 plan, Ambler was able to show that the plan was not ‘the final source of authority’ for the type and location of Primitive Methodist activities during this period.<sup>95</sup> Although Fieldsend was planned to go to Balderton in the afternoon, followed by Newark in the evening, he also included a visit to Coddington in the morning. His journal also reveals that the ticket renewal planned at Balderton actually became a lovefeast.<sup>96</sup> That the plan only provided the basic framework within which local spiritual activity took place is also highlighted by the journal of William Doughty, local preacher in the Oswestry circuit in the year 1840:

‘Not planned today; but feeling much of the love of Christ, I set out with Brothers Jones and Fitzgerald. At P. we held a short open-air meeting; then at Carredew, a five minutes sermon on the high road.’<sup>97</sup>

This not only reveals the likelihood of spontaneous spiritual activity, but also emphasises the dedication of early Primitive Methodist preachers.

### **Circuit Management: discipline and finance.**

Although the need to organise the quarterly preaching appointments was of paramount importance, the ultimate success of the connexion in the local setting not only depended upon the careful provision of ‘religious worship’, but also upon a circuit’s ability to manage its financial and disciplinary affairs. A circuit committee

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<sup>93</sup> SRR/NM5166/1/6/32/1: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers’ Plan, 1878.

<sup>94</sup> SRR/NM4391/1/6: Oswestry Circuit – Annual Report, July 1836.

<sup>95</sup> Ambler, ‘Preachers and the plan’, p. 26.

<sup>96</sup> Ambler, ‘Preachers and the plan’, p. 26.

<sup>97</sup> PMM, 1840, p. 217.



had to effectively govern its preachers and members. Dissension could arise very quickly if circuit authorities were not seen to have complete control, and such discord often resulted in divisions in the membership. Officials were therefore conscious of the potential for unrest and were wary of those characters with strong will or a reputation for trouble-making,

‘That J. Williams speak to Mrs A. Russell respecting her evil speaking and towards the Travelling Preachers in particular, and in case she does not she cannot remain a member.’<sup>98</sup>

In 1849, the Annual Conference ruled that,

‘No wrangler, troubler, society disturber, nor imposter, must be readmitted...without indubitable evidence that he is a true penitent, nor until he has given a written pledge, subscribed by himself that his future condition shall be peaceable, industrious and upright...’<sup>99</sup>

This rule did not only apply to the membership, but also to the local and travelling preachers. An ill-disciplined itinerant ministry not only undermined local circuit life, but also had particularly dire consequences for the well-being of the connexion as a whole. Hatcher argues that the great urgency to recruit preachers during the early years of rapid expansion ensured that many unsuitable ministers were employed. In some cases, popularity encouraged individual ministers to assert themselves against the connexional authorities. Other ministers known as ‘runners out’ failed to collect society money and lived off the achievements of their predecessors, ensuring that circuits had become crippled financially by the time of their departure.<sup>100</sup>

Local and travelling preachers alike were expected to set a good example for their congregations by adhering to a strict code of conduct. In a lecture given to the local preachers of the Wrockwardine Wood circuit on 5 July 1847, John Petty cautioned against a lack of discipline.

‘Improper conduct would not only dishonour your God, wound your Christian friends, expose you to the ridicule of wicked men, and occasion the triumph of evil spirits, but would greatly injure your usefulness in the church and the world, destroy your inward peace and hinder your progress in the Divine

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<sup>98</sup> SRR/NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit - Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44. 26 Jan 1839.

<sup>99</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes 1849, p. 63.

<sup>100</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, pp. 183-5.



life.’<sup>101</sup>

From the evidence of Annual Meeting and local circuit committee minutes, it is possible to ascertain the extent to which the life of a Primitive Methodist was determined by a desire to uphold a certain moral code. The Annual Meeting involved itself in all aspects of a preacher’s life, dictating the standards expected from them in both professional and personal spheres. In 1832 the Annual Meeting set out the way a Primitive Methodist itinerant preacher should dispose of his time. The ruling suggested that seven hours be given over to sleep and four to study, while the rest of the day should be spent in family visiting and other active labours.<sup>102</sup> All preachers were required to maintain a certain level of behaviour or face the disciplinary forces of their circuit committee.

As a basis of respectability preachers were expected to maintain a certain standard in their physical appearance. Travelling preachers were required to wear single-breasted waistcoats and to keep their hair in its ‘natural form’. They were not allowed to wear either pantaloons, fashionable trousers or white hats; while female itinerants were to be ‘patterns of plainness in all their dress’.<sup>103</sup> In 1822, the Annual Meeting extended its regulations to include its unpaid preachers,

‘That in future all our local preachers and exhorters shall appear in the same plain uniform of dress as the travelling preachers’.<sup>104</sup>

Finally, in 1828 the rules were simplified as a general recommendation of ‘plainness’ was suggested.<sup>105</sup> Appearance was also fundamental in dictating the personal lives of the Primitive Methodist preachers who had to provide a correct image at all times. For example, the circuit committee was quick to discipline those who failed to uphold the sanctity of the Sabbath, or those preachers seen participating in frivolous forms of entertainment.

‘That Brother Francis see Brother Preece...and request him to attend the quarterly meeting this afternoon to answer the charge of attending the circus’.<sup>106</sup>

Perhaps the most common disciplinary matter dealt with by local circuit authorities was that of drunkenness. The consumption of excessive levels of alcohol by the preachers

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<sup>101</sup> PMM, Sept. 1847, pp. 532-3.

<sup>102</sup> PMACM, 1832, p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> PMACM, General Minutes 1821, p. 5.

<sup>104</sup> PMACM, General Minutes 1822, p. 3.

<sup>105</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 139.

<sup>106</sup> SRR/NM3544/1/4: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers and Quarterly Meeting, 1866-79, 5 Jun 1871.



was not to be tolerated, not only because it led to inebriation but also to other forms of unacceptable behaviour such as swearing and fighting. Those found guilty of intoxication could receive the harshest of punishments:

‘That Brother E. Powell come off plan in consequence of drunkenness and that he be dismembered’.<sup>107</sup>

Although it was not viewed as a matter for disciplinary action, the habit of smoking was also frowned upon. The Annual Meeting ruled that no tobacco smoking preacher could be taken on the annual list, without having produced a certificate from a physician to prove that it is necessary for their health.<sup>108</sup> Summing up contemporary opinion in 1834, Henry Sharman set out the argument against smoking, noting that the habit not only induced apoplexy but also wasted money and brought on a habit of indolence. He goes on to suggest that many precious opportunities for private devotion or personal improvement were ‘too frequently quite occupied or greatly infringed upon by the pipe’. But perhaps most dangerously of all were the associations of tobacco with the fearful habit of alcohol consumption. Sharman admonishes that

‘too many are, by smoking brought to love “a wet one”, and have been led into the practice of tippling, drinking, and drunkenness’.<sup>109</sup>

Preachers were also cautioned against spending too much time in the wrong company:

‘That Brother Benjamin Phillips speak to Brother John Woodhouse respecting his condition in keeping with an ungodly woman’.<sup>110</sup>

In particular, they were warned about the perils of allowing females to accompany them on their travels. Circuit committee minutes reveal that many got themselves into considerable trouble over this issue, and it is clear that preachers had to keep their distance in order to safeguard their reputation and ultimately that of the Connexion. In August 1835, Brother James Tristram of the Hopton Bank circuit, found it necessary to explain himself when allegations were made concerning a young woman accompanying him to an appointment in Shrewsbury.<sup>111</sup> Although his reasons were found to be satisfactory, the caution of local officials becomes clear when we examine the case of Samuel Russon, local preacher and class leader in the Dudley circuit who was expelled

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<sup>107</sup> SRR/NM3544/1/4: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers and Quarterly Meeting, 1866-79, 3 Dec 1866.

<sup>108</sup> PMACM, Consolidated 1836, p. 32.

<sup>109</sup> H. Sharman, *Tobacco Refused. Reasons assigned for not using tobacco at all. Addressed to those members of the Primitive Methodist Connexion who are not consumers of tobacco* (Bemmersley, 1834), pp. 3-10.

<sup>110</sup> HRO/K76/10: Leintwardine Circuit - Circuit Minute Book, 1849-65, 22 Feb 1851.

<sup>111</sup> SRR/NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit - Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 25 Aug 1835.



for immoral conduct after sexually molesting three women.<sup>112</sup>

The appearance of financial stability was also important for Primitive Methodist preachers. Although it was recognised that their circumstances were often very poor, travelling and hired local preachers were encouraged by the Annual Meeting to ‘make a provision, by their own subscription’ and to deposit it in a savings bank.<sup>113</sup> In 1828, the Annual Meeting ruled that all travelling preachers in debt,

‘shall have three pounds per quarter stopped out of his salary and transferred to the treasurer of the Conference Fund and that treasurer shall account for it to the circuit in which such debts are owing, until the whole be cleared off’.<sup>114</sup>

Minutes of the Leintwardine circuit committee meeting reveal that local preachers too, could be subject to disciplinary action if they failed to keep their financial affairs in order:

‘That a letter be written to Brother W. Bathurst informing him of a charge being brought against him for the none discharge of debt which he owes to his brother’.<sup>115</sup>

The ability to manage ones own financial affairs also had implications for the well-being of the circuit; people who were incapable of managing their own affairs would be unable to manage those of the circuit.

As we have seen, local circuit authorities were quick to inflict punishment for an array of different transgressions. Although circuit officials were not afraid to suspend or even expel those found guilty of the most serious offences, preachers were not always punished, but simply urged to do better in future.

‘That we are sorry to hear of a complaint against Brother Weaver respecting the disagreement between him and a young woman with whom he has been keeping company and that he promises this meeting that he will be more careful in the future’.<sup>116</sup>

In 1821, the Annual Meeting allowed that circuit committees be able to suspend any accredited preacher accused of violating the rules until the following quarter-day.<sup>117</sup>

The evidence of Ludlow reveals that this ruling was regularly applied. The suspension

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<sup>112</sup> DALH/9066: Dudley Circuit - Committee Meeting Minutes, 1845-55, 5 Apr 1852.

<sup>113</sup> PMACM, General Minutes 1822, p. 14.

<sup>114</sup> PMACM, Various Regulations 1828, p. 8.

<sup>115</sup> HRO/K76/12: Leintwardine Circuit - Circuit Minute Book, 1864-87, 6 Sept 1877.

<sup>116</sup> SRR/NM3544/1/3: Ludlow PM Circuit - Committee Meeting Minutes, 1860-66, 10 Jun 1861.

<sup>117</sup> PMACM, General Minutes 1821, pp. 6-7.



of preachers was not only used as a form of punishment, but also gave circuit officials time to examine the case further.

‘That Brother Davis and Hall see Brother William Lloyd of Kingsland to talk to him on the charge of using improper language’.<sup>118</sup>

Suspension also enabled the quarter-day board to demonstrate an element of forgiveness:

‘That this quarter-day considers Brother Price to have done seriously wrong in going into a public house on the Sabbath - and as he was so near home too.

But as he has manifested proper penitence this quarter-day forgive him’.<sup>119</sup>

Finally, the ultimate punishment that could be handed out was that of complete expulsion from the Connexion:

‘That Brother T. Cole be finally excommunicated for a slanderous report being raised between him and a young woman’.<sup>120</sup>

Generally this was the last resort after several warnings and previous disciplinary actions, and it is clear that circuits were not keen to lose their preachers. This may explain the willingness to forgive them their indiscretions. In 1852, the Leominster branch of the Ludlow circuit expelled Brother J. Hughes of Luston, although he was to be readmitted just over a year later.<sup>121</sup> However, although the maintenance of order and discipline was an important part of circuit life, Jennings has observed how circuit officials were occasionally able to display a more light-hearted side. In June 1832, minutes of the Ruddington circuit committee meeting noted:

‘That Brother Martin be exonerated for not going to Ruddington on account of his being dead and buried. That Brother Beckelegge be exonerated from not going to Ruddington as he was ill in bed but not dead as Brother Martin.’<sup>122</sup>

Each circuit was solely responsible for its own finances. It was not only expected to raise the sufficient means to provide for the salary and maintenance of its travelling preachers, but also to take care of its rented rooms, chapels and Sunday schools, and also to pay all other costs incurred during the course of the quarter. Each

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<sup>118</sup> HRO/J92/26: Leominster Branch - Quarterly and Branch Meeting Minutes, 1848-52, 8 Mar 1852.

<sup>119</sup> SRR/NM3544/1/3: Ludlow Circuit - Committee Meeting Minutes, 1860-66, 9 Mar 1863.

<sup>120</sup> SRR/NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit - Quarterly and Committee Meeting Minutes, 1840-50, 9 Jun 1845.

<sup>121</sup> HRO/J92/26: Leominster Branch - Quarterly and Branch Meeting Minutes, 1848-52, 8 Mar 1852.

<sup>122</sup> Cited in S. Jennings, *Sermons and Stocking Frames. The History of Methodism in Ruddington and its links with the Framework Knitters* (1993), p. 26.



member that joined a Primitive Methodist class, was asked to pay at least one penny each week and more if they could do so, and was also expected to make a contribution at the quarterly renewal of tickets.<sup>123</sup> However, the giving of class and ticket money represented a considerable sacrifice for many poor families, and the poverty of Primitive Methodist congregations often meant that circuits faced a considerable task in balancing their books.<sup>124</sup>

The evidence of the Ludlow circuit accounts clearly reveals the inability of certain societies to raise their quarterly ticket money. Of the 33 societies listed in the quarterly accounts of March 1840, 21 did not collect the full revenue entitled to them. For example, the society at Bouldon only raised 2s, well below the 10s. 10d it should have contributed to the circuit funds, if each member was paying a penny each week of the quarter according to rule. At Leominster there were a total of 28 members, however at 14s 4d, the quarterly income of the society was well below what it should have been. Ludlow, the largest society in the station at that time, made the greatest total contribution to the circuit funds. This is perhaps to be expected, not only because this society had the greatest number of members, but also because it was situated in a town where the congregation may have been more able to find their weekly membership money. Ludlow was one of 12 societies that managed to collect more than their basic quarterage. The society at Hopton Bank raised the greatest 'extra revenue', a total of 17s 4d on top of their class money. Generally, additional income came from the various collections that were made throughout the quarter. For example, the society at Brimfield received 4s 10d from its quarterly collection, and a further 3s 4d from contributions made at its lovefeasts. Although, Brimfield's quarterage was actually below what it should have been if all members were paying equal amounts, the extra revenue from collections ensured that its quarterly income was increased by 5s 31/2d.<sup>125</sup> A decade later, the situation had not changed significantly. In the quarter ending March 1850, eighteen of the thirty-three societies in the Ludlow circuit failed to collect all class money owing to them from their members. Again many societies were obviously dependent upon the revenue raised from the miscellaneous collections made during the course of the quarter.<sup>126</sup> This pattern is also repeated in 1870 when only 6 of

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<sup>123</sup> PMACM, 1819, p. 11.

<sup>124</sup> Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry*, pp.150-2.

<sup>125</sup> SRR/NM2612/21: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, March 1840.

<sup>126</sup> SRR/NM2612/22: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, March 1850.



the twenty-four societies listed in the accounts collected their full class money.<sup>127</sup> The evidence of the Ludlow accounts reveals that many Primitive Methodists were indeed unable to make all the contributions expected of them as full members. Although the various collections made during the quarter often provided societies with a reasonable income, these may well have prevented many with limited surplus income from paying their class money in full. Werner has argued that the sacrifice made by those who did pay their class and ticket money demonstrated ‘an allegiance to the cause that was both voluntary and genuine’. However, Primitive Methodism understood the economic pressures of its congregations, and allowed those that could not afford to contribute to remain members in good standing.<sup>128</sup>

Circuit accounts not only reveal the level of income raised during each quarter, but also give a very detailed picture of the expenditure made. In the quarter ending March 1840, the Ludlow circuit raised a total of £50 10s 3d. Of this amount, all but £1 15s 2d was required to cover the circuit’s expenses. An array of different costs had to be met: letters and stationery, travelling expenses, house rent and the provision of necessary household implements all had to be paid for out of the quarterly budget. One of the greatest regular expenses was the meat bill for the circuit travelling preachers, a total of £6 13s in the quarter to March 1840. However, by far the largest outgoing was the salaries of the itinerants; in this period the Ludlow circuit employed five itinerant preachers, costing a total of £18 16s for the quarter. An additional burden upon circuit funds derived from the fact that one of the five was a married preacher with children, a further £2 18s 6d going towards their upkeep. Although there was a balance to carry over in March 1840, this was not always the case. The quarterly accounts for the first half of the nineteenth century reveal that the Ludlow circuit regularly owed salary to its preachers. In March 1840, back salary of £2 2s was paid to each of the five travelling preachers.<sup>129</sup> This problem again appears in the accounts of March 1841, when each itinerant received the sum of £1 3s 1d which had been owing to them since September 1840.<sup>130</sup>

It is clear that circuits often had problems footing the bill for their itinerant ministers, but under certain circumstances the Annual Conference saw to it that relief

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<sup>127</sup> SRR/NM2612/23: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, March 1870.

<sup>128</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 138.

<sup>129</sup> SRR/NM2612/21: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, March 1840.

<sup>130</sup> SRR/NM2612/21: Ludlow PM Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, March 1841.



was available. The 'Charitable Fund' was established in 1828. The purpose of the Fund was to make up any deficiencies in the salary of those itinerants working in circuits that had 'manifestly improved', but were still unable to provide a full wage.<sup>131</sup> Each quarter-day board that had the resources was required to subscribe a quarterly sum, not less than 5s. Similarly, every itinerant preacher who could afford it was expected to contribute something each quarter 'towards assisting his suffering brethren'. In order to qualify for assistance, the Annual Conference ruled that each claimant send an 'account of the embarrassment in the circuit when he entered it, and his opinion of the means by which it was run-out'. It was also necessary to send proof that the condition of the circuit had indeed improved in his hands and the amount by which his salary was short, with an explanation of why this deficiency had occurred.<sup>132</sup> That the Charitable Fund did provide considerable assistance for those in need is demonstrated by the example of Brother J. Moore, itinerant preacher in the Shrewsbury circuit, who received a total of £13 19s from the Fund in 1837.<sup>133</sup> At the Annual Conference of 1849, the Charitable Fund became the Auxiliary Fund, although its ultimate purpose remained unchanged.<sup>134</sup>

Another source of financial assistance for circuits was the 'Contingent Fund' or as it became known later the 'Circuits-assistant-sick-preachers-fund' which provided for sick itinerant ministers. To qualify for relief, the preacher must have travelled in the Connexion for a minimum of one year and must have been ill for at least four weeks. Female preachers were paid at the rate of 6s a week, single preachers at the rate of 10s a week, while married preachers received 14s, a payment which was made throughout the duration of the illness.<sup>135</sup> In 1837, a total of £26. 12s was paid from this fund to six different Shropshire circuits. The Shrewsbury circuit was awarded the greatest amount, a total of £9 12s for the illness of its preacher J. Moore. The Ludlow circuit received £8. 4s, all except £1. 4s of which was given for the illness of Lucy Hubbard who had been unable to fulfil her appointments for over 20 weeks. Bishop's Castle, Wrockwardine Wood and Oswestry also received assistance from the fund. Clearly, these sums were essential for circuits where ill itinerant preachers were unable

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<sup>131</sup> PMACM, Various Regulations 1828, pp. 4-5.

<sup>132</sup> PMACM, Various Regulations 1831, p. 6.

<sup>133</sup> PMACM, Various Regulations 1837, p. 21.

<sup>134</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes 1849, p. 120.

<sup>135</sup> PMACM, Various Regulations 1829, p. 3 & General Minutes 1831, p. 1.



to continue their work.<sup>136</sup>

Finally, another source of financial assistance was the Conference Fund, which aided circuits in the payment of travelling expenses. Although individual circuits were responsible for the removal of itinerants from one circuit or branch to another, the Conference Fund occasionally intervened when the distance and therefore the expense, was too great to be easily managed by a single station. Similarly, the fund also paid the travelling expenses of general committee delegates to and from district and conference meetings.<sup>137</sup>

### **Conclusion.**

The need to co-ordinate activities and to organise the business of Primitive Methodism at the local level was vital. As we have seen, the great numbers of men, employed as travelling and local preachers, needed constant supervision, management and discipline. Similarly, the vast number of societies and members had to be carefully administered to by means of regular worship and contact with the itinerant ministers if they were to be maintained and were to enjoy continued growth. Lamenting the loss of membership, an address made to the Annual Conference of 1875 noted:

‘...we cannot ascertain the numbers lost to us by mere cessation of membership; we, however, have reason to believe that they amount to several thousands annually. And what is the lesson taught by this fact? It is comprised in one word – organise. This is our duty, organise! organise! organise!...Effective organisation in a station will secure a richer harvest than eloquence in the pulpit.’<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> PMACM, Various Regulations 1837, p. 17.

<sup>137</sup> PMACM, Various Regulations 1836, p. 13.

<sup>138</sup> PMACM, General Minutes, 1875, p. 88.



## **Chapter 5: The Social Origins of Shropshire Primitive Methodists**

### **and their Preachers**

The nature of religious experience ultimately prevents us from making very precise judgements about why people were drawn to the Primitive Methodist Connexion during the nineteenth century. What prompted them to become convinced of sin and search for the means to their salvation? During the first half of the century in particular, members of the denomination were encouraged to speak freely about their experiences and to share the story of their conversion. However the information they imparted in class and society meetings inevitably remains elusive. Generally, those people who became Primitive Methodists were not able to leave behind detailed written accounts of their own religious experience, and we therefore have to rely on the notes of others who took up the task of recording their spiritual journeys in obituaries and biographies.<sup>1</sup>

The process of conversion began as the ‘sinner’ began to recognise their situation and seek ‘liberty’. However, it appears from the evidence that the final stage of this process did not always come at once.<sup>2</sup> Conversions could occur at any time and in any location. In *Son of Thunder*, Middleton presents the example of Charles Bayliss who experienced a powerful moment of revelation while in the tavern:

‘When he first entered he called for beer, threw down the money and rose to drink, but, while stretching out his hand to grasp the cup, was seized by the Spirit, whose thunder-peals startled him, and rang echoes through every part of his being’.<sup>3</sup>

He left the tavern without touching a single drop and immediately went and joined his local congregation. Conversions were prompted by a variety of different personal situations, however, and as Werner points out it was particularly common when ‘individuals felt despair or were in straitened circumstances’. The fear of illness and death provided considerable impetus for conversion; the outbreak of typhus or cholera, a pit accident, the death of a spouse, a miscarriage or a disabling injury often led people to turn to religion to in order to find an explanation and solace.<sup>4</sup> Ambler argues that

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<sup>1</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 151-2.

<sup>2</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 232-3.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. G. Middleton, *A Son of Thunder, or a Life Sketch of Charles Bayliss, commonly called Ironsides*. (London, 1874), pp. 21-2.

<sup>4</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 154.



Primitive Methodism gave those individuals who found themselves in 'difficult' circumstances the 'hope of deliverance through the experience of conversion'. The emotional and spiritual development that conversion brought also enabled people to gain a 'sense of worth and value in a changing world'.<sup>5</sup>

The evidence of obituaries not only provides an insight into the reasons that led people to experience conversion, but also gives information about the general socio-economic profile of those who became Primitive Methodists during the nineteenth century. Of the one hundred converts examined by Werner, whose age at the time of conversion was noted, approximately half were between fifteen and thirty-four. Although the occupation or status of converts was only given in forty cases of the total number examined, Werner calculated that over half were servants or farm labourers.<sup>6</sup> Hempton praises Werner's 'valiant attempt' to analyse the first generation of Primitive Methodist converts and agrees with her conclusions that they were predominantly young and from a poor background. However, he argues that the pattern of recruitment was in fact more likely to reflect the general social and occupational structure of the locations in which Primitive Methodism found a following, 'than to match the monochromatic categories devised by social historians'.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Membership: social classification of Primitive Methodism.**

In order to obtain a greater understanding of the nature of Primitive Methodist communities and to help explain their successes and failures, it is important to establish their social composition. Knowledge of the social structure of the various Methodist denominations is of considerable consequence when attempting to assess their relative successes within particular regions. The strong appeal of Primitive Methodism for the lower classes of rural and industrial society alike has long been established. Kendall, the Primitive Methodist historian, noted in his work how it was accepted from the earliest of dates that

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<sup>5</sup> Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 154.

<sup>7</sup> Hempton, *Religion of the People*, p. 25.



‘we were the Church for the neglected and the forgotten... We were down amongst the Luddites and Levellers, the oppressed and almost despairing agricultural labourers, the miners struggling for the rights of labour..’<sup>8</sup>

Wickham writing in the late 1950s about industrial Sheffield, argued that it was the Primitives who reached down lower than any of the other Nonconformist denominations, and ‘reflected more than any other the changes that have taken place in the working-class’.<sup>9</sup> Similarly Obelkevich has commented that the Primitive Methodists of South Lindsey invited analysis as one of the few forms of ‘expression of the lower orders in rural society.’<sup>10</sup> That the majority of its ranks were indeed drawn from a working-class background was clearly recognised by connexional officials. In 1845, the Primitive Methodist magazine advised its itinerant preachers to remember the needs of its lowliest members and to treat them with the respect:

‘never speak coldly to a villager because you have seen him repairing a ditch or a road, thatching a barn, coming from a coal mine, or employed in an humbler sphere than your own...shake him cordially by the hand, ask him of his welfare, and let him be convinced that your enquiry is not ceremonious, but dictated by the outgoings of an affectionate heart...Remember that the souls of ploughmen, ditchmen, cartmen, blacksmiths, stone-breakers, pitmen etc., are as precious in the sight of God as those of Monarchs.’<sup>11</sup>

Nineteenth-century baptism registers are an important source, offering a clear insight into the occupational structure of the various denominations and allowing us to analyse the social differences between them. When each baptism was registered various details including the occupation of the father of the child was noted. Snell has suggested that the information found in baptism registers enables us to see the occupation of a man at the most operative point in his life. Unlike marriage or burial registers, which give information about occupation at the beginning and end of a man’s working career, baptism registers span a greater period of his working life, and therefore the occupation given in them may indeed be the ‘most representative’.<sup>12</sup> However, despite being one of the few available sources with which we can assess the

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<sup>8</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 162.

<sup>9</sup> Wickham, *Church and People*, p. 133.

<sup>10</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 220.

<sup>11</sup> PMM, 1845, p. 240.

<sup>12</sup> K. D. M. Snell, *Church and Chapel in the North Midlands. Religious Observance in the Nineteenth Century* (Leicester, 1991), p. 41.



social background of a local religious community, the use of baptism registers for this purpose does create certain problems. Setting aside the basic problems of faded pages and illegible handwriting, it is important to realise that a proportion of the local Primitive Methodist membership would not have been married and would not therefore have raised a family. Moreover, there would be many older couples who had passed the age of child-rearing. Obviously neither of these types are represented in the baptism registers. Similarly by only counting those registrations that give the occupation of the father, important occupations are excluded. This is particularly true of those working in the service industry. During the nineteenth century, vast numbers of women would have been employed as servants and many of these would have been members of the Primitive Methodist connexion.

The extent to which baptism registers are representative of the true levels of membership has also been called into question. Having a child baptised in a particular chapel did not necessarily imply membership of that place of worship or of that denomination as a whole. Obelkevich has suggested that the Primitive Methodists did not value baptism 'either as a Sacrament or as a mark of piety', and he therefore disputes that baptism is necessarily a sign of membership.<sup>13</sup> Hugh Bourne was clear in his belief that all children should be baptised regardless of their membership status. In contrast, other Nonconformist denominations appear to have been quite clear in asserting that baptism within their chapels should indeed imply membership. For example, the Wesleyan Conference of 1795 established that baptism was only intended for its own members, this being extended later to also include regular hearers. Doubts about the legal status of baptisms performed within a Nonconformist chapel may well have led many to have their child baptised in the Anglican church during this period, and it is difficult to establish how many Primitive Methodist members would have done so. Comparing baptism registers with other sources including the 1851 Religious Census, Watts has suggested that a considerable number of those attending Nonconformist chapels did indeed continue to have their children baptised in the parish church. Despite this evidence, Watts argues that the action of having one's child baptised in a Nonconformist chapel, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century, inevitably implied a degree of commitment, and that the registers therefore

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<sup>13</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society* p. 240-1.



provide a reasonably 'accurate guide to the occupational structure...of the wider community which worshipped at its chapel.'<sup>14</sup>

Another factor to take into consideration when using baptism registers to determine social structure, is that of class fertility differentials. Field argues that the effect of these differentials could be 'distorting' unless individual fathers are noted solely at their first mention.<sup>15</sup> Snell has challenged this idea, suggesting that no adjustment for fertility differentials is necessary for the basic task of establishing social structure. Moreover, Snell argues that fertility differentials between the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists did not vary to any considerable extent, at least not during the first half of the nineteenth century, and that any disparity caused by high marital fertility among the Primitive Methodists was probably offset by high male mortality rates in certain occupation groups sympathetic to that denomination.<sup>16</sup> Of those baptisms that did occur, it is impossible to ascertain the extent to which the registrations would have been correctly completed. The consolidated minutes of the 1849 Primitive Methodist Annual Conference ruled that,

'A book for registering the baptism of a child shall be kept at each town or place which stands at the head of a circuit, and at such other place or places belonging to the station, as may be thought convenient, and each baptism must be immediately registered, by the persons who performed the rite, in the book which is most easily accessible to him and the parents...'<sup>17</sup>

However, despite this clear ruling designed to aid the process of registration, some of the early registers did not always have baptisms recorded chronologically. There are certain instances when baptisms that were held many months, even years previously, have been recorded at a later date. Although this leads us to question their accuracy, the problem is not so great as to undermine the exercise.

A second series of problems confronts us when we begin to manipulate the material in baptism registers. It is impossible from the descriptions given in these registers to be certain of the implications of a man's occupation, as they do not provide any information as to his economic and social standing. As Watts has argued,

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<sup>14</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, pp. 307-9.

<sup>15</sup> C. Field, 'The social structure of English Methodism: eighteenth - twentieth centuries', in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 28, no. 2, 1977, p. 200.

<sup>16</sup> Snell, *Church and Chapel*, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes, 1849, p. 46



‘a man described as a ‘tailor’ might be a prosperous master tailor employing others, a man whose business was in retailing rather than manufacture, or an employee earning a low wage in a sweat shop.’<sup>18</sup>

Not only do we often need to deal with vague job descriptions that prevent us from making accurate classifications, but it is also necessary to take account of the changing nature of an individual’s occupation. During the nineteenth century, particularly as a result of mechanisation, occupations changed in terms of both economic reward and status. The first task is to determine the most appropriate way to count baptisms found in the registers. Hatcher, in his work on Primitive Methodism in Hull, has taken the registers and manipulated the data by decade, counting each father only once on his first appearance. He suggests that this provides a greater level of precision in the classification of occupations, and has also enabled him to compare the figures obtained from the registers with the population census.<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, Snell has questioned the need to count each father individually, commenting that this method is unlikely to present any real difference in results, overall percentage figures varying little.<sup>20</sup>

Once information is collected, it is necessary to apply some form of social classification in order to interpret the data. Glancing through the literature it quickly becomes evident that the problem of social classification has been tackled in a variety of ways. Lord in her work on the social landscape of south-east Surrey presents a scheme that enables her to comment upon the social composition of a rural setting.<sup>21</sup> However, problems arise when using this system to classify rural areas that contain considerable occupational diversity beyond the typical ‘agricultural’ trades. One of the most commonly applied schemes is the registrar general’s five-fold classification of occupations. This scheme is regularly chosen because it ‘has the merit of simplicity and a degree of historical continuity’.<sup>22</sup> As no general scheme of social classification exists for the nineteenth century, Armstrong recommends the application of the registrar general’s system as it provides a directory of occupations that allows for ‘easy

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<sup>18</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 309.

<sup>19</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, pp. 391-2.

<sup>20</sup> Snell, *Church and Chapel*, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> E. Lord, ‘Communities of common interest: the social landscape of south-east Surrey, 1750-1850’, in C. Phythian-Adams (ed.), *Societies, Cultures and Kinship, 1580-1850* (Leicester, 1993), p.141-6.

<sup>22</sup> S. R. S. Szreter, ‘The genesis of the Registrar General’s social classification of occupations’, in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 35:4 (1984), p. 523.



allocation and comparability'.<sup>23</sup> Although Armstrong is careful to highlight the need for several modifications to the scheme, particularly concerning those occupations in retail and commerce, it has been argued by Watts that the results produced by this system are 'absurd'. Watts presents his own alternative scheme. Unlike that of the registrar generals, Watts' eleven-fold classification breaks down more precisely each of the different social groups. For example, he separates the 'labour aristocracy' from the 'skilled workers', in turn dividing the 'skilled workers' into four separate categories determined by the 'level of their earnings'.<sup>24</sup> Again this system is not without limitations. The most basic criticism is that it is often difficult to ascertain information about a worker's income, therefore making classification of obscurer occupations more awkward. The most sensible choice for the purposes of this work appears to be the classification scheme presented by Snell in his work on the North Midlands. Using a six-fold classification scheme, Snell groups workers according to a general understanding of the skill involved in each separate occupation and the status with which it would have been held. Class I, the Gentry, is irrelevant for the purposes of examining Methodist registers in Shropshire. Class II includes those of the middle and professional classes such as the various 'manufacturers', farmers and merchants. Class III comprises many of the lower-middle classes including many of the retail and trade occupations; minor administration occupations, such as clerks, are also grouped in this category. Class IV is for skilled workers, usually those 'traditionally involved in an apprenticeship or extended period of training'. Class V is for those occupations that are semi-skilled in nature, and finally class VI is for all unskilled employment. Included in the unskilled group are, for example, all agricultural labourers, miners, porters and quarrymen. Of course all forms of classification are open to criticism, and this scheme is no different, some historians probably questioning the legitimacy of placing miners and other extractive workers in the 'unskilled' category. However, as Snell points out, attention has been paid to 'analytical convention rather than to the abundant skills' these workers may have had.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> W. A. Armstrong, 'The use of information about occupation', in E. A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Society. Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 202.

<sup>24</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, pp. 310-3.

<sup>25</sup> Snell, *Church and Chapel*, p. 43-4. The classification of all occupations presented in the baptism registers examined here have been carefully discussed and categorised with extensive help from Snell.



Twenty-six registers were taken from the whole of Shropshire. All Primitive and Wesleyan Methodist registers that provided occupational data were used. Applying the beginning of 1900 as a cut-off date, a total of 17,594 baptisms occurring throughout the whole of the nineteenth century were compiled. As a result of the Wesleyan registers generally being devoid of occupational information, the majority of the baptisms examined were from Primitive Methodist registers. However, sufficient data is available to enable important comparisons to be made between the two Methodist denominations. Unfortunately problems do arise from the fact that nearly half of the Wesleyan baptisms examined here were limited to a particular area of Shropshire, namely the Coalbrookdale coalfield. This means that a number of agricultural occupations, including that of farmer, inevitably do not feature to any great extent in the occupational structure of the Wesleyan Methodists. However, comparison of registers from one single area enables us to ignore issues that can arise over differences in local economies, as we can assume that most people living and working within a certain locality will be involved in the predominant local industries in some way. It is fortunate that registers for both the Primitives and the Wesleyans survive for the town of Ludlow, enabling us to examine the membership in a more agricultural setting. Finally, it is important to note that caution is required when comparing circuit registers with those of individual chapels, as it is likely that the catchment area of circuit registers will be much greater than that of the chapel, which is more likely only to include members of its own congregation.

The mass of work already completed on the social composition of Methodism has revealed clear trends that are repeated time and again. It is generally thought that the Wesleyan Methodists were the more affluent of the Methodist denominations, attracting a 'higher class' of adherent, while the Primitives attracted the lowest orders of society. Field has shown that the greatest successes of the Primitive Methodists during the period 1830-37 were indeed among the ranks of the semi and unskilled workers. By comparison, over 60 per cent of Wesleyans were categorised as 'artisan'.<sup>26</sup> These findings are confirmed by the work of Snell on the counties of Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire, where the Primitives were definitely the more 'proletarian' of the two denominations. 28.8 per cent of the Primitive Methodist fathers of children being baptised in his area of research were labourers, compared with

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<sup>26</sup> Field, 'Social structure', pp. 203-7.



only 18.2 per cent of the Wesleyans. Similarly, the numbers of those employed as miners or colliers also varied considerably, making up 17.5 per cent of the Primitives and only 2.1 per cent of the Wesleyans. Snell goes on to argue that

‘It is a striking finding that over half the male occupations entered in Primitive registers were unskilled, compared with a quarter for the Wesleyan Methodists...the overwhelming preponderance of Primitive Methodists were clearly manual workers or wage-dependent artisans with varied degrees of skill’.<sup>27</sup>

As noted earlier the majority of baptisms examined here were from Primitive Methodist registers. However as the table below reveals, the percentages obtained from the data are clearly comparable.

**Table 3. Social Structure of Primitive Methodists and Wesleyan Methodists in Shropshire<sup>28</sup>**

	Primitives		Wesleyans	
	N	%	N	%
I – Gentry	0	0	0	0
II – Middle & Professional	881	6.0	147	5.0
III – Lower Middle	571	3.9	261	9.0
IV – Skilled	2997	20.4	883	30.0
V – Semi-skilled	1017	6.9	235	8.0
VI – Unskilled	9196	62.7	1406	48.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>14662</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>2932</b>	<b>100</b>

Despite some obvious differences, what is perhaps most notable about the above table is the remarkable similarity between the two denominations as a whole. With only two

<sup>27</sup> Snell, *Church and Chapel*, pp. 42-4.

<sup>28</sup> The registers used were from the Shropshire Records and Research Centre and the Public Records Office. Primitive Methodist Registers: In Shropshire: NM5166/1/1/1 - Ludlow Circuit Register, 1840-1908; NM2612/17 - Peaton Strand Circuit Register, 1864-1912; NM4942/1/1 - Bishop's Castle Circuit Register, 1887-1904; NM311/6 - Wrockwardine Wood Mission Chapel, 1877-1929; NM4942/4/8/1 - Clunton Chapel, 1869-96; NM2533/136 - Ironbridge Chapel, 1856-98; NM2123/1 - Shrewsbury Circuit Register, 1822-1903; Minsterley Circuit Register, 1850-86; NM3038/4/1A - Oakengates Chapel, 1888-99; NM3038/9/1 & NM3027/1/193 - St George's Jubilee Chapel, 1861-1953; NM6559/1 - Trench Chapel, 1867-1996; NM3511/1-5 & NM3505/1 - Wrockwardine Wood Circuit Register, 1838-93; NM4113/2/1 - Old Park Chapel, 1858-95; NM3767/XIII/L - Stoke Eaton on Tern Chapel, 1858-1938; NM3767/XIII/CT - Newport Chapel, 1870-1922; NM4219/1/1 - Oswestry Circuit Register, 1867-1922; NM4627/RCT/1-2 & NM3023/1 - Prees Green Circuit Register, 1843-1918. In the PRO: RG4/2848 - Old St Chapel, Ludlow, 1824-37; RG4/2849 - Oswestry Chapel, 1830-37; RG4/3249 - Prees Green Chapel, 1824-37. Wesleyan Methodist Registers: In Shropshire: NM3767/III/A - Wellington Chapel, 1827-1900; NM3038/10/1 - Wrockwardine Wood Chapel, 1819-1900; NM3767/XVIII/C - Newport Chapel, 1843-88. In the PRO: RG4/3250 - Coalpit Bank Chapel, 1811-37; RG4/3086 - Broad St Chapel, Ludlow, 1815-37; RG4/1814 - Whitchurch Chapel, 1813-37.



exceptions, the percentage of fathers within each of the social classes is generally similar. 9.9 per cent of the Primitives, and 14 per cent of the Wesleyans, were in classes II and III. 90 per cent of the Primitives and 86 per cent of the Wesleyans were in classes IV, V and VI. Surprisingly it is the Primitives that have the higher percentages in category II, the middle and professional classes. This however is more likely to be a result of the low number of Wesleyan registers that included the occupation of farmer, the occupation most assigned to this category in the county, rather than the more affluent nature of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire. Less surprising is the fact that the Wesleyan Methodists had significantly more people in the lower middle class, the percentage of Wesleyans being placed in this social class being twice as high as for the Primitives. The evidence presented here clearly supports the idea of Primitive Methodism being a denomination of people drawn heavily from the unskilled working classes: 62.7 per cent were placed in this class. Clearly the Wesleyans were indeed the more 'affluent' of the two denominations, as previously suggested. However, what is most interesting is that nearly half of the fathers' occupations were in fact unskilled. This picture contrasts with that presented for the North Midlands by Snell, where the Wesleyans were more drawn from the skilled working classes.<sup>29</sup> Taking the 'working-classes' as a whole, the Wesleyans had almost as many people in these groups as did the Primitive Methodists. In his work on baptism registers, Watts again confirms the working-class nature of the Primitives, but also reveals that a high number of working-class men amongst the Wesleyans was not unusual:

'At least 70 per cent of both the Wesleyan and New Connexion Methodist fathers belonged to the working class in every county for which we have evidence, and for the Wesleyans in 31 out of 51 counties the figure was over 80 per cent.'<sup>30</sup>

By examining individual occupations we are able to gain further insights into the exact social composition of these two Methodist denominations within Shropshire. Taking the occupation of 'labourer', we find that 28 per cent of Primitive Methodists in this study area were classified in this way.<sup>31</sup> In comparison, labourers only comprised

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<sup>29</sup> Snell, *Church and Chapel*, p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 323.

<sup>31</sup> It is important to point out that there are certain ambiguities about the term 'labourer', as it is impossible to be certain which particular 'industry' the person was labouring within; this is made



10.7 per cent of the total number of Wesleyan fathers. This is a sizeable difference. Clearly the number of labourers did not account for the high level of unskilled workers drawn to the Wesleyan Methodists. Snell calculated that 28.8 per cent of Primitive Methodists in the North Midlands were labourers, an amount almost identical to Shropshire. However, the number of labourers within Wesleyan Methodism does not compare, the percentage being significantly higher in the North Midlands.<sup>32</sup> If we examine the occupation of mining a very different picture emerges.<sup>33</sup> Here we find a rather surprising result: 30.3 per cent of the Wesleyans examined here were miners or colliers, in comparison with only 27.5 per cent of Primitive Methodist fathers. This differs considerably from the picture of the North Midlands presented by Snell, where 17.5 per cent of Primitive Methodists and only 2.1 per cent of Wesleyans were miners and colliers.<sup>34</sup> The large number of Wesleyan miners and colliers helps us to understand the overall total of Wesleyan unskilled workers in Shropshire. As commented earlier, it is clearly not surprising that such a significant proportion of the Wesleyan Methodist fathers were miners or colliers, considering the rather narrow location of the Wesleyan registers used. However, other occupations examined, such as grocer, compare favourably with the expected outcome, 1.9 per cent of Wesleyan and only 0.6 per cent of Primitive fathers being classified in this way.

Issues that arise either as a result of attempting to compare baptisms that occurred within significantly different economic settings, or high numbers of fathers living in one particular area, can be overcome by examining the registers of the same location. As we have seen, miners and colliers made up a large proportion of the total number of Wesleyan baptisms in Shropshire. As suggested, this is a result of the location of the baptism registers used. However, if we compare the registers of the two denominations in Wrockwardine Wood located in the coal-field, we see that miners and colliers still dominated the total number of Wesleyan fathers having their children baptised. The table below shows how the baptisms of the two denominations compare in an individual location.

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especially complicated when two separate industries dominated a single area. All those labouring occupations that do specify this, such as Furnace Labourer, are also included in the calculations.

<sup>32</sup> Snell, *Church and Chapel*, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Included in these calculations are all miners, whether of coal or lead, and all 'colliers'.

<sup>34</sup> Snell, *Church and Chapel*, p. 42.



**Table 4. Social Structure of Primitive Methodists and Wesleyan Methodists in Wrockwardine Wood<sup>36</sup>**

	Primitives		Wesleyans	
	N	%	N	%
I – Gentry	0	0	0	0
II –Middle & Professional	20	0.6	10	2.1
III – Lower Middle	43	1.3	24	5.1
IV – Skilled	609	17.7	120	25.6
V – Semi-skilled	159	4.6	57	12.2
VI – Unskilled	2610	75.8	258	55.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3441</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>100</b>

Examination of these two registers confirms the general trends noted earlier. Of the two denominations, the Wesleyans were clearly the more affluent, 7.2 per cent of fathers being in classes I and II, in comparison with only 0.6 per cent of Primitive Methodists. Wesleyans also had the greatest percentage of skilled workers. The Primitives tended to have higher percentages of fathers drawn from the unskilled working classes, a total of 75.8 per cent. However, as noted earlier the Wesleyans also drew a significant percentage from the same ranks. To obtain further insights into the social composition of the two Methodist denominations in Wrockwardine Wood, it is interesting to compare individual occupations. As a result of the Primitive Methodist register containing considerably more baptisms than that of the Wesleyans, there was a much greater diversity of occupations. However, if we examine each social class in turn, we find that there are many similarities between the two denominations, similar occupations being apparent in the same social class. Beginning with class II we can see that for each of the denominations this category was comprised entirely of farmers and various types of ‘manager’. Similarly, for both denominations the predominant occupation in class III was that of grocer. The only other occupation in this class for the Primitive Methodists was that of minister, whereas the Wesleyans also had a number of chemists, agents and publicans. In class IV both denominations had a range

<sup>35</sup> SRR/NM3038/10/1: Wrockwardine Wood W. M. Chapel baptism register, 1818-99. SRR/NM3511/1-5 & SRR/NM3505/1: Wrockwardine Wood P. M. Circuit baptism register, 1838-99. Although the two registers cover the same area and similar periods, it is important to note that certain problems remain. The register of the Primitive Methodists is for the entire circuit, and the Wesleyan’s register is for the chapel at Wrockwardine only, therefore the Primitive register not only has a greater number of baptisms, but also encompasses a much wider range of occupations. Other Primitive Methodist registers for



of different skilled occupations, but engineers, puddlers, moulders and blacksmiths made up the greatest number for each. In the fifth class, we find more diversity between the two denominations, the Primitives in this class mainly being forgemen, brickmakers and those involved in tending engines. The Wesleyans too had a significant proportion of forgemen; however, instead of brickmakers and engine tenders Wesleyans were dominated by iron rollers and heaters, those three occupations together comprising 72 per cent of the total number of fathers in this class. Finally, the largest numbers of fathers for both the Primitives and the Wesleyans were unskilled workers in class VI. Both denominations were dominated by the miners and colliers that worked the coal-field: 51.3 per cent of all Primitive Methodist fathers recorded in the register and 47 per cent of all Wesleyan fathers. If we examine the occupation of labourer we see that only 2.8 per cent of the Wesleyan fathers were classified in this way in comparison with 15.7 per cent of Primitive fathers. The high percentage of miners and colliers explains why the Wesleyan Methodists in Shropshire had such a large percentage of people in social class VI.

If we now examine a different local economy by looking at the baptism registers of Ludlow we can again see that there were many similarities between the two Methodist denominations.

**Table 5. Social Structure of Primitive Methodists and Wesleyan Methodists in Ludlow**<sup>36</sup>

	Primitives		Wesleyans	
	N	%	N	%
I - Gentry	0	0	0	0
II - Middle and Professional	5.0	4.0	25.0	9.1
III - Lower Middle	3.0	2.4	7.0	2.6
IV - Skilled	47.0	37.9	108.0	39.4
V - Semi-skilled	1.0	0.8	1.0	0.4
VI – Unskilled	68.0	54.8	133.0	48.5
Total	124	99.9	274	100

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Wrockwardine Wood are in existence, but these are less comparable as they only cover the latter half of the nineteenth century.  
<sup>36</sup> PRO/RG4/2848: Old St. P. M. Chapel - Ludlow, baptism register, 1824-37; PRO/RG4/3086: Broad St. W. M. Chapel - Ludlow, baptism register, 1815-37.



Wesleyan Methodists had the greatest percentage of fathers in the middle and professional class. However both denominations had very similar percentages of fathers in all other social classes. The Wesleyans had a slightly higher percentage in the skilled category, while the Primitive Methodists had a slightly higher percentage in the unskilled category, as we would expect. The differences however are not great. Examination of each individual social classes reveals further similarities between the denominations. In class II for example, farmers were the only occupation that qualified for this category in both the Primitives and the Wesleyans. It is fair to comment that the percentage of farmers does differ considerably, farmers comprising 9 per cent of the Wesleyans but only 4 per cent of the Primitives. This supports the findings of Snell who discovered that 3 per cent of Primitives and 7 per cent of Wesleyans in the North Midlands were farmers.<sup>37</sup> Class VI was also identical in the types of occupations that appeared for both the Primitive and the Wesleyans, both comprised solely of labourers, miners and colliers. Again, the percentages are slightly different. The Primitive Methodists had the highest percentage of fathers in this class: 59 per cent of fathers in this social class being miners or colliers and 41 per cent being labourers. In contrast with the situation in Wrockwardine Wood, a higher percentage of Wesleyan Methodist fathers in Ludlow were labourers than were miners and colliers. With significant numbers of both farmers and extractive workers in Ludlow, it is impossible to be certain which industry the 'labourers' were employed in. However, what remains clear is the significant percentage of labourers in each denomination, suggesting that the situation in southern Shropshire in particular was very different from the rest of the country where the number of Wesleyan labouring fathers was much lower.

Snell has supported the argument that Primitive Methodism 'represented a downward spread in the social scale of religious dissent, and a breakaway of the lay membership from the strictures of the Wesleyan authorities in areas which had already been much influenced by Wesleyan Methodism'.<sup>38</sup>

The extent to which this applies to Methodism in Shropshire, as well as the north Midlands, is difficult to assess from the evidence I have presented. Certainly, the vast majority of married Primitive Methodists were members of the working class, drawn particularly from the ranks of the unskilled. However, we have seen that the same was

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<sup>37</sup> Snell, *Church and Chapel*, p. 43.

<sup>38</sup> Snell, *Church and Chapel*, p. 45.



also true of the Wesleyan Methodists in Shropshire, although to a lesser extent than the Primitives. We have noted the problems that can arise when using data taken from a narrow location, but have clearly seen from the local evidence that the distorting effect of this is not as great as may be imagined. In fact, the general picture of Wesleyan Methodism being comprised in the main of the working class remains intact. Although Wesleyan Methodism had a slightly higher percentage of skilled workers, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the two denominations were drawing upon similar audiences. Gilbert has argued for the need to emphasise the ‘underlying social homogeneity’ of the Nonconformist movement, suggesting that

‘the notion that particular denominations served their own distinctive social constituencies was false, despite its evident attraction for contemporary denominational leaders who liked to rationalise sectarian differences in terms of specific denominational missions to particular social groups.’<sup>39</sup>

It is interesting at this point to discuss the argument presented by Thompson, who has suggested that the rural evidence shows us the extent to which the importance of social class is limited by other factors. He argues that it was only when there was more than one nonconformist denomination present in a particular area that social distinctions emerge. He adds that the issue of which social groups went where depended on the choice available, for example, in one village there may have been farmers at the Congregational chapel and labourers at the Wesleyan Methodist; but in another, there may have been farmers at the Wesleyan establishment while the labourers attended Primitive Methodist worship.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Preachers.**

It is now evident that the vast majority of Primitive Methodists in Shropshire during the nineteenth century were from the lower echelons of society; but what drew these people to the denomination, and what was the nature of the experience for those who chose to embrace it? Primitive Methodism delivered a unique spiritual experience catering for those who desired enthusiastic and energetic worship; it spoke to its hearers in words they could understand and in a manner they could appreciate, and its simple

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<sup>39</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, pp. 61-2.

<sup>40</sup> D. M. Thompson, ‘The churches and society in nineteenth century England: a rural perspective’, in Cumings & Baker (eds.) *Studies in Church History*, vol. 8 (Cambridge, 1972) p. 274.

message was delivered by people from their own walk of life. Let us now examine the nature of the religious experience provided, looking in particular at those who delivered the gospel, and the characteristics that made these preachers unique.

Within Primitive Methodism the call to preach could be heard and accepted by virtually anyone. Werner presents the example of Englesea Brook, a small rural village in Cheshire where in one single year, four different members of the local community followed the call to enter the ministry. The first was Thomas Brownsword, a young boy who gave up work on the harvest to begin his career as a travelling preacher. The second was his sister Ann, who began as an itinerant and later became a local preacher; the third Thomas Webb who left his plough to preach, and finally William Newton who became an itinerant despite his blindness.<sup>41</sup> This clearly illustrates the appeal that Primitive Methodism had to all members of a local community and reveals the readiness of the denomination to accept all types including the young, female, and even physically impaired. However, the prevailing feature of those who entered the Primitive Methodist itinerancy was their working-class character. In 1850 Thomas Church noted the humble origin of the connexion's travelling preachers:

‘One is taken from the plough; another from the lap-stone; a third from the tailor's board; a fourth wrought iron at the village smithy’.<sup>42</sup>

In his work on the Nonconformist ministry, Brown laments the general lack of evidence about the lives of those who dedicated themselves to the work of the Lord:

‘their names emerged only briefly from obscurity when they died and their earthly memorials are few; a short obituary in a denomination's publication; a weathered tombstone in some now neglected graveyard; or a fading photo in a musty chapel vestry. Of these once highly influential individuals history has made very little and they remain largely anonymous.’<sup>43</sup>

He goes on to note that the evidence which does survive is often extremely ‘stylised and predictable’ and provides little of ‘the sort of detail so useful to the social

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<sup>41</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 140-1.

<sup>42</sup> Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 151. However, while the vast majority of travelling preachers were from the working classes, it is important to note that Primitive Methodism did attract men of some social standing. Edward Williams long-serving itinerant in the Bishop's Castle circuit regularly made donations of considerable sums. For example, in 1873 he gave £200 towards the erection of a minister's house at Bishop's Castle and a further £100 towards the new chapel at Clun. (SRR:NM2138/84: Bishop's Castle PM Circuit – Annual Return, 1874)

<sup>43</sup> K. D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800-1900*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 12.



historian'.<sup>44</sup> Much of the literature published in the form of either biographies or obituaries attempted to promote the virtues of a Christian life and to encourage its readers to follow the examples set by others. Obelkevich has argued that obituaries in particular drew upon a 'stock of biblical and regal imagery' which often excluded secular biographical details; these 'final earthly memorials' always provided information about the individual's conversion, praised their devotion to the cause, but rarely included their former occupation.<sup>45</sup> The obituary of Thomas Morgan, a travelling preacher in the Hopton Bank circuit, provides a clear example of the stylised biographical sketch published in the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* during the nineteenth century. Bestowed with 'rather more education than generally falls to the lot of children in his walk of life', as a young boy Morgan acquired a 'considerable fear of God, often trembling about the judgement-day and the doom of the wicked'. However, once he left the parental home his religious convictions gradually became weakened until he was 'plunged into a career of vice'.<sup>46</sup> Thomas Morgan was ultimately saved from a life of swearing, fighting and Sabbath-breaking by a chance meeting with Primitive Methodist missionaries who showed him the error of his ways.

'He began to read his neglected Bible, and to attend the preaching services; the recollection of the instructions which he had received when a child, of the early strivings of God's Spirit, and of his folly and guilt, filled him with unutterable anguish.'<sup>47</sup>

The obituary presents a battle-like scene as 'the arrows of the Almighty stuck fast in him' and he struggled with Satan to free his soul. Three years later, in 1827, Morgan was taken out to travel.<sup>48</sup> It is clear that we can learn something from this about the spiritual development of this character; however the obituary reveals little evidence about his precise social and economic background, about which we can only make assumptions.

Although references to occupation in obituaries are rare, sufficient examples exist to provide an insight into the social and economic background of local preachers working in nineteenth-century Shropshire. For example, we learn that William

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<sup>44</sup> Brown, *Nonconformist Ministry*, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Society*, pp. 235-7.

<sup>46</sup> PMM, 1848, p. 449.

<sup>47</sup> PMM, 1848, p. 450.

<sup>48</sup> PMM, 1848, p. 450-6. For another strikingly similar account, see also the memoir of Thomas Payne itinerant in the north Shropshire circuit of Prees Green: PMM, 1842, pp. 9-12.

Bromhall, a local preacher in the Oswestry circuit, worked as a farmer, Richard Evans, a preacher working in the Wrockwardine Wood circuit, made his living as a ironstone miner, and Thomas Price of the Hadnall circuit owned a commercial painting business.<sup>49</sup> The memoir of Richard Tanner, a local preacher in the Presteign circuit, appeared in 1843. From this entry we discover that Tanner initially laboured as a hired servant, then became apprenticed to ‘learn the business of a carpenter and joiner’, and eventually worked as a journeyman at Lyonshall in Herefordshire.<sup>50</sup> The occupations cited here typify the general employment profile of the working-class elements in each of these areas as revealed by the denominational baptism registers. In his work on religion and the role of Primitive Methodism in South Lindsey, Obelkevich has noted a similar pattern. Of 58 local preachers identified and examined, over half were farm labourers, the same proportion as in the general population.<sup>51</sup> The high number of local preachers who were farm labourers also corresponds with the general membership of Primitive Methodist circuits in the area; 72 per cent of the fathers of children receiving baptism, in the Gainsborough, Horncastle and Louth circuits between 1844 and 1875 were labourers. Obelkevich also discovered that a significant proportion of the local preachers examined were craftsmen. He notes that this group was in fact over-represented in the sample of preachers, in comparison with their level in the general population and local Primitive Methodist membership. This suggests that although craftsmen did not often become members, when they did choose to do so they revealed a greater level of commitment to the movement and were more likely to hold offices.<sup>52</sup>

Other sources also emphasise the working-class character of the unpaid army that entered the Primitive Methodist pulpit. The biography, *Mr Richard Jones of Clun, Salop. An Appreciation* provides a vivid description of the local preachers that worked in the southern Shropshire circuit of Bishop’s Castle during the nineteenth century. The author comments that these characters who ‘gave ungrudgingly of their time and talents’ were not men of ‘wealth, pedigree, or high learning’, but were nevertheless ‘men of sterling character, fervent piety, shrewd common-sense, and noble self-forgetfulness.’<sup>53</sup> For example, we learn about Thomas Lewis, the local blacksmith who had ‘a face as hard as an anvil, and principles as unflinching as the steel bars he used to

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<sup>49</sup> PMM 1840, p. 21; 1842, p. 86 & 1850, p. 641.

<sup>50</sup> PMM, 1843, p. 165.

<sup>51</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Society*, p. 239.

<sup>52</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Society*, pp. 239-242.

<sup>53</sup> W. Jones Davies, *Mr Richard Jones, of Clun, Salop. An Appreciation* (Grimsby/N. D.), p. 26



beat', and about Thomas Bowen, 'the farmer noted for his psychic presentiments'. Also there was Edward Reece 'who toiled all week on the soil, and walked miles over hill and dale to keep his appointments on the Sabbath', and James Davies whose 'honesty, reliability, integrity and real goodness...gave him a place as one of the makers of the circuit.'<sup>54</sup> As members of the community, Primitive Methodist local preachers lived and worked alongside their congregation, and were therefore able to 'understand the problems that vex the common mind in a way which is not possible to the settled minister'.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, this factor provides one of the keys to the early success of the denomination. Local preachers proved their worth as Christians and as representatives of the Primitive Methodist Connexion 'on the simple basis of the quality of their lives, work and character'.<sup>56</sup> In 1850, Thomas Church attempted to explain the appeal of the denomination for the members of the lower classes:

'Among the middle and lower classes, the services of Primitive Methodist preachers are found to be more acceptable and effectual than many others...Though perhaps most deficient in collegiate accomplishments, at the same time; Primitive Methodist preachers are more abounding in zeal for the salvation of their fellows. Not having been made too fine for their work by the pride of scheme; nor kept at a distance by refinement of taste, but fired with zeal for the noblest interests of men, Primitive Methodist preachers live but for them. They are emphatically, *men of the people!*'<sup>57</sup>

The large number of local preachers required to carry out the working life of a nineteenth-century Primitive Methodist circuit created a significant outlet for religious enthusiasm within a local community.<sup>58</sup> Although it is clear that the majority of local preachers employed during the nineteenth century were from a working-class background, Obelkevich has shown that many were drawn from a wider spectrum of social class than the general membership of the connexion. This acted to enlarge the outlook of the congregation by providing them with different types of presentation and thought.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the employment of young or female preachers also broadened the

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<sup>54</sup> Jones Davies, *Mr Richard Jones*, pp. 26-8.

<sup>55</sup> J. Banks, 'Local preachers and theological change: the late nineteenth century and earlier twentieth centuries', in G. Milburn & M. Batty (eds.) *Workaday Preachers. The Story of Methodist Local Preaching* (Peterborough, 1995), p. 269.

<sup>56</sup> D. English, 'Local preachers and the church's mission', in G. Milburn & M. Batty (eds.) *Workaday Preachers. The Story of Methodist Local Preaching* (Peterborough, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 147.

<sup>58</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 147 (his italics).

<sup>59</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Society*, pp. 242-3; Banks, 'Local preachers', pp. 268-9.

experience provided. Women preachers in particular provided novelty value and persuaded the curious to attend.<sup>60</sup> Dews has argued that Primitive Methodism's acceptance of female preachers is understandable given the movement's early emphasis on conversion preaching, as the results more than justified the means.<sup>61</sup> The use of women preachers was by no means confined to nineteenth-century Primitive Methodism. In the 1640s, the employment of females had so shocked conservative elements of the population that the majority of Older Dissenting denominations had refrained from using them again. However, during the Evangelical Revival of the later eighteenth century, a growing belief in 'spiritual equality' between the sexes rekindled the desire that women be allowed to speak and preach in public.<sup>62</sup> John Wesley had initially been concerned about the propriety of female preaching, looking to the teachings of St. Paul which prohibited women from speaking in public; however, his opinion gradually became modified as he witnessed the results of their work.<sup>63</sup> Although Wesley never formally sanctioned the employment of women and his approach to this thorny subject continued to be confused, he did acknowledge that some females had 'an extraordinary call to preach'.<sup>64</sup> After Wesley's death the issue continued to provoke controversy as Wesleyan officials saw

'preaching women, refractory laymen, and "wildfire" revivals as bound together in an unholy alliance that would thwart the speedy realisation of its current aims'.<sup>65</sup>

In 1803, the Wesleyan Conference ruled against female preachers, but still allowed for an 'extraordinary call', and suggested that women should only preach in their own circuit or in other locations with the permission of the local superintendent. Rack comments that this legislation was 'curiously permissive' considering the level of hostility displayed in some places.<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, the Wesleyans' negative attitude towards female preachers pushed women away from the denomination and towards groups such as the Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists, who readily exploited their skills.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 147.

<sup>61</sup> D. C. Dews, *Ranters, Revivalists, Radicals, Reformers and Revolutionaries. A Celebration of Methodist Local Preaching in Yorkshire* (Leeds, 1996), p. 55.

<sup>62</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, pp. 55 & 147.

<sup>63</sup> Rack, *How Primitive*, p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, pp. 147-8.

<sup>65</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 143.

<sup>66</sup> Rack, *How Primitive*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>67</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 149; Hempton, *Religion of the People*, p. 145.



In contrast with John Wesley, female preachers found an enthusiastic ally in Hugh Bourne, whose ‘singular open-mindedness...enabled him to readily perceive the immense value of gifted and devoted women’, and he willingly employed those females that demonstrated the necessary gifts and graces.<sup>68</sup> Sarah Kirkland was born at Mercaston in 1794. Converted in 1811, as the result of a visit by Hugh Bourne to her family home, Sarah Kirkland first began to preach in 1813. Her missionary work took her to many different locations, and from her efforts came striking results, most notably the introduction of Primitive Methodism into Derby.<sup>69</sup> Hugh Bourne was suitably impressed with her work as a ‘great preacher’ and therefore took it upon himself to give her two guineas a quarter. However, the Derby quarter-day quickly proclaimed their right to pay her a salary, and so Sarah Kirkland became the connexion’s first permanent female travelling preacher in 1816.<sup>70</sup> Graham has traced as many as ninety women who worked as Primitive Methodist itinerants between 1816 and 1862, the year when Elizabeth Bultitude the last female travelling preacher was superannuated. Female itinerants were mainly a feature of the early nineteenth century, which is reflected in the fact that their numbers peaked nationally in 1834 at a total of 26. It is important to note however, that this represents only a fraction of the total number of women employed to preach in local circuits throughout the nineteenth century. The true extent of their numbers is often obscured by the tendency to list females on plan with their initials only.<sup>71</sup> It is difficult to assess the extent to which this practice occurred. However, the fact that it did happen is made clear by a minute made by the Ludlow circuit committee in 1863,

‘That the initials of Mrs Briggs come on plan with Mr Briggs.’<sup>72</sup>

It is clear that female preachers were often viewed as a prized asset for any circuit wishing to cater for all audiences,

‘That we have a female preacher as soon as we can get one.’<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 134.

<sup>69</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, pp. 176-7 & 194-5; Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 134-8.

<sup>70</sup> Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours*, vol. 1, p. 414 & vol. 2, p. 35; Herod, *Historical and Biographical Sketches*, p. 317.

<sup>71</sup> Graham, ‘Women Local Preachers’, pp. 173-6; Rack, *How Primitive*, p. 25; Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 151.

<sup>72</sup> SRR/NM3544/1/3: Ludlow PM Circuit Minutes, 1860-66, 9 Mar 1863.

<sup>73</sup> SRR/NM2941/3/1: Ludlow PM Circuit and Quarterly Minutes, 1840-50, 18 Sept. 1842.

Unfortunately, the experience of female preachers is often obscured and we can rarely learn anything more than a name from local source material. Although the preaching skills of women were recognised, they were paid less for their efforts and were excluded from the structures of local government. In 1824, the Annual Meeting ruled that females could not become superintendents, that they could not vote at local quarter-day meetings, and that they were forbidden to speak at such meetings unless specifically requested to do so.<sup>74</sup> This attitude towards women is understandable in view of contemporary beliefs about the divinely-given natures of each sex, and it is certainly clear that female preachers did have to suffer pressures that their fellow men did not:

‘That Sister Mary Russell’s name go off plan by reason of her inability to attend her appointments being kept from it by her family calling’.<sup>75</sup>

The dilemma facing those female preachers with children is presented by the case of Mrs Mary Lee, a local preacher in the Flatleigh station, whose life is chronicled by Patterson in *Behind the Stars*. As Mrs Lee’s husband was also a Primitive Methodist preacher, Patterson explains how Mary often forced by necessity to take her three young children with her to her appointments.

‘And what a picture whilst she was conducting the worship! A woman fondling her babe in arms as she “lined” out the hymn...and clasping it to her breast as she prayed that the Everlasting Arms might enfold the babes in Christ!’<sup>76</sup>

During the hymn Mary sat in the pulpit and breast-fed her child. The fact that the congregation was not at all perturbed by this sight reveals an understanding of the considerable commitment made by those women who devoted themselves to preaching the gospel. In 1862, the Reverend J. Lightfoot published the biography of Mrs Mary Porteus who worked as a travelling preacher during the first half of the nineteenth century. The story of her dilemma about whether to enter the itinerant ministry and her subsequent attempts to ensure that her children would be cared for, again emphasises the sacrifices and tough choices female preachers were required to make.<sup>77</sup>

One of the most renowned female itinerant preachers originating from Shropshire was Elizabeth Russell, a character of considerable determination and

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<sup>74</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 143.

<sup>75</sup> SRR/2941/2/2: Hopton Bank PM Circuit Quarter-day Minutes, 1828-40, 24 Mar 1834.

<sup>76</sup> W. M. Patterson, *Behind the Stars* (PM Leader, 1911; Australia, 1974), pp. 24-25.

<sup>77</sup> Lightfoot, *Life and Labours of Mrs Mary Porteus*.



commitment, who was willing to give up her own dress-making business without the prospect of a salary, in order to raise up a new mission in Radnorshire. It is indicative of the strength of Elizabeth's conviction that she chose to leave her Ludlow business even before she discovered that she would receive a salary of two guineas a quarter for her efforts.<sup>78</sup> The *Primitive Methodist Magazine* also provides numerous examples of the considerable commitment made by female local preachers. The memoir of Mrs Ann Frances, a preacher in the Bishop's Castle circuit which appeared in the connexional magazine in 1844, described her as a 'useful and creditable' character who 'laboured hard' for the cause. The magazine notes that she 'was generally planned on an average of ten Sundays out of every three months, and often at a great distance from home'. As Bishop's Castle was an extremely large circuit in the first half of the nineteenth century, spanning a great expanse of land in the southern regions of Shropshire,

'her appointments caused her to have to travel sometimes thirteen miles on a Sabbath, and sometimes seventeen, twenty or more; yet nothing short of an impossibility was ever known to prevent her from discharging her duties.'<sup>79</sup>

The *Primitive Methodist Magazine* of 1856 even presents the story of a woman who ultimately died for the cause. Elizabeth Minton, a local preacher in the Ludlow circuit, 'sank down in the pulpit in a fit of apoplexy' while taking her appointment on 23 December 1855, eventually passing away a few days later.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps one of the most tragic examples of the extreme sacrifice made by women is that provided by Elizabeth Elliot, who died whilst working as a local preacher for the Oswestry circuit at the tender age of 15. The eloquent description of her life, conversion and subsequent death reveal considerable respect for her abilities despite her youthful condition.<sup>81</sup>

### **Enduring the hardships of a Primitive Methodist calling.**

Ritson has argued that the need for preachers was so urgent, that new recruits were thrust into the itinerancy with only the 'slenderest equipment' and the firm 'assurance that they would soon demonstrate their fitness or otherwise for the work'.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Church, *Popular Sketches*, pp. 154-160; Russell, *Life and Labours of Elizabeth Russell*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>79</sup> PMM, 1844, pp. 82-3.

<sup>80</sup> PMM, 1856, pp. 132-3.

<sup>81</sup> PMM, 1825, pp. 409-413.

<sup>82</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 207-8.

All probationers that did not make the grade were expected to withdraw their services. However, the considerable level of hardship that had to be endured, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century, served to weed out the ranks of the unfit.<sup>83</sup> The low pay of Primitive Methodist itinerants was notorious and resulted in a fairly rapid turnover in the itinerancy. In 1820, the Annual Conference ruled that a single itinerant preacher receive a total of £15 a year and be provided with board and lodgings. A married preacher was to receive the annual salary of £29.12s. This figure could be supplemented with 15d. a week for each child under the age of eight that had been born after the father had entered the ministry. However, a married preacher did not receive help with bills for house rent and victuals except when planned to labour in the town in which his wife also resided. On these occasions he was to be paid by the society of that place a total of 1s 6d a day for his board. A female preacher was paid substantially less than her male counterparts, receiving a mere £2 each quarter.<sup>84</sup> As probationers were often employed as additional labourers in circuits that had previously only supported one or perhaps two ministers, and were generally expected to ‘break up new ground’, they did not always receive the full wage allowance recommended by the Annual Conference. Ritson has noted that in many circuits the people were so poor that they were unable to raise the necessary salary, and itinerants were forced to survive upon the little that they could find.<sup>85</sup> That some circuits often had difficulties finding the full salary for itinerants, is revealed by the quarterly accounts of the Ludlow circuit. In March 1841, each of the five itinerants were paid back-salary of £1 3s 1d, a sum which had been owing to them since the September of the previous year.<sup>86</sup>

Nineteenth-century Primitive Methodist literature is imbued with a strong sense of the considerable sacrifice made by preachers in their endeavour to extend the cause. There are countless examples of the commitment they demonstrated, walking many miles, trusting solely in the benevolence of others for their survival. In 1825, William Lea was stationed to the Shropshire circuit of Oakengates and sent out to Pillawell, an extensive branch that spanned three counties on the English-Welsh borderland. His autobiography reveals the burden placed upon itinerants required to make very long journeys in order to attend their appointments:

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<sup>83</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 193 & 207-8.

<sup>84</sup> PMACM, 1820, p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 208-9. It is interesting to note, that the Annual Meeting could punish those circuits that paid its itinerants more than the recommended level.

<sup>86</sup> SRR/NM2612/21: Ludlow PM Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1836-1844, March 1841.



‘Some of the places were wide apart, and occasioned us some very long journeys. Some part of the countryside was forest, and some of it hilly, and the roads were far from good. There was no chance of relieving our wearied limbs by taking railways or even coach, for there were none, neither could we have found the money for the fare had opportunity served.’<sup>87</sup>

The circuit provided each preacher with board and lodgings up to the sum of £2.10s for each quarter; however as Lea laments, this was rarely sufficient to meet their needs adequately. He goes on to explain how such journeys were regularly made on nothing more than bread and water, and how he often had to resort to eating hawthorn or bramble berries in order to ‘satisfy hunger’s craving and to spare the circuit’s funds’.<sup>88</sup> During the long weeks spent away from their own residence with no money to pay for accommodation, itinerants had to look to others for their care. Many local society members regularly opened their doors and provided preachers with hospitality; Lea presents the example of Mrs Jones and Mrs Needham, two women whose generosity could always be relied upon when he found himself in need of accommodation.<sup>89</sup> However, itinerants could not always be sure where they would be spending the night; those involved in missioning new areas often found themselves in ‘great straits’ with a hedge or a haystack as their only resting-place.<sup>90</sup> Even if invited to stay by a family, the quality of the accommodation was not always guaranteed. During his stay in the mission station of Haverfordwest, John Petty noted the various ‘lodgings’ he had been obliged to accept. In one location he slept with two other people upon ‘some old straw that had been there for several years’, while in another he awoke to find a calf in the neighbouring bed.<sup>91</sup> Although society members were often in the poorest of circumstances, they willingly gave what they could to assist the roving missionaries. However, it is important to note that this was not always the case. While working in the Shrewsbury circuit in 1840, John Petty noted in his journal the lack of ‘common humanity’ displayed at certain societies:

‘After preaching at Stretton Heath I was conducted to lodgings about a mile distant, where I was not very welcome to spend the night. Next morning...as

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<sup>87</sup> Rev. W. Lea, *Autobiography of the Reverend William Lea, 1800-70. With Extracts From His Diary* Annotated by Sheila Gibbs (Powys, 1996), pp. 29-30.

<sup>88</sup> Lea, *Autobiography*, p. 32.

<sup>89</sup> Lea, *Autobiography*, p. 35.

<sup>90</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 210.

<sup>91</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Labour*, p. 73.

people did not expect me to stay to breakfast, I obtained, by waiting sometime, a little bread and cheese, and one cup of coffee. I then walked home eight miles'.<sup>92</sup>

The extreme hardships endured during his time as a travelling preacher led Petty to comment,

'I have completed my 32<sup>nd</sup> year. I am a young man in years, an old man in infirmities. Such is my state of health that I may probably not see another anniversary of my birthday.'<sup>93</sup>

By the Annual Conference of 1849, the maximum salary of a married preacher had risen to 19s a week or £49.8s a year. However, all ministers that permanently resided in a different station to their wife received just 12s a week. If the circuit could afford to pay the full weekly salary of 19s, then the minister was entitled to a further 2s a week for each child under the age of sixteen. They were also provided with a furnished house or set of rooms for which they were required to pay 1s every three months.<sup>94</sup> It must be noted that the total of 19s a week was perceived by many as an extravagant sum, and this ruling led to considerable uproar in certain quarters.<sup>95</sup> The annual salary of a single preacher now depended upon his status; preachers were paid £16 for the first of their four-year probation, and £18 for each of the remaining three. After being formally received on the annual list their salary rose to a total of 7s 8 1/4d a week or £22 a year. The maximum sum for their board and lodgings remained fixed at £2.10s. Female preachers also received the same sum for their board and lodgings, but were only paid a guinea each quarter for the first two years of their itinerancy, which subsequently rose to 50s a quarter for every successive year.<sup>96</sup> Although female and single preachers were given £2 10s each quarter for their board and lodgings, we have seen how this was barely sufficient. Similarly, although married itinerant ministers were supplied with accommodation by the local circuit, the nature of the places in which they were expected to live left much to be desired. Ritson notes the poor level of accommodation that ministers often had to make their home:

'The Rev. R. Langham, at Bridlington, occupied a thatch-roofed cottage near a farmyard. At night the house was often visited by rats. In wet weather the

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<sup>92</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Labour*, pp. 339-40.

<sup>93</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Labour*, p. 335.

<sup>94</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes 1849, p. 87.

<sup>95</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 209.

<sup>96</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes 1849, p. 87.



water ran down the walls, and occasionally before breakfast both bucket and broom were needed to remove the puddles.’<sup>97</sup>

In most cases the people were poor and therefore could only supply houses that were within their means. As Ritson notes,

‘Suddenly confronted with the duty of providing a house for the minister, they took the least line of resistance, and rented the first and cheapest they could get.’<sup>98</sup>

Perhaps some circuits may have been able to do more, but most lay officials could not see the need for their ministers to be in better situations than their own people.<sup>99</sup>

Although a Primitive Methodist travelling preacher with a wife and two children earned nearly twice as much as the average Welsh Baptist pastor, his income was approximately half that of his Wesleyan counterparts.<sup>100</sup> Wesleyan ministers not only received a greater level of income and a house rent free, but also benefited from an allowance for washing and also money for any necessary servants. In the Wesleyan circuit at Horncastle, contributions were also made towards the provision of a horse upon which itinerants could travel to their distant appointments.<sup>101</sup> These were indeed unimaginable luxuries for most Primitive Methodist itinerants. Gilbert argues that both the real incomes and the social expectations of Wesleyan ministers increased rapidly during the opening decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>102</sup> In comparison, unmarried Primitive Methodist preachers had to be happy with as little as a poor agricultural labourer; even married itinerants whose income was slightly higher had to be willing to make considerable financial sacrifices.<sup>103</sup>

In March 1837 the Ludlow circuit employed a total of six itinerants. The highest paid itinerant was the married preacher who received a basic rate of 14s a week or £9 2s a quarter, a figure which was supplemented by a further £4 17. 6 for the maintenance of his five children. The lowest paid was the female preacher who received as little as 3s 10d a week. The other single preachers received between 5s 4½d and 6s 2d a week according to their level of experience.<sup>104</sup> In the nineteenth

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<sup>97</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 213.

<sup>98</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 214.

<sup>99</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 213.

<sup>100</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 254; Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 181.

<sup>101</sup> J. N. Clarke & C. L. Anderson, *Methodism in the Countryside: Horncastle Circuit 1786-1986* (Horncastle, 1986), pp. 51 & 54.

<sup>102</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 152.

<sup>103</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 254.

<sup>104</sup> SRR/NM2612/21: Ludlow PM Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1836-1844. March 1837.

century the weekly wage rates of agricultural labourers varied considerably. Caird calculated that the average weekly wage in 1850 was 9s 7d. However there was significant disparity between the highest weekly wage of 14s, which was paid to agricultural labourers in the West Riding, and the 7s a week received by those in the counties of Gloucestershire, Suffolk and Wiltshire.<sup>105</sup> In 1837, the weekly wage rates in the Midland counties of Herefordshire and Shropshire were 8s and 9s respectively, and were amongst the lowest paid in the country. In contrast, those labourers situated in the adjacent county of Staffordshire had one of the highest rates of pay, earning 12s a week.<sup>106</sup> The opportunity for alternative, higher paid employment, acted as an important influence upon the wages of farm labourers. At the turn of the century, Archdeacon Plymley examined the situation in the East Shropshire coalfield, and discovered that an agricultural labourer working in the Madeley area earned 9s a week, which rose to 10s in the summer months. The weekly rate of ironworkers was between 11 and 12s, depending upon the season, while some could earn as much as £2 a week. In Broseley, 'the least-able worker' could obtain 10s a week for common work in husbandry, and ironworkers could earn between £1 10s and £2.<sup>107</sup> In the south-western parish of Hopton Wafers, paper-makers earning 10s a week and miners earning between 12 and 15s a week, again pushed the cost of ordinary farm work up to 16d a day, 2d above the prevailing rate. However, the close proximity of alternative employment did not always have such a positive effective. In the southern parish of Stoke St Milborough, those working in the coal and lime works earned between 2 and 3s a day, while the wage rates of the farm labourers was slightly below average.<sup>108</sup> Despite the disparity in the average wage rates in Shropshire, it is clear that Primitive Methodist ministers were poorly paid in comparison with many members of their congregation. It is important to note however, that the obvious poverty of the Primitive itinerants was to form the very basis of their success, enabling them to reach out to members of the working class without hypocrisy. As Werner points out,

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<sup>105</sup> J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850-51* (London, 1852), pp. 474-475.

<sup>106</sup> M. A. Bowley, 'The Statistics of Wages in the United Kingdom during the last Hundred Years', in *The Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* (Dec. 1898), p. 704.

<sup>107</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 203.

<sup>108</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV. pp. 221-2.



‘Clothing, speech, and demeanour all signalled that theirs was a mission of the poor to the poor, not by a well-meant but condescending work of charity aimed at improving morals and manners.’<sup>109</sup>

### **Creating the Primitive Methodist Experience.**

In 1850, Thomas Church noted that most travelling preachers came into the work raw of experience and knowledge, commenting that,

‘Religion...found them in many instances, as devoid of understanding as it found them in all cases, destitute of goodness. And it more readily filled their heart with grace, than stored their head with knowledge.’<sup>110</sup>

Although young preachers often began their labours with little practical experience and only the most basic level of education, many were quick to recognise the need for self-improvement, and worked tirelessly to gain further enlightenment. However, as early Primitive Methodist circuits were extensive, the load placed upon the young itinerant preachers was considerable, and the opportunities for study were scarce. A letter sent to the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* in 1847 reviews the labours of a probationary travelling preacher, and clearly reveals the pressures on all itinerants and the variety of tasks they were expected to complete.

‘From the journal of my ministerial labours, before I was taken into the annual list, I have arrived at the following facts...When visiting from house to house, I offered up prayer in different families 10,833 times, frequently praying with from 30 to 40 families a day; I preached about 1,500 sermons, besides attending to other services; travelled about 10,948 miles and about 179 persons professed to be converted to God by my instrumentality.’<sup>111</sup>

As travelling preachers could be away from home for days at a time, many discovered that their only free time was while walking to and from their appointments. In the memoirs of Atkinson Smith, Kendall describes the ‘first college’ and ‘earliest studio’ of his subject,

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<sup>109</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 146.

<sup>110</sup> Church, *Popular Sketches*, pp. 151-2.

<sup>111</sup> PMM, Aug. 1847, p. 491.

‘He composed and recited amongst singing birds, bleating flocks, lowing herds, and rustling corn.’<sup>112</sup>

Many conscientious scholars learned to study ‘on foot, a book in one hand and umbrella in the other, with a portable library and wardrobe on their backs’.<sup>113</sup>

During the first half of the nineteenth century resources for education and the general development of a preacher’s skills were limited. Young men were expected to accompany their elders to their appointments in the hope that they would learn from them the required skills. In 1824, during the second year of his itinerancy, William Lea was sent to Tunstall. In his autobiography, Lea comments:

‘This to me was a fortunate appointment though the thought of my poor infant-like discoursing amongst the sages of Tunstall made me stagger. Yet it was to me as a term at College and it would have been much to my advantage if my residence amongst them had been protracted.’<sup>114</sup>

It was during his stay in this station that Lea learned from James Nixon about the merits of sufficient pulpit preparation and the importance of study.<sup>115</sup>

Preachers did however, receive encouragement in their efforts from the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* which regularly provided ‘Advice for Travelling Preachers’ and which stressed the need for pious education.<sup>116</sup>

‘Never indulge yourself in lying in bed in the mornings...After you rise and your private prayer is over, get to your bible and read two chapters in the Old Testament and one in the New, and form your ideas on the general contents of each...By practising this every morning it will lead you in time to a wonderful knowledge of the word of God’.<sup>117</sup>

The connexional magazine also provided practical direction for its preachers, particularly in the area of sermon preparation. An article which appeared in January 1855 warns that those who do not ‘put pen to paper’ never produce sermons of great accuracy or profundity. Those preachers who choose to write ‘their sermons in extenso’ are ‘poor pastors’ who will ultimately ‘be rendered unsociable, reserved, if not morose, by their sedentary and laborious habits’. It suggested that a good sermon

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<sup>112</sup> Kendall, *Christian Minister in Earnest*, p. 13.

<sup>113</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 194.

<sup>114</sup> Lea, *Autobiography*, p. 21.

<sup>115</sup> Lea, *Autobiography*, p. 22.

<sup>116</sup> PMM, 1819, p. 10.

<sup>117</sup> PMM, June 1824, p. 122-3.



should present different propositions ‘connected by leading and well related thoughts’ allowing for an element of extemporaneous speech.<sup>118</sup> It should provide ideas drawn from a variety of sources that have been so

‘thoroughly digested and assimilated to his own mode of thinking and expression, that when reproduced they are not only instinct with life and energy, but bear the unmistakable mental image of the composer’.<sup>119</sup>

Although it is likely that many Primitive Methodist preachers did not have all the necessary skills to create ‘a good sermon’ as set out above, they were nevertheless able to drive home doctrines long neglected by the Church of England.<sup>120</sup> In her account of rural life in the hamlet of Lark Rise, Flora Thompson noted the unsuitable nature of many of the Anglican vicar’s sermons:

‘A favourite theme was the duty of regular church-going. He would hammer away at that for forty-five minutes, never seeming to realise that he was preaching to the absent, that all those present were regular attendants, and that the stray sheep of his flock were snoring upon their beds a mile and a half away.’<sup>121</sup>

Another favourite topic regularly tackled by the Rector of Lark Rise was ‘the supreme rightness of the social order as it then existed’, a theme that may not have had much appeal for the working-class elements of the congregation. However, it is clear from Thompson’s account that much of what the Rector had to say simply by-passed his hearers, who revealed a considerable degree of apathy and whose main purpose for attendance at the Sunday service had little to do with religion.<sup>122</sup> In 1840, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* printed ‘An Agricultural Sermon’, a service that had originally been given in the open-air at an unnamed country village, and which had been reproduced as the direct result of a written request. This text clearly demonstrates the attempts which Primitive Methodists made to tailor preaching to suit the needs and desires of their hearers, and speak upon subjects which their congregations would be able to strongly identify with. The sermon also reveals their ability to employ imagery that would directly appeal to the agricultural working-class listeners.

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<sup>118</sup> PMM, Jan. 1855, pp. 21-2.

<sup>119</sup> PMM, Dec. 1855, pp. 725-6.

<sup>120</sup> M. Batty, ‘Origins: The Age of Wesley’, in G. Milburn & M. Batty (eds.) *Workaday Preachers. The Story of Methodist Local Preaching* (Peterborough. 1995), p. 28.

<sup>121</sup> F. Thompson, *From Lark Rise to Candleford* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 211.

<sup>122</sup> Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, pp. 211-3.

‘Now my brethren, here is the seed-basket in my hand; the Bible... And the great husbandman has sent me out this day to sow this precious seed. I am now throwing it abroad left and right. Oh! May it fall not among thorns; not on stony ground, not by the way side; but into good ground, and bring forth an hundred fold.’<sup>123</sup>

The close relationships that were often formed by means of regular contact in the domestic setting, enabled a minister to gain a greater understanding of the problems that plagued his listeners. In his biography of the Primitive Methodist itinerant John Petty, Macpherson points out that,

‘Unless a minister will thus get among the people he cannot know their actual spiritual condition. His pulpit discourses will consequently not be appropriate. They may be admirable specimens of composition, every way calculated to captivate the speculative hearer, but they will be inapplicable to the spiritual state of the people.’<sup>124</sup>

Family visiting also enabled Primitive Methodist preachers to monitor closely the spiritual progress of their congregation and to stimulate a desire for regular worship. In contrast, the technique adopted by the Rector at Lark Rise prevented any such connection developing:

‘When the weather had been discussed, the health of the inmates and absent children inquired about, and the progress of the pig and the prospect of the allotment crops, there came an awkward pause, during which both racked their brains to find something to talk over. There was nothing. The Rector never mentioned religion.’<sup>125</sup>

Primitive Methodist literature not only noted the inability of the Anglican Church to provide a religious experience that had direct relevance for its working-class hearers, but also made constant allusions to the monotonous character of its worship. In 1865, Garner published a printed reply to an address made by John Gibson, the Vicar of Brent, who had been critical about joining the Primitive Methodists. In his reply Garner criticised the Church’s lack of spontaneity:

‘Your prayers are ready-made, and printed in a book. They must be read word for word as they are printed, whether they be appropriate or not. The minister,

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<sup>123</sup> PMM, March 1840, pp. 97-8.

<sup>124</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Labour*, pp. 125-6.

<sup>125</sup> Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, pp. 220-1.



no matter how learned and pious is instructed by regulations what to say, when to pause, when to conclude, and even forms of doxologies and benedictions are printed for his guidance, as though he was the veriest dolt in the congregation.<sup>126</sup>

Werner argues that Wesleyan ministers were also aware of the effectiveness of the Primitive Methodist style in comparison with their own. The growing pressure for increased levels of decorum in Wesleyan worship stifled spontaneity, and attempts to cater for the more intellectual members of the congregation by means of ‘sermons embellished with literary allusions and delivered in highflown language’ left many apathetic.<sup>127</sup>

The great array of people who entered the Primitive Methodist pulpit inevitably provided a multitude of preaching styles, which led to considerable diversity and often very entertaining sermons. In his work on the development of Primitive Methodism in Great Yarmouth, Patterson reminisced about the variety of preachers he had witnessed:

‘One would thunder the law and its penalties in our ears, another would confuse by intricate reasoning, another tickled us with eloquence, yet another wearied by his repetition. One would remind us there was a hell and make us wince to think of it; whilst yet another would take us to the gates of heaven, until we momentarily wished we could go through them without the painful preliminaries necessary to our entrance.’<sup>128</sup>

*Mr Richard Jones, of Clun, Salop. An Appreciation* provides a real insight into the various abilities of the local preachers working in the Shropshire circuit of Bishop’s Castle during the nineteenth century. James Davies of Cwm Kay, a cobbler by trade is presented as a man who

‘could preach far better than he could make or mend shoes...A man whose singing was an infliction, whose deliverance was weariness to the flesh when it ceased to be comical, but whose sermons, in spite of bad elocution, were often remarkable productions’.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Rev. W. Garner, *Dialogues between John Gibson, B.D., Vicar of Brent with Furneux Pelham, Herts, Formerly Fellow and Tutor of Sidney Sussex College, Camb. And Martin Bull, Primitive Methodist; Being a Reply to the said Vicar’s Address to his Parishioners against joining the Primitive Methodists* (London, 1865), p. 12.

<sup>127</sup> Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 181.

<sup>128</sup> A. H. Patterson, *From Hayloft to Temple. The Story of Primitive Methodism in Yarmouth* (London, 1903), p. 79.

<sup>129</sup> Jones Davies, *Mr Richard Jones*, p. 27.

We also learn of John Croxton of Clunton,

‘a man of real worth and much preaching power, but with an occasional weakness for a big word, and whose “Hallelujahs” came rolling out like great waves of the sea carrying with them many a sermon.’<sup>130</sup>

Extemporaneous worship ensured a constant spontaneity, and services provided by such an array of different characters were rarely stale and monotonous. From the reminiscences of A. B. Tinsley, we learn of one Shropshire local preacher, who got so carried away during the delivery of his sermon that he exhorted his congregation with the words: ‘My friends, let us have another pull at the heavenly barrel, it ‘inna’ dry yet’. Tinsley argues that such a ‘down to earth faith’ was well suited to the mood of the common dwellers.<sup>131</sup> Ultimately, the authorities had very little power to control the style of preaching adopted. The *Primitive Methodist Magazine* suggested that preachers,

‘select the most stupid, illiterate person in his congregation, and preach particularly to him. If that person understand him, everybody else will’,<sup>132</sup>

and it appears that local circuit committees were also keen to promote simplicity,

‘That Brother Graham speak to Brother Jones about some awkward expressions he uses whilst preaching’.<sup>133</sup>

In 1845, the connexional magazine concluded that even the most intellectual of hearers ‘prefer sermons containing a few thoughts, forcibly and briefly expressed’.<sup>134</sup>

While authorities could do little more than guide their preachers as to the content and form of services, they could however ensure that time restrictions were adhered to. Thompson notes the frustration of hearers forced to listen to the ramblings of itinerant ministers and local preachers alike who talked for hours and yet said nothing at all.<sup>135</sup> That long-preaching occurred regularly is highlighted by the example of one particular Shropshire local preacher, who felt the need to lock in his congregation so that they could not sneak out before the end of his ‘lengthy sermon’:

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<sup>130</sup> Jones Davies, *Mr Richard Jones*, p. 28.

<sup>131</sup> A. B. Tinsley, *With Horse and Cart and Friend. Memories of a Salop farm boy* (Church Stretton, N. D.), pp. 59-60

<sup>132</sup> PMM, Nov. 1855, p. 660.

<sup>133</sup> SRR/NM2941/2/2: Ludlow PM Circuit - Quarter Day Minutes, 1828-40, 21 Sept. 1835.

<sup>134</sup> PMM, May 1845, p. 240.

<sup>135</sup> Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, pp. 218-9.



‘Taking the key with him into the rostrum he declared in a loud and firm voice, “Now you are here, you’ve got to have it”’.<sup>136</sup>

The Annual Primitive Methodist Conference of 1836 noted the injurious nature of long preaching and ruled that morning and afternoon Sunday services should not exceed an hour and a quarter, while those held in the evening should not exceed an hour and a half. Weeknight services were also to be no longer than one hour and a quarter.<sup>137</sup> It was understood that those men and women who had spent all week working and who had families to attend to at home had ‘neither the time nor the relish for those which exceed their limits’.<sup>138</sup> Various attempts were made to curb the ramblings of certain preachers; itinerant ministers who acted contrary to the rules set out risked having their salary reduced by ten shillings a quarter, while local preachers could be made to sink one figure on the plan.<sup>139</sup>

## Conclusion.

The evidence of Shropshire reveals that Primitive Methodist members and preachers alike were drawn predominantly from the working classes. Primitive Methodism set out to fill a religious and spiritual gap, and it is clear that the appeal of the movement lay in the fact that its preachers spoke the language of the common man and could truly relate to the daily struggles of their congregations. In contrast with their Anglican or Wesleyan counterparts, Primitive Methodist preachers were on equal terms with their audience and clearly understood the best way to direct their simple message so that it firmly struck home. Moreover, the diversity of preachers ensured dynamic and entertaining services. As Morris has remarked:

‘It was a simple faith for simple folk, but one which gripped and stirred their hearts, and gave them the secret of victorious living.’<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Tinsley, *With Horse and Cart*, p. 59.

<sup>137</sup> PMACM, Consolidated 1836, p. 45.

<sup>138</sup> PMM, May 1845, p. 240.

<sup>139</sup> PMACM, Various Regulations 1831, pp. 1-2.

<sup>140</sup> G. M. Morris, ‘The origin of Primitive Methodism in north Staffordshire, 1800-1812’, in *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies*, vol. 9 (1969), p. 72.

## **Chapter 6: Calculating Primitive Methodism**

The Religious Census of 1851 and the extensive series of membership figures compiled by the Primitive Methodists themselves, provide considerable insight into the success of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire throughout the nineteenth century. As we shall see, the Census of 1851 offers a unique snapshot of religion in the mid-nineteenth century, presenting a clear picture of the position of the denomination at that time. Moreover, it also enables us to compare the progress of the Primitive Methodist Connexion with that of other religious bodies in the county. However, as the census only provides information about those people who attended worship on a single day, it is necessary to turn to other sources to move beyond the narrow confines of 1851. Connexional membership figures are perhaps the best way, to obtain a greater insight into the changing fortunes of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire over a longer period. Carefully compiled each year of the nineteenth century, these membership figures together with the Census of 1851, will provide a clear picture of those areas in which denomination flourished, and the advances it made throughout the county as a whole, over the course of the century.

### **The Census of Religious Worship.**

Carried out on the 30 March, by the government of Lord John Russell, the Religious Census of 1851 was the first and last of its kind. Produced as a result of mounting concern about growing religious indifference amongst the working class population, and the developing strength of Nonconformist denominations, the census was the first time that the private sphere of attendance at religious worship had been intruded upon in such a manner. The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of religious development, the growth and subsequent divisions of the Methodist Connexion being one of a series of significant changes. The government was clearly concerned about these developments and wished to assess the extent of real change; in particular the extent to which religious provision was keeping pace with changing population levels. As Snell notes, the association between politics and religion had a long history, and the government's involvement in religious matters was 'much more conspicuous than it is today'. Indeed it is difficult to find 'political issues that were not



overlaid and influenced by religious debate.’<sup>1</sup> Before 1851, with certain rare exceptions including the 1829 returns of non-Anglican places of worship, figures for membership and accommodation were only published by the individual religious bodies. These however were often inadequate, as the denominations varied not only in the extent of the collection of such information, but also in the levels of reliability. As Inglis points out it was almost impossible to make any reliable conclusions, from these figures, as to the actual number of people who attended the services. The Census provided unprecedented levels of information about religious behaviour, and the relative success of the various denominations in attracting people to worship.<sup>2</sup> The 1851 Religious Census brought home, to an increasingly statistically minded age, the real position of religion in England. Out of a total population of approximately eighteen million, 5,292,551 attendances were made at Church of England establishments. 4,536,264 at the main Protestant dissenting bodies, such as the Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and the Baptists. Finally, 383,630 attendances were made at the Roman Catholic establishments.<sup>3</sup> The census therefore, clearly revealed the extent of religious dissent in England by the mid-nineteenth century, despite its firm intention to demonstrate the ‘continuing strength of the Church of England.’<sup>4</sup>

The form the enquiry should take was suggested by the Registrar General for the 1851 Population Census, Major George Graham, who lamented the lack of available information on the provision of education and religious worship, and the inadequacy of the statistics that had been collected earlier. Graham argued that the census should tackle this deficiency, suggesting that the existing administration could easily be employed to collect the necessary information.<sup>5</sup> As a character acceptable to all those of differing religious persuasions, Horace Mann, a Barrister-at-Law in Lincoln’s Inn, was chosen to take responsibility for the census and its administration. According to Mann the purpose of the census was firstly to calculate the numbers of attendances made at divine service on a particular Sunday, in this case, the 30th of March 1851, and secondly to estimate the number of people within the general

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<sup>1</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 26 & 27.

<sup>2</sup> K. S. Inglis: ‘Patterns of religious worship in 1851’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 11, 1960, p. 79

<sup>3</sup> W. Gibson: *Church, State and Society, 1760-1850*, (Basingstoke, 1994) pp. 168-9.

<sup>4</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 29.

community who attended worship at all. This second aim was soon dropped, once the complexity of the subject became clear.<sup>6</sup> Snell has commented that a 'census of religious actions' is of greater value than a 'census of profession', because the threat of prejudice against particular beliefs such as atheism, may well have led people to falsely claim loyalty to a particular form of religion. Snell suggests that it is likely that they would have claimed allegiance to the Established Church, therefore over-emphasising its actual strength.<sup>7</sup> The questions put to the religious bodies on the census forms aimed to obtain information concerning: the situation of the church or chapel; when and how it was consecrated; the extent of accommodation it provided; the numbers it received on Census Sunday, and an estimate as to the average level of attendance for the past twelve months.<sup>8</sup> However, before the Census was carried out there was considerable debate concerning the nature of the questions that should be asked, and whether it should be made compulsory for the religious bodies to answer them. Such debate arose because many clergymen resented having to give such information, especially that of a financial nature. It was suggested that information provided from the census returns would therefore be very vague and of little real consequence, and leading contemporaries such as the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, warned that it was perhaps better to have no information than imperfect information. This was a typical attitude that characterised the attack on the experiment.<sup>9</sup> Eventually it was decided that it should not be compulsory to answer all the questions on the census, a factor that has often been presented as a potential cause of unreliability. However, it is important to note that of 34,467 returns, only 2,524 did not contain information about the sittings, and only 1,394 did not contain information about attendance. Finally, only 390 contained no information about both sittings and attendance.<sup>10</sup>

Mann attempted to provide certain safeguards against any potential inaccuracies. The returns were collected and examined by local census officers, who were chosen without any reference to their own religious convictions, and who resided in the locality, therefore hopefully ensuring that they would be able to recognise any

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<sup>6</sup> W. S. F. Pickering, 'The 1851 Religious Census - a useless experiment?', *The British Journal of Sociology*, XVIII (1967), p. 384.

<sup>7</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> Inglis, 'Patterns of religious worship', p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> D. M. Thompson, 'The Religious Census: problems and possibilities', in R. Lawton (ed.), *The Census and Social Structure: an Interpretative Guide to the Nineteenth-Century Censuses for England and Wales* (1978), p. 243.

<sup>10</sup> Thompson, 'The Religious Census', p. 247.



wild claims. The returns were then sent to the local registrar, who also examined them before finally sending them to London. If any clergymen refused to participate in the census, then the local census officer was asked to fill in the returns. As Inglis points out, this occurred only in 10% of the cases. When no information at all could be obtained, this was clearly stated in the official report.<sup>11</sup> Criticised for being incomplete, it was suggested that the Census did not contain information about every religious establishment in existence during the period. For example, a complaint was made that as many as 200,000 people in workhouses, where services were required to be held under the Poor Law of 1834, were not added to the census returns for the Church of England.<sup>12</sup> However despite such criticisms, it is clear that efforts were made to include all places, enumerators being asked to seek out places of worship 'on the ground', rather than obtaining such information from official lists. Therefore, this ensured that many small places were actually included in the Census, which might otherwise have been excluded. This idea is supported by Thompson who has commented that 'on the national scale, the completeness is impressive.'<sup>13</sup>

One of the most important issues that arises when assessing the reliability of the census is the fact that a systematic count was not adopted nationally to ensure that all attendances were recorded in the same manner. The actual enumeration was the responsibility of the priest or minister, who did not receive any direction as to how the count should be carried out. Attendance figures were therefore recorded using various methods, some clergymen counting accurately, others choosing to round to the nearest ten or hundred. This led to inconsistencies, and of course inaccuracies. Pickering has argued that, it is perhaps the 'lasting weakness of the census' that the participating clergy were not aided more in the most vital part of the process, the actual counting.<sup>14</sup> Figures were also criticised by contemporaries for having been twisted or boosted by certain dissenting denominations. For example, contemporaries such as Lord Robert Cecil claimed that as the priest or minister completed the actual enumeration, then the census could not be trusted, suggesting that it was 'tainted...with fraud'. Samuel Wilberforce argued that it was likely that the levels of attendance for the Church of England would be understated, considering that many of their clergy did not agree with

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<sup>11</sup> Inglis, 'Patterns of religious worship', pp. 75-6.

<sup>12</sup> Pickering, 'The 1851 Census', p. 385.

<sup>13</sup> Thompson, 'The Religious Census', pp. 247-8.

<sup>14</sup> Pickering, 'The 1851 Census', pp. 385-6.

the census, and had therefore declined to submit returns, and that the Nonconformists would be inclined to exaggerate them. Anglicans were quick to criticise the behaviour of the dissenting denominations, suggesting that they had canvassed adherents before the census was carried out. However, although there is little doubt that some exaggeration may have occurred, dissenters perhaps twisting figures to use as ammunition in the campaign for the disestablishment of the Church of England, it is unlikely that this activity was confined to members of any one denomination. Therefore it is unlikely that this had any real overall effect on the regional or sectarian distribution of attendances.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Mann defended dissenting ministers accused of canvassing or exaggeration, by suggesting that the number of worshippers was more or less in proportion with the number of seats, and that they were often eager to explain why their congregations were in fact smaller than usual.<sup>16</sup> Census returns regularly cited circumstances which had acted to reduce their number of worshippers. The most commonly cited were the poor weather and the Midlent Sunday custom of visiting relatives on this day. Inglis suggests that the excuse of weather can be ignored considering that bad weather is both widespread and typical throughout the year. Like Mann, Inglis also argues that the fact that clergymen remarked about such factors as having caused poor attendance figures

‘may be interpreted as a sign that worshippers were being enumerated conscientiously, and that when numbers seemed low the authors tended not to exaggerate but to explain.’<sup>17</sup>

Another problem that arises when using the census to ascertain levels of attendance at religious worship on 30 March 1851, is the fact that it is almost impossible to determine exactly how many ‘individual’ attendants there were. Members of Nonconformist denominations were more inclined to attend as many as two or three services on a Sunday, for example Wesleyan Methodists often attended services at both the parish church and their own chapel if they were held at different times. This practice ultimately distorted the true level of attendances made on census day. It was only during the course of the nineteenth century that adherence to one church or denomination developed into a strict membership, the division between church and chapel coming to symbolise ‘the identity and aspirations of rival elites in

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<sup>15</sup> Inglis, ‘Patterns of religious worship’, pp. 75-7.

<sup>16</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Inglis, ‘Patterns of religious worship’, pp. 75-7.



their struggle for power'.<sup>18</sup> However as Gibson points out, as late as the 1850s there were still Wesleyans leaving their services early in order to reach the parish church on time.<sup>19</sup> Mann, realising the significance of this problem, devised a formula that he claimed would solve the problem of 'double attendances'. Mann's formula took the entire figure for the morning attendances, half of the figure of attendances made in the afternoon, and one third of those made in the evening. This he suggested would reveal the true level of individual attendants. Watts has argued that it was in this attempt to calculate the individual number of worshippers that Mann left himself most open to criticism. He continues that Mann did not offer any real justifications for applying this formula, which was ultimately unfair to the dissenting denominations that obtained their best attendance figures at the evening service.<sup>20</sup> According to Inglis, if we look at the figures provided by the census we see that for every 100 Church of England buildings there were only 16 sittings occupied in the evening, in comparison with 45 out of 100 for the Nonconformist denominations.<sup>21</sup> The census has also been criticised for failing to make a careful distinction between the number of adults and young people present in the congregation on Census Sunday. The Church of England, the Roman Catholics, and the main dissenting bodies all had Sunday scholars, from which the adult congregations were mainly recruited. Although the returns did request that they should be counted separately, it appears that many priests and ministers became confused as to how the Sunday Scholars should be totalled, often including them with the General Congregation figures. Therefore, it is likely that many of the apparently large figures collected will have included some scholars. Inglis argues that this is not necessarily a major problem, as long as it is remembered that a Nonconformist congregation would, during this period, have contained a considerably larger number of Sunday scholars than a congregation of the Church of England.<sup>22</sup> When compiling his statistical tables Mann decided that the safest approach was to add the Sunday Scholars total with the attendance total when a service took place simultaneously with the Sunday class, and to ignore all those that occurred separately. He presumed that those Sunday schools that took place at the same time as the general congregation met were more likely to take part in worship than those that did not, and

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<sup>18</sup> McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class*, p. 39

<sup>19</sup> Gibson, *Church, State and Society*, p. 84.

<sup>20</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Inglis, 'Patterns of religious worship', p. 80.

<sup>22</sup> Inglis, 'Patterns of religious worship', p. 82.

‘although he failed to justify such a proposition it did have the unintended merit of preventing the double counting of many Sunday scholars who met for more than one Sunday session.’<sup>23</sup>

Finally, the dramatic developments that had occurred in both the size and distribution of population during the first half of the nineteenth century, led contemporaries to question the ability of the Established Church to adapt to these growing demands. Some contemporaries, including Mann himself, argued that it was perhaps a lack of accommodation that had contributed to the apparent decline in religious attendance. The Census of Religious Worship therefore gave valuable information about the level of accommodation provided by each of the denominations, and the extent to which the total population of the country could be accommodated in religious worship. The census gave the number of sittings in each of the individual religious establishments dividing them into those that were ‘free’ and those that were ‘appropriated’. In order that the members of great families within the local community could disassociate themselves from the ‘lesser’ members of the congregation, it was common practice to divide seating, segregating poorer members from their social superiors. This practice led to the appropriation of seats into private pews for which a rent was paid. Although most commonly upheld as a feature of the Anglican churches, the census revealed that the custom prevailed in many Nonconformist chapels too. However, some difficulties with the seating figures do arise. Often the distinction between free and appropriated seats was not understood, or ministers simply gave a total figure for the entire church or chapel without distinguishing between the two. Similarly there were occasions when the number in the pews was given rather than the number of individual sittings. However, Snell argues that any attendance figure which exceeds that of the number of sittings is not necessarily incorrect, suggesting that in some cases the place of worship may not have been able to ‘supply seating commensurate to demand’ or alternatively that it was sometimes normal to stand during worship.<sup>24</sup> Despite such discrepancies, the accommodation figures in the census are probably the most accurate of all the figures given. Most errors were easily identified by local enumerators, who were then able to remedy the situation, so that the information provided in the census reports could be as correct as possible.<sup>25</sup> Snell, in

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<sup>23</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 26. This approach will be applied during the course of my own research.

<sup>24</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 45.

<sup>25</sup> Thompson, ‘The Religious Census’, p. 248.



his recent work on the census, has examined the relationship between the level of sittings provided by the major denominations and the number of attendants on 30 March 1851. By providing rank correlations between the total sittings available in his study area, and the maximum number of attendances for each individual denomination, he has been able to reveal a very strong relationship between the two. With rare exceptions, sittings generally increased alongside attendances. He has also been able to show that the sittings provided by the older denominations were not always in line with the demand now placed upon them. In particular, as a result of shifts in population, the Church of England often had a number of sittings that was over and above the extent of local demand. On the other hand, sittings provided by the newer denominations were generally more in alignment with population size.<sup>26</sup>

Inglis comments that the census is in fact ‘comparable with registering a vote at an election’.<sup>27</sup> Therefore it is evident that despite certain limitations, the 1851 Religious Census is a valuable source for the historian attempting to assess the level of church attendance in the mid-nineteenth century. The census is not only an extremely valuable source when it is used to determine relative levels of church attendance in various regions, for example between town and country; it also revealed as for the first time the true state of religion and the church in England. As Thompson comments, ‘For all its faults...it stands out as a fascinating revelation of the religious state of Britain in the middle of the century.’<sup>28</sup>

### **The situation in Shropshire on Census Sunday.**

By taking information directly from the enumerator’s returns, certain problems in the gathering of this data do arise.<sup>29</sup> The most basic of these is the necessity to interpret handwriting which can, on certain occasions, be very unclear. Similarly, as discussed previously, certain problems such as missing entries or bizarre discrepancies do also arise from time to time. These problems would probably have been addressed by the local registrar; however, it is impossible for us to be sure of their exact findings and therefore must take the enumerators’ returns at face value, irrespective of any obvious discrepancies. In the fifteen registration districts of Shropshire, attendances

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<sup>26</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 46-49.

<sup>27</sup> Inglis, ‘Patterns of religious worship’, p. 82.

<sup>28</sup> Thompson, ‘The Religious Census’, p. 241.

<sup>29</sup> SRR: H.O. 129 352-366, Religious Census of 1851 – Enumerator’s Returns.

were made at a total of 732 places of religious worship on 30 March 1851.<sup>30</sup> In order to measure the precise level of attendance at religious worship on Census Sunday, it is useful to calculate the index of attendance (IA from now on). The IA is arrived at by adding together the total attendances of each denomination, expressed as a percentage of the total population of the area being examined. It is important to note that an index of 100 does not mean that everybody attended religious worship.<sup>31</sup> This method of measuring religious attendance is well established, being used by nearly all that have analysed the census. The IA provides an accurate measurement that enables easy comparison of the religious situation in different locations, and also comparison of the achievements of the various religious bodies. Inglis has calculated that the IA at all places of worship in England and Wales was 61. This varied considerably upon examination of the local situation. In rural areas and small towns the average achieved was 71.4; however in large towns with a population of over 10,000 it was only 49.7.<sup>32</sup> The IA for the county of Shropshire was 58.7, a figure that was very close to the national average. However, once again this average concealed considerable diversity, as is shown by the table below.

**Table 6. Religious Census of 1851. Index of total attendances (all denominations) for each registration district in Shropshire.**

Registration District	Population	Index of Total Attendances
Market Drayton	14,160	78.2
Wem	16,948	72.8
Shrewsbury	23,104	72.7
Ellesmere	15,680	71.4
Oswestry	22,795	71.1
Bridgenorth	15,608	58.0
Atcham	19,174	57.8
Wellington	20,729	55.6
Ludlow	17,051	51.6
Newport	15,620	50.2
Church Stretton	6,167	49.7
Madeley	27,627	47.3
Clun	10,119	43.5
Shifnal	11,483	41.9
Cleobury Mortimer	8,633	38.7

<sup>30</sup> Of these 732 places of worship, a total of 10 do not give attendance figures, 20 do not provide sittings figures, and 6 provide neither attendances nor sittings. All figures given have been used as reported in the census.

<sup>31</sup> As a result of the Nonconformist practice of attending more than one service on a Sunday, the number of attendances made would have been much greater than the total number of individual worshippers.

<sup>32</sup> Inglis, 'Patterns of religious worship', pp. 79-80.



The registration district of Market Drayton in the north attained the highest IA of 78.2. Cleobury Mortimer, located in the southern half of the county only achieved a figure of 38.7. The great diversity of religious experience throughout the county supports the point made by McLeod, who notes that both the highest and lowest levels of attendance were to be found in small towns or rural areas.<sup>33</sup> Five of the fifteen districts of Shropshire attained an IA that matched Inglis's average of 71.4, all of which were located in the northern half of the county. Two of the lowest levels of attendance at worship were recorded in registration districts located in the southern extremities of the county. Therefore we can clearly see that there existed a north-south divide in the religious experience of Shropshire in 1851.

Using the data provided by the census, it is also possible to ascertain which areas of the county provided the greatest level of accommodation for those wishing to attend worship. In order to measure the level of sittings provided within each registration-district, it is useful to calculate the 'Index of Sittings'. This is arrived at by adding together all denominational sittings in each registration-district, which is then expressed as a percentage of the population in 1851. An index of 100 would indicate that all of the population could be accommodated by the local religious bodies. Despite previously noting the general accuracy of the census in supplying data concerning the number of sittings, it is unfortunate that this is not always the case for Shropshire. For example, the Census Report notes that the Shropshire Primitive Methodists submitted the highest level of defective returns.<sup>34</sup> The Primitive Methodists are not the only denomination for which questions arise about the number of sittings. In Crackley Bank, Shifnal registration district, the Wesleyan Methodist chapel had a maximum attendance of 35, despite only noting a total of 8 sittings. Therefore, although there does appear to be a close correlation between the attendance figures and those of sittings, I am reluctant to base too much discussion on the level of sittings alone. It is possible to compare the enumerators' returns with the official report on the census, in order to rectify some of the most obvious discrepancies. However, doing so can often raise more questions than it is able to solve. In the case of the Church of England in Shropshire, the tables given in the report reveal that attendance figures were missing for a total of thirteen places of worship, and the number of sittings in a further seven.

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<sup>33</sup> H. McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (London, 1996), p. 60.

<sup>34</sup> *1851 Census of Religious Worship, Population* vol. 11 (I.U.P Shannon 1970 edn), pp. clxxxi-clxxxii.

**Table 7. Religious Census of 1851. Index of total sittings for each registration District in Shropshire.**

Registration District	Population	Index of Total Sittings
Wem	16,948	81.6
Oswestry	22,795	71.3
Market Drayton	14,160	70.7
Ludlow	17,051	67.7
Ellesmere	15,680	67.2
Shrewsbury	23,104	67
Bridgenorth	15,608	64.5
Atcham	19,174	64.4
Cleobury Mortimer	8,633	57.5
Clun	10,119	57.3
Church Stretton	6,167	57
Madeley	27,627	54.3
Wellington	20,729	54.2
Newport	15,620	53.1
Shifnal	11,483	52.6

The above table gives the index of sittings for each registration district in Shropshire, enabling us to make some basic statements about the situation of accommodation 1851. Perhaps it is not surprising that those registration districts with the greatest number of places of worship had the highest level of sittings, and vice-versa. Oswestry with an index of 71.3 had a total of 88 places of worship in 1851, and Shifnal with an index of 52.6 had only 23 places. There also appears to be a relationship between the number of dissenting establishments and the index of sittings achieved. For example, both Wem and Oswestry had the greatest number of Nonconformist places of worship, and Shifnal had the least. Oswestry had a total of 19 Churches, but 69 dissenting places of worship. Shifnal however, had 15 Churches but only 8 dissenting establishments. The figures do not reveal any close relationship between the size of the population and the total number of sittings provided. Oswestry in the north, had one of the highest population levels in Shropshire in 1851, and had the second highest index. However, both Madeley and Wellington, which also had very high population levels in 1851, had some of the lowest levels of sittings. There is however, a greater correlation between the level of sittings and the number of attendances on Census Sunday. Out of the five registration-districts, which achieved



the highest IAs on 30 March 1851, four also had the highest index of sittings. Of the five districts, which had the lowest level of attendances, three also had the lowest provision of sittings.

The number of different religious groups present in a registration-district and the level of sittings they provided varied considerably. Generally, the number of places of religious worship located within an individual district varied according to the size of its population, as did the number of different denominations present. For example, the greatest number of places was recorded in Oswestry, which also had one of the highest levels of population in the county, totalling 22,795 in 1851. Similarly, Oswestry was also one of two districts that had over ten different denominations located within its confines. The registration district of Church Stretton in the south of the county had the smallest population in 1851, and also the least religious establishments. Moreover, Church Stretton also had the smallest number of different denominations present, only the Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists being located in this rural locality alongside the Established Church. It is perhaps not surprising, that the registration district with the greatest variety of religious denominations in 1851 was that of Shrewsbury, the county town. A total of 14 of the 19 different denominations present in the county of Shropshire as a whole were located in this district. Of the fifteen registration districts, six had a total of six different denominations. It appears from the evidence that there was a degree of correlation between the level of religious diversity and the number of attendances made at worship on Census Sunday. Both Shrewsbury and Oswestry, the two districts in the county that had over ten different denominations present, had an IA of over 71. Alternatively of those districts that only managed an IA of 50 or less, all except one had a maximum of six denominations located within them.

In certain locations, individual Nonconformist denominations enjoyed particular success. For example, the Census reveals that Madeley, Wellington and Ludlow were all districts where the Wesleyan Methodists were strong. Similarly in Clun, it was the Primitive Methodists which provided real competition for the Established Church. Of the older dissenting denominations, it was the Independents which continued to make an impact upon certain local communities of Shropshire; despite being unable to achieve an IA greater than 12, the Independents were the dominant Nonconformist denomination in the registration districts of Wem and Atcham. In Wem, located in the

north, the Independents obtained their highest level of attendance on Census Sunday, attaining an IA of 11.9. Despite having significantly fewer establishments than the Primitive Methodists, the other predominant Nonconformist body located in the area, the Independents, with only nine places of worship were able to achieve second position, behind the Established Church. A similar situation occurred in Atcham, where the Independents were also the most important body after the Church, despite having considerably fewer places of worship than the Primitives. In Atcham however, their IA was only 7, a reflection of the overall performance of the district. The Independents also managed a high level of attendance in Oswestry, falling just short of their achievements in Wem, with an IA of 11.8, despite having a total of twenty-two places of worship in the district as a whole, in comparison with only nine in Wem. But in this area they came second to the Primitive Methodists as the major Nonconformist group, a situation that was replicated in two other districts. Once again, a clear north-south divide is apparent. In the southern half of the county, the Independents only managed a reasonable presence in Ludlow, a total of five Independent places of worship being recorded in 1851. However, in this district they struggled to match the efforts of the Methodist bodies.

The experience of Methodism in the county was dominated, as is to be expected, by the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist denominations. Many other denominations formed from the original Connexion were also present in small numbers in certain districts, occasionally doing better than the Wesleyans or the Primitives. For example, the Methodist New Connexion obtained more attendances than the Primitives in the Shrewsbury registration district, while the Calvinistic Methodists did better than the Wesleyans in Oswestry. As is to be expected the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists appear to have had certain pockets of strength within the county as a whole, each being the dominant form of nonconformist activity in various registration districts. If we examine the situation of the Wesleyan Methodists in Shropshire in 1851, we can see that they were the strongest form of dissent in six of the fifteen registration districts. They were particularly successful in attracting attendants in the districts of Wellington and Madeley, located across the important coalfields of Coalbrookdale, and where the densest levels of population in the county were to be found. Madeley had the largest population of all the registration districts, with a total of 27,627, and was the area of greatest population density. Wellington, also had a vast number of inhabitants, concentrated in a small area, and was second only to Madeley in its population density.



As the dominant form of Nonconformist activity in these districts, the Wesleyan Methodists achieved an IA of over 14 in both. This denomination also did very well in Ludlow located in the south, with an IA of 12.

However, despite the particular strength of the Wesleyan Methodists in certain areas of the county, it was the Primitive Methodists who were the most important rivals of the Church of England throughout Shropshire. The Primitive Methodists had nearly twice as many places of worship than the Wesleyans, and like the Wesleyan Methodists, Primitive Methodism was the dominant form of dissent in a total of six of the registration districts. However, the Primitive Methodists also had higher IAs than the Wesleyans in the three districts where the Independents were the greatest dissenting body. Primitive Methodism was the strongest denomination after the Church of England in the registration districts of Cleobury Mortimer, Clun, Church Stretton, Newport, Ellesmere and Market Drayton. Three of these were located in the south and had the smallest populations in the county, and of the other three none exceeded a population level of 16,000. Moreover, these six districts were predominantly rural in nature, agricultural activities being the primary form of economic activity. In his work on north Shropshire, Yalden has noted that the area

‘was not only one of the strongholds of Primitive Methodism, but also one of the few areas in England and Wales where the connexion was the predominant Nonconformist denomination in the middle of the nineteenth century.’<sup>35</sup>

However, as we can see from the table below, the districts where the Primitives acted as the main rival to the Church were not always those where they achieved their greatest IAs on Census Sunday. Similarly, it did not necessarily follow that their best levels of attendance were achieved in those areas of smallest population.

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<sup>35</sup> Yalden, ‘Nonconformity in north Shropshire’, p. 80.

**Table 8. Religious Census of 1851. Index of total attendances and index of total sittings for the Primitive Methodists in each registration district in Shropshire.**  
**(descending from highest level of attendance)**

Registration District	Population	Index of Total Attendances	Index of Total Sittings
Ellesmere	15,680	14.3	13.4
Clun	10,119	13.6	11.4
Wellington	20,729	11.7	8.7
Oswestry	22,795	10.7	9.5
Market Drayton	14,160	9.9	7.4
Ludlow	17,051	9.8	7.1
Wem	16,948	7.9	8.7
Church Stretton	6,167	6.5	5.1
Atcham	19,174	5.6	5.8
Cleobury Mortimer	8,633	5.3	1.4
Newport	15,620	4.5	5.7
Madeley	27,627	3.8	4.0
Shrewsbury	23,104	1.7	1.7
Shifnal	11,483	0.2	0.3
Bridgenorth	15,608	0.1	0.2

The Primitive Methodists achieved their greatest IA in the district of Ellesmere in the north. They also did particularly well in the district of Clun in the south. Therefore unlike the Independents, the areas where the Primitives achieved high levels of attendance on Census Sunday were not confined to one particular locality. Figure 1 illustrates very clearly the above table and experience of the Primitive Methodist Connexion in Shropshire at this point in the nineteenth century. The map reveals a distinct band of Primitive Methodist strength which progresses along the English-Welsh borderland. Two regions of strength within this band particularly stand out. One stretches across the north of Shropshire, extending into the county of Cheshire, and a second in the south progresses westwards over the county boundary into Radnorshire, all attendances in these areas being 7.6 and over. The belt of Primitive Methodist strength that extends along the border of England and Wales, is surrounded in the east and west by areas of considerable weakness for the Connexion. In the west this weakness begins for the most part with the presence of Welsh speaking population. To the east, Primitive Methodist weakness is bounded by a band that runs north-south through the four counties of Staffordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. In the eastern extremities of Shropshire, the registration districts of



Shifnal and Bridgenorth were areas of particularly weak attendance levels on Census Sunday, the Primitives failing to gain an IA of more than 1.

The factors that ensured that Primitive Methodists were more successful in some rural areas than in others have been considered by many historians wishing to explain such disparity in experience. Yalden has challenged the traditional interpretation that the Connexion usually flourished in areas where the Established Church was weakest, arguing that as this was clearly not the case in north Shropshire where the Anglicans attained some of their highest levels of attendance on Census Sunday.<sup>36</sup> Therefore other factors must have ensured their success. Yalden has argued that the principle key to their success in north Shropshire was the extent to which the Primitive Methodists continued to rely on the cottage meeting or other temporary buildings, a system which ensured considerable flexibility.<sup>37</sup> Without a chapel the activities of the Primitive Methodists could be extremely vulnerable to local influence such as that from the major landowners, or local clergy. Although the Connexion increasingly desired the building of chapels, as one of the means to safeguard their future in any local setting, it is clear from the census that they were still often reliant upon the use of temporary accommodation.

A total of 173 Primitive Methodist places of worship were recorded in Shropshire on 30 March 1851. Of these, 103 were chapels and 70 were temporary meeting places. Of the temporary meeting places, 66 were described as 'meeting houses', two as 'rented rooms' for which a small rental would have been paid, one as a factory, and finally one meeting place in the Oswestry registration district was described as being part of the race-course grandstand. Generally, the societies that met in these places relied solely upon the generosity of local individuals, who opened up their homes to the group once, sometimes twice, during the week. The use of temporary accommodation was an ideal way in which the Primitive Methodists could penetrate a new area without accruing any major expenses, therefore enabling them easily to retreat from the area if success was not achieved. By 1851, the tide of opinion was changing, and an increasing number of societies were building chapels in order to stamp their mark upon a locality. However, the extent to which this process was underway by the mid-century varied from place to place, depending upon the size and

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<sup>36</sup> Yalden, 'Nonconformity in north Shropshire', pp. 31-6.

<sup>37</sup> Yalden, 'Nonconformity in north Shropshire', pp. 81-2.

ability of individual societies and circuits to raise the necessary funding. In the two adjacent registration-districts of Market Drayton and Wem two very different pictures emerge. In 1851, Market Drayton had a total of 12 places of Primitive Methodist worship, ten of which were chapels. Wem, however had 22 places and only 7 of these were chapels. Wellington and Madeley were the only other registration districts in Shropshire, that had a greater number of temporary meeting places than chapels. Two registration districts had equal numbers of each; Ludlow and Cleobury Mortimer, both located in the south having the same number of chapels and meeting places in 1851.

Each registration district in the county had at least one Primitive Methodist place of worship. As may be expected, there was a clear relationship between the number of places and the level of attendance achieved. For example, there were a total of 25 places of worship in Ellesmere registration district where the Primitives attained their greatest IA. Alternatively, in Shifnal and Bridgenorth where the number of attendants was at its lowest, there was only a single place of worship. The size and number of sittings provided by each of the places of worship varied considerably. Temporary accommodation generally provided sittings for much smaller numbers, accommodating between ten and forty people for worship. The society that met in a house in Burrington, in the Ludlow registration-district, recorded that it only had sittings for ten people. However it was possible, depending upon the size of house in use, to provide for much larger numbers; the meeting at Lydbury North in the Clun reported sittings for a total of seventy-five people. Chapels on the other hand, were usually built to cater for much larger numbers, although this was not always the case, some chapels such as that at Babbins Wood in the Oswestry circuit having sittings for less than 100 people.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, one of the largest chapels in Shropshire was that of Wrockwardine Wood located in Wellington district, which had sittings for 500 people, and standing space for another 100.

The problems surrounding the sittings provided by the Primitive Methodists in Shropshire, and the resulting difficulties in calculating an index for sittings have already been noted. Although table 8 does appear to reveal some correlation between the total number of attendants at worship and the total number of sittings provided, the problems with the figures are clearly illustrated by the returns of Cleobury Mortimer district. Table 8 shows that the index of sittings for this district was very low, and well

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<sup>38</sup> SRR:NM4219/4/27-35 – Oswestry Circuit - Chapel Schedule, 1891.



out of line with the level of attendances. This extremely low figure was produced as a result of two obvious discrepancies. Hopton Bank chapel, which had a maximum attendance of 180, only reported a total of 40 sittings. Similarly, the chapel located in Rock, which had a maximum attendance of 20, only reported sittings for 8 people. Fortunately it is possible, in the case of Hopton Bank chapel, to rectify this error. A chapel schedule form of 1852 reveals that the chapel did in fact have well over 40 sittings, noting that a total of 200 people could be accommodated in the chapel, a figure that is much closer in line with the maximum attendance at Hopton Bank.<sup>39</sup> The disparity between the number reported in the census and that given in the schedule, illustrates the caution required when using the sittings figures for Shropshire. No similar schedule survives for the chapel at Rock, which was located in a different circuit and over the county boundary in Worcestershire. If we calculate the index of sittings substituting the corrected figure for Hopton Bank, we see that the figure has increased from 1.4 to 3.3; however, this is still smaller than that of attendances. Similarly, each of the four Primitive Methodist places in the registration district of Cleobury Mortimer had a greater number of attendants than sittings on 30 March 1851.

Snell has attempted to examine the question of provision of sittings further, by addressing the issue of pressure upon the accommodation provided. Dividing the total attendances of each denomination located in a registration district by its total sittings, and multiplying the result by 100, the 'index of occupancy' is measured. Snell argues that this is a useful variable, which gives insight into the pressure upon the accommodation provided, and which has not been used previously in the historiography. A total of 100 or more reveals that the number of attendances were greater than the sittings provided. However, because there was more than one service on Census Sunday, it must be remembered that a figure of over 100 does not necessarily imply that places were full or overcrowded, while a value below 100 would

'suggest a mismatch between accommodation and worshippers, with over-provision perhaps reflecting changes in the geography of religion, or declines in attendances at some time after the construction of the church or chapel, or a place that never fulfilled its initial expectation.'<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, a high value may not necessarily imply high demand, but alternatively a

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<sup>39</sup> SRR: NM5166/1/6/10 - Hopton Bank Circuit - Chapel Schedule, 1852.

<sup>40</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, Appendix C, p. 4.

previous low level of demand leading to inadequate provision. Using Snell's measurement and the figures given in the census to ascertain the index of occupancy for Cleobury Mortimer, we obtain a value of 359. If we use the corrected figure for Hopton Bank, we obtain a value of 160. This illustrates how distorted the overall picture can become when some of the figures are inaccurate. However despite this, the obvious pressure upon sittings remains clear, even when using the adjusted figures. This high level of occupancy was a recurring feature of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire in 1851. Examining the sittings figures for the eleven registration districts that have no apparent errors or discrepancies, we can see that five had an index of occupancy of over 100. The highest figure was 137, attained by the Primitive Methodists in Wellington, a parish which spanned 8757 acres and had in 1851 a total of population of 11,554.<sup>41</sup> With such a high population density it is perhaps not surprising that it was in this location that the greatest pressure was placed upon Primitive Methodist accommodation.

It is also possible to calculate which of the three Sunday services placed the greatest amount of pressure upon the number of sittings provided. The Church of England had its greatest number of attendants in the morning. In every registration district in Shropshire, the morning service was by far the best attended. It is impossible to ascertain why the morning service was better attended, although one may suggest that many chose to attend an Anglican service in the morning, wishing to be free to attend that of a Nonconformist denomination in the afternoon or evening. The Wesleyan Methodists contrasted significantly with the Established Church, receiving the greatest number of attendants in the evening. In three registration districts however, the best attended Wesleyan Methodist service was actually in the morning, and in a further two, the total number of attendants at morning service was nearly as large as that in the evening. This perhaps reveals an increased willingness of some to establish their firm allegiance to the denomination. By snubbing the morning service at the local church, Wesleyan Methodists were asserting their own separate identity. The Primitive Methodists were similar to the Wesleyans in that they received their largest number of attendants at the evening service. Of the 16,991 attendances at a Primitive Methodist establishment on Census Sunday, a total of 2771 were at the morning service, 6197 at the afternoon, and 8023 at the evening service. Ambler noted a similar pattern of

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<sup>41</sup> *1851 Census of Great Britain*, Population vol. 6, pp. 864-5.



attendance in his study of Lincolnshire:

‘The fact that the Primitive Methodists achieved their best attendances at evening service suggests that their adherents either waited until the end of a Sunday before going to a chapel or that they attended services at other places of worship - perhaps the Church of England which had its best-attended services in the morning and slightly less well-attended services in the afternoon.’<sup>42</sup>

It is likely that many of the manual labourers, who worked extremely hard for six days, simply chose to remain at home on Sunday morning, resting after the week’s industry. Alternatively, agricultural labourers still had many jobs that needed to be done, and found it necessary to work in the morning, and attend worship in the evening.

It is clear from the Census of Religious Worship that the Primitives had become a successful Nonconformist denomination in Shropshire by the mid-nineteenth century, achieving good levels of attendance in both the north and south. However, as the Census can only provide a snapshot of Primitive Methodist experience, it is important to turn to other material in order to expand our understanding of their successes and failures during the course of the nineteenth century.

### **Levels of Primitive Methodist Membership in Shropshire.**

Robson has argued that the ease with which people were admitted into the ranks of the Methodists was viewed with contempt by members of other religious bodies, who felt that they were too quick to admit them and often to expel them again. The Methodists were the easiest of all the religious bodies to join, as they did not expect a potential member to have experienced conversion before joining a class.<sup>43</sup> All that was necessary to become attached to a Primitive Methodist class meeting, and ultimately to become a fully-fledged ‘member’ of the Connexion, was that a person ‘earnestly desires to flee from the wrath to come’. Admitted ‘On Trial’, prospective members were expected to attend class meetings and manifest this ‘desire’ for a period of three months before being received into full membership.<sup>44</sup> For other religious

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<sup>42</sup> Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, p. 61.

<sup>43</sup> G. Robson, ‘Religion and irreligion in Birmingham and the Black Country’, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1997), pp. 205-6.

<sup>44</sup> PMACM, 1831 - Various Regulations, p. 3.

denominations such as the Congregationalists or Baptists, it was necessary to confirm that the search for salvation had already been successful. Inevitably, the Primitive Methodist method of admission led to great losses, as many people failed either to have a conversion experience, or to continue meeting in class for the three-month period.

After having become a full member, the Primitive Methodist Connexion placed certain expectations upon its members. Regular attendance at the class meeting remained the test of membership throughout the century.<sup>45</sup> The manner in which members were expected to conduct themselves was clearly dictated by the Primitive Methodist annual conference. The conference made demands about many different aspects of a member's life, even suggesting the type of person members were to marry. Members were required to maintain a certain level of discipline at all times, and failure to do so could lead to expulsion:

‘That John Davis be expelled from society for immoral conduct, having attended at a Public House Ball.’<sup>46</sup>

The turnover of membership was extremely rapid throughout the nineteenth century. In addition to meeting in class, full membership also had financial implications. Members were expected to pay one penny each week, more if it was within their means, and also whatever they could afford at the quarterly renewal of the class ticket.<sup>47</sup> Sustaining a certain level of membership and therefore generating income, was of vital importance if a society was to survive. However, this financial commitment on behalf of the members was another factor that led to a high turnover, as some members would or could not pay the money required of them. The need to recruit considerable numbers each year in order to sustain the same level of membership, inevitably led to a deep obsession with enumeration. The huge turnover of members is highlighted by the experiences of the Oswestry circuit in 1860. Reporting a loss of 183 by removal or death in its annual return for that year, circuit officials go onto comment that

‘by God's blessing we have been able to cover this loss and to report a good increase’.<sup>48</sup>

Each year Primitive Methodist circuits were directed to report to the District and ultimately to the Annual Conference, giving precise details about its membership.

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<sup>45</sup> ‘That we are in favour of attendance at class meeting being retained as the test of membership.’ SRR:NM3544/1/5: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers and Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1890-99, 7 Dec. 1893.

<sup>46</sup> SRR:NM2941/2/: Ludlow Circuit - Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 11 May 1839.

<sup>47</sup> PMACM, 1819, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> SRR:NM4219/4/2-36, Oswestry Circuit - Annual Return, 1860.



Those members that were 'approved', 'on trial' and 'doubtful' were added together to provide the total figure reported in the annual return. The accuracy with which each circuit was expected to count its members reveals the obsession of the Primitive Methodists with membership levels. It was the responsibility of the travelling preachers to provide the March quarter day board with an account of the members in the circuit, which would then be presented to the District Meeting. At the June quarter day board, these lists were further examined to check that the number of members was correct up to that time, and that all names were recorded in the roll book, which was to be inspected and signed. In September, the report of members presented in June was again checked for losses and gains. The September quarter day board was also requested to provide an account of the work of the travelling preachers that had left the preceding Midsummer. All losses in membership incurred during their period of control were to be explained.<sup>49</sup> This obsessive level of enumeration provides us with an excellent source that depicts the changing fortunes of each Primitive Methodist circuit in Shropshire.

Membership series produced by individual denominations are not without their problems. Currie, Gilbert and Horsley have examined the reliability of such data and have argued that although membership records count 'observed actions' rather than an 'individual utterances', the true level of active membership will always be either under- or over-stated. Irrespective of the precision with which the various denominations attempted to count members, the roll books will always include some who have ceased to be members, but who have not yet been removed from the lists. Another problem highlighted in their work is the need to be aware of any potential bias among those doing the counting. As the level of membership was so important in gauging success, it may be suggested that those counting would have had motive to inflate numbers. Figures were vulnerable to both simple errors on behalf of enumerators, and also to manipulation and distortion.<sup>50</sup> As we have seen, the September quarterly meeting required a precise report of the successes and failures of those travelling preachers who were leaving the station. The importance of membership figures for gauging success often led new ministers to radically revise the roll books in order to highlight discrepancies that had been made before their arrival to the circuit. A new minister did

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<sup>49</sup> PMACM, 1836 - Consolidated Minutes, pp. 11-5.

<sup>50</sup> R. Currie, A. Gilbert & L. Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers - Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford, 1977), p. 16.

not want to be held responsible for errors that would make it appear that work in the circuit had been adversely affected by his presence.<sup>51</sup> This suggests that some inflation may have occurred. One particular practice that may have acted to distort the true picture of membership appears to have been carried out by all circuit committees throughout the whole of the nineteenth century.

‘That the number of members be received, 307 approved, 6 on trial, total 313 being 37 in advance of what we reported last year and that we report 10 of the increase and keep 27 in reserve’<sup>52</sup>

By deciding the exact number of members it was going to report to the District, the quarter-day meeting was able to provide a margin of safety if membership fell the following year. However, minutes do not always record how many had been held in reserve, leaving us unsure as to the disparity between the real level of membership and that reported to the Conference. Despite this it has been argued, that if any distortion is present in the membership series it is not sufficient to prevent their use.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, membership itself is a ‘problematic concept’. Currie, Gilbert and Horsley have argued that the relationship between membership and ‘real’ religion is complicated, some people only using membership as a method of improving their social standing. They argue that

‘Only a part of any church’s total growth can be treated as the product of a commitment to religious faith.’<sup>54</sup>

Any attempt to calculate a denomination’s success in attracting a membership that directly relates the number of members to the total population, can never be entirely satisfactory. A religious denomination does not recruit membership from the whole population of a country; within the total population at any one time, there are only a limited section who are ‘disposed towards membership’ of any of the religious denominations present within society. Clearly, as we can never be certain as to the exact number of those people ‘disposed’ towards membership in the total population, it is impossible to ascertain a church’s true level of success or failure to recruit members.<sup>55</sup> It is also important to understand that membership figures alone do not provide a definitive picture of the success or failure of a denomination, because there is

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<sup>51</sup> Burrows, ‘Religious provision and practice’, p. 343.

<sup>52</sup> HRO: K76/12: Leintwardine Circuit - Minute Book, 1864-87, 2 Mar 1881.

<sup>53</sup> Currie, Gilbert & Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers*, pp. 16-7.

<sup>54</sup> Currie, Gilbert, & Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers*, p. 19.

<sup>55</sup> Currie, Gilbert & Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers*, pp. 65-6.



an indeterminate area between membership and adherence. The presence of any religious body within a local setting will inevitably have an effect upon the community at large. Beyond those people who made a commitment to the Primitive Methodist Connexion, and became members, would have been a number of 'irregular members' who were willing to attend worship, participate in various activities, and who remained sympathetic to the cause, despite being unwilling to commit to full-membership, with all of its requirements. Moore has argued that,

'in many subtle ways Methodist culture was upheld in penumbral areas as much as in active centres of chapel life.'<sup>56</sup>

However, despite such problems, membership figures offer the best guide to the numerical progress of the Primitive Methodist Connexion in our area of research.

During the course of this research, membership figures taken from the annual connexional conference minutes, have been examined for a total of twenty-eight Primitive Methodist circuits and branches in Shropshire and the surrounding counties.<sup>57</sup> These figures span the entire nineteenth century and give a very complete picture of the successes and failures of the Connexion in the county as a whole. By exploring the developments of the circuits, following the missionaries as they entered and gradually spread across the county drawing in members, we employ the same methods as the Primitive Methodists, who charted their success in this way. However, it is important to be aware that a further set of problems confronts us when attempting to manipulate this data. Due to the constantly developing nature of Primitive Methodism, it is difficult to understand the fluctuations in membership levels that occurred without having a basic knowledge of the way in which each of the circuits grew and eventually divided. Circuit officials often included in their total figures those members in their various branches, without providing as requested a precise breakdown of the numbers in each. This makes it difficult to ascertain the real changes that were occurring. If we examine the case of Ludlow circuit, which had a considerable number of branches by the mid-century, the potential for confusion becomes clear. The ill fated Much Wenlock circuit was the first to develop from the missionary work of the circuit in 1843. By the late 1840s, Ludlow also had branches in Leintwardine, Leominster and Weobley, and in 1849 received Bromyard Mission and the branch at Worcester.

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<sup>56</sup> Moore, *Pit-men, Preachers and Politics*, p. 69.

Although the figures were recorded separately by the Conference from 1849, Leominster and Weobley remained under the jurisdiction of Ludlow until 1855 when they joined to form a circuit, and Leintwardine until 1864. A further circuit, Peaton Strand, was formed from Ludlow in 1875. The confusion presented by the division of circuits into branches and other new circuits is emphasised by the case of Wrockwardine Wood circuit in 1848-9. Taking the figures provided by the conference at face value, it appears that the circuit's membership was reduced by 48 per cent during this one year. However, further knowledge of the circuit's development reveals that both Stafford and Dawley Green, two branches of Wrockwardine Wood, were in fact recorded separately by the Conference from that point, despite remaining under the authority of the mother circuit for many more years.<sup>58</sup> Other examples of the potential for confusion are provided by the experiences of the Oswestry circuit. In 1842, the annual membership was recorded as 1200. The following year this had been reduced to 960, a considerable decrease for one year. At face value, it may appear that something considerable was acting to affect membership. However, when examining the case further, it becomes clear that Oswestry's two missions were included in the total figure in 1842, but were excluded from that of 1843. A similarly large decrease occurs in the figures between 1844 and 1845, membership falling from 936 to 666 a total of 29 per cent in a single year. Once again, the importance of looking beyond the figures for further information is highlighted. The 1845 annual return of the Oswestry reveals that there was a 'real' decrease in membership, due to removals from the area through 'want of labour'.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, although not mentioned in its official report, the Oswestry circuit underwent a particularly difficult year from 1844 as several members led by William Fitzgerald and Robert Thomas left the Primitive Connexion over a doctrinal dispute.<sup>60</sup> This secession had clearly had a dramatic impact upon the circuit's membership figures; however the decrease was actually exacerbated by over-reporting the previous year. In 1844 the membership figure was over-reported by a total of 82.<sup>61</sup>

All of this shows that caution is required when making assumptions about the success of a circuit based upon the membership figures alone. The figures can be

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<sup>57</sup> PMACM, Various Minutes, 1820-1900.

<sup>58</sup> PMACM, Various Minutes, 1848-9. All membership figures given here and from this point on derive directly from the Various Minutes of the Annual Conference, 1820-1900, unless stipulated otherwise.

<sup>59</sup> SRR:NM4391/1/6 – Oswestry Circuit - Annual Returns, 1842-3 & 1844-5

<sup>60</sup> Yalden, 'Nonconformity in north Shropshire', pp. 78-9.

<sup>61</sup> SRR:NM4391/1/6 – Oswestry Circuit - Annual Returns, 1844-5.



misleading, presenting a picture of decrease when in fact membership had simply been overstated in previous years or transferred to the jurisdiction of another authority. In order to prevent confusion, all members of the circuit's branches will be included in the total membership figures presented. Once the branch becomes a circuit in its own right the figures will then be examined separately. One final result of the constant changes in the organisation of Primitive Methodist circuits is that it is difficult to discuss circuit membership in terms of averages. The average number of members in an individual circuit, during the nineteenth century, will clearly be affected by the amount of times that the circuit has been divided. Moreover, the value of an average figure will also be affected by error, such as that noted earlier. Therefore, in order to avoid such pitfalls, it is more valuable to discuss the relative successes and failures to recruit membership, in terms of their general rises and falls, looking in particular at the various peaks and troughs. Occasionally the average membership figure for a particular circuit will be used in order to explain developments, however these will only cover a short period of time.

In order to ascertain the geographical triumphs of Primitive Methodism within Shropshire during the nineteenth century, it is logical to examine the progress of individual circuits. The membership figure of each circuit can then be related to the registration district in which the circuit is located. It must be pointed out that this is not an entirely satisfactory method of applying the membership figures to the local setting, as Methodists did not confine themselves to neat geographical boundaries; circuits developing irrespective of parish, county or even national boundaries. However, the use of the registration-district system does enable us to divide the county into reasonable areas of examination, that can be easily compared with other parts of the country and perhaps more importantly with other data, such as that presented in the 1851 Religious Census. It is possible to divide the study area into northern, central, and southern regions. In the north we have the four registration districts of Oswestry, Ellesmere, Wem and Market Drayton. In the central band are the registration districts of Atcham, Shrewsbury and Montgomery in the west, and Wellington, Newport, Madeley and Shifnal in the east. Finally, in the south are Church Stretton, Bridgenorth, Clun, Ludlow and Cleobury Mortimer. Table 9 shows the total membership figures of the Primitive Methodist Connexion in the different regions of the county, giving their progress at five-year intervals over the nineteenth century. These figures provide a clear picture of the successes of the Primitive Methodist Connexion in Shropshire during the

nineteenth century.

**Table 9. The total number of Primitive Methodist members in the three regions of Shropshire, over five-year intervals.**

Year	Total Number of Members in North	Total Number of Members in Central Area	Total Number of Members In South
1830	736	708	383
1835	1542	965	630
1840	1775	915	1012
1845	1476	1290	758
1850	1959 <sup>62</sup>	1689 <sup>63</sup>	1544
1855	1764	1491	1411
1860	2369	2015	1834
1865	2383	2535	2092
1870	2261	2313	1998
1875	2311	2218	1877
1880	2418	2409	1826
1885	2506	2223	1828
1890	2554	2060	1685
1895	2513	2048	1602
1900	2590	1830	1541

Using these figures, with those of individual circuits located in the various regions, we are able to establish a clear picture of the experiences of the Primitive Methodists in recruiting and maintaining a membership throughout the county. From as early as 1830 it became evident that the Primitive Methodists were to experience considerable success in the north of Shropshire, and the connexion obtained its greatest number of members in this area. From its formation in 1825, the Prees Green circuit grew rapidly. In 1832 the number of members was sufficient to enable a second circuit to be formed. It is clear from the figures of 1833 that this early success was achieved as a result of activity in and around the Oswestry area. In 1833, Prees Green circuit had a total of 342 members, whereas Oswestry had twice as many with a total of 697. Together the Prees Green and Oswestry circuits increased rapidly, growing between 1830 and 1835 by a total of 109 per cent. In 1838 the Hadnall circuit was formed, ensuring that numbers had further increased by 1840. In the following decades from

<sup>62</sup> This figure is for the year 1851 as the membership figures for 1850 are missing.  
<sup>63</sup> This figure is for the year 1851, as the membership figures for both the Minsterley and Dawley Green branches of the Wrockwardine Wood circuit are missing for 1850.



1840, Primitive Methodist activity in this region became characterised by fluctuation in the number of members. After these early successes, membership fell between 1840 and 1845, rising again to 1851, subsequently falling to 1855, but growing again to 1860. During the first period of decline noted here, both Prees Green and Hadnall continued to expand, Hadnall growing by 47 per cent, and Prees Green by 24 per cent. It is clear therefore, that Oswestry was the sole cause of this downturn. Although Oswestry had been extremely successful during the previous five-year period, having an average annual membership of 1043, total numbers in the circuit fell from 1081 to 666 between 1840 and 1845. As we have seen, while problems over local secessions did lead to a decrease in membership, the changing structure of the circuit and the over-reporting of members did much to create an appearance of an overall decline in the region. Between 1845 and 1851, Oswestry circuit regained some of the losses made during the previous five-year period, as all other circuits in the area continued to grow. Expansion was sufficient to ensure that Market Drayton was formed into a separate branch of the Prees Green circuit in 1849, and Whitchurch became a branch of the Burland circuit in 1851. These successes were not consolidated upon and a period of decline in some circuits followed.

From 1855 growth was resumed once more. Between 1855 and 1865 membership increased from 1644 to 2383, a total of 45 per cent. It was in 1862 that the area experienced its first peak level, of 2587 members. All northern circuits underwent an increase during these years, experiencing their own individual peaks in the years between 1862 and 1865. This period of expansion was a national phenomenon, which as we shall see later not only affected all regions of the county, but also all of the Methodist denominations. As Watts has noted, membership of all Methodist denominations increased in the ten years after 1857. While the Wesleyan Methodists grew by 24 per cent and the Methodist New Connexion by 25, the Primitive Methodists enjoyed a total increase of 36 per cent during the period.<sup>64</sup> In the period from 1865 to 1870, the upward momentum of membership levels was briefly arrested and although figures remained very high, a small decline did occur. This phase cannot be attributed to any single circuit, as northern circuits declined very slightly over the five-year period. Between 1865 and 1866, membership of the Oswestry circuit fell by 6 per cent. The annual return for 1866 explains that decline was a result of the upheaval in the

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<sup>64</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, pp. 661-2.

local iron forges, which had been closed after the workers went out on strike over wages. It also goes on to cite the continuing cattle plague as another factor causing removal from the area, and an ultimate decline in numbers.<sup>65</sup> The impact of this plague has been reiterated by the *Victoria County History*, which notes that

‘from 1865-7, a very severe outbreak of foot and mouth disease caused much hardship in the North Shropshire dairying district, particularly among the smaller farmers.’<sup>66</sup>

From 1875, the course of expansion was resumed, and these northern regions of Shropshire became the only part of the county to experience any significant growth in the latter half of the century. However, membership did not develop evenly throughout the region for the entire period. The Prees Green circuit located in the Wem and Market Drayton registration districts continued to grow to 1869 when Market Drayton was divided into a separate circuit. In 1878 the Prees Green circuit was further divided as the Wem circuit was formed. Between 1878 and 1900, there was very little change in the level of membership of these three circuits, numbers remaining almost constant in this final quarter of the century. Whitchurch also located in this north-eastern area did undergo some expansion during this period, peaking at 450 members in 1880, however, by 1900 it had returned to its previous average level. Therefore it is clear that the growth that occurred after 1870 was not a result of activity in the north-east. However, it is fair to comment that the circuits of this area did play an important role through the simple maintenance of membership in a time when as we shall see, many other Primitive Methodist circuits in the county were in decline.

It is clear that the most dynamic expansion in numbers during the final quarter of the century occurred in the north-west. Oswestry circuit was the largest of all the northern circuits during the nineteenth century, and between 1870 and 1875 had an annual average total of 886 members. As we have seen, there was significant mining activity in the parishes of Oswestry and St Martin throughout the nineteenth century, and in the period around 1870 there was a significant upturn in the mining industry in this region. The number of miners working in the southern part of the Oswestry coalfield peaked in 1871, as did the number of colliery enginemen employed in the northern half. The upturn in numbers has been linked to the increased consumption of

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<sup>65</sup> SRR:NM4219/4/2-36, Oswestry Circuit - Annual Return. 1866.

<sup>66</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV. p. 169.



coal by the ceramics works in this vicinity, and would clearly help to explain any expansion in the number of Primitive members in this period.<sup>67</sup> After 1875 this massive circuit was to become divided, the Rhosymedre circuit being formed in 1877, the Llanymynech in 1878, and the Ellesmere circuit in 1895. The total number of members in this north-western area increased steadily to the end of the century, increasing by 36 per cent between 1875 and 1900. This level of growth was significantly greater than the 16 per cent increase enjoyed by the denomination as a whole during this final quarter of the century. Primitive Methodists continued to enjoy success in the area around Oswestry, the circuit recovering quickly to increase its total membership after each successive division. Similarly, each of the circuits divided from it also experienced continued development. The most successful of these offshoots was the circuit of Rhosymedre located over the county boundary in Denbighshire, and it was there that the Primitive Methodists enjoyed the greatest expansion during the final quarter of the nineteenth century, members increasing by 59 per cent between 1877 and 1900. By 1900, Rhosymedre was one of only two circuits to have over 400 members.

Turning now to the central parts of the county, there were at various points during the nineteenth century a total of seven different Primitive Methodists circuits located across the seven registration districts listed earlier. For the purposes of analysis it will be occasionally useful to further divide this central area, separating the two circuits of Shrewsbury and Madeley situated in the west, from Wrockwardine Wood, Oakengates and Wellington, Dawley and Madeley situated in the east.<sup>68</sup> As we have seen all activity by the Primitive Methodists in this area derives from the missionary work of the Wrockwardine Wood circuit. However, Wrockwardine Wood was divided very early on, as Shrewsbury became a circuit in its own right in 1824, ultimately providing two main bases from which the Connexion could develop. However, Shrewsbury and its offspring Minsterley, never experienced the same level of success as those circuits in the eastern half of the region, where the Primitive Methodists were considerably more successful.

Table 9 reveals that the Primitive Methodists achieved considerable growth throughout most of the first half of the century, a pattern of expansion which continued

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<sup>67</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, pp. 87-90.

<sup>68</sup> The Stafford circuit which evolved out of Wrockwardine Wood, is not examined here being situated entirely over the county boundary in Staffordshire.

into the third quarter of the century. Between 1830 and 1850, the total number of Primitive Methodist members in these central regions expanded massively, growing by 138 per cent over the twenty year period. The picture of continued success presented here must however, be tempered by that of the very different experiences of the eastern and western halves of the region. During this period, membership in the circuit of Shrewsbury increased by 16 per cent; however in the east growth was much more dramatic, the Wrockwardine Wood circuit expanding by a total of 287 per cent over the same time. Located within the confines of the Coalbrookdale coalfield, a region which experienced rapid expansion in population during the first half of the nineteenth century, it was inevitable that membership of Wrockwardine Wood should also grow considerably too. In the years between 1835 and 1840 Shrewsbury circuit was divided twice, Newtown being separated in 1836, and Hadnall in 1838.<sup>69</sup> It also gave up control of its Irish mission during this period therefore ensuring that membership was reduced by a total of 48 per cent, although members were not actually 'lost'. Shrewsbury circuit soon recovered from these early divisions as the societies to the south of town began to grow. The total number of members increased from 310 in 1840 to 457 in 1845. However, this growth was not maintained, and membership remained at the same level for the following decade.

In the five-year period following 1850, losses in membership were sustained throughout the region. However, recovery was soon achieved and the pattern of growth was restored. In the decade between 1855 and 1865 the total number of Primitive Methodists increased by 70 per cent, reaching a peak level of 2585 members in 1866, Shrewsbury and Minsterley peaking at a total of 890 members, and Wrockwardine Wood at 1695. This period of growth was however characterised by massive expansion in the west, unlike that experienced earlier in the century which was concentrated in the east. During the period the total number of members of the Shrewsbury circuit increased from 407 to 880, a percentage increase of 116 per cent. In the first half of the decade growth was achieved as a result of expansion to the south of Shrewsbury, as Minsterley became a circuit in 1856. Membership of this circuit increased by 166 per cent between 1855 and 1861. However, these high levels of membership could not be sustained and numbers dwindled by 13 per cent over the second half of the decade.

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<sup>69</sup> The circuit in Newtown is not examined here being located primarily over the county-boundary in the



During this time the Shrewsbury circuit was also experiencing growth. After the division of 1856, numbers rose from 211 to 430 in 1865. Growth was slowest in the first half of the decade, membership only rising by 20 per cent between 1855-60. However, in the second half it rose more steeply, increasing by a total of 69 per cent, 1860-65. The considerable growth experienced by circuits in this locality during this decade was certainly stimulated by the expanding industrial activity of the Shrewsbury coalfield which covered this area, and which reached the peak of its activity during this period. During the 1860s, over 300 miners were employed in the Shrewsbury coalfield.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the 1860s were also a time of moderate prosperity for the lead industry around Minsterley.<sup>71</sup> Expansion did also occur in the east, although not to the same degree, the majority of growth being in the Wrockwardine Wood circuit, although the Dawley Green circuit also expanded after its division in 1854. In 1865, after a series of disputes over boundaries and individual societies, Wrockwardine Wood was divided for the final time, and the Oakengates and Wellington circuit was formed.<sup>72</sup>

The final phase of expansion in membership in this central region was during the five-year interval between 1875 and 1880. All circuits experienced some growth. In the west, Shrewsbury grew slightly increasing by 3 per cent and Minsterley extended its membership by 26 per cent. In the east the two circuits of Wrockwardine Wood and Oakengates and Wellington increased by 9 per cent, and Dawley Green grew by 7 per cent. However, after 1880 a general trend of decline set in. Between 1880 and 1900, Primitive Methodist membership in the central regions of the county fell by 24 per cent. From 1870, a downturn began in the industrial activity located in these central regions of the county. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Shrewsbury and Coalbrookdale coal-fields underwent decline as a result of competition from other areas. As ironworks on the Coalbrookdale coal-field began to close, and various integrated companies were broken up, the population of the area began to fall as the economy went into decline.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, large discoveries of lead in the New World also caused significant problems for the lead industry round Minsterley, as lead ore prices began to fall and one by one the lead mines closed.<sup>74</sup> However, decline in the

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registration district of Montgomery in Wales.

<sup>70</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, pp. 77-81.

<sup>71</sup> Merry, *History of Minsterley*, p. 41.

<sup>72</sup> SRR: NM1861/15 – Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Annual Return, 1865.

<sup>73</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology*, p. 99; Trinder, *The Industrial Revolution*, pp. 239-41.

<sup>74</sup> Merry, *History of Minsterley*, pp. 41-2; Burt, Waite & Burnley, *Mines of Shropshire*, pp. xii-xiii; Brook & Allbutt, *Shropshire Lead Mines*, pp. 11 & 15-6; Turner, 'Leadmining in Shropshire', p. 50.

number of Primitive Methodist members in this area of Shropshire was not as dramatic as in other parts of the county, Wrockwardine Wood remaining one of the most successful circuits in the county at the end of the nineteenth century with a total of 420 members. Only Rhosymedre circuit in the north had more members in 1900.

The ability of the Primitive Methodists to recruit and maintain a membership in the southern half of the county is perhaps the most complicated to analyse. Of the eight circuits that spanned the southern regions, four originated from the missionary efforts of the Ludlow circuit. These were Leominster, Weobley, Leintwardine and Peaton Strand.<sup>75</sup> The remaining three were Bishop's Castle and its two offshoots, Church Stretton and Clun. During the course of the century these eight circuits, including Ludlow, extended across ten registration districts and four different counties, and even crossed the border into Wales. In 1850, the Ludlow circuit alone covered five registration districts and three different counties, and despite some decrease in its size by the late nineteenth century, it was still sufficiently large to span three separate districts. This inevitably makes analysis of the Ludlow circuit a complicated process. Bishop's Castle circuit was located predominantly in the registration district of Clun, spreading into Church Stretton later in the century. Of the eight circuits located in this area, Ludlow was to attain the greatest membership figures for the whole of the century, peaking at 1282 members in 1852. Bishop's Castle circuit which was not divided until 1872, reached a peak of 580 members in 1870.

Taking the total membership figures and examining their progress at five-year intervals, it is clear that the greatest period of expansion in this region was in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1830, Ludlow was the sole circuit in this locality. By 1832, Bishop's Castle had also been formed ensuring that membership had risen from 383 in 1830 to a total of 630 in 1835. This success was maintained during the following years, the total number of members increasing by 60 per cent 1835 to 1840. By 1840 there were a total of 1012 members of the Primitive Methodist Connexion in these southern regions. However, these early advances were not consolidated upon and during the next five year period ground was lost, membership in the area declining by a quarter. How can such losses be explained? Membership of the Ludlow circuit fell by

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<sup>75</sup> It is important to note that the circuits of Presteigne and Knighton, in the county of Radnorshire are not included in the eight circuits examined here, although Presteigne and its offshoot did develop from the Ludlow circuit in 1828. However, as this division occurred so early on in the century, and the circuit is



31 per cent between 1840 and 1845, and that of Bishop's Castle by 13 per cent. Clearly then, the greatest losses were sustained by Ludlow. When we examine the figures alongside the circuit committee minutes, it becomes apparent that the Ludlow circuit had experienced several divisions, its Much Wenlock branch becoming a circuit in its own right, albeit briefly. In 1843, the Ludlow circuit reported to the Annual Conference a total membership of 668. However, in 1844 this figure stood at 410, and the Much Wenlock circuit reported a total of 214 members. Therefore, membership of the two circuits together totalled 624.<sup>76</sup> Clearly, while there was indeed a slight downturn during the year, the bulk of membership was not 'lost' but simply transferred to another authority. However, this does not explain the decrease experienced by Bishop's Castle at this time, which exacerbated the general decline of members in this area.

This phase of 'decline' did not last long as upward momentum was regained, and a massive increase in membership was achieved. In the years between 1845 and 1850, the number of members in this area increased by 104 per cent. However, once again this success is not as straightforward as it may initially appear. Bishop's Castle circuit only increased by a total of 1.3 per cent. The main gains were made by the Ludlow circuit its membership increasing by 174 per cent over the period. Between 1845 and 1849 membership increased from 450 to 701, a rise of 56 per cent. Growth was achieved during these four years as a result of increased activity in the two extremities of the circuit. Sufficient success was achieved in both Leominster in the south and Leintwardine in the west to enable each of these to become separate branches. However, between the years 1849 and 1850, the total membership increased by a further 76 per cent, a staggering rise in just one-year. Once more we see how the membership figures produced by the Primitive Methodist conference can be misleading if taken at face value, as this increase was not a result of new missionary activity, but instead of the transference of membership. During 1849, Ludlow received the Weobley branch from the Cwm circuit, the Worcester branch from Brinkworth circuit and finally the mission at Bromyard.<sup>77</sup> During the next few years the Ludlow circuit

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located entirely in Wales, I have chosen to exclude them from the discussion.

<sup>76</sup> The Much Wenlock circuit did not survive long and was soon dissolved, the various societies being taken into the Wrockwardine Wood circuit, to which they were more closely located. SRR:NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly and Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1840-50, 20 Mar-29 Apr 1843.

SRR:NM1861/162-3: Letter re. Fate of Much Wenlock circuit.

<sup>77</sup> SRR:NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly and Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1840-50, 14 Apr-13 Oct 1849.

underwent further change as the branches of Leominster and Weobley separated to form a new circuit, and Worcester was passed on to Kidderminster.

From 1850, despite some reshuffling of the Ludlow circuit, some members being passed to other authorities, the number of Primitive Methodists in the southern regions again rose considerably to 1865. This was the last phase of continued growth experienced. In the years between 1850 and 1865 the number of Primitive Methodists increased by 35 per cent, reaching a peak of 2122 members in 1866. Although Ludlow remained the largest circuit in the area at this time, averaging 853 members between 1855 and 1860 in comparison with an average of 394 in the Bishop's Castle circuit, it did not experience growth during this period. From 1850 to 1865, membership of the Bishop's Castle circuit increased by 67 per cent. Growth can be attributed to missionary activity of this circuit in the area of Church Stretton, sufficient expansion to enable Church Stretton to become a separate branch in 1860. Between 1855 and 1860 membership of the Bishop's Castle circuit annually averaged 394, however this rose to 525 in the period between 1860-65. By comparison the Ludlow circuit was characterised during this period by maintenance of its membership. In the years 1855-60 the average annual membership was 853. This changed very little over the next five-year period, averaging 847 between 1860 and 1865. Other branches and circuits experiencing growth during this phase were Leintwardine to the west of Ludlow, and Leominster and Weobley over the border in Herefordshire. Leintwardine grew by 38 per cent over the period, ensuring that it had sufficient numbers to become a circuit in 1864. Leominster and Weobley increased a total of 46 per cent between 1850 and 1865, in fact attaining a peak level during the short period after 1865. Leominster and Weobley achieved a peak of 470 members in the years 1865 and 1866, Leintwardine peaked at 391 in 1867, Church Stretton branch at 206 in 1866-7, while Peaton Strand branch achieved a peak membership of 291 in 1868.

Although Bishop's Castle circuit continued to grow after 1865, the Church Stretton branch becoming a circuit in 1872, the general picture of Primitive Methodist membership in this region is one of steady decline after 1870. As we have seen, many rural parishes, particularly in the south of the county, experienced considerable depopulation during the final stages of the nineteenth century as a result of changes in agriculture. Agricultural depression, the mechanisation of certain tasks, and the general decrease in labour demands encouraged a mass desertion of the countryside and created difficulties for many rural Primitive Methodist circuits during this period. Wearmouth



has noted that these difficulties manifested themselves in the loss of 280 village chapels in the period from 1870 to 1896.<sup>78</sup> It is clear from the evidence of the Annual Conference minutes that Connexional officials understood their precarious situation. In 1896, the minutes noted:

‘to a much larger extent that was generally thought we are a village church. Nearly 75 per cent of our chapels and a large proportion of our ‘preaching places’ are in the villages...The declining population of the villages...are in fact, creating difficulties with which many of the country circuits are unable to successfully deal.’<sup>79</sup>

In 1872, the Leintwardine circuit annual return to the District Meeting reported a loss of members due to migration and emigration and commented that

‘the station on the whole is not what we desire. The labourer’s agitation for the last 18 months has seriously affected us, the agitation in this part of the country was confined to this station’.<sup>80</sup>

The following year the circuit again reported a decline in numbers noting that ‘America is the subject of general conversation’.<sup>81</sup> Between 1865 and 1875 membership fell by 10 per cent to 1877 members. The following decade saw relatively little change as total membership in the region remained over 1800. However, there was a further decline of 8 per cent between 1885 and 1890, but once again this level remained stable until 1900. This overall decline does in fact mask a short period of increase for some circuits during the period between 1880 and 1885. Peaton Strand, Church Stretton, Leintwardine, and Leominster and Weobley all experienced an upturn in membership during the years from 1880 to 1885. Peaton Strand achieved the greatest increase, rising by a total of 19 per cent in the years between 1880 and 1886. The other circuits expanded between 4 and 8 per cent. However, despite this momentary upturn, the general downward trend of membership in this region during the later nineteenth century cannot be ignored. Between 1884 and 1900 the Ludlow circuit declined by 35 per cent. Leintwardine also declined from 1884, falling by 18 per cent to 1900. Peaton Strand’s membership fell by 29 per cent between 1887 and 1900. The picture is

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<sup>78</sup> R. F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes, 1850-1900* (Leicester, 1954), p. 104.

<sup>79</sup> Cited in E. D. Graham, ‘Chosen by God. The female itinerants of early Primitive Methodism’, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1986) p. 276.

<sup>80</sup> HRO: K76/34: Leintwardine Circuit – Annual Return 1872.

<sup>81</sup> HRO: K76/34: Leintwardine Circuit – Annual Return 1873.

however slightly different in the southwest of the county, where membership levels were maintained fairly evenly until the end of the century. In 1884, the Clun branch of the Bishop's Castle circuit was formed into a circuit; a factor that clearly suggests a level of continued success in this area. In this year the Bishop's Castle circuit had a total of 355 members; in 1900 the members of Bishop's Castle and Clun together still totalled 350. Similarly, the Church Stretton circuit was also able to maintain its level of membership almost until the end of the century, decline only setting in from 1898. Clearly, the picture of overall decline in this region must be tempered by one of the maintenance of members in certain parts.

### Conclusion.

What are we able to ascertain from these figures about the general trends in Primitive Methodist membership during the nineteenth century? Currie, Gilbert and Horsley have identified five phases in the growth cycle of membership. The first is 'depression' in which recruitment is low. As church leaders are relatively inactive, any expansion during this phase is usually attained through the families of current members. However losses are inevitably low. The second phase is 'activation', one of a series of possible changes, which produces an increased drive for recruitment. The third phase is that of 'revival', when recruitment rates increase rapidly. Currie, Gilbert and Horsley suggest that this phase is generally characterised by 'effort and excitement', but point out that losses are higher, as new recruits quickly fall by the wayside. 'Activation' is then followed by a period of 'deactivation', as leaders and members lose the confidence and motivation necessary to sustain expansion, and further losses occur as the drive for recruitment decline. Finally, in a phase of 'declension' recruitment and loss rates fall simultaneously, and the pool of adherence becomes replenished, taking the cycle back into a period of 'depression'.<sup>82</sup> Gilbert has argued that the membership figures of the Methodist churches reveal a clear pattern that 'consisted of a succession of short-term cycles' with the peaks and troughs of these cycles occurring at 'intervals of between five and ten years'.<sup>83</sup>

This is borne out by the figures of Shropshire, and is particularly true of the first half of the nineteenth century when the Primitive Methodists were still expanding

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<sup>82</sup> Currie, Gilbert & Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>83</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 190.



rapidly. Up to 1850 the longest period of expansion or decline was ten years, after which a trend of the opposite nature set in, again lasting between five and ten years. For example, in the north numbers increased between 1830 and 1840, fell over the following five years to 1845 and subsequently rose again to 1850. Similar patterns of growth were witnessed throughout the county, although not necessarily at the same time, cycles varying throughout the region. In the years 1845 to 1850 the Primitive Methodists experienced growth in all parts, followed by a phase of decline throughout the county in the following five-year period. Gilbert has noted that the maintenance or improvement of membership levels was not due to

‘consistent recruitment at levels sufficient to offset inevitable losses, but to sporadic periods of extremely heavy recruitment which compensated for longer intervening phases of virtual stagnation or decline.’<sup>84</sup>

He goes on to suggest that the cycles of high growth in the years 1840 to 1914 were the ‘statistical reflections’ of what contemporaries generally labelled religious revival, the most emphatic peaks coming in 1849, 1859-60, 1874-76, 1881-83 and 1904-06.<sup>85</sup> As we have seen, the period of ‘revival’ between 1859 and 1860 is clearly reflected in the figures for Shropshire. Between the years 1855 to 1860, the total number of Primitive Methodists in the county increased by 33 per cent, a pattern of growth that was not only in line with national expansion, but which was in fact sustained for a further five years. All regions of the county reached their peak levels of membership as a result of activity carried out during this phase. Membership peaked in the north of the county in 1862, while the southern and central regions both peaked in 1866. Looking more closely at individual circuits, we see that the Wrockwardine Wood circuit increased by 55 per cent, 1859-64. Similarly, Minsterley circuit increased by 35 per cent 1858-61, and Oswestry by 24 per cent between 1859 and 1862. Gilbert has argued that revivals were notable because they provided such clear contrast with the normal level of growth. However, he goes on to point out that they only represented a ‘sporadic and short-lived resumption’ of the type of expansion that had occurred during earlier periods of Nonconformist activity. One of the most important factors stimulating revival was the presence of political dispute associated with religious matters. The revival that peaked during this period coincided with the most intense stage of the political crusade against

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<sup>84</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 192.

<sup>85</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, pp. 192-4.

church rates.<sup>86</sup> Another factor that influenced growth over short periods was fluctuation in the economy. Currie, Gilbert and Horsley, have argued that there were some short-term changes in the pattern of growth that appear to have been associated with changes in the economic climate, but suggest that in general such fluctuations had a 'rather diffuse influence on church growth'<sup>87</sup>. We have seen in the case of Shropshire that economic developments could indeed have an important effect upon the membership levels of the Primitives. Industrial expansion on the eastern coalfields acted to stimulate increases in the number of Primitive Methodist members in that area during the first half of the century, while agricultural depression in the south towards the end of the period had a detrimental affect upon numbers.

So what have we learnt about the general experiences of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire during the nineteenth century? Clearly the greatest gains of the Connexion were made in the northern registration districts of the county. It was in this area that the largest numbers were drawn into Primitive Methodist circles; and perhaps most importantly it was here that the Connexion was to experience continued growth, expanding until the close of the century. The central regions of the county attained similar membership figures as the north, both peaking at approximately 2580 members. However, circuits in this area were unable to maintain this level, membership falling to the end of the century. Finally, it was in the south that the Primitives had the least success throughout the century, and while this region cannot be presented as an example of failure, it was here that decline began the earliest, and where numbers fell the most.

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<sup>86</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 194.

<sup>87</sup> Currie, Gilbert & Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers*, p. 105.



## **Chapter 7: Locations of Primitive Methodist Success and Failure**

Examination of circuit membership figures has given us a clear insight into the geographical successes and failures of the Primitive Methodist Connexion across the county of Shropshire during the course of the nineteenth century. However, while we have identified some of the possible short-term causes of growth or decline in membership numbers, it is now necessary to establish those factors which enabled the denomination to thrive in the local setting, and those which ultimately led to its eventual failure in others. Why was Primitive Methodism more successful in establishing places of worship in some parts of Shropshire than in others? In order to answer this question, it will be necessary to examine Primitive Methodism at the level of the parish, looking in particular at structures of landownership, and at the role played by both the Church of England and the various Nonconformist groups.

Snell and Ell have argued that some of the most important hypotheses presented in the study of nineteenth century religious history have been concerned with the geographical strengths and weaknesses of the Church of England. In particular historians have examined how this related not only to the development of Wesleyan Methodism and its various offshoots, but also to the regional presence of the older dissenting bodies. The debate that surrounds this issue spans a considerable period of time. In 1935, Tillyard suggested that Methodism grew strong in regions that were ‘noticeably distinct and separate’ from those in which denominations such as the Congregationalists, Baptists and Presbyterians found success. Historians such as Currie and Gilbert have subsequently added to the discussion, arguing that while older dissent became strong in those locations in which the Church of England was strong, absorbing membership from the Established Church, Methodism developed in those regions in which it was weak, attracting new members that the Church could not reach.<sup>1</sup> This point is reiterated by Watts who comments that new dissent flourished in areas previously prepared by the Church of England, but where the Established Church had ‘proved incapable of reaping the harvest’ and where its

‘inflexible parochial structure, inadequate pastoral machinery, and unemotional

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<sup>1</sup> Tillyard, ‘The Distribution of the Free Churches in England’, *Sociological Review* 27, (1935); R. Currie, ‘A micro-theory of Methodist growth’, in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 36, (1987); Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 185-7.

moralistic theology... proved inadequate to meet their spiritual needs'.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly then, the historiography presents the Church as having the 'pivotal role' in the geographical development of other denominations, and suggests that the success of Nonconformity in general came 'only where the Church was either too weak or too negligent to defend its traditional monopoly of English religious practice.'<sup>3</sup>

Discussion about the role of the Church of England in relation to the geographical successes and failures of Nonconformity ultimately begins with the parish. The character of each individual parish varied considerably across the country; not only were there great disparities in the size of parishes and their populations, but also in territory they encompassed. It has been noted that the parochial system was most appropriate in the small, compact communities of pre-industrial England.<sup>4</sup> In smaller parishes, with small-nucleated village settlements and centrally located churches, the Anglicans were able to provide much more easily for their parishioners. The parish church was the focus of local religious activity, and its incumbent not only played an integral role within the community, but was also commanded considerable influence. This relationship discouraged dissent of any kind. In many of the larger parishes the inhabitants were often grouped in scattered and irregular settlements. Even if the population was small, this presented the Church of England with the difficulty of maintaining contact with parishioners who could live several miles from the parish church. In these situations the parochial system was often unworkable. In remote areas of these large parishes, dissenting denominations were able to gain a foothold, and although Anglican chapelries were regularly created to provide a link between Church and parishioners, these did not enjoy the same status, and did not always have the same appeal as their Nonconformist counterparts.<sup>5</sup> Further problems arose for the Church when boundary settlements grew up at the borders or on common land shared by two or more parishes. Everitt has argued that these settlements 'fostered independent and lawless behaviour'; here parochial jurisdictions were difficult to define, and disputes often developed.<sup>6</sup> Away from the watchful eye of Anglican authorities and relatively

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<sup>2</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 187-9.

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 99; M. Urdank, *Religion and Society in a Cotswold Vale – Nailsworth, Gloucestershire, 1780-1865* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 16-7.

<sup>5</sup> B. Greaves, 'Methodism in Yorkshire, 1740-1851', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1968), p. 333; Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, pp. 99-100 & Urdank, *Religion and Society*, pp. 16-7.

<sup>6</sup> A. Everitt, *The Pattern of Rural Dissent: in the nineteenth century*, (Leicester, 1972), pp. 22-3.



free from the constraints of the law, dissent was able to flourish.

Obelkevich has argued that the size of the parish, the pattern of settlement within it, and the structure of landownership 'combined to exert the most powerful of indirect influences on social relations and religious life.'<sup>7</sup> Of these he suggests that it was the structure of landownership, which was the most important influence upon the local religious geography of a parish.<sup>8</sup> Historians wishing to distinguish parishes by means of their structure of landownership have generally categorised them in terms of either being 'open' or 'closed'. Closed parishes were characterised by a high concentration of ownership in which all or most of the land in the parish was owned by a single landlord. In open parishes, ownership of the land was much more widely distributed; although there were often several large landowners with small or medium holdings, there was a much higher proportion of smallholders. In the closed parishes the power of the landowner was immense, especially if he resided in the parish, and dissenting religious groups could easily be prevented from gaining a foothold in these communities. As a result, historians have regarded these types of parishes as much more conformist, and have therefore seen them as secure ground for the Established Church, whose interests were often well protected by the local landowners. In contrast, open parishes were generally larger in area and had a more scattered population, a factor that ensured that the inhabitants could maintain a level of independence from their landlords.<sup>9</sup> Dissent was able to thrive in these more relaxed conditions, and as a result open parishes were often religiously pluralistic.<sup>10</sup>

In their recent study of the geography of Victorian religion, Snell and Ell have examined the role of landownership in shaping the religious character of a parish, and have attempted to test the hypothesis that the Established Church fared best in 'closed' parishes, while dissent thrived in more 'open' situations. In order to classify a total of 1,524 parishes in terms of their landownership, Snell and Ell have made use of the *Imperial Gazetteer*, an important Victorian source that provides information about many parishes across the country. The *Imperial Gazetteer* placed parishes into one of four categories according to its structure of ownership; land was either 'held in one

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<sup>7</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 8; Urdank, *Religion and Society*, pp. 16-7.

<sup>8</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 11-3.

<sup>10</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 375.

hand', 'not much divided or in few hands', 'sub-divided' or 'much sub-divided'.<sup>11</sup> Although the *Imperial Gazetteer* does not provide landownership data for every parish in the country, and the origin of the material used remains unclear, these problems are insufficient to detract from the overall value of the source. In order to test the evidence presented in the gazetteer, Snell and Ell have compared it with Leicestershire land-tax data, and have found that this in fact confirms many of the findings made.<sup>12</sup> As we shall see, it is clear from their research that structures of land division did indeed make a considerable impact upon the location of religious bodies within the local setting. However, they suggest that the influence of landownership should be considered alongside a 'wider range of matters'. In particular they argue that it is vital not only to examine 'the local political significance of religious views, the broader cultural regions within in which denominations gained ground, the presence and rivalry of other denominations', but also 'the prior standing and disposition of the Church of England.'<sup>13</sup>

If we first examine the relationship between the Church of England and the division of land, it is clear from Snell and Ell's research that the Established Church did indeed have greatest success in those parishes of most highly concentrated landownership. While population levels and the actual size of a parish had some effect upon the geographical success of the Anglican Church, Snell and Ell argue that landownership remained the dominant factor however the evidence was tested, and comment that 'this historical view can now be regarded as definitely proven'.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the hypothesis that dissent flourished in those parishes where the division of land was greater also stood firm in light of detailed analysis. While the acreage of each individual parish and the population within it again played a part in determining the level of dissent present, once more it was the factor of landownership which provided the strongest influence. Their research also revealed that parishes became more religiously diverse as one moved from the closed to open situations; those parishes with the greatest divisions of ownership demonstrated the highest levels of diversity. Some historians have suggested that the religious character of a parish had less to do with the structure of land division and much more do with their size. For example Spufford has

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<sup>11</sup> J. M. Wilson, *The Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh, 1874).

<sup>12</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 441-4.

<sup>13</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 369-70.

<sup>14</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 373-4.



noted that religious dissent found a natural home in larger parishes, and that these were by the virtue of their size the more 'open' of parishes. She argues that the causal links identified between the structure of landownership and religion may in fact be a result of the parishes being larger in size, and therefore inevitably more pluralistic in their character. Although Snell and Ell admit that there is 'some justification for this hypothesis' they argue that factors of landownership produced a greater influence upon local religious geography than the actual size of the parish.<sup>15</sup>

The strong relationship between ownership of land and religion is to be explained by 'the nature of dependency and the exercise of power in the different types of parishes.'<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that one should be careful about making generalisations about the ways in which landowners chose to exercise their power. In many parishes the authority of the landlord was absolute, and many felt justified intervening in many different aspects of parish life. Not only could landowners manipulate population levels by controlling the amount of housing available, they could also scrutinise the behaviour and religious inclinations of their tenants, and could continue to superintend these through the application of restrictive clauses.<sup>17</sup> In his history of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds, Woodcock presents the example of Sir Tatton Sykes who attempted to prevent the Wesleyan Methodists meeting at Sledmere, by threatening them with eviction,

'If you don't turn out these runabout preachers you'll have to give up your holding.'<sup>18</sup>

Another important way in which land-owning interests were able to prevent the growth of Nonconformity was to deny them land on which to build a chapel. This was a common problem for all denominations, and is one that was regularly noted in the histories and magazines of the Primitive Methodist Connexion. Often the local clergy, who were driven to protect the interests of the Church, positively encouraged landowners in their actions against dissenting denominations. Ritson cites the example of Tallarn Green, Flintshire, where 'a much desired site of land could only be obtained

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<sup>15</sup> M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 31; Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 372.

<sup>16</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 383.

<sup>17</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 11-3.

<sup>18</sup> Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry*, p. 129.

by securing the assent of certain members of the parish church'.<sup>19</sup> In order to block the efforts of the Primitive Methodists in achieving their goal, the local clergyman agreed that they could have the land, but only if they fulfilled certain conditions. The Primitive Methodist members were required to attend Holy Communion at the parish church, to accept confirmation from the Bishop, to pledge to attend worship at the church every Sunday morning, and to recognise the headship of the clergyman, notifying him of all their affairs and activities. Inevitably this 'generous' offer was declined.<sup>20</sup> Annual returns made by the Shropshire Primitive Methodist circuit of Leintwardine reveal much about the pressures placed upon societies and meetings by the actions of the local landowners. As a result of encouragement from the local 'Puseyite Clergyman', A. K. B. Knight, a considerable landowner in the area of Downton Common, informed the tenants of two of his houses that they faced eviction if they continued to hold Primitive Methodist meetings. In accordance with a signed agreement the tenants were given one month to give up their dissenting activities, and because Knight owned all of the housing in the area, the Primitive Methodists were unable to find alternative accommodation, and were therefore denied the opportunity to continue their meetings in this location. The annual return for 1864 refers to the great secrecy and caution with which the circuit attempted to purchase land on which to build a chapel, and reveals the careful negotiations made to obtain one of the very few plots of land that was not owned by Knight.<sup>21</sup> Watts provides some interesting examples of the various attempts made by Nottinghamshire Methodists to obtain a permanent place of worship in locations where land was denied to them. For example, in 1844 Wesleyan Methodists in the Bingham circuit commissioned the construction of a wooden chapel mounted on wheels. This enabled the chapel to be moved on certain occasions into those villages where all the land was the property of noblemen and other such large proprietors. At Shelford, where the land was owned exclusively by the Earl of Chesterfield, the Primitive Methodists took to the water, purchasing a boat that had originally been used as a waterman's chapel in Nottingham.<sup>22</sup>

Although Nonconformist denominations were faced with considerable

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<sup>19</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 222.

<sup>20</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 222-3.

<sup>21</sup> HRO: K76/34: Leintwardine Circuit - Chapel Schedules and Annual Returns, 1853-1928, Annual Return 1864.

<sup>22</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 117.



difficulties in many of the closed parishes of the nation, it is important to note that in many others the main land-owning interests were much more tolerating of dissent, and in some particular cases they positively encouraged its progress and development.<sup>23</sup> Watts presents an example of the positive measures taken by some landlords to aid the progress of dissent. In Peterborough in 1833, Earl Fitzwilliam not only created a site for a Wesleyan Methodist chapel in the new thoroughfare he was building, but also contributed £25 towards its construction.<sup>24</sup> Burrows has discovered several instances of the positive involvement of local landowners in the building of Primitive Methodist chapels in Shropshire and the neighbouring county of Herefordshire. For example, in 1843 the Duke of Sutherland provided the Prees Green circuit with land to build a chapel at Ellerdine. Similarly, in 1884 Lord Hill of Hawkstone Park donated land for a chapel at Moston, and in 1890, the Marquis of Bath gave land worth £120 for a chapel at Snailbeach.<sup>25</sup> Another illustration of the positive relations that could exist between the Primitive Methodists and local landowners, is highlighted by the example of the chapel at Adley Moor in the Leintwardine circuit. Each year the society paid rent of 1 shilling to Squire Harley, upon whose land their chapel was located. Ultimately, only those landlords who were resident on their land were able to exercise any real influence over the religious choices made by their tenants, and as Obelkevich has pointed out, there were many compelling factors during the nineteenth century which led landowners to live away from their country residences.<sup>26</sup>

Examination of the various socio-economic conditions of the different kinds of parishes suggest that the relationship between landownership and religious freedom went far beyond the ability of the landlord to control the pursuits of his tenants. Snell and Ell have argued that the inhabitants of the closed parishes exhibited a much greater level of dependency in comparison with those living in more open situations. Analysis of the annual values of Anglican livings and real property, reveal that the Established Church was financially stronger in many of the parishes where landownership was

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<sup>23</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 384.

<sup>24</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 117.

<sup>25</sup> Burrows, 'Religious provision and practice', pp. 283-4.

<sup>26</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp.27-31.

highly concentrated. This gave the Church considerable economic power, particularly in matters of charity distribution, and enabled the Anglicans to gain the support of the local inhabitants. Not only was the Established Church generally wealthier in closed parishes, but examination of property values and relief expenditure reveal that in *per capita* terms, the average values and acreage of property per inhabitant was also well over that found in most open parishes. The low level of unemployment in closed parishes also increased the financial security of its inhabitants. However when parishioners did require assistance, higher *per capita* poor relief payments ensured that they received more generous levels of relief.<sup>27</sup> It is clear that inhabitants would have felt the need to protect their interests. The power of the Church to withhold vital financial relief from those parishioners, who dared to join with the Dissenters, is highlighted by the story of Norfolk Primitive Methodist John Kent. When the clergyman discovered that John Kent has been attending meetings at the local Primitive Methodist society, he threatened that if Kent should continue with the 'noisy, outlawed and fanatical set' he would deny the family any parish privileges during the winter.<sup>28</sup> This helps explain why so many remained faithful to the Established Church in closed parishes and why others willingly joined clergymen and landowners in a collective attack upon the appearance of dissent. This idea is further emphasised by the example of the Bromyard Mission. The Annual Report of 1872 comments that the 'station is not prosperous' as a result of the country being 'full of little parish churches and a very pursuing clergy'. It goes on to point out that:

'the people being poor are under their influence and are afraid to attend our places of worship.'<sup>29</sup>

In contrast the experience in more open parishes was quite different, and any display of dissent against both the Church, landowners and local authorities carried a much lesser financial and social penalty. Snell and Ell have argued that the considerable pressures on employment, the exploitative working relations, and low levels of poor relief, combined with the practice of rack-renting and provision of squalid housing ensured that 'dissent came more naturally as a habit of mind'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 384-9.

<sup>28</sup> Rev. D. Newton, *True to Principle: The Story of John Kent, An Agricultural Labourer in the County of Norfolk* (London, N.D.), p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> HRO: W66/22: Bromyard Circuit – Annual Report, 1872.

<sup>30</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 375-389.



Moreover this spirit of independence was reinforced by the economic context within which the parishioners carried out their daily existence; inhabitants were driven by the need to compete effectively within an extensive and diverse market, and were forced to protect their individual rights. In this situation any choices to be made in religious matters were simply considered alongside all other daily decisions; and religious faith often provided the opportunity to consolidate upon other financial and social relationships.<sup>31</sup>

Other historians have also noted the importance of economic and social structures for the penetration and growth of dissent in the local setting. For example, Valenze has suggested that the industrial villages of many large open parishes were particularly receptive to cottage religion. She argues that the considerable numbers of unemployed and migrant poor that were drawn into the 'rural slums' of these industrial villages were all potential converts for dissent, and for Primitive Methodism in particular. She comments that,

'In these pockets of the "masterless" poor, the class basis of Methodist sectarianism gave labourers an ideology and a community.'<sup>32</sup>

In his work on the locations of rural dissent, Everitt also highlighted the role of decaying market towns for the development of religious Nonconformity, arguing that these populous rural communities were 'almost invariably amongst the chiefholds of rural Dissent' during the nineteenth century. Here the inhabitants were free from the control of the squirearchy and stood unopposed in their religious choices.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Situation in Shropshire:**

Let us now explore the location of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire, looking first at patterns of landownership and the role played by the Church, before examining the effect of other factors such as settlement patterns, population growth and the role of local economics. In 1851, Shropshire had a total of 224 civil parishes and 5 extra-parochial divisions.<sup>34</sup> The size and nature of these parishes varied. Ellesmere and Clun were the two largest parishes in the county. Ellesmere spanned 26,633 acres and had

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<sup>31</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 389.

<sup>32</sup> Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, pp. 102-3.

<sup>33</sup> Everitt, *The Pattern of Rural Dissent*, pp. 29-31.

<sup>34</sup> Samuel Bagshaw, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Shropshire; Comprising a General Survey of the County...* (Sheffield, 1851), p. 7.

25 townships, while Clun, the second largest parish in the county spanned 19,782 acres. In contrast, the smallest parish was St Lawrence (Ludlow), spanning just 240 acres.<sup>35</sup> During the nineteenth century, we discover that Shropshire was one of the most 'gentrified' counties in England. In 1873 a national survey of landownership revealed that the gentry owned 44 per cent of the land in Shropshire; this compared with an average of 29.5 per cent for the country as a whole. Of this the 'squirearchy', members of the lesser gentry who held estates of 1,000-3,000 acres or alternatively those with larger estates whose rentals were below £3,000, held 13 per cent. Members of the 'greater gentry', those who had estates of 3-10,000 acres, held the remaining 31 per cent. Clearly, the greater gentry occupied a considerable area in Shropshire during the later nineteenth century, particularly when one compares this with the national average, which was just 17 per cent.<sup>36</sup> The *Victoria County History* for Shropshire notes that in the year 1872-3, there were 65 'squires' with estates of between 1,000 and 3,000 acres, 52 men who owned estates of 3,000 acres and above, and a further 8 who owned estates that were over 10,000 acres.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps what is most interesting about the gentry of Shropshire is that they were particularly noted for their ancient lineages. In 1873, there were a total of 160 gentry and squires in Shropshire who held estates of 1,000-10,000 acres. Of these, the origins of 106 can be established, three-fifths of which can be traced back beyond the eighteenth century.<sup>38</sup> The high incidence of larger 'gentry' estates in Shropshire inevitably suggests that much of the county was relatively undivided in terms of landownership; however it is difficult to ascertain how this was reflected at the level of the parish. If we now examine the information contained within the *Imperial Gazetteer* we are not only able to obtain further insight into the structures of land division in Shropshire during this period, but also to categorise many of the individual parishes.

It is important to note that although there were a considerable number of omissions in the data presented in the *Imperial Gazetteer*, the coverage of Shropshire actually compares very favourably with that of the study area examined by Snell and Ell. Snell and Ell suggested that the *Imperial Gazetteer* gave information about the

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<sup>35</sup> 1851 *Census of Great Britain*, Population vol. 6, pp. 854-5. The parish of St. Lawrence was situated in the southernmost extreme of the county, and contained the municipal borough of Ludlow.

<sup>36</sup> F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), pp. 112-5.

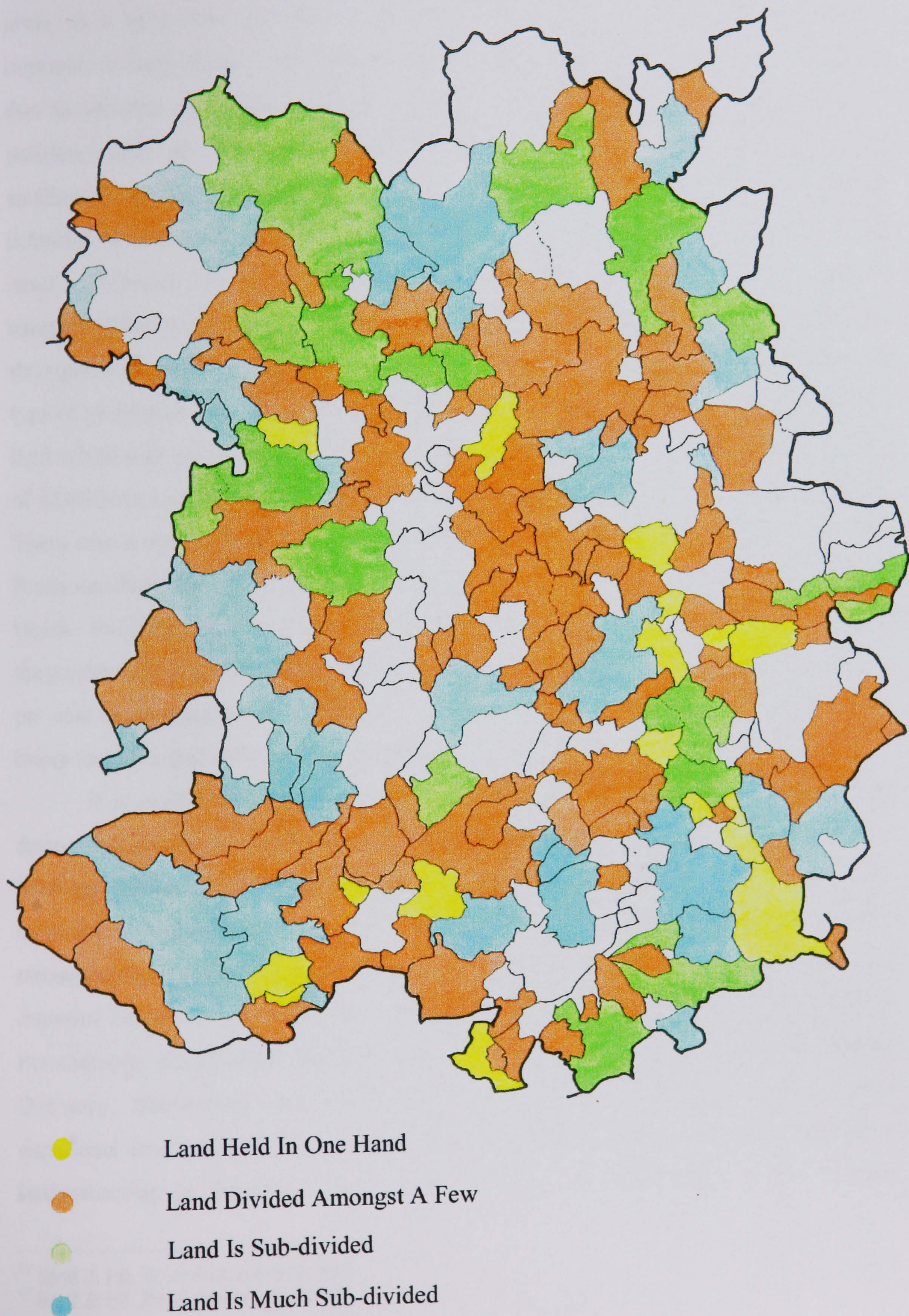
<sup>37</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. IV, pp. 250-1.

<sup>38</sup> Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 124.



Figure 3

STRUCTURES OF LANDOWNERSHIP IN SHROPSHIRE





structure of landownership in a total of 62 per cent of the 1,524 parishes that they studied.<sup>39</sup> However, in the case of Shropshire, the gazetteer provides data for well over 70 per cent of the parishes in the county. Therefore, as figure 3 reveals, the gazetteer gives us a very clear picture of the division of land at the parish level. First impressions from figure 3 are that the land of Shropshire was little sub-divided, and that its parishes were predominantly 'closed'. If we first examine the incidence of parishes where the land was held entirely by one person, it is clear that these were the smallest in number. Only 9 per cent of the parishes for which the gazetteer provides information about the structure of ownership were classified as being 'held in one hand'. However, the great majority of parishes in the county fell into the second category ('not much divided or in a few hands'). Although these were scattered throughout the entire county, it is clear that there were particular regions where this type of parish dominated. In the southern half of the county there was a clear band of land which was relatively undivided, cutting across the county from the western parish of Mainstone to the eastern parishes of Neenton, Ditton Priors, and Cleobury North. There was a second band sweeping up from the centrally located parishes of Church Preen and Hughley to the northern parishes of Lee Brockhurst and Stanton upon Hine Heath. Parishes that fell into the first two categories made up a total of 70 per cent of the parishes for which the gazetteer gave data about ownership. In comparison, only 11 per cent of the parishes in Shropshire were characterised by the *Imperial Gazetteer* as being 'sub-divided' and a further 19 per cent as being 'much sub-divided'.

It is perhaps fair to point out that the picture of landownership in Shropshire during this period as determined by the gazetteer maybe a slightly misleading one. Snell and Ell have argued that omissions in the data were more likely to occur for the most sub-divided or urban parishes where the numbers of landowners were perhaps too numerous to ascertain.<sup>40</sup> In the case of Shropshire, many of the parishes for which the *Imperial Gazetteer* omitted to give information would have fallen into this category. For example, the gazetteer does not provide data about the parishes of Church Stretton, Oswestry, Shrewsbury and Wellington, which were indeed urban centres with significant levels of population during the nineteenth century. Clearly, the picture of landownership in Shropshire would have appeared rather different if all information

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<sup>39</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 441.

<sup>40</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 444.



about these ‘much divided’ parishes had been included. However, although it is evident that parishes for which data is missing were indeed areas of significant subdivision of land, it is important to note that we cannot make this assumption about all of the parishes for which the gazetteer fails to provide information. County directories enable us to fill in some of the gaps. If we look at the parishes of Adderley, Aston Botterell, Burwarton, Condover, Hopton Cangeford, More, Shelve, Sibdon Carwood, Sutton, Tong, Willey and Woolstaston we see that there was in fact very little subdivision of ownership throughout the period from 1851 to 1891. For example, the parish of More was owned during this entire period by the family from whose name it derived.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the parish of Sutton was owned solely by Lord Berwick.<sup>42</sup> Again, if we look at the parish of Sibdon Carwood, we discover that in 1851 the land was owned in its entirety by James Baxter, and in 1891 complete ownership of the parish had passed to the Reverend Henry Fleming Baxter.<sup>43</sup> Condover also had one main landowner throughout the latter half of the century, in 1851 this was Edward William Smythe Owen Esq. and in 1891 Reginald Cholmondley esq.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in Woolstaston the land was also held throughout this period by one principal owner, in 1851 by W. W. Whitmore esq., and in 1891 by Reverend Francis Henry Wolrych-Whitmore.<sup>45</sup> In 1851, land in the parish of Tong was held by four different owners, however by 1891 it was owned solely by the Earl of Bradford.<sup>46</sup> In other parishes too, directories reveal that the land was very little divided. For example, the parishes of Monkhopton, Rushbury, Stapleton, and Stow were all divided between just two landowners during this period. Other parishes such as Bitterley, Hope Bowdler and Shipton had between three and four different owners. Evidently, while some of the parishes for which information was missing were clearly open parishes with numerous landowners, a great many of these parishes were in fact very little divided in terms of their structure of ownership, therefore supporting our earlier assumptions that Shropshire was a county

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<sup>41</sup> Bagshaw, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Shropshire*, pp. 703-4; *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire* (London, 1891), p. 367.

<sup>42</sup> Bagshaw, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Shropshire*, pp. 515-6; *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire*, p. 450.

<sup>43</sup> Bagshaw, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Shropshire*, p. 705; *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire*, p. 443.

<sup>44</sup> Bagshaw, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Shropshire*, pp. 501-2; *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire*, pp. 302-3.

<sup>45</sup> Bagshaw, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Shropshire*, pp. 516-7; *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire*, p. 481.

<sup>46</sup> Bagshaw, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Shropshire*, p. 486; *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire*, p.

of the gentry.

If, as it has been argued, the role of landownership played a significant part in determining the location and ultimate success of a Nonconformist denomination in the nineteenth century, to what extent did the geography of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire reflect the county's relatively 'closed' structure of ownership? When the Religious Census was carried out in March 1851, there was a total of 69 Primitive Methodist chapels and 79 meeting houses in Shropshire. The denomination surpassed all other Nonconformist bodies in terms of its penetration of the county. Dissenting religious groups were present in a total of 105 parishes of Shropshire in 1851. While the Wesleyan Methodists appeared in 46 of these, and the Independents in 33, the Primitive Methodists had a chapel or meeting place in a total of 68 different parishes, a clear testament to the major efforts of its early missionaries. Although one quarter of Primitive Methodist places of worship were located in parishes for which the *Imperial Gazetteer* failed to provide information about the division of land, we are still able to gain a very clear picture of the location of the denomination in relation to the structures of landownership.

**Table 10 – Parish landownership and the presence of Primitive Methodism.**<sup>47</sup>

Parish type	Nos. of Parishes	Nos. of parishes with presence of PM	% of parishes with presence of PM
Land Held In One Hand	16	0	0
Land Divided Amongst a Few	104	30	29
Land Is Sub-divided	19	9	47
Land is Much Sub-divided	32	12	37

Table 10 reveals that Primitive Methodism found its way into all but one of the parish categories, as we may expect, the denomination having no success where the land was owned entirely by one person. However, what is perhaps surprising is that by 1851 Primitive Methodism had penetrated 29 per cent of those parishes where the land was divided amongst a few, parishes which some would regard as being relatively 'closed'. If we look at the total number of Primitive Methodist places of worship in Shropshire in 1851 we can see that 58 (or 39 per cent) were located in parishes where the land was divided amongst a few. The remaining chapels and meeting places were divided

452.  
<sup>47</sup> The presence of Primitive Methodism is taken here to mean all chapels and meeting places recorded in the Religious Census of 1851 (SRR: H. O. 129 352-366).



equally between the two categories of open parishes, a total of 18 per cent in each parish type. Although we cannot make assumptions about the denomination's success in each of the parish types, it is clear that the structure of landownership did not present a considerable barrier to Primitive Methodist expansion across the county.

It has been argued that Nonconformist denominations often had difficulties when attempting to obtain land upon which to build a permanent place of worship, and it has been made clear that the Primitive Methodists certainly experienced problems of this nature in Shropshire. The Religious Census reveals that just under half of all houses in which Primitive Methodist meetings were held were situated in closed parishes. Clearly, this supports the idea that Primitive Methodism struggled to obtain permanent places of worship in those parishes in which the land was little divided, and in which the landowners had the power to impede their progress. Regularly denied the opportunity to acquire land upon which to build a chapel, the Primitive Methodists had to be satisfied with simply being able to continue their services. However, while the building of a chapel was a goal to which most Primitive Methodist societies aspired, the cottage meeting system not only gave them considerable flexibility, but also enabled the denomination to maintain a presence in these parishes. The societies of Rock and Pant in the Oswestry circuit for example, met in two cottages for over 40 years.

‘For many years the want of a chapel in a central situation has been deeply felt, and land whereupon to build has been frequently sought from the proprietors of the surrounding estates; but...the good people were disappointed and disheartened by the determined opposition they met with.’<sup>48</sup>

In 1866, after many years of trying, they secured some land, and when a chapel was erected Primitive Methodism finally gained a ‘permanent’ foothold in the community.<sup>49</sup> Although the majority of Shropshire Primitive Methodist meeting places were concentrated in the second category of closed parishes, the census reveals that the denomination was equally successful in putting up buildings in the different parish types. In 1851, 29 per cent of Primitive Methodist chapels were located in parishes where the land was divided amongst a few. 21 per cent had been built in those where the land was divided, 25 per cent in parishes with significant land sub-division, and finally 25 per cent of the denomination's chapels were located in those parishes which

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<sup>48</sup> PMM, 1866, p. 690.

<sup>49</sup> PMM, 1866, p. 690.

the *Imperial Gazetteer* fails to provide data about the structure of ownership. While it is clear that the Primitive Methodists did indeed have a greater proportion of its chapels in the open parishes of the county, their ability to obtain permanent places of worship in the second category of closed parishes cannot be denied.

In order to establish the relative success of Primitive Methodism at the level of the parish, it is necessary to scrutinise further the evidence of the Religious Census. If, as it has been argued, the location and strength of Nonconformity in the nineteenth century depended upon the relative successes and failures of the Church of England, we must first begin by examining the experience of the Established Church. Using the Religious Census of 1851 it is possible to calculate an index of attendance for the Anglican Church in each parish of Shropshire.<sup>50</sup> Clearly, this helps us to establish the geographical successes and failures of the Church in the county in the mid-nineteenth century, and to examine the relationship between the Established Church and the dissenting denominations in each parish in which they appeared. Both Obelkevich and Watts have ascertained that attendances at the services of the Established Church in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire were highest in those small parishes with fewer than 200 people, and in which the ownership of land was concentrated in just a few hands. In contrast, attendances were lowest in parishes with more than 600 people, and in which the land was much sub-divided.<sup>51</sup> Analysis of Anglican attendances in Shropshire provides clear evidence to support the findings of Obelkevich and Watts. The average IA attained by the Established Church in the parishes of Shropshire was 46.3. However, the strength of the Church inevitably varied considerably across the county. Of the 191 parishes for which an index of attendance can be calculated, the Church of England achieved an IA of 60 or more in a total of 46 parishes.<sup>52</sup> 74 per cent of these parishes had a population of below 300 in 1851, and all but two were relatively

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<sup>50</sup> SRR: H.O. 129 352-366, Religious Census of 1851. The index of attendance (IA) is arrived at by adding together the total attendances of the Church of England, expressed as a percentage of the total population of the parish in 1851.

<sup>51</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 12 & 154-5; Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 114.

<sup>52</sup> As figures of attendance are missing for several Anglican places of worship, it is therefore not possible to calculate an index of attendance for every parish in the county. For example, the incumbent of Rushbury parish church fails to provide exact attendance figures, complaining about the different number of attendants in the winter and summer. It is important to be aware that the calculation of an index of attendance at the level of the parish is a somewhat imprecise method of examining the success of a denomination in the local setting; inhabitants often crossed parochial boundaries to attend worship in adjoining or other neighbouring parishes.



undivided in terms of landownership. The Established Church attained its greatest levels of attendance in the parishes of Hopton Cangeford (208.7), Battlefield (145.6), Deuxhill (143.5), Badger (140) and Sibdon Carwood (130). These were all small parishes which spanned less than 1000 acres, and which contained tiny populations. For example, Hopton Cangeford had a population of just 23 in 1851. Moreover, these were all parishes where the land was relatively undivided. As we have seen, Sibdon Carwood was owned by a single person throughout the nineteenth century. It is also interesting to note that these parishes were situated predominantly in the southern extremes of the county, in a region described by Snell and Ell as one of the core areas of Anglican strength in 1851.<sup>53</sup> Although it is clear from the results of the census that the Established Church did best in more compact parishes where the land was little divided, there were certain exceptions to this in Shropshire. For example, it managed to achieve an IA of 68 and 69 in the two northern parishes of Market Drayton and Whittington respectively. Whittington spanned 8296 acres and had a population of 1927 in 1851. Similarly, Market Drayton was also a large parish that spanned 7526 acres, and as a significant market town in the nineteenth century, its population exceeded 4000 at the time of the census, and its land was much subdivided. Clearly these two parishes provided a significant contrast with the usual locations in which the Church found considerable levels of success.

Inevitably, the closed nature of the parishes in which the Church of England was generally able to attain high levels of attendance on Census Sunday helped to preclude the establishment and growth of religious dissent. Of the 46 parishes in which the Anglicans had an IA of 60 and over, religious dissent was present in just seven of these: Great Hanwood, Great Ness, Market Drayton, Moreton Corbet, Norton in the Hales, and Preston Upon the Weald Moors and Whittington. The Primitive Methodists were present in all seven of these parishes, and the denomination was the only form of religious Nonconformity in three of them. Of these parishes Market Drayton and Whittington were the most unusual. Not only were these large parishes, with high populations and much divided land ownership, but they were also parishes in which there was competition from a number of other religious bodies. There was a total of four Nonconformist groups present in both Market Drayton and Whittington. Although the majority of these did not represent any real threat to the Established Church in

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<sup>53</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 71.

terms of their level of attendance, the census reveals that the Anglicans did have some competition from the Independents in Market Drayton.<sup>54</sup> The Church of England also did relatively well in Ellesmere, again proving their ability to compete effectively in the diverse religious environment; while the Anglican's IA was below 60, there was competition from six other religious denominations in 1851.<sup>55</sup> What factors enabled the Established Church to compete so effectively in the face of considerable opposition from dissenting denominations? Yalden has already noted the strength of the Church of England in the northern regions of the county. In his study on Nonconformist communities in this area, he suggested that although the Established Church was disadvantaged by the region's large multi-township parishes and dispersed settlement pattern it was 'strongly supported' in 1851. In fact the IA achieved by the Anglicans in the four registration districts of north Shropshire (41.7) was one of the ten highest figures recorded. He argues that the strength of the Anglican Church in this part of the county was not only indicated by its level of attendance on Census Sunday, but also by the large proportion of very well endowed livings. In the period 1829 to 1831, a total of 27.8 per cent of the benefices in North Shropshire had an annual gross income of £500 per annum or more, in comparison with only 13.9 per cent of the 10,478 benefices of England and Wales.<sup>56</sup>

Although there were a significant number of parishes in which the Anglicans did much better than the county average, there were many parishes in which it did much worse. Of the 191 Shropshire parishes, for which an IA could be calculated, the Church of England attained an IA of less than 20 in a total of 36 parishes. Exactly one half of these parishes had a population of over 600 in 1851, and eleven of the 36 were large parishes that covered 5000 acres or more. In order to explain the poor levels of attendance, those completing the actual census returns often emphasised the difficulties of catering for a dispersed population. At Holdgate where the Anglicans only achieved an IA of 9.5, the incumbent explained that it was a 'scattered parish'. The incumbent of Diddlebury parish noted that more than a third of the population actually lived closer

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<sup>54</sup> Here the Independents managed to achieve an IA of 28.5 on Census Sunday

<sup>55</sup> The Anglicans achieved an IA of 46.7, the Wesleyan Methodists 7.4, the Primitive Methodists 7.2, the Wesleyan Methodist Association 2.3, the Independent Methodists 2, the Independents 1.5, and finally the Particular Baptists had an IA of just 1.

<sup>56</sup> Yalden, 'Nonconformity in north Shropshire', pp. 34-5.



to the churches of neighbouring parishes; this excuse was also used to explain the poor level of attendance at St Mary's in the parish of Shawbury.<sup>57</sup> Although this clearly supports the arguments presented by Obelkevich and Watts, it is apparent from the evidence of parish IAs that the Church of England was in fact weak in many of those locations in which it should actually have performed very well. Habberley spanned just 795 acres, was very little divided in ownership, and had only 144 inhabitants in 1851. There the Anglicans only managed an IA of 18.4. Similarly in Lee Brockhurst, a parish which covered just 664 acres and which only had 141 inhabitants, the Established Church again achieved an IA of only 18.4. The poor level of attendance in this parish is perhaps more surprising when we consider the comment made by the incumbent of St Mary's, Shawbury, who suggests that many of his 'missing' parishioners are in fact attending worship at Lee Brockhurst. As parishes in which there was no competition from other religious groups it is fair to comment that we could have expected the Church to perform much better. Conversely the lack of competition may have made the Anglicans lethargic.

If we examine the experience of Primitive Methodism, it is possible to calculate an index of attendance for the Primitive Methodist Connexion in almost every parish in the county in which the denomination appeared at that time. Inevitably, the average parish IA of 17 was much lower than that attained by the Church of England. However this figure conceals a great diversity of experience within Shropshire as a whole in 1851. The Primitive Methodists achieved their highest level of attendance in the south-western parish of Edgton, with an IA of 76.4. This is somewhat surprising, as Edgton was a small parish, with just 191 inhabitants in 1851; moreover ownership of land in Edgton was little divided. This was exactly the type of location in which the Church should have been most effective. However the Religious Census reveals that it was in fact the Primitive Methodists who had the highest level of attendance in the parish in March 1851. Although the Church of England did not do as well as the Primitive Methodists on Census Sunday, it still managed to achieve an IA of 46.7, a reasonably high level of attendance when compared with its experience in other parishes of the county.<sup>58</sup> It is apparent therefore that Primitive Methodism was able to compete

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<sup>57</sup> The Anglicans had an IA of 27.7 in the parish of Shawbury, and just 22.1 in Diddlebury.

<sup>58</sup> The total number of attendances at the Anglican places of worship was 88, and at the Primitive

effectively in a location in which the Anglican Church was relatively strong. Clearly, the success of Primitive Methodism at the local level did not depend upon the ultimate 'failure' of the Established Church. The reason why Primitive Methodism flourished in a parish such as this can however be explained by looking at the pattern of settlement. In his census return, the incumbent of Edgton noted that the population was 'scattered and poor', and lamented the fact that many of the families in the parish lived between 2 and 3 miles away from the Church. Inevitably, this dispersed nature of settlement would have created 'religious' vacuums in which the Primitive Methodists would have been free to carry out worship away from the watchful eye of the Anglican clergy. For example, the Primitive Methodists had built a chapel at Horderley, situated in the north-east of the parish nearly two miles away from the village of Edgton and the parish church.<sup>59</sup>

The second highest IA of 74.3 was achieved in the south-eastern parish of Hopton Wafers. Hopton Wafers was also a relatively small parish; covering just 1610 acres, it had a total of 444 inhabitants at the time of the census. Once again the parish was little divided, the principal landowner in 1851 being the lady of the manor, Mrs Lucy Botfield.<sup>60</sup> The religious character of Hopton Wafers appears to have been almost identical to that of Edgton; not only did the total number of attendances made in the parish on Census Sunday exceed the number of parishioners, but also it is clear that the Established Church was a considerable force. Although the Established Church again fell behind the Primitive Methodist Connexion in total number of attendances, the Anglicans still did relatively well, achieving an IA of 52.5. Another almost identical situation arose in the parish of Hordley. In 1851, Hordley was a relatively small parish with little land sub-division, and a small population of just 325 in 1851. Once again the total number of attendances made in the parish on Census Sunday exceeded the total number of inhabitants, and despite the relative strength of the Church of England, the Primitive Methodists were still able to gain a higher level of attendance.<sup>61</sup> Once again, the success of Primitive Methodism in Hordley can be explained by examining the

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Methodist places 146; therefore it is clear that the total number of attendances in the parish far exceeded the total number of inhabitants. While it is likely that this disparity may well have occurred as the result of double-attendance, it may also have been the result of migration to Edgton's places of worship from the surrounding parishes.

<sup>59</sup> *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire*, p. 313.

<sup>60</sup> Bagshaw, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Shropshire*, pp. 646-7.

<sup>61</sup> The IA for the Anglicans in Hordley was 46, while the Primitive Methodists achieved an IA of 57.8.



location of its chapel and the pattern of settlement. Situated in the township of Bagley, the Primitive Methodist chapel was actually some two and a half miles away from the parish church in the township of Hordley. This distance would have made it difficult for the local incumbent to superintend the activities of the Primitive Methodists in this part of the parish, therefore enabling them to develop and ultimately thrive. It is interesting to note that while the land in the township of Hordley was owned solely by Sir John Roger Kynaston, the township of Bagley actually had over 14 different owners. This therefore helps to explain why the Primitive Methodists had found it easier to build a chapel in this part of the parish.<sup>62</sup>

In light of earlier arguments, we would expect the parishes of Primitive Methodist strength to have been those in which the Established Church was weak. However, the evidence of Edgton, Hopton Wafers and Hordley reveal that this was clearly not the case in Shropshire; Primitive Methodism thriving in areas of relative Anglican strength. Welshampton was another parish, in which the Primitive Methodists did well, despite the relative strength of the Anglicans. Here the Primitive Methodists attained an IA of 35.7, despite the fact that the Established Church had an IA of 59.4. It is clear that Welshampton again fits the hypothesis presented above. Although much divided in terms of its structure of landownership, it was a reasonably small parish with only 527 inhabitants in 1851, and with a total parish IA of 95 it had a high overall level of attendance on Census Sunday. The Primitive Methodists also gained ground in other parishes in which the Church of England was a dominant force. For example, the census reveals that the parishes of Morton Corbet, Preston upon the Weald Moors and Norton in the Hales were strongholds of the Established Church. Despite this the Primitive Methodists had been able to set up worship in all three. For example, in Norton in the Hales where the Anglicans had an IA of 118, the Primitive Methodists meeting in their own chapel managed to attain an IA of 18.8.<sup>63</sup> Although it is clear that the denomination did not represent any real threat to the Church of England in these parishes, the mere presence of the Primitive Methodists in these types of locations is perhaps remarkable.

Other parishes in which the Primitive Methodists achieved high levels of

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<sup>62</sup> Bagshaw, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Shropshire*, p. 244.

<sup>63</sup> In Preston upon the Weald Moors the Primitive Methodists attained an IA, despite the fact that the Anglicans attained an IA of 85.1. Again in Morton Corbet, while the Established Church had an IA of 73.1, the Primitive Methodists achieved an IA of 17.



attendance in 1851 were Wrockwardine Wood (50.6) and Kinnerley (34.7). It is interesting to note that these parishes were both quite different in terms of their size, population, and landownership structure. Wrockwardine Wood was a very compact but densely populated parish, located in the East Shropshire coalfield.<sup>64</sup> In comparison, Kinnerley was a larger parish with considerably divided landownership and over 1200 inhabitants. Unlike those examined previously, these were both parishes in which the Church enjoyed very little success on Census Sunday; the Anglicans achieved an IA of just 13.8 in Kinnerley and 13.9 in Wrockwardine Wood. Kinnerley provides a clear example of the type of parish in which the Established Church experienced difficulties during the nineteenth century; in such a large, much-divided parish, the ability of the incumbent to restrict dissenting religious activities would have had severely tested. Here the Primitive Methodists again took advantage of the inflexibility of the traditional parochial structure, building a chapel at Maesbrook, approximately two and a half miles from the village of Kinnerley and St Marys, the parish church.<sup>65</sup>

In Wrockwardine Wood too, the Primitive Methodists were able to benefit from the vacuum created by an ineffective parochial structure. Originally a detached part of the parish of Wrockwardine, Wrockwardine Wood was situated 7 miles away to the west of the mother parish. While the inhabitants of Wrockwardine Wood attended St. Peters at Wrockwardine for the various rites of passage, they inevitably preferred to attend regular worship at churches and chapels of ease situated closer to them. W. Howard Williams has summarised the situation, noting that the 'fast-rising and poorly-educated population' of Wrockwardine Wood was ultimately 'starving for religion'. Despite the obvious lack of religious provision in this detached part of the parish, the Anglicans failed to act and 'it was left to the Methodists to begin to set matters right'.<sup>66</sup> Primitive Methodist missionaries arrived in the area in 1821, and they quickly began 'to reap an abundant harvest among the men employed in the mines and iron works' of Oakengates.<sup>67</sup> However, while they had trouble obtaining a site for a more permanent place of worship in this location, they were blessed with better luck in Wrockwardine Wood; here William Amphlett gave them land upon which to build a chapel in 1822.

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<sup>64</sup> The parish of Wrockwardine Wood had a total of 2099 inhabitants in 1851, and spanned just 502 acres.

<sup>65</sup> Bagshaw, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Shropshire*, pp. 148-52.

<sup>66</sup> W. Howard Williams, *A Brief History of Wrockwardine Wood Church and Parish* (1974). p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*. p. 168.



Although the Wesleyan Methodists already had a chapel in the parish by 1815, Williams argues that it was the ‘fervour’ of Primitive Methodist activity that ultimately motivated the incumbent of Wrockwardine to act.<sup>68</sup> The Rev. Joshua Gilpin, vicar of Wrockwardine initially began a series of ‘cottage lectures’, while his successor the Rev. George Lavington Yate set about providing a church, burial ground and National school. The school, completed in 1830 was opened first, and it was here that after having obtained a licence to preach, the vicar continued the work begun at the earlier meetings. The church, which was built next to the school, was consecrated in 1833 and Wrockwardine Wood became an ecclesiastical parish in its own right the following year. Although Wrockwardine Wood now had a permanent place of worship and was provided with the means to endow a living, it was not until 1837, when a house was purchased that Wrockwardine Wood had its own Rectory, and therefore a resident incumbent.<sup>69</sup> However as the evidence of the Religious Census has shown us, these developments ultimately came too late to enable the Established Church to enjoy any real success within Wrockwardine Wood. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Anglicans could do little to prevent the proliferation of Methodist chapels in the parish.

The Primitive Methodist Connexion had higher attendances than the Church of England in total of 15 Shropshire parishes.<sup>70</sup> With the exception of Edgton, Hopton Wafer and Hordley, these were all places of relative weakness for the Church of England in 1851; the IA for the Anglicans in these parishes ranged from between 5.6 in Eaton under Haywood and Ludlow, and 24.5 in Clungunford. Clearly then the success of the Primitive Methodist Connexion was indeed very often dependent upon the ‘weakness’ of the Anglicans, therefore supporting the previous assertion that the Church through neglect had a role in the development and progress of Nonconformity in the local setting. Of the 15 parishes in which the Primitive Methodists attained a higher level of attendance than the Anglicans, the denomination was the only form of Dissent in a total of 6 of these: Bitterley, Clungunford, Eaton Under Haywood, Edgton,

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<sup>68</sup> Williams, *Brief History*, p. 12.

<sup>69</sup> G. C. Baugh, *The Victoria County History of the Counties of England – A History of Shropshire*, vol. XI, (Oxford, 1985), pp. 330-2; Williams, *Brief History*, pp. 12-3.

<sup>70</sup> These were Bitterley, Clungunford, Eaton Under Haywood, Edgton, Hopton Wafers, Hordley, Kinnerley, Ludlow, Norbury, Stanton Upon Hine Heath, Stoke St. Milborough, Wistanstow, Wombridge, and Wrockwardine Wood. Also included in this list is Minsterley, a chapelry in the parish of Westbury. Although Minsterley did not become a separate ecclesiastical parish until 1910, it was made to maintain



Hopton Wafers and Norbury. With the exception of Edgton and Hopton Wafers, which as we have seen were particularly 'religious' in 1851, the others listed here were all parishes of low religious attendance, their total IA being no more than 55. The lowest number of total attendances was recorded in Eaton under Haywood. Here the Primitive Methodists had a total of 60 attendances made at its services on Census Sunday, while the Anglicans had only 30; this ensured that the IA for the entire parish was just 16.6. As the only alternative form of worship in these locations, it was perhaps inevitable that the Primitive Methodists would have capitalised quite easily upon any kind of religious dissatisfaction that may have been present amongst the parishioners.

With the exception of Ludlow, all of the other parishes, in which the Primitive Methodists attained higher levels of attendance than the Church of England, had an IA of 50 or more.<sup>71</sup> However, despite the greater level of 'religiosity', the census reveals that the Established Church was the weakest denomination in all but two of these parishes. For example, in Wrockwardine Wood, the Anglicans managed to attain an IA of just 14, trailing considerably behind both the Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists who achieved an IA of 50.6 and 40 respectively. Similarly, in Stoke St. Milborough the Church of England had the lowest level of attendance with an IA of 18.4, the Wesleyan Methodists had an IA of 23.1, while the Primitive Methodists had the highest level of attendance with an IA of 30.7. In Ludlow, the Church of England again had a lower level of attendance than both the Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists, and also the Independents.

Clearly, the evidence of Shropshire supports the argument that dissent and Primitive Methodism in particular thrived where the Church of England was weak. However, what is perhaps most interesting about the parishes in which the Primitive Methodists exceeded the Anglicans in terms of their level of attendance, is that the denomination was also more successful than all of the other Nonconformist bodies which were present in these locations. For example, while both the Baptists and Independents were present in the parish of Kinnerley, neither of these was able to match the 34.7 achieved by the Primitive Methodists.<sup>72</sup> In the parishes of Stoke St. Milborough, Wistanstow, Wombridge and Wrockwardine Wood the Primitive

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its own poor after 1766, and was accounted as a distinct civil parish.

<sup>71</sup> Ludlow had an IA of 43.4.

<sup>72</sup> The Baptists had an IA of 24 and the Independents 8.2.



Methodist Connexion had a greater number of total attendances than both the Church of England and the Wesleyan Methodists.<sup>73</sup>

The Religious Census of 1851 reveals that throughout the county, Primitive Methodism was not only able to compete effectively against the Church of England, having a higher IA in a total of 15 parishes, but was also able to gain an advantage over many of the different Nonconformist denominations. Primitive Methodism was the most successful Nonconformist denomination in a total of 27 of the 68 parishes in which it appeared in 1851. For example, while the Primitive Methodists fell behind the Anglicans in the parish of Ruyton-in-the-Eleven-Towns, it still achieved a much higher index of attendance than the Independents who also carried out worship in the parish.<sup>74</sup> Primitive Methodism was again the most successful dissenting body in the south-westerly parish of Lydbury North, despite the fact that the Connexion had competition from both the Independents and the Roman Catholics.<sup>75</sup> This pattern of success was repeated in the parishes of Bishop's Castle, Clun, Oswestry, Stottesdon, and St. Martin. In Oswestry and St Martin we see how Primitive Methodism was able to compete very effectively against a multitude of different Nonconformist denominations. In St. Martin there was a total of 5 dissenting religious groups; however despite this level of competition, the Primitive Methodists were still able to achieve the highest level of Nonconformist attendance in the parish on Census Sunday, and even closely rivalled the Anglicans.<sup>76</sup> In Oswestry, the level of competition was even greater; a fact, which probably explains the low individual index of attendances, recorded by each of the denominations in the parish. In total there were 9 Nonconformist denominations in Oswestry in March 1851. Although the Primitive Methodist IA (10.2) was much lower than the denomination's average for the county as a whole, once again the Connexion was the most successful dissenting body in the parish.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> For example, in Stoke St. Milborough, the Primitive Methodists had an IA of 30.7, the Wesleyan Methodists an IA of 23.1, and the Anglicans an IA of 18.4. A very similar pattern is also found in Wombridge, where the Primitive Methodists achieved an IA of 26.3, the Wesleyan Methodists 18.3, and the Anglicans just 12.5.

<sup>74</sup> The Anglicans had an IA of 32.8, the Primitive Methodists 21.6, and the Independents 12.3.

<sup>75</sup> The Primitive Methodists had an IA of 25.4, while the Roman Catholics had an IA of 8.3, and the Independents just 2.8.

<sup>76</sup> The Anglicans had an IA of 23.9, the Primitive Methodists 21.1, the Wesleyan Methodist Association 12.7, the Welsh Calvinist Methodists 9.3, the Wesleyan Methodist Reformers 7, and finally the Independent Methodists 3.7.

<sup>77</sup> The Anglicans had an IA of 27.6, the Primitive Methodists 10.2, the Independents 6.2, the Calvinist Methodists 4.1, the Welsh Independents 2.1, the Welsh Calvinist Methodists 2, the Welsh Wesleyan Methodists 1.7, the Baptists 1.4 and finally there was one other undesignated 'Christian' group who had



As we can see, the Primitive Methodist Connexion can clearly be viewed as one of the most important Nonconformist denominations in many parishes throughout Shropshire in 1851. However, while the Primitive Methodists enjoyed relatively high levels of attendance in certain locations, there were many parishes where the denomination had little success, and where it fared much worse in comparison with the other religious groups present. Of the 67 parishes for which it is possible to calculate an Index of Attendance, there was a total of 12 parishes in which the Primitive Methodist Connexion had an IA of 5 or less in 1851. These were Broseley, Clunbury, Ditton Priors, Lilleshall, Llanblodwell, Madeley, Much Wenlock, Newport, Wellington, Wentnor and Whitchurch. What factors acted to impede the development of Primitive Methodism in these parishes? It is clear from the 1851 Religious Census that in the case of both Clunbury and Wentnor, located in the south-westerly regions of the county, there was a distinct overall condition of 'irreligion'. Both of these parishes had generally low levels of attendance on Census Sunday. In Clunbury, where both the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists had active congregations, the total Index of Attendance for the whole parish was just 23.6; here even the Anglicans had an IA of just 11.9.<sup>78</sup> Again in Wentnor the total parish IA was just 30.3, and although the Anglicans had the highest number of attendances with an IA of 26.8, the Primitive Methodists trailed well behind with an IA of just 3.6.

In his research on religious provision and practice in the Lowland Marches, Burrows has argued that the Primitive Methodists found it difficult to establish societies in communities where there was competition from pre-existing denominations.<sup>79</sup> While we have seen that in many instances the Primitive Methodists were able to compete quite effectively against other religious groups in certain settings, it is clear from the evidence of the 1851 Census that there were many locations in which it struggled to do so. Primitive Methodism had competition from at least one other Nonconformist denomination in almost all of the 12 parishes in which it had an IA of 5 or less.<sup>80</sup> Often it was the strength of one individual Nonconformist denomination that acted to inhibit the development of Primitive Methodism. For example in Ditton Priors, the Wesleyan Methodists had by far the highest level of

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an IA of 0.6.

<sup>78</sup> The Wesleyan Methodists had an IA of 7, while the Primitive Methodists managed an IA of just 4.6.

<sup>79</sup> Burrows, 'Religious provision and practice', p. 107.

<sup>80</sup> Wentnor was the only parish in which the Primitive Methodists were the sole dissenting body.



attendance on Census Sunday, attaining a much greater IA than all the denominations present in the parish, including the Established Church.<sup>81</sup> In other parishes it was the combined force of two different dissenting denominations, which impeded Primitive Methodist expansion. Although the Anglicans enjoyed the highest level of attendance in Newport in March 1851, it was the combined strength of the Independents and the Roman Catholics, which ultimately precluded the development of any of the Methodist denominations in the parish. The Primitive Methodists had an IA of just 3.3, while the Wesleyan Methodists had the lowest level of attendance of all with just 2.5.<sup>82</sup> In other parishes, it was the sheer number of different dissenting groups rather than the strength of any one individual denomination, which presented a problem for Primitive Methodism. For example, in Broseley where the Primitive Methodists had an IA of 4.8, there were four other Nonconformist denominations vying for the attention of the local parishioners. Again, in Wellington where the Primitive Methodists had an IA of 4.6, there was a total of five other dissenting bodies present. Religious diversity could impede the outright domination of any one denomination. For example, if we look again at the parish of Broseley, we see that none of the 5 different Nonconformist denominations attained an IA of higher than 9.4; and only as a combined force did dissenting religion in the parish provide any real competition for the Established Church.

The lowest levels of Primitive Methodist attendance were recorded in the parishes of Lilleshall and Madeley; in Lilleshall the Primitive Methodists attained an IA of only 1.6, and in Madeley just 1.7. This presents a very considerable contrast with the levels of attendance observed in other parishes of Shropshire. It is clear from the Religious Census of 1851 that the failure of the Primitive Methodists in Lilleshall and Madeley can again be explained by the relative strength of the other denominations present in these parishes. The Census shows that in Lilleshall it was the Anglicans that reigned supreme; with an IA of 40.5 they had by far the highest level of attendance on 30 March. The Particular Baptists also carried out worship in the parish, and although this denomination was relatively insignificant in terms of its attendance on Census Sunday, it still had a greater IA than the Primitive Methodists.<sup>83</sup> In Madeley, it was the

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<sup>81</sup> The Wesleyan Methodists had an IA of 36, the Anglicans 12.7, the Roman Catholics 9.6, and the Primitive Methodists just 3.8.

<sup>82</sup> The Anglicans had an IA of 27.5, the Independents 19.3, and the Roman Catholics 18.

<sup>83</sup> The Particular Baptists in Lilleshall had an IA of 4.8.



Wesleyan Methodists that enjoyed the highest level of attendance. Primitive Methodism also had competition from the Roman Catholics and the Methodist New Connexion, both of which had much higher levels of attendance.<sup>84</sup>

If we examine the location of Primitive Methodist 'weakness', we see that 7 of the 12 parishes in which the Connexion had an IA of 5 or less were situated in the eastern half of the county, and in particular around the regions of the East Shropshire coalfield. A significant factor that hindered the expansion of Primitive Methodism in parishes such as Broseley, Ditton Priors, Madeley and Wellington was the dominance of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion; the Wesleyan Methodists had the highest levels of Nonconformist attendance in all four of these locations. The strength of Wesleyan Methodism in this part of Shropshire and particularly in the parish of Madeley is not at all surprising when the rich heritage of the denomination in this area is taken into account. When in 1760 John Fletcher (Jean Guillaume de la Flechere) was inducted as the vicar of Madeley, Methodism had made little impact upon the county of Shropshire. By 1765 however, Salop had been formed into a circuit, and Fletcher had become established as one of the central figures in the developing movement. Fletcher first became acquainted with Methodism while in the service of the Hill family of Tern Hall, joining the Methodist class of Mr Richard Edwards, and his move to Madeley in 1760 gave him the ideal opportunity to extend the work of the Methodists.<sup>85</sup> It was Fletcher's incumbency which 'began an eighty years' exposure of Madeley to intense Evangelical and Methodist influences'.<sup>86</sup> Fletcher not only formed societies in Madeley, but also throughout the coalfield at places such as Broseley, Little Wenlock, and Trench. Although he did have a share of rich converts Fletcher's chief concern was to reach out to the coalfield's poorer inhabitants who were notorious for their 'ignorance and profanity', exhorting them to 'seek providential or spiritual promptings in their working routine and daily round'.<sup>87</sup> John Wesley made his first of many visits to Madeley in 1764, and from 1765 Wesley's preachers from the Shrewsbury Circuit began to serve the societies formed by Fletcher, although they remained attached to the

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<sup>84</sup> The Wesleyan Methodists had an IA of 21.5, the Anglicans 18.9, the Roman Catholics 6, and the Methodist New Connexion 3.5.

<sup>85</sup> R. F. Skinner, *Nonconformity in Shropshire, 1662-1816* (Shrewsbury, 1964). pp. 57-60.

<sup>86</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. XI, p. 61.

<sup>87</sup> J. A. Vickers (ed.), *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (Peterborough, 2000). p. 124; Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. XI, p. 62; Skinner, *Nonconformity in Shropshire*. p. 69.



parish church at Madeley.<sup>88</sup> During the early 1770s, Fletcher concentrated his efforts in Madeley, building a meeting house in the parish at great personal expense. However, by the middle period of this decade his rigorous parish ministry and austere lifestyle were taking their toll upon his health. Although he eventually recovered from this bout of poor health, he died in 1785 from typhoid.<sup>89</sup> After Fletcher's death, his wife remained in the vicarage and continued the work; meetings at Madeley Wood, Coalbrookdale, Coalport and the vicarage barn were carried out in a type of sub-circuit in which preaching and classes were led by the Mrs Fletcher and her adopted daughter, Mary Tooth.<sup>90</sup> During the following thirty years, the Methodist movement in Madeley continued to demonstrate its loyalty to the parish church, and a harmonious relationship between the two persisted. However, after the death of Mary Fletcher in 1815 the situation began to deteriorate. Although there was no obvious conflict between the Methodists and the church people, both groups claimed succession to Fletcher's work, and as a result he continued to have a considerable influence upon the religious character of the parish. For example, even in the second half of the nineteenth century, the vicar of Madeley continued to teach Fletcher's doctrine.<sup>91</sup>

While Mary Tooth's Madeley class and Coalport society maintained a strong membership, they became increasingly isolated as Wesleyan ministers struggled to accept their legitimacy, regarding the Madeley church Methodists as only 'half and half'.<sup>92</sup> In comparison, the Wesleyan Methodists went from strength to strength in the parish of Madeley and across the coalfield as a whole after 1815. Although the Wesleyans did not build a chapel in the parish until 1833, Madeley quickly became the centre of a large Wesleyan circuit formed in 1815 (originally known as the Broseley circuit). In 1817-18, a second Wesleyan circuit was formed in the northern regions of the coalfield, with Wellington at its centre. By 1835, each of these circuits claimed to have over 1000 members. Characterised by revivals which owed 'more to their origins in vernacular culture and the environs of the coalfield than to strictly denominational sources',<sup>93</sup> Wesleyan Methodism continued to expand in this area. By the time of the

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<sup>88</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. XI, p. 69 & Skinner, *Nonconformity in Shropshire*, pp. 69-73.

<sup>89</sup> Vickers, *Dictionary of Methodism*, pp. 124 & 220.

<sup>90</sup> Vickers, *Dictionary of Methodism*, p. 220.

<sup>91</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. XI, pp. 62-3, 69; Skinner, *Nonconformity in Shropshire*, p. 96.

<sup>92</sup> Baugh, *Victoria County History*, vol. XI, p. 69.

<sup>93</sup> Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, p. 167.



Religious Census, the denomination was enjoying its greatest period of success in the east Shropshire coalfield. In comparison, the Primitive Methodists did not begin worship in Madeley until 1840, and it is clear therefore that they could not hope to compete effectively against the Wesleyans who had long been established in the parish. However, while they had set up three meetings by the time of the Religious Census, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the Primitive Methodists were to enjoy any great success in the parish, attendance at its two chapels quadrupling after 1851.<sup>94</sup>

As we have seen, the Wesleyan Methodists had the highest level of attendance in each of the important 'coalfield' parishes. In Madeley, with an IA of 21.5 the Wesleyan Methodists saw off competition from all other denominations, including the Anglicans who had an IA of 18.9. Although Wesleyan Methodism could not beat the Established Church in the parishes of Broseley and Wellington, it was still the strongest Nonconformist denomination in each of these. While it is evident that Primitive Methodism was generally weak throughout this part of the county there was one clear exception. As we have seen, one of the parishes in which the Primitive Methodist Connexion had a high level of attendance on Census Sunday was in Wrockwardine Wood. Their considerable success in this part of the coalfield is intriguing when compared with the poor attendance levels achieved in Broseley, Madeley and Wellington. Why did Primitive Methodism thrive in Wrockwardine Wood? Clearly, the weakness of the Anglican Church in Wrockwardine Wood enabled Primitive Methodist missionaries to establish worship in the parish with relative ease. However, this does not explain why the Connexion was able to fend off competition from the Wesleyans so effectively, particularly when it had failed to do so in the other coalfield parishes. The fact that Wrockwardine Wood became the head of a thriving Primitive Methodist circuit in 1828 probably contributed greatly to their overall success in this parish. However, as the majority of its inhabitants were employed in the coal, iron and steel works, it is likely that the Primitive Methodists would have had a considerable appeal amongst this relatively 'unsophisticated' population. In comparison, the more 'urbanised' parishes of Broseley, Madeley and Wellington had a more diverse demographic profile, making it more difficult for the Primitive Methodists to have such

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<sup>94</sup> Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, vol. XI, pp. 70-1.



an appeal.

### **Conclusion.**

In conclusion, it is clear that the experience of Primitive Methodism in Shropshire was one of considerable diversity. While the denomination enjoyed considerable success as the dominant form of Nonconformity in certain parishes of the county, there were many in which it was barely able to make a mark. It appears from the evidence examined above, that there was no clear geographical pattern for the location of Primitive Methodist success within Shropshire. The parishes in which the denomination achieved its highest attendance in March 1851 were spread throughout the county, two being located in the north-west, one in the south-west, one in the south-east, and one in the eastern coalfield. It is clear however, that the denomination did indeed thrive where the Anglican Church was weak. As we have seen the Primitive Methodist Connexion attained its greatest success in Edgton, Hopton Wafers and Hordley, locations in which the Established Church also enjoyed relative success on Census Sunday. However, while Edgton, Hopton Wafers and Hordley were all compact parishes with low populations, Primitive Methodism was able to take advantage of the inflexible parochial system in these locations, setting up worship at their boundaries, several miles away from the church and the watchful eyes of its incumbent. In contrast, it appears that the 'failure' of Primitive Methodism at the local level had little to do with the relative experience of the Established Church. Although there were clear exceptions, Primitive Methodism was generally weakest in those parishes in which it faced considerable competition from other Nonconformist groups. In particular, we have seen how the denomination had difficulties throughout much of the East Shropshire coalfield where the Wesleyan Methodists were such a dominant force. In other parishes, it was the combined strength of two or more denominations which precluded Primitive Methodist success.



## **Chapter 8: The Changing Geography of**

### **Primitive Methodist Circuits**

Let us now examine more closely the experience of Shropshire Primitive Methodist circuits, by looking in particular at the methods used by the denomination to penetrate the county during the first half of the century, and at the manner in which it created a solid and thriving network of circuits. We must also explore the ways in which factors such as changing missionary tactics, internal dissension and the trend towards sub-division acted to shape the geography of Shropshire circuits as the nineteenth century progressed.

#### **Extending the Mission.**

Kendall has characterised the first half of the nineteenth century as the ‘Heroic Period’ of Primitive Methodist history. The relentless and often aggressive style employed by its missionaries ensured that, with ‘the slenderest of means and appliances and in the face of difficulties neither few nor small’, their plain and powerful message spread rapidly across the land.<sup>1</sup> Middleton has argued that Primitive Methodism went ‘where other religious bodies *would* not, and *could* not go’.<sup>2</sup> Its missionaries brought excitement and provided distraction for isolated rural communities and industrial villages alike; and the simple evangelistic message, that salvation and sanctification were attainable by all who would repent and believe, was readily accepted by their unsophisticated inhabitants. Primitive Methodists entered parishes without invitation, singing as they made their way to the village green or town market place, where on arrival they began their open-air appeal.<sup>3</sup> The element of surprise was one of the most successful techniques adopted during this period, as Middleton comments:

‘It was not an uncommon thing in the early history of the Primitive Methodist Church, for her missionaries to enter a village or town suddenly, and to startle the inhabitants by their loud songs and ministrations...and by these means

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<sup>1</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> Middleton, *Son of Thunder*, p. 10 (his italics).

<sup>3</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 144; Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 249; Colls, *Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield*, pp. 170-1; Colls, *Collier’s Rant*, p. 138; G. Herod, *Historical and Biographical Sketches*, p. 12.



hundreds of souls were startled and saved'.<sup>4</sup>

The experience of Robert Key presented in *The Gospel Among the Masses*, gives a clear insight into the lengths to which missionaries would go in order to spread the word. On entering the village of Booton 'an entire stranger, having never seen the place before', Key invites himself into the home of one of the local inhabitants proclaiming 'I am come to preach in your house today'. To defend his unusual and somewhat brusque behaviour, he comments:

'Should my readers ask the question, what induced you to pursue such a course? I can only reply, I do not know: it is as contrary to my natural mind, as darkness is to light. I was led in a mysterious way.'<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting that the occupants of the invaded home were all too willing to accommodate the roving missionary, not only inviting him to dinner and offering him a bed for the night, but also opening their house up for worship as requested. Although Key's tactics may have been somewhat unusual, all missionaries were keen to go into virgin territory, as the journal of William Doughty of the Oswestry circuit reveals:

'New Kenerley, a small village, lay on our way home... This place has never, I believe been opened by any denomination. It was much on my mind to call and preach there.'<sup>6</sup>

Itinerants took to the lanes, fields and highways with the hope that their words would be the catalyst for further extension of the cause.

In 1834, the connexional magazine published the 'Missionary System', a plan of action that aimed to translate the initial excitement into a solid base for continued growth. The article provided precise instructions to assist the formation of a permanent congregation in the local setting, and therefore the ultimate creation of a solid missionary station. Every preacher sent out to mission was expected to:

'take up eight places, towns, villages or neighbourhoods: so that his missionary range covers a certain part of the country'.<sup>7</sup>

Preachers were expected to obtain a place in which to hold a prayer meeting and to carry out a weekly sermon in each. Moreover, they were also instructed to visit from house to house, so that they could 'bring forward the work of God' and establish a

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<sup>4</sup> Middleton, *Son of Thunder*, p. 16

<sup>5</sup> Rev. R. Key, *The Gospel Among the Masses*, (London, 1872), pp.21-3.

<sup>6</sup> PMM, 1838, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> Rev. C. Tonks, *Victory in the Villages: the History of the Brinkworth Circuit* (Aberdare, 1907), pp. 42-4.



permanent society. Each quarter the itinerant preacher was required to make a general collection for the support of the mission. Although these collections were occasionally very successful, this was by no means the typical experience of missionaries.<sup>8</sup> In his biography of Samuel Atterby, Simpson describes the life of an early Primitive Methodist itinerant who

‘frequently had to go without “purse or scrip” into a town or village hitherto unvisited by any of his contemporaries, and to “hold forth the word of life” to a wandering, staring crowd, who not unseldom gave him a shower of stones or filth for his pains, and left him to trust in Providence for his victuals and bed.’<sup>9</sup>

Despite the appearance of a well formed set of tactics, Ambler has argued that the ‘revivalistic fervour’ demonstrated by missionaries during this early period, was in fact like ‘the ostrich dropping its eggs...scattering good that seldom or never comes to perfection’.<sup>10</sup> Converts were made but often deserted, as roving evangelists keen to move onto pastures new, failed to consolidate their gains into permanent societies. Although it is likely that many simply neglected to follow the straightforward advice presented in the magazine, in reality missionaries regularly worked to establish new societies in the face of considerable adversity, particularly during the early decades of the nineteenth century. The problem of persecution was universal:

‘Often the preacher had to labour unaided, the gazing stock of witless and godless spectators, the object of their buffoonery and vulgar sarcasm, or violent persecution...’<sup>11</sup>

Throughout the country, abuse from all quarters of society threatened the progress of the early movement, as landlords, magistrates, clergymen and even village labourers expressed animosity towards these ‘God-talking’ strangers. For landlords and magistrates, wandering missionaries not only demonstrated a complete disregard for traditional social boundaries, but also brought the labouring classes together in large and dangerous numbers.<sup>12</sup> Valenze has argued that the ruling classes feared the effects of Primitive Methodism upon the local population. She notes that roving itinerants

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<sup>8</sup> Tonks, *Victory*, pp. 42-4.

<sup>9</sup> J. Simpson, *Memoir of the Life, Labours, Character and Death of Samuel Atterby, Primitive Methodist Minister* (London, 1849), p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in R. W. Ambler, *Churches, Chapels and the Parish Communities of Lincolnshire, 1660-1900* (Lincoln, 2000), p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Labours*, p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> J. Walsh, ‘Methodism and the mob in the eighteenth century’, in G. J. Cuming & D. Baker (eds.) *Popular Belief and Practice. Studies in Church History*, vol. 8 (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 213-27.



often acted as ‘catalysts in bringing local antagonisms into the open’, and that preachers soon discovered they could ‘capitalise on a readiness to rebel’.<sup>13</sup> For example, the imprisonment of Shropshire missionary James Bonsor in August 1822 became the ‘talk of the city’, and ‘resulted in calling attention to the missionaries and securing for them a large measure of public sympathy’.<sup>14</sup>

In many cases however, village labourers were all too willing to take encouragement from landlords and clergymen, eagerly persecuting the very people trying to reach out to them. The brutality of the crowd could be considerable, and preachers often narrowly escaped with their lives, as the experience of John Garner illustrates. Immediately on entering Sowe, a village near Coventry, the itinerant was attacked by a vicious rabble, amongst which was the clergyman of the parish.

‘I necessitated to expose myself to the malicious rage of wicked men, who furiously drove me out of the village with stones, rotten eggs, sludge, or whatever else came to hand...After being shamefully beaten with their hands, feet and other weapons, I was dragged to a pond, and the enraged mob seemed anxious to gratify their cruelty, by witnessing the death of one of their fellow-creatures.’<sup>15</sup>

Although Garner was eventually rescued and was able to make his escape, such extreme violence was not untypical. A letter sent by Thomas Batty in June 1838 to Hugh Bourne clearly supports this:

‘Your situation certainly calls for sympathy...But many of the old soldiers in the field, many of our old preachers have clods, stones, and rotten eggs thrown at them. They have been hauled before magistrates, and have been cast into prison for the Gospel’s sake...In opposition, let patience possess your soul; exercise faith in a present saviour. If you have to suffer firmly endure it. Be firm as a rock...’<sup>16</sup>

However, what is clear from this letter is that the persecution experienced often acted to strengthen resolve. As Obelkevich has argued, the resistance which preachers endured in their missionary endeavours, only made them more determined to succeed ‘for they considered themselves to be instruments of the Lord and were confident that He was

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<sup>13</sup> Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, pp. 134-5; Ambler, *Churches*, p. 139.

<sup>14</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 278.

<sup>15</sup> Garner, *The Life of Mr John Garner, Senior*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>16</sup> Petty, *Memoir of the Life and Labours of Thomas Batty*, pp. 115-6.



actively advancing His kingdom.’<sup>17</sup>

However, even if itinerants managed to escape the attention of the mob, newly established societies continued to be vulnerable to the threat of persecution. Nineteenth-century Primitive Methodist literature provides countless examples of the trials faced by congregations, attempting to carry on their worship in the midst of considerable disruption. For example, Patterson notes the difficulties for worshippers wishing to attend services in the Hayloft, where the only entrance was a passage 10 feet wide:

‘it frequently became a case of “running the gauntlet”...between the cross-fire of ribald jests and profane denunciations’.<sup>18</sup>

At the north Shropshire society of Cloy, located in the Prees Green circuit, the members were greatly harassed by a local wealthy farmer.

‘Sometimes he would stand at the gate leading to the preaching house swearing and otherwise disturbing both the people at the house and the congregation gathering to worship. At other times he would raise a mob, and encourage them to make a great noise, by beating pans, hooting and otherwise.’<sup>19</sup>

Finally, in order to get the inhabitants of the house evicted, he wrote to the owners of property requesting their removal. However, as an example of the classic didactic tale regularly presented in nineteenth-century Primitive Methodist literature, the hand of God is seen to have been at work when the farmer was eventually found dead one Sunday morning.

The desire to extend the mission dominated circuit life, and dictated many of the decisions it made. As Kendall comments,

‘When a circuit was hemmed in by preoccupied territory; when there was an available surplus at its quarter-day, however small, or, on the other hand, when the balance was on the wrong side; or when the circuit did not seem to afford work enough for the preachers labouring on it; then the circuit would set about

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<sup>17</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 249; Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, p. 184. It is interesting to note that it was not only preachers who were the focus of abuse. In *The Gospel Among the Masses*, Robert Key presents the story of an old woman who was attacked and put into the stocks for many hours simply for standing by the preacher (see p. 37).

<sup>18</sup> A. H. Patterson, *From Hayloft to Temple. The Story of Primitive Methodism in Yarmouth* (London, 1903), p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Anon. (A Layman), *Memoir of the Life and Labours of J. Wedgwood, One of the First and Most Successful of the Home Missionaries of the Primitive Methodist Society* (London, 1870), p. 97.



beginning a new mission on virgin soil.’<sup>20</sup>

In his thesis on Primitive Methodism in Hull, Hatcher has used quarterly account books to demonstrate how the Hull circuit very quickly ‘set its sights on vigorous expansion’.<sup>21</sup> Despite having a significant debt, Hull circuit officials decided against a reduction in the number of itinerants, but instead employed more salaried ministers. While this course of action further increased financial liability, as Hatcher explains, it also acted to increase the circuit’s potential revenue.<sup>22</sup> In September 1819, the Hull circuit employed three itinerant ministers, and had a total deficit of £11. 7s. 4d. By the following quarter, the number of travelling preachers employed had been doubled, and the total debt carried by the circuit had risen to £30. 6s. 7d. However, by March 1820, the finances of the Hull circuit had seen a radical transformation; despite the fact that the circuit now employed a total of eight itinerants, its finances were now in balance. Hatcher comments,

‘Not only had the coverage of greater territory led to the raising of more societies and secured income through their collections, but the sale of books by the travelling preachers to a wider audience, had provided a major source of revenue.’<sup>23</sup>

Shropshire circuit officials also demonstrated an awareness of the need to employ sufficient numbers to help in the extension of the mission. In its annual report of 1845, the Shrewsbury Primitive Methodist circuit made a ‘loud call for a third preacher to labour in the circuit’. Officials went on to comment,

‘We should like to call the attention of the Conference and the General Missionary Committee to the subject of town missions in our populous circuit towns. Thousands are ready to perish in Shrewsbury for the want of a town mission.’<sup>24</sup>

In Ludlow too, calls were made for additional preachers to maintain the missionary work of the circuit:

‘We may lose ground in the country having 12 chapels and openings in a number of villages which we cannot have access to without another preacher.’<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> H. B. Kendall, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London, 1902), p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, p. 157.

<sup>22</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, p. 157.

<sup>23</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, p. 157.

<sup>24</sup> SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Report, 1840.

<sup>25</sup> SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1840-50, 18 March 1844.



However, Hatcher has argued that efforts to extend the missionary field of a circuit often had a negative effect and could in fact actually impede expansion. For example, many circuits loaded themselves with significant amounts of debt, when ‘excessive evangelistic zeal’ encouraged them to take on more preachers than they could actually maintain.<sup>26</sup> As we have seen, in the period between 1836 and 1842, the Ludlow circuit regularly had difficulties providing wages for all of its ministers. The need for such a large number of travelling preachers not only placed greater financial strain upon a circuit, but also meant that a great many of those recruited had little previous training. Inexperienced ministers could quickly lead circuits into financial ruin through the excessive and inappropriate application of its funds. In 1828, Hugh Bourne made reference in his journal to the ‘severe difficulties’ experienced by Prees Green circuit in the period from 1825. He comments that many of these were

‘caused by the conduct of a preacher who was stationed in it for the first year of its being a circuit, and from whom different things were expected, but who has since left the work of a travelling preacher.’<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, during the early years of the nineteenth century, the demand for itinerants also led to the employment of many ‘improper persons’. Classed as ‘impostors’ by the Annual Conference, these were people claiming to have come from Primitive Methodist circles elsewhere, who took advantage of the hospitality offered them.<sup>28</sup> In 1831, the Annual Conference ruled that more caution be taken with regards to strangers, noting that

‘during the last twelve months some of these have actually dealt out abuse against our own people, on our own platforms.’<sup>29</sup>

Considering the fine balance between security and financial ruin that many Primitive Methodist circuits maintained, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century, these impostors could often have a major impact upon the work of a circuit. Finally, as missionaries extended the distance between circuit boundaries and the centre of command, it became increasingly difficult to ensure that discipline was maintained throughout its limits. Hatcher argues that this ‘was the most serious problem of all as it

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<sup>26</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, p. 177.

<sup>27</sup> PMM, 1829, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, pp. 177 & 183.

<sup>29</sup> PMACM, Various Regulations - 1831, p. 3.



undermined the whole of circuit life.’<sup>30</sup> In his work on the Primitive Methodist circuits of the old Sunderland District, Patterson has noted how William Clowes was called upon to

‘repair the damage done by Thomas Johnstone, a Hull Circuit preacher...who had entered the Brompton Circuit and sought, with some degree of success, to alienate the societies, and get hold of the Hutton Rudby Chapel, which had been willed to the Connexion.’<sup>31</sup>

Another example can be seen in the Oswestry Circuit’s Annual Report of 1839. In the report, Oswestry circuit officials lamented the failings of its Irish mission; however, while they note that the poverty of the people had been one of the mission’s main problems, they argue that these difficulties had been exacerbated by ‘the bad conduct of some of the official characters’.<sup>32</sup>

Obelkevich has argued that the turbulent character of the denomination during these early years was reflected in the precarious state of many of its local societies. He notes that,

‘In its first phase the sect was aggressive, ambitious, speculative; offering itself to villagers ‘on approval,’ it had many failures...societies were founded, flourished briefly, then subsided and even disappeared.’<sup>33</sup>

Circuit quarterly accounts provide us with the names of each society within an individual circuit, and also the number of members on its roll book. These are therefore a valuable source, which enable us to both identify the changing location of Primitive Methodism within a particular setting, and to track the varying fortunes of each individual society. As we may expect, the evidence of Shropshire Primitive Methodist quarterly accounts does indeed provide us with an image of considerable change during the first half of the nineteenth century. In the decade between 1836 and 1846, a total of 32 new societies were added to the Ludlow circuit quarterly accounts.<sup>34</sup> This was a pattern of activity that was repeated throughout the region during this period. For example, the Prees Green circuit missioned a total of 20 different places between 1841 and 1852. Again, in the Church Stretton branch of the Bishop’s Castle

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<sup>30</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, p. 177.

<sup>31</sup> Patterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism*, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> SRR: NM4319/1/6: Oswestry Circuit – Annual Report, 1839.

<sup>33</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 249-50.

<sup>34</sup> SRR: NM2612/21-22: Ludlow Circuit - Quarterly Accounts. 1836-44 & 1844-56.



circuit, 15 societies were added to the circuit accounts between 1847 and 1856.<sup>35</sup> Many of these new additions did not survive long. Of the 32 different places missioned by the Ludlow circuit in the decade from 1836 to 1846, a total of 17 of these had disappeared from the quarterly accounts by 1850. This was a considerable rate of turnover, which clearly reflects the vulnerability of many newly established preaching locations.<sup>36</sup>

Minutes of circuit quarterly meetings reveal that the continuance of preaching places was carefully deliberated:

‘That all those places at which we have no interest nor likely to have, be submitted to the Quarter day for consideration of continuing service’.<sup>37</sup>

However, it is not always possible, even when examining committee-meeting minutes, to ascertain exactly why certain places were pursued, and others were not. Generally the minutes simply stated which locations were to be terminated:

‘That we give up Goldfield on the weeknight and take up the Hundred’.<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, many societies were discontinued when it became evident that there was to be ‘no opening of the work’; many places, which appeared in the quarterly accounts one year, had simply vanished by the next.<sup>39</sup> For example, Aston Pitch appeared in the Ludlow circuit accounts in March 1841, but was gone by March 1842. Similarly, Rowley’s Field was present in March 1847, but had also been removed from the accounts by the following March. Little Hill, listed in the accounts of 1848, vanished without trace within the year.<sup>40</sup> Often great numbers of locations were given up by a circuit during a single year, for example in the period between March 1843 and March 1844, a total of eight preaching places were removed from the quarterly accounts of the Prees Green circuit. Similarly, in the period between March 1847 and March 1848, a total of seven different preaching places were given up.<sup>41</sup> Generally such places appeared in the quarterly accounts with only a few members on trial, and in many cases with no membership at all. In March 1840 the Annual Return of the Shrewsbury circuit noted that

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<sup>35</sup> SRR: NM2775/8: Prees Green Circuit - Quarterly Accounts, 1841-1864 & NM2138/49: Church Stretton Branch Quarterly Accounts, 1847-56.

<sup>36</sup> SRR: NM2612/21-22: Ludlow Circuit - Quarterly Accounts, 1836-44 & 1844-56.

<sup>37</sup> SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1844-59, 1 Nov 1845

<sup>38</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit - Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 7 Aug 1841

<sup>39</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit - Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 13 Nov 1834.

<sup>40</sup> SRR: NM2612/21-22: Ludlow Circuit - Quarterly Accounts, 1836-44 & 1844-56.

<sup>41</sup> SRR: NM2775/8: Prees Green Circuit - Quarterly Accounts. 1841-1864.



‘We have opened 2 new places...but have founded no societies at those places.’<sup>42</sup>

In 1842, Ightfield appeared in the Prees Green circuit accounts despite the fact that it had no members attached to it. Unsurprisingly, this place was given up within the year and was never tried again.<sup>43</sup> However, there were certain exceptions to this. In 1842, a society was formed at Rook Lane, and a total of twenty members were noted as being ‘on trial’ in the Ludlow circuit quarterly accounts. By March 1843, this number had dwindled to 13, and by March 1844, Rook Lane was no longer listed in the accounts.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, the Primitive Methodists often found it difficult to sustain the enthusiasm generated by their initial missionary efforts and, as Obelkevich argues, such considerable fluctuations in membership were the inevitable result.<sup>45</sup>

Although circuit authorities had to be realistic about their ability to establish a thriving cause in certain locations, quarterly accounts reveal that many places where they had little previous success became the focus of new missionary endeavours. In March 1847, Edgebolton appeared in the quarterly accounts of the Prees Green circuit. Although it failed to attract a membership and was given up the following year, a second attempt to form a society in this location was made in 1852. However, once more, the Primitive Methodist cause failed to establish itself in Edgebolton.<sup>46</sup> This was not an isolated case, there are countless other examples of this throughout the county and throughout the century. For example, after having failed to form a membership at Rhosygadfa in the period between 1841 and 1843, preachers in the Oswestry circuit made a second attempt in 1865, again with the same result.<sup>47</sup> In the Shrewsbury circuit, three separate attempts were made at different points during the nineteenth century to establish societies at both Falls Green and Barkers Green.<sup>48</sup>

What encouraged Primitive Methodist preachers to return to locations in which they had previously failed? Perhaps it is possible to gain some understanding of the impetus behind their actions from the attempts made to form a society at Whittingslow Heath. Whittingslow Heath first appeared in the Shrewsbury circuit quarterly accounts in September 1828, although it had no membership at that point. However, by

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<sup>42</sup> SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Report, 1840.

<sup>43</sup> SRR: NM2775/8: Prees Green Circuit - Quarterly Accounts, 1841-1864.

<sup>44</sup> SRR: NM2612/21-22: Ludlow Circuit - Quarterly Accounts, 1836-44 & 1844-56.

<sup>45</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 250.

<sup>46</sup> SRR: NM2775/8: Prees Green Circuit - Quarterly Accounts, 1841-1864.

<sup>47</sup> SRR: NM4219/3/1&3: Oswestry Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1840-1846 & 1863-1875.

<sup>48</sup> SRR: NM2123/435-437: Shrewsbury Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1835-48, 1848-71 & 1868-1891.



December 1828 Whittingslow Heath was making progress and a total of 12 members were recorded as being attached to the society. But this success was only to be short-lived, and Whittingslow Heath disappeared from the accounts in 1832. In March 1852, no doubt inspired by the memory of previous achievements in this location, the Church Stretton branch of the Bishop's Castle circuit made a second attempt to establish there. However, the success that had been enjoyed between 1828 and 1832 could not be duplicated, and the society was removed from the accounts in March 1853. Although two further attempts were made to establish a society in Whittingslow Heath in 1854 and 1860, no membership was ever formed there again.<sup>49</sup>

While there were many situations in which repeated attempts to form a thriving society failed, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* presents numerous examples where such persistence ultimately produced considerable success. In 1842, the connexional magazine published information about the triumph of Primitive Methodism in the market town of Whitchurch:

‘It was missioned again and again, both by Burland and Prees circuits, and ultimately given up by both. A few years ago we decided to give it another trial, and our preachers went and preached in the streets for a considerable time, when a small house was opened for preaching in a principal street and many came to hear.’<sup>50</sup>

Eventually their success was so great that a chapel was built, and the town became the head of a new circuit. This account is interesting, not only because it provides us with an understanding of the process by which Primitive Methodism became established in the local setting, but because it also raises an important question about the conditions required for success. Why did the cause fail continuously in Whitchurch for such a long time, and what were the ingredients present in 1842 which enabled the Primitive Methodists to establish a healthy and thriving society? Why did certain preachers enjoy success where others had previously failed, and why did those societies which had struggled for a long time suddenly become animated and experience growth? One of the factors for success, as highlighted by the above example, was the need for a ‘permanent place of worship’. In 1852, the Ludlow circuit committee debated the

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<sup>49</sup> SRR: NM2123/433-434: Shrewsbury Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1828-1834 & NM2138/49: Church Stretton Branch Quarterly Accounts, 1847-56.

<sup>50</sup> PMM, 1842, p. 257.



continuance of the Bleathewood society, noting that

‘The Brothers Cundel and Thomas be appointed to go to Bleathewood and enquire if it be possible to obtain a house to preach in, and if it be impossible that we take it off the plan.’<sup>51</sup>

Clearly, a meeting place not only provided the denomination with a secure foothold in the community, but also gave local members a focus for their worship. Another example of the need to obtain a permanent place in which to carry out regular worship, is offered by the efforts of the Leintwardine circuit to establish a society at Craven Arms. For two years, circuit officials attempted to set up worship in this location; however when it eventually became clear that they could not acquire a permanent meeting-place, Craven Arms was given up and removed from the plan.<sup>52</sup>

Although in many cases it is hard to ascertain what was the stimulus for growth, the connexional magazine presents us with several examples where one particular factor was highlighted as having a positive effect upon a failing society. In June 1832, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* published an article about the ‘work of God’ in Kinver, a large village situated close to the county boundary of Shropshire and Staffordshire. The article notes the ‘barbarous and inhuman’ opposition, which had led to the failure of the Methodists, Baptists and Independents over the previous fifty years. In 1825, the Primitive Methodists managed to establish a small society in the village. However, the society did not make rapid progress, and the total number of members remained at either three or four, for the following five years. The connexional magazine notes that the Kinver society’s prospects were considered ‘gloomy’ and ‘discouraging’, and if it had not been for the ‘moving entreaties of the three members’, circuit officials would certainly have discontinued it. Fortunately, from 1830 the society’s fortunes started gradually to improve; however it was not until a lovefeast was held, that the size of the congregation rocketed to 28 and the future of the society was made secure.<sup>53</sup> Camp-meetings were also regularly cited as being the instrument by which new growth was initiated. In 1842, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* detailed the opening of Bircher’s Common chapel, a location in which the Connexion had struggled to establish a thriving society:

‘The cause in this place was for some years low, and it was frequently in

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<sup>51</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1850-55. 13 Sept 1852.

<sup>52</sup> HRO: K76/12: Leintwardine Circuit – Circuit Minute Book, 1864-87.

<sup>53</sup> PMM, 1832, pp. 226-227



contemplation to put it off the plan.’<sup>54</sup>

However, after several young men from Bircher’s Common became converted at a camp meeting in a neighbouring village, the fortunes of the society began to change.

‘The word of God was rendered quick and powerful; sinners were pricked in their hearts, some of whom found peace with God... and joined the society at Bircher’s Common. From that time the work began to move; many were brought to know God, and the preaching house became crowded to excess.’<sup>55</sup>

Hatcher explains that camp meetings were a ‘part of the Primitive Methodist strategy to stimulate an atmosphere of curiosity through the staging of high profile events’, and notes that they could have a considerable impact on a wide geographical area. He argues that people could be drawn from a radius of 20 miles or more, therefore returning ‘unofficial devotees to areas that had not been officially reached.’<sup>56</sup> In 1851, Joseph Grieves of the Wrockwardine Wood circuit sent a report to the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* noting,

‘I have long been persuaded, that these mighty field-days are among the most powerful means now employed for the evangelisation of the masses of this nation, and for the conducting of which God has raised up the Primitive Methodist Connexion.’<sup>57</sup>

Although the initial impetus for growth at Bircher’s Common resulted from a camp meeting, it is clear from the membership figures that the building of the chapel itself also played an important role in the society’s development. Between March 1840 and 1842, the membership of Bircher’s Common increased by 167 per cent. Although this level of growth could not be sustained, and numbers began to decline in the following year, membership figures were never as low as they had been before the chapel was built. Moreover, the provision of the chapel ensured that the society remained an important part of the Ludlow circuit until the end of the century. At Leintwardine too, we can see how the erection of a chapel did much to stimulate its membership.

‘Here we have had a steady society for about five years; but our labours have been much impeded for want of a more convenient place of worship.’<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> PMM, 1842, p. 144.

<sup>55</sup> PMM, 1842, p. 144.

<sup>56</sup> Hatcher, ‘The origin and expansion’, p. 161.

<sup>57</sup> PMM, 1851, p. 626.

<sup>58</sup> PMM, 1842, pp. 144-5.



Membership of the Leintwardine society expanded considerably after the chapel was built in 1842, increasing by 111 per cent between 1842 and 1844.<sup>59</sup> Clearly, the provision of a permanent place of worship put a considerable financial burden upon a local society, and this coupled with the pride in a new building may have encouraged adherents to make a firm spiritual and economic commitment by becoming full members of the Connexion.<sup>60</sup>

### **The Developing Geography of Shropshire Circuits.**

As we have seen, during the first half of the nineteenth century, Shropshire witnessed an explosion of Primitive Methodist activity as missionaries endeavoured to form new societies and to extend circuit boundaries. Missionary activity in the southern regions of Shropshire began in the 1820s. Within the space of just a few years, numerous of Primitive Methodist preaching places were established, as missionaries sent out by the Darlaston circuit travelled through Ludlow and across the extremes of the county, and others from Shrewsbury made their way towards the town of Bishop's Castle.<sup>61</sup>

The first circuit to be formed in the area was Hopton Bank in 1824. Unfortunately, a lack of evidence for the period from 1824 to 1831 prevents us from establishing the precise geographical development of the circuit in its infant years. However, minutes of the quarterly committee meeting reveal that the circuit had made sufficient progress by 1830 for it to be divided. The minutes record:

‘That the Kidderminster branch be made into a circuit.’<sup>62</sup>

In the consolidated minutes of 1836, the Annual Primitive Methodist Meeting stipulated that there must be sufficient evidence to prove that any new circuit would be able to support itself. New circuits were not only required to support two travelling preachers, but also to demonstrate that they had the necessary staff in the form of stewards and circuit committee members to ensure careful management. The Annual Meeting was adamant that:

‘No new circuit shall be made if proof can be given that the forming of such a

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<sup>59</sup> SRR: NM2612/21-22: Ludlow Circuit - Quarterly Accounts, 1836-44 & 1844-56.

<sup>60</sup> Currie, *Methodism Divided*, p. 45.

<sup>61</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 282; Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 198 & pp. 253-8.

<sup>62</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/2: Hopton Bank Circuit – Quarter Day Meeting Minutes, 1828-40, 27 Dec 1830.



circuit will injure the welfare of the parent circuit.’<sup>63</sup>

Evidently, the Hopton Bank circuit had grown sufficiently between 1824 and 1828 to make such a division a necessity. Our first glimpse of the precise dimensions of this circuit is obtained from its roll book of 1831. This reveals that the circuit spanned 19 miles from Broadstone in the north, to Leominster in the south, and covered approximately 195 square miles.<sup>64</sup> While we are unable to make any exact judgements about the level of growth experienced between 1824 and 1831, committee meeting minutes show that circuit officials were determined to follow a course of expansion. Between 1831 and 1840 the Hopton bank circuit turned its attentions to ‘New Ground’ to the north of its territory:

‘That this meeting recommend to the next quarterly meeting the propriety of sending a missionary on the Wenlock side of this circuit with all possible speed.’<sup>65</sup>

Using information about societies from circuit roll books, quarterly accounts or preacher’s plans, it is possible to construct maps of individual circuits. These are extremely valuable, not only because they enable us to discover the area covered by a circuit, but because they also reveal the location and density of societies within them. Moreover, a series of diagrams can allow us to chart the geographical development of a circuit over a period of time. These maps can also be used to compare the progress of two or more circuits, and also to help establish the boundaries of each circuit; this is of particular value when examining the relationships between neighbouring circuits. For example, maps reveal the close proximity of many societies located in different bordering circuits, which, as we shall see, helps to explain why disputes between certain societies regularly occurred.<sup>66</sup>

Figure 4 depicts the Hopton Bank circuit in the years 1831 and 1835.

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<sup>63</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes – 1836, pp. 22-23.

<sup>64</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/3: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Roll Book, 1831-1845. It is important to note that figures given for the area of a circuit are only approximate, as it is often impossible to be certain of their precise boundaries. However, this does not detract from their value, and they provide a clear picture of the expansion and contraction experienced by individual circuits during the nineteenth century.

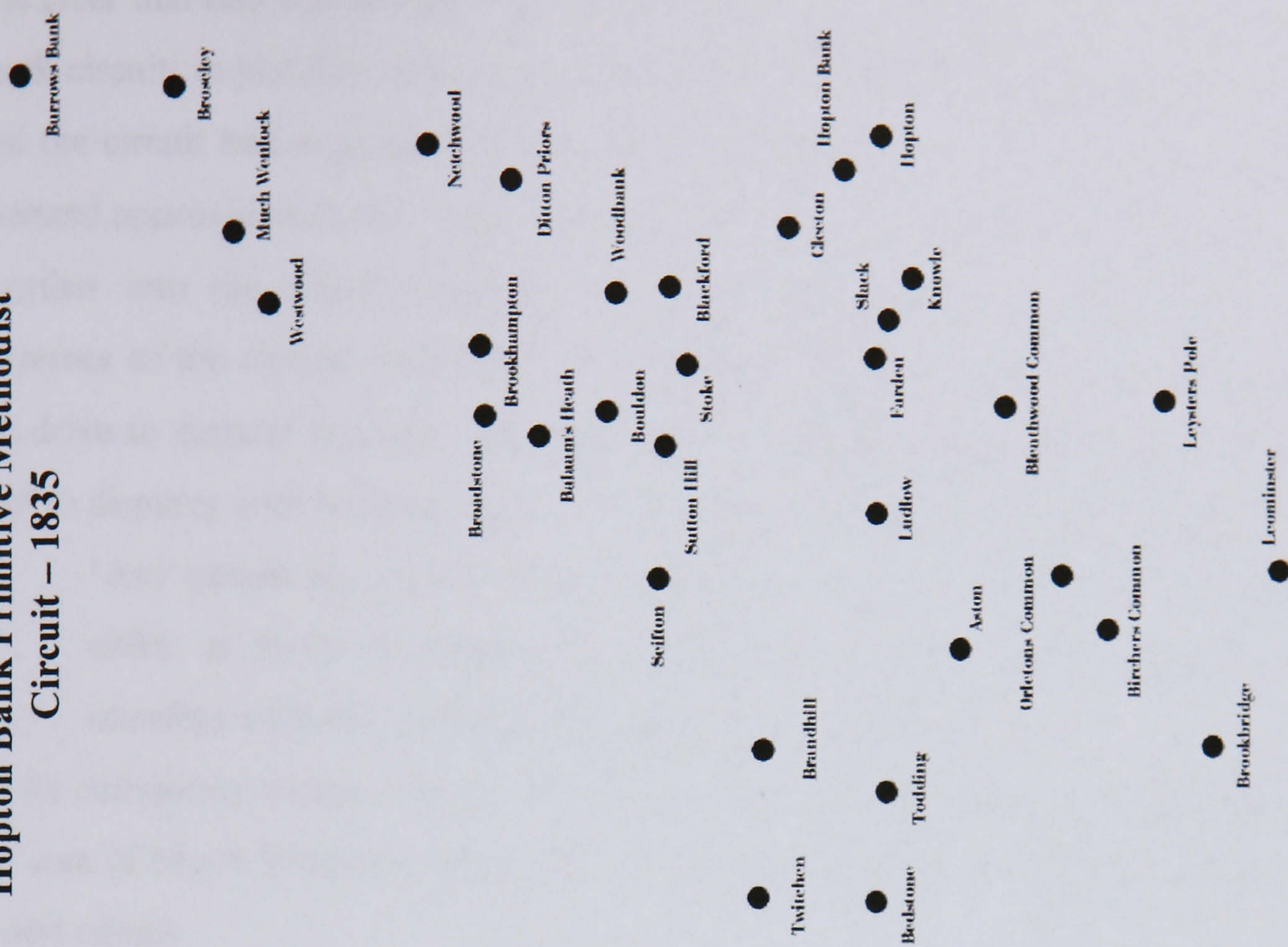
<sup>65</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 15 May 1833 – 16 Apr 1835.

<sup>66</sup> Certain problems can arise when attempting to devise these ‘circuit-maps’. Names of societies were often abbreviated in quarterly accounts and on the plan, for example, the use of Aston, instead of Aston on Clun, therefore making it difficult to be sure that one has the correct location, particularly when a name is common within an area. Another problem is that Primitive Methodist societies were sometimes in remote areas, making it difficult to be certain of exact positions, especially if a place-name is not given on Ordnance Survey maps. However, such uncertainties only arise in a small number of cases, and do not undermine the value of these maps to illustrate the geography of an individual circuit.

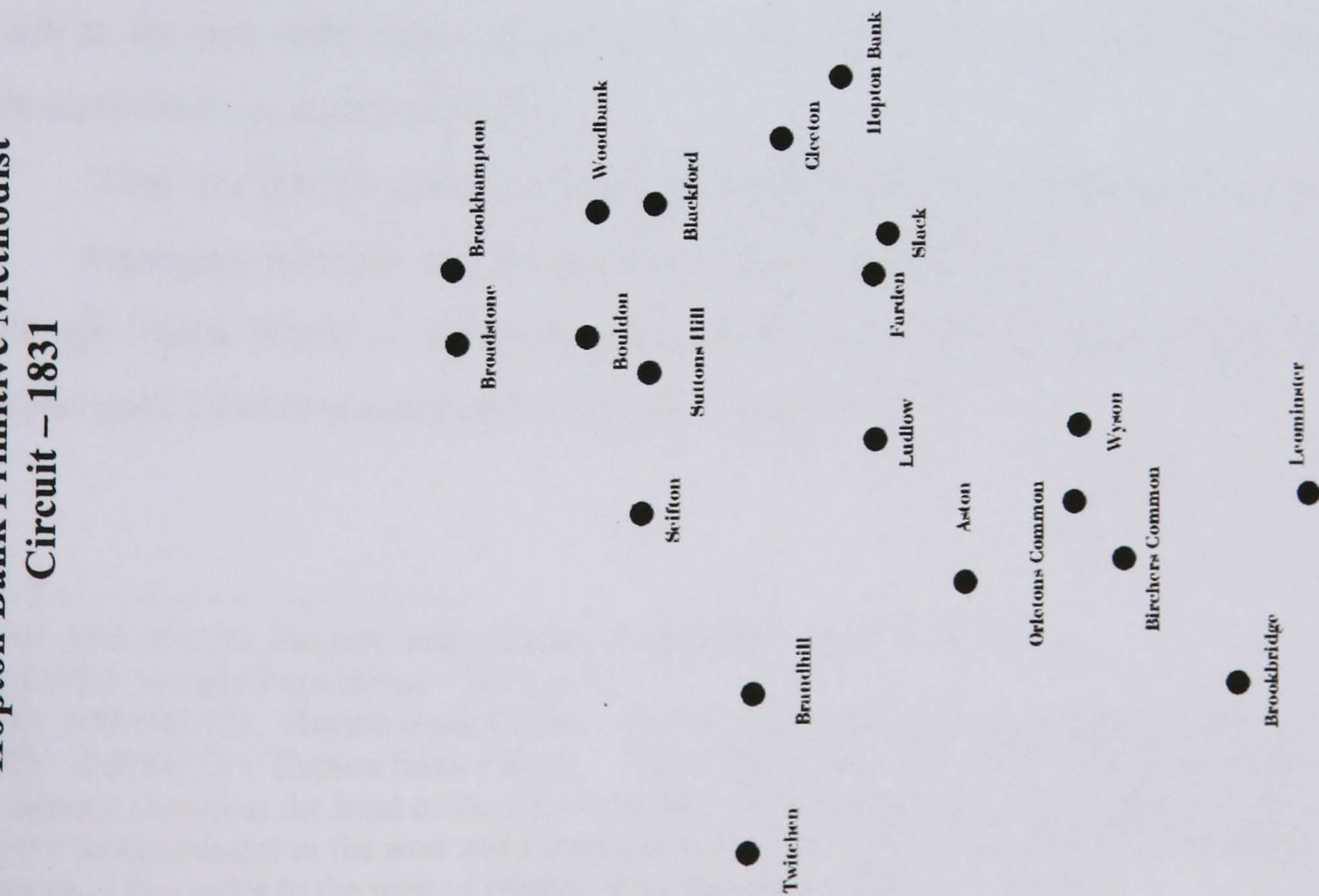


Figure 4

# Hopton Bank Primitive Methodist Circuit – 1835



# Hopton Bank Primitive Methodist Circuit – 1831





It is clear that this was indeed a period of significant missionary activity for the Hopton Bank circuit; in just four years the number of preaching places had risen from 20 to 34, and the circuit had expanded 11 miles to the north. By 1835 the Hopton Bank circuit spanned approximately 293 square miles.<sup>67</sup> In 1835, the northern societies were formed together into the Much Wenlock branch, and missionary activity in the northern extremes of the circuit intensified. It is clear from the evidence of Hopton Bank that the drive to expand territory and increase the number of preaching places could often lead to disputes with neighbouring circuits. In 1831, the Annual Meeting ruled:

‘Any circuit has always been, and still is, at liberty to send out any missionary either at home or abroad; providing that such missionary does in no way interfere with any circuit or station already occupied.’<sup>68</sup>

As its committee minutes reveal, the missionary activity of the Hopton Bank circuit in the area of Much Wenlock, brought it into direct ‘competition’ with the Wrockwardine Wood circuit:

‘That Friend Rich be authorised by the committee to write to Wrockwardine Wood respecting the infringement at Little Dawley, that we consider preaching at Burrows Bank be not an infringement on their circuit.’<sup>69</sup>

Despite this degree of conflict, activity in the Much Wenlock branch continued and by 1840, as figure 5 reveals, the societies located in this area had become a distinct and separate part of the Ludlow circuit.<sup>70</sup> While attempts to form Much Wenlock into a circuit in its own right began in 1837, it is clear that the home branch committee had little confidence in such a division:

‘That the branch cannot be allowed to be made into a circuit as there is not any managing men nor any prospect of it continuing a circuit.’<sup>71</sup>

Although Much Wenlock officials continued to make regular appeals for a division, it was not until 1843 that sanction for this was secured.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/3: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Roll Book, 1831-1845.

<sup>68</sup> PMACM, Various Regulations - 1831, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 5 Oct 1839.

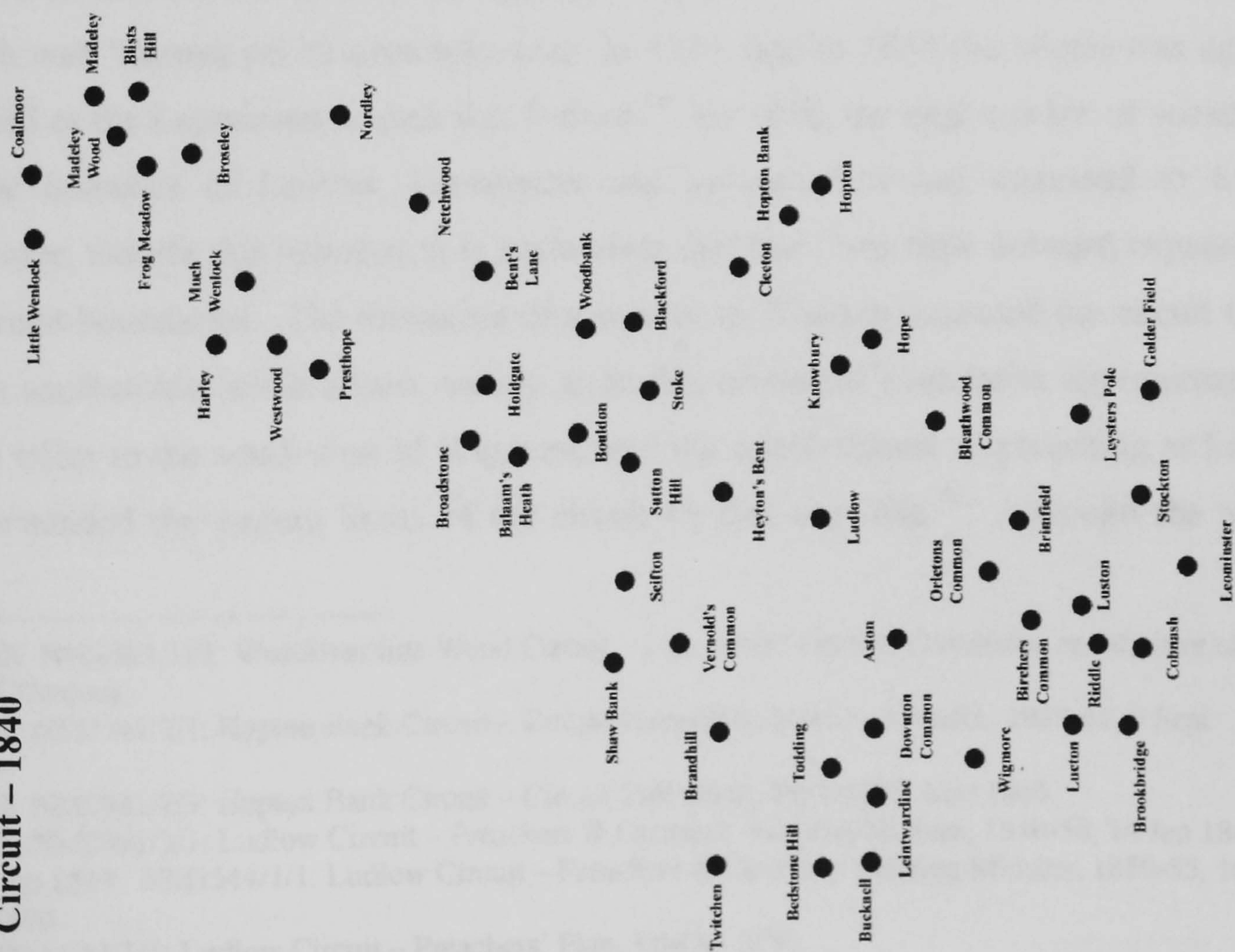
<sup>70</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/3: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Roll Book, 1831-1845. Although Hopton Bank was initially chosen as the head of the circuit because of its convenient location, approximately half-way between Kidderminster in the west and Presteigne in the east, in 1836 the name was changed to Ludlow, as this town five miles to the west of Hopton Bank became the focus of circuit life.

<sup>71</sup> SRR: NM2612/2/2: Hopton Bank Circuit – Preachers & Quarter Day Meeting Minutes, 1828-40, 20 Mar 1837.

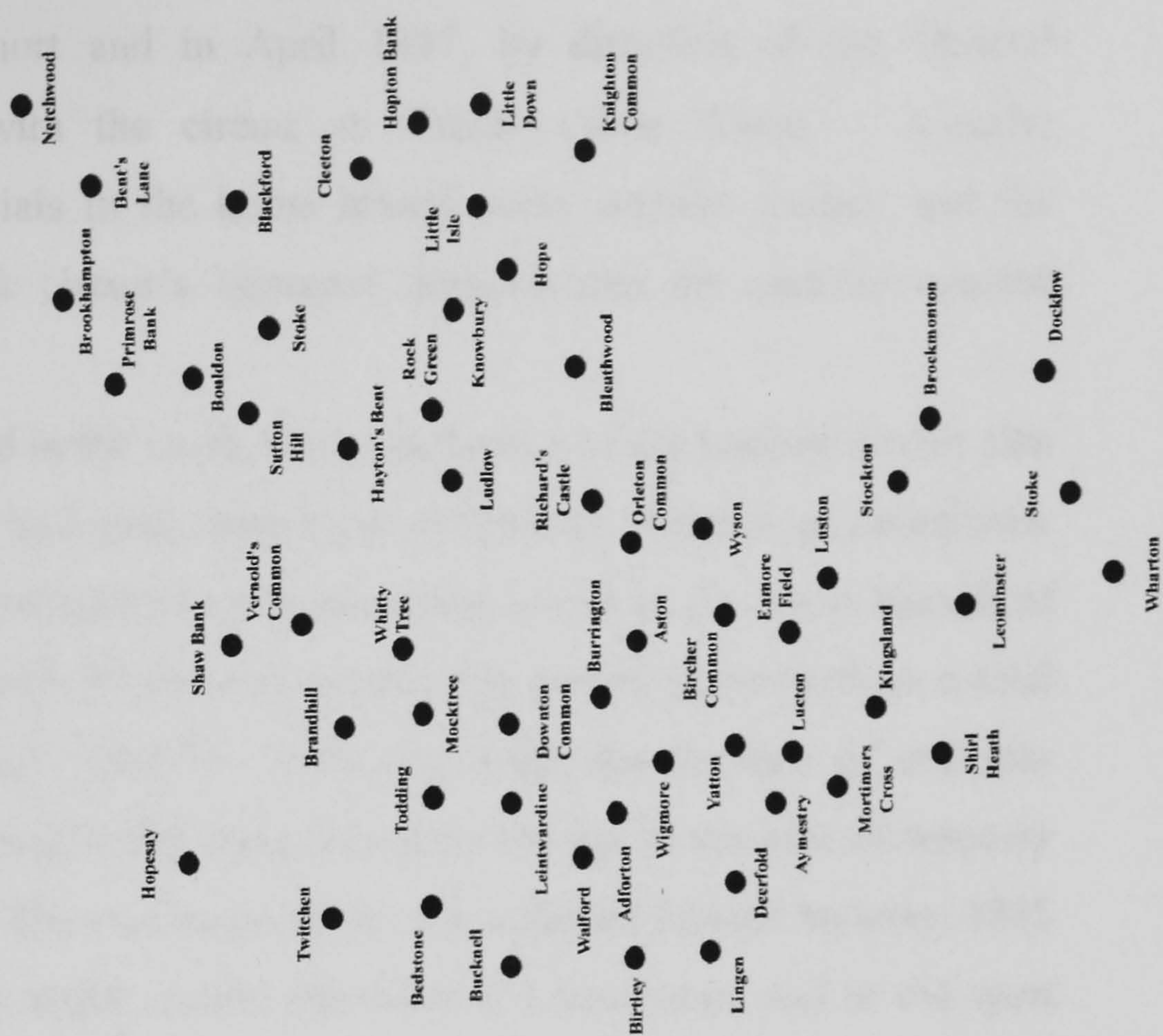
<sup>72</sup> SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1840-50, 20 Mar 1843.



## Ludlow Primitive Methodist Circuit – 1840



## Ludlow Primitive Methodist Circuit - 1850





Despite the determined efforts to secure a division, the life of the Much Wenlock circuit was however very short and in April 1847, by direction of the General Committee, it was united with the circuit at Wrockwardine Wood.<sup>73</sup> Clearly, reservations outlined by officials in the home branch were entirely correct, and the brevity of the Much Wenlock circuit's existence demonstrates the caution required when making such decisions.

As expansion continued in the north, the home branch of the Ludlow circuit also sought expansion in the south and west, stationing an itinerant preacher at Leominster in 1836.<sup>74</sup> The total number of societies and preaching places in the home branch of the Ludlow circuit also increased dramatically during this period, growing from a total of 30 in 1835 to 42 in March 1840.<sup>75</sup> However, while the number of societies continued to grow, figure 5 reveals that there was little change in the size of territory covered by the home branch. The vast majority of new societies formed between 1835 and 1840 were situated in the south around the town of Leominster, and in the west around Leintwardine. For example, we see the establishment of preaching at places such as Bucknell, Luston, and Wigmore. After the northern division of 1843, the level of activity in the south and west of the circuit further intensified. In 1847, societies located to the west of Ludlow were grouped together to form the Leintwardine branch which was 'thrown on its own resources' in 1849, and in 1850 the circuit was again divided as the Leominster branch was formed.<sup>76</sup> By 1850, the total number of societies in the branches of Ludlow, Leominster and Leintwardine had increased to 61.<sup>77</sup> However, despite this increase, it is again clear that there was little outward expansion of circuit boundaries. The formation of a society at Wharton extended the circuit two miles southwards, while a new society at Birtley advanced boundaries approximately three miles to the south-west of Wigmore, and the establishment of preaching at Little Isle extended the eastern limits of the circuit by just one mile.<sup>78</sup> Although the total

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<sup>73</sup> SRR: NM1861/162: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Letter from General Committee re. Minister of Much Wenlock.

<sup>74</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 9 Sept 1836.

<sup>75</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/3: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Roll Book, 1831-1845, Mar 1840.

<sup>76</sup> SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1840-50, 14 Jun 1847 & 18 Jun 1849. NM3544/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1850-55, 16 Sept 1850.

<sup>77</sup> NM3212/12/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers' Plan, Jul-Oct 1850.

<sup>78</sup> While outward development of the Ludlow, Leominster and Leintwardine branches was relatively limited between 1840 and 1850, the total area of the entire circuit actually underwent massive expansion. In 1849, a series of branches and missions were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Ludlow circuit. In



number of societies listed in the quarterly accounts continued to multiply and change in the years to 1850, circuit officials had begun to look for some level of consolidation in its work. In the period between 1840 and 1850, 25 of the 55 preaching places in the Ludlow circuit were either transferred to the new Much Wenlock circuit or were given up, and a total of 31 new societies were formed. However, 30 (or 55 per cent) of the societies listed in the quarterly accounts of 1840 were still present in 1850; moreover, just under half of these had survived from 1831.

It is clear that the geography of Primitive Methodism within Shropshire was established very early in its existence. A significant proportion of the societies listed on Primitive Methodist circuit plans and quarterly accounts at the end of the nineteenth century were actually formed before 1850. Just over 60 per cent, or 11 of the 18 societies on the Ludlow preachers plan of 1906, had been established before 1856, and seven were actually present in the circuit's quarterly accounts of 1840.<sup>79</sup> Again if we look at the Leintwardine circuit which was formed out of Ludlow in 1864, we see that of the 17 societies on the plan in 1895, 12 were already in existence by 1850. Six of these societies were present in the Ludlow quarterly accounts of 1836 and two were recorded in the Shrewsbury quarterly accounts as early as 1829.<sup>80</sup> The evidence of the Bishop's Castle, Shrewsbury and Oswestry circuits also reveals a similar pattern. The Bishop's Castle preachers' plan for the period from April to July 1845 shows that there were a total of 33 societies in the circuit at this time. Of these, 14 were still on the plan in 1874. A further six, were also still in existence as part of the Church Stretton circuit which split from Bishop's Castle in 1872.<sup>81</sup> In the Shrewsbury circuit, 20 (or 51 per cent) of the 39 societies present in the quarterly accounts of 1828 were still in existence in the various circuits divided from Shrewsbury in 1900.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, if we look at the

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April, Ludlow received the Weobley branch of the Cwm circuit, in May it received the mission located at Bromyard, and in October, the Worcester branch of the Brinkworth circuit was also transferred to the Ludlow circuit. (SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1840-50, 14 Apr 1849, 19 May 1849 & 13 Oct 1849). In the space of a single year the area covered by the entire circuit expanded from approximately 67 square miles, to 123 miles. While we must note the vast size of the entire circuit at this point, the acquisition of Bromyard, Weobley and Worcester had little direct impact upon the actual geographical expansion of the Ludlow, Leominster and Leintwardine branches.

<sup>79</sup> SRR: NM2612/21-22: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1836-44 & 1844-56. Ludlow preachers' plan of 1906 has been obtained from the collection held at Englesea Brook Primitive Methodist Chapel & Museum.

<sup>80</sup> HRO: K76/6: Leintwardine Circuit – Circuit plan, 1895; SRR: NM2612/21-22: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1836-44. NM2123/433: Shrewsbury Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1828-30.

<sup>81</sup> SRR: NM2138/54: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Report, 1845 & NM3675/4: Preachers Plan, 1874.

<sup>82</sup> SRR: NM2123/438 Shrewsbury Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1891-1912. NM2138/200: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1900. NM4111/3/3: Minsterley Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1881-



Oswestry circuit we see that 17 of the societies listed in the quarterly accounts of March 1841 were still in existence in the final decade of the century.<sup>83</sup>

By 1840, the Ludlow circuit had already established a core group of societies, which provided a focus for much of the work carried out. Societies such as Hayton's Bent, Hopton Bank, Knowbury Bank, Leintwardine, Leominster, Orleton's Common, Stoke St Milborough, Twitchen and of course the society in the town of Ludlow itself, were all thriving centres of activity. All had healthy memberships and many of them already had chapels. The importance of these societies was reflected in the number of services they planned and the attention they received from the itinerant ministers. For example, if we look at the Ludlow circuit plan, which covers the period July to October 1850, we can see that Ludlow and Leominster, the head society of each branch, had the greatest number of Sunday services during the quarter. Both of these had a morning, afternoon and evening service each week in the quarter.<sup>84</sup> Of the 38 Sunday appointments planned over the thirteen week period, 26 (or 68 per cent) of the Ludlow Sunday services, and 18 (or 47 per cent) of the Leominster services were carried out by one of the itinerant ministers. Similarly, the plan also reveals that the great majority of the special services held during the quarter were planned at these locations. All of the Lovefeasts, Sacraments, Anniversary Sermons, Tea Meetings, and 11 of the 15 camp meetings, 9 of the 14 missionary meetings, and 7 of the 11 missionary sermons, were planned at societies which had been in existence since 1840. It is clear therefore that there had been a definite shift in focus; the desire for continued evangelistic outreach being relinquished in favour of the maintenance of existing local institutions. As Kendall has observed,

‘in the forties the denomination was emerging from the valley, winning a recognised position and seeking to minister to the enlarging needs of those whom it had rescued and elevated and gathered into church fellowship.’<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, it is evident from the work of Rogers and Vickers that this process of institutional change closely paralleled the experiences of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion several decades earlier.<sup>86</sup>

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1901. NM3219/4: Church Stretton Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1880-1900. NM2045/10/65: Hadnall Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1878-1900.

<sup>83</sup> SRR: NM4219/3/1&4: Oswestry Circuit Quarterly Accounts, 1840-46 & 1876-1896.

<sup>84</sup> SRR: NM3212/12/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers' Plan, Jul-Oct 1850.

<sup>85</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, p. 160.

<sup>86</sup> Rogers, 'When city speaks for county', pp. 336-42; Vickers, 'Methodism and society in central southern England', pp. 156 & 159-60.



As well-established centres of activity within the circuit, these societies provided the foundations for the work of the circuit as a whole. However, not only did they play an important role in the spiritual life of the circuit; it also appears that they acted as centres, from which other locations could be missioned. Figure 5 clearly reveals the increasing density of societies within the Ludlow circuit. Of the 31 new societies formed between 1840 and 1850, 23 were situated in the western half of the circuit, and all were within a few miles of societies which had been in existence for over a decade. For example, the society formed at Mocktree was situated within two miles of the societies at Brandhill and Todding, and within one mile of the society at Downton Common.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the new society at Yatton was located just over a mile from Lucton, and the new society at Richard's Castle was within a mile of Orleton's Common.<sup>88</sup> It is therefore evident that the Ludlow circuit officials not only aimed to provide worship for those less willing to travel, but also to consolidate its work and to confirm its geographical position. It is interesting to note that increased activity within the Leintwardine branch during this period brought it into conflict with the boundaries of the Bishop's Castle circuit. In 1847, Ludlow circuit officials requested that Clungunford, a society in the Bishop's Castle circuit, be transferred to its authority. It is perhaps inevitable that the Ludlow circuit should make this request, as Clungunford was actually much closer to the societies in the Leintwardine branch.<sup>89</sup> In 1849, there was further friction between Leintwardine and Bishop's Castle, as the minutes of the Bishop's Castle committee meeting reveal:

‘That it be found that the Leintwardine branch have infringed upon this circuit at Burgham.’<sup>90</sup>

The matter of the Clungunford society which was not settled in 1847, was again brought up by the Ludlow circuit in 1851:

‘That we make an offer of Primrose Bank to Bishop's Castle circuit on the condition of their giving up to the Leintwardine branch, Clungunford, at the same time informing them if they continue to interfere with our societies we

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<sup>87</sup> Brandhill was listed in the circuit roll book of 1831, Todding in the circuit roll book of 1835, and Downton Common in the quarterly accounts of March 1836.

<sup>88</sup> The society at Orleton Common appears in the circuit roll book of 1831, and Lucton in the quarterly accounts of 1836.

<sup>89</sup> While Clungunford was located just 1 mile away from the society at Bedstone, it was approximately 4 miles away from Clunton in the Bishop's Castle circuit.

<sup>90</sup> SRR: NM2138/2/1: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1847-51, 12 Mar 1849.



shall lay out the case in the hands of the District Committee.’<sup>91</sup>

In response, Bishop’s Castle declined to ‘comply with the proposition made by the Ludlow circuit’.<sup>92</sup> However, the Ludlow circuit eventually got its way, and in 1855 Clungunford was included along with the other societies in the Leintwardine branch quarterly accounts.<sup>93</sup>

While a gradual decline of outward expansion can be witnessed in the Ludlow circuit from 1840, in other circuits this process began later. Although we are unable to chart the geographical development of the Bishop’s Castle circuit before 1845, the evidence of its preachers’ plans reveals that the circuit continued to expand up to 1851. In the quarter from April to July 1845, there were 33 societies in the Bishop’s Castle circuit, of which 12 were located in the branch at Church Stretton. Extending west across Offa’s Dyke and into the Clun Forest, and north-west across the hills of the Long Mynd and the Caer Caradoc, the Bishop’s Castle circuit spanned approximately 14 miles from north to south and 16 miles from east to west, and covered 144 square miles.<sup>94</sup> By 1851, the number of societies had grown to 49, 31 in the home branch and 18 in the Church Stretton branch. Of the 49 societies on plan in the quarter from January to April 1851, 20 (or 41 per cent) were ‘new’ societies.<sup>95</sup> Although we cannot be sure that these were completely fresh places that had not been previously missioned, it is impossible to deny that this was a large turnover in the number and location of societies, clearly revealing the continued missionary activity within the circuit. However, while the north-south dimensions of the circuit remained unchanged, considerable expansion occurred in the east, as the home branch established societies at Cefnycoed, Llandyssil and Montgomery, and also in the west as the Church Stretton branch formed societies at Day House, East Wall and Hughley. In 1851, the entire circuit spanned 23 miles from east to west, and covered 198 square miles.

Although Bishop’s Castle continued to grow after 1845, plans reveal that by 1860 the phase of outward-expansion had passed. Between 1851 and 1860, there was not only a slight reduction in the number of societies, but also in the area covered by

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<sup>91</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1850-55, 15 Dec 1851.

<sup>92</sup> SRR: NM2138/44: Bishop’s Castle Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1851-57, 20 Dec 1851.

<sup>93</sup> HRO: K76/18: Leintwardine Branch – Quarter Day Accounts, March 1855.

<sup>94</sup> SRR: NM2133/1: Bishop’s Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, Apr–Jul 1845.

<sup>95</sup> SRR: NM2133/2: Bishop’s Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, Jan-Apr 1851.



the circuit; by 1860 the number of societies had decreased to 46, and the area spanned to 176 square miles.<sup>96</sup> While this was not a major decline, it is apparent that the Bishop's Castle circuit had passed its peak. However, this picture of overall decline masks a maintenance of growth in the Church Stretton branch: during this period, the number of societies in the branch increased from 18 to 20, and its area expanded from 11 to 15 square miles. Moreover, there continued to be a considerable turnover in the location of the Church Stretton societies; seven of the societies on plan in 1860 were new from 1851. In contrast, the home branch underwent a period of considerable contraction, the number of societies declining from 31 to 26. Moreover, there was also very little change in the location of its preaching places, 88 per cent of those on plan surviving from 1851. It is clear from the minutes of the Bishop's Castle circuit committee meeting that the home branch had begun to look for consolidation:

‘That all places where there is no society...be informed that if there cannot be a society formed at those places we must withdraw our labours from them and attend to those places where there is a society after this quarter.’<sup>97</sup>

Although it took longer for Bishop's Castle to evolve into a ‘mature’ circuit, with a core group of viable societies, the pattern of development was the same as in the Ludlow circuit a decade earlier.

As Primitive Methodism increasingly focussed upon its ‘well-established societies’ the age of speculative expansion passed circuit officials ‘took fewer risks, venturing less and failing less’.<sup>98</sup> Although missioning continued and new societies were formed after 1850, Obelkevich has argued that such activity was increasingly ‘overshadowed by the rise of revivalism’. He comments,

‘if it was God who initiated conversions in the first period, now it was self-consciously the preachers. They were confident that revival could break out simply by virtue of their own will-power and prayer-power.’<sup>99</sup>

This point is supported by the evidence of the Ludlow committee meeting minutes:

‘That our members be requested to meet at 7 O'clock on Sunday mornings where convenient to pray for a revival of God's work. If not convenient for

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<sup>96</sup> SRR: NM2138/69: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, Apr-Jul 1860.

<sup>97</sup> SRR: NM2138/43: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1847-51, Jun 1853.

<sup>98</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society* p. 250.

<sup>99</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society* p. 251.



them to meet, to pray at their respective homes.’<sup>100</sup>

While the drive to recruit new converts was still very much alive after 1850, missionary activity increasingly took the form of carefully planned revival and protracted meetings:

‘That a revival meeting be planned for every place in the circuit on some one Sunday on the next plan.’<sup>101</sup>

At the revival meeting, which was held on the Sabbath, various travelling or local preachers were engaged to give a short address to the gathered congregation. Following the same format, the protracted meeting was held over a series of consecutive nights, and usually lasted for a week or more.<sup>102</sup> The purpose of such meetings was not only to create new converts, but also to revive the zeal of existing members. In 1854, Brother J. Guy related information to the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* about the protracted meeting carried out in the Canterbury Mission. From this we can gain a clear insight into the nature of the week-long gatherings. The meeting began on Monday, ‘two souls were saved’ on Tuesday, on Wednesday another good meeting was held, by Thursday ‘the conflict with the powers of hell’ had become very great, and on Friday evening, just as ‘the meeting was about to be closed, 6 souls began to cry for mercy, all of whom found peace.’ On the morning of the Sabbath, Brother Hawes and others processioned through the neighbourhood of the chapel, securing a large number of attendants for the afternoon meeting, and in the evening a love-feast was held and ‘12 more professed to find salvation through faith in Jesus.’ Brother Guy proclaimed the success of the week, noting that many new souls were converted and many backsliders restored.<sup>103</sup>

Plans of the various Shropshire circuits indicate that the protracted meeting was predominantly a feature of the winter. As Church has noted, ‘having been almost regularly confined to their chapels during the winter months’ Primitive Methodists were eager to get out into the open air once more, and as the better weather returned the Camp Meeting was reinstated.<sup>104</sup> While it is evident that Primitive Methodism

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<sup>100</sup> SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1840-50, Quarter Day Dec 1846. In June 1851, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* published an article (pp. 360-3) suggesting that a revival of religion could be secured by ‘frequent conversations on revivals’, ‘diligent attention to the means of grace’, and ‘earnest prayer’.

<sup>101</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/3: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1860-66, 9 Sept 1861: Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>102</sup> Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 134.

<sup>103</sup> PMM, 1854, p. 235.

<sup>104</sup> Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 120.



increasingly saw revival as something that could be ‘consciously planned and carried out by the acts of men’, Obelkevich has observed how the enthusiasm and fervour exhibited during the early years of the movement could also become a feature of the protracted meeting.<sup>105</sup> In 1857, J. Prosser informed the connexional magazine of the successes of the missionary services held in the Oswestry circuit. He noted that the meeting held at Bethel,

‘was large, and the influence mighty; indeed at one time, the weeping of sinners and the shouts of joy from believers were so powerful, that the speakers could not proceed.’<sup>106</sup>

If we look at the plans of the Prees Green and Bishop’s Castle circuits, the changes in missionary tactics are clearly visible in the organisation of the quarterly preaching engagements and the various special services. In the quarter from January to April 1829, weeknight appointments in the Prees Green circuit were divided into six different rounds. This ensured that all of the places listed had weeknight preaching at least once every three weeks. In two of these rounds, one specific day was set aside for ‘Mission’. For example, in the week beginning Monday 26 January, the first travelling preacher J. Hallam, was planned at Market Drayton on the Monday, Ercall Heath on the Tuesday, Marchamley on the Wednesday, Weston on the Thursday and was set free for missionary work on the Friday.<sup>107</sup> By setting aside specific days, the planning committee helped to give missionary work an emphasis, and encouraged the travelling preachers to maintain their endeavours. However as Ambler has argued, this ‘tight planning’ of missionary activity did act to limit its scope, particularly when single days given over to missionary work had fixed appointments on either side.<sup>108</sup> For example, although J. Hallam was set free for missionary work on Monday 2 February, he was planned at Wem on both the Sunday, and on the Tuesday evening. This would have severely restricted his movements on the Monday, and may well have limited the overall impact of his missionary work. Also planned during this quarter was a single missionary meeting at Welch End on Thursday 24 February, and six preachers were planned to address the congregation. It can be argued that missionary meetings were the precursor to the later revival and protracted meetings, as they were very similar in

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<sup>105</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society* p. 226.

<sup>106</sup> PMM, 1857, p. 106.

<sup>107</sup> The Prees Green preachers plan of 1829 has been obtained from the collection held at Englesea Brook Primitive Methodist Chapel & Museum.

<sup>108</sup> Ambler, ‘Preachers and the plan’, p. 31.



nature. In the early period of Primitive Methodist history, the missionary meeting was used as an arena in which to celebrate the glorious victories already achieved and to encourage the work further. Song, prayer and 'stirring speeches' in which the deputation told of the work of the circuit's missions, were followed by tea and the opening of the missionary box.<sup>109</sup> However, as the nineteenth century progressed and the Primitive Methodist Connexion matured, it appears that the character of these meetings changed, increasing emphasis being placed upon the collections made. When in 1857, J. Prosser celebrated the successes of the missionary services in the Oswestry circuit, it was the level of collections that was praised first.<sup>110</sup>

In the quarter from April to July 1831, weeknight appointments continued to be given over to missionary work in the Prees Green circuit; moreover, two Sunday appointments were also allocated for this work.<sup>111</sup> However, by the quarter of January to April 1844, no specific days were set aside for this task. While the earlier plans did not include any revival or protracted meetings, it is clear that these were now being employed as a replacement for the open 'Mission' days, a total of 12 missionary meetings and 10 revival meetings being planned during the thirteen-week period. In the home branch, these meetings were held throughout the quarter, and were planned together at the same location. For example on 4 March, a missionary meeting at Brown Moss followed an afternoon revival meeting. By contrast, in the Market Drayton branch, revival meetings were all held on 21 January, and all missionary meetings were planned for the month of March.<sup>112</sup> Although the Prees Green circuit continued to expand from 1831, as the Oswestry branch became a circuit in its own right and Market Drayton became a branch, by 1844 it appears that there was well established group of societies, and that the drive to advance circuit boundaries had dwindled. However, while the desire for outward expansion of circuit boundaries may not have been as keen as it had been during the earliest years of the movement, it is important to note that success itself could have a negative impact upon missionary work. As the total number

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<sup>109</sup> Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry*, pp. 235-44.

<sup>110</sup> PMM, 1857, p. 106.

<sup>111</sup> SRR: NM5909/1: Prees Green Circuit – Preachers Plan, Apr-Jul 1831.

<sup>112</sup> Prees Green preachers plan of 1844 has been obtained from the private collection of Mr T. Edwards.



of societies within a circuit increased and these were given weeknight appointments and other various engagements, the travelling preachers inevitably had less available time for other endeavours.<sup>113</sup>

It is clear that many circuits were well established by the early 1840s and therefore did not have the demand, or time, for general missionary work. However, the practice of setting aside specific days for missioning endured where need continued. If we look at the Bishop's Castle preachers' plan of April-July 1845, we can see that although the home branch had no missionary activity planned during the quarter, the Church Stretton branch had one Sunday evening and two week nights set aside for mission work each fortnight.<sup>114</sup> This would suggest that the Church Stretton branch was less well developed than the Bishop's Castle half of the circuit, and therefore required more time for general missionary work. Ambler has observed a similar pattern in the Lincoln circuit plan of 1821, noting that the travelling preachers in the 'South Part of the plan were more strongly tied to missionary work than those on the Lincoln or East Part'. While he argues that this 'could reflect the needs of the area as perceived by the compiler of the plan', he also points out that this may simply 'reflect the amount of time available to the full-time preachers after fulfilling their weeknight obligations.'<sup>115</sup>

As we have seen, planned missionary days in the Church Stretton branch did indeed have the desired effect, the total number of societies increasing between 1845 and 1851. However by 1851, the protracted and revival meeting had become the only form of missionary activity within both branches of the Bishop's Castle circuit. During the quarter from January to April, protracted meetings were held in both branches of the circuit. In the home branch protracted meetings, which began at Bishop's Castle and concluded at the society in Asterton, were planned for a total of 15 days. In the Church Stretton branch, the protracted meetings lasted for one week and were planned at five different locations. In total, 14 revival meetings and six missionary meetings were planned throughout the entire circuit during the period from January to April.<sup>116</sup> While the Church Stretton branch enjoyed continued expansion to 1860, the decline witnessed in the home branch would suggest that these changes in missionary 'tactics'

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<sup>113</sup> Ambler, 'Preachers and the plan', p. 31.

<sup>114</sup> SRR: NM2333/1: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, Apr-Jul 1845.

<sup>115</sup> Ambler, 'Preachers and the Plan', p. 31.

<sup>116</sup> SRR: NM2333/2: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, Jan-Apr 1851.



did indeed have a negative effect upon the work of a circuit.

While the outward expansion of Primitive Methodist circuits faltered and the nature of missionary work changed during the second half of the nineteenth century, many circuits continued to undergo considerable transformation in both the number and location of their societies. Taking the evidence of circuit quarterly accounts on a five-year basis, it is possible to obtain a clear insight into the changing number of new societies formed. If we look at the evidence of the Ludlow quarterly accounts, we can see that there continued to be considerable alteration in the societies listed throughout the second half of the century. While many of these did not stand the test of time, some did become important societies where chapels were eventually built. In the period between 1855 and 1860, eight new places were added to the list of societies in the Ludlow quarterly accounts. However, while Cleeton, Cleobury, Little Leinthall and Seifton had been the focus of previous Primitive Methodist attention, Coxheadford, Factory, Hopes Cross and Peaton Strand were new preaching places that had not appeared in the circuit's quarterly accounts before. The five-years between 1860 and 1865 saw the establishment of a further eight new societies at Angel Bank, Ashford, Bitterley, Hints, Little Isle, Middleton, Oerton, and Pipe Aston. Again, all of these were fresh locations previously unmissioned by the Ludlow circuit. Although it is evident that missionary activity was still very much a part of the work of the Ludlow circuit in the period between 1860 and 1865, quarterly accounts reveal that this was carried out within a much narrower field. With the exception of Oerton, all of the new societies created during this period were located within eight miles of the town of Ludlow. New preaching places continued to appear in the Ludlow quarterly accounts from 1865, and by 1870 a further five societies had been established. Again, with the exception of Cleestanton, these were fresh locations that had not been the focus of previous missionary endeavours. While efforts to form new societies continued, it is clear that the success of the Ludlow circuit in this area began to diminish later in the nineteenth century; between 1870 and 1875, only three new societies were established. Although the Ludlow quarterly accounts are made confusing by the appearance and disappearance of the Bromyard Mission in the decade between 1875 and 1885, the decline of missionary results after 1870 remains unequivocal.<sup>117</sup>

If we look at the evidence of the Oswestry circuit, we can again see that

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<sup>117</sup> SRR: NM2612/22-24: Ludlow Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1844-56, 1856-75 & 1875-94.



missionary activity ensured that new societies continued to be formed well into the second half of the nineteenth century. Although six societies were removed from the Oswestry circuit accounts between 1855 and 1860, a total of five new places were added. By 1865, a further six new societies had been created as the total number of places in the accounts rose from 42 to 48. Again, despite a reduction in the total number of preaching places in the circuit between 1865 and 1870, four more societies were added to the accounts during this period. From 1870 however, the quarterly accounts reveal a permanent decline in the establishment of new societies. If we compare the March quarterly accounts for the years 1870 and 1875, we can see that only three new societies were formed during the five-year period. Between 1875 and 1895, this number declined further, and the accounts reveal that in the five years after 1890 no new societies were established.<sup>118</sup> Although decline began after 1870 in circuits such as Ludlow and Oswestry, in others the process started much earlier. Of the 20 societies on plan in the Church Stretton branch in the quarter April-July 1860, six had been established in the period from 1855.<sup>119</sup> However, between 1860 and 1865 only two new societies were formed, and between 1865 and 1870 just one. While Church Stretton did experience spells of greater activity, four new societies being formed in the five-year period from 1880, the decline of real missionary activity ensured that the circuit remained fairly static throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>120</sup> Again we can see a similar pattern in both the Minsterley and Shrewsbury circuits. Neither of these circuits managed to establish more than two new societies in any five-year period after 1865, and both were entirely static after 1885.<sup>121</sup>

While the formation of new societies certainly played an important role, perhaps the most important factor affecting the developing geography of a circuit was the extent of sub-division it experienced. Each of the Shropshire Primitive Methodist circuits underwent some form of division during the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, the Wrockwardine Wood circuit underwent three separate divisions, as the Dawley Green, Oakengates and Wellington, and Stafford circuits were formed. The Prees Green circuit also became fragmented as Market Drayton became a circuit in

<sup>118</sup> SRR: NM4219/3/2-4: Oswestry Circuit – Quarter day Accounts 1850-63, 1863-75 & 1876-96.

<sup>119</sup> SRR: NM2138/64: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, Apr-Jul 1855 & NM2138/69: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, Apr-Jul 1860.

<sup>120</sup> SRR: NM3219/3-4: Church Stretton Branch/Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1860-80 & 1880-1900.

<sup>121</sup> SRR: NM2123/436-438: Shrewsbury Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1848-71, 1868-91 & 1891-1912. NM4111/3/2-3: Minsterley Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1859-81 & 1881-1901.



1869, and Wem in 1878. Oswestry is one particular circuit, which underwent considerable geographical change as a result of sub-division in the later stages of the century. In the period from 1875, the Oswestry circuit experienced a total of three separate divisions as its Rhosymedre, Llanymynech and Ellesmere branches became circuits in their own right.<sup>122</sup> In 1875 the Oswestry circuit had control of 31 chapels and 14 other preaching places. It spanned approximately 17 miles from north to south, and 13 miles from east to west. However, by 1895, there were just seven chapels and two preaching places in the Oswestry circuit, which now spanned approximately seven miles from north to south and eight miles from east to west.<sup>123</sup>

In 1836, the Annual Meeting ruled that each new circuit should be able to support two travelling preachers.<sup>124</sup> However, in the period after 1850, this emphasis declined, as increasing numbers of new circuits formed with just a single itinerant minister. What factors acted as a catalyst for division, and what led to the growing numbers of single-minister stations? Clearly, the maintenance of a single minister inevitably placed much smaller financial burdens upon a new circuit. In 1871, the Knighton branch of the Presteigne circuit became a circuit in its own right. In its annual return of 1869, the Knighton branch admitted that they were unable to support two itinerants, but made an ‘appeal for some privileges’, commenting that ‘other branches have been made into circuits with but one travelling preacher.’<sup>125</sup> Other Shropshire branches such as Church Stretton, Llanymynech and Minsterley were also made into circuits, despite the fact that they were unable to support more than one travelling preacher. Division also had other financial implications, as new circuits took full control of their own monetary affairs. Moreover, it is evident that division itself was viewed as a way in which to increase quarterly revenues. In 1869, Knighton officials proposed that division would encourage the various societies and friends to be

‘more free and liberal in their contributions being naturally prompted to this by a feeling of independence and increased responsibility.’<sup>126</sup>

Appeals made in 1884 for the division of Clun from Bishop’s Castle reveal that the issue of distance was also a matter for consideration when the subject of division was being discussed. Bishop’s Castle circuit officials suggested that ‘the geographical

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<sup>122</sup> SRR: NM4219/4/14 & 27-35: Oswestry Circuit – Annual Returns 1876-78 & 1895.

<sup>123</sup> SRR: NM4219/3/3-4: Oswestry Circuit – Quarter day Accounts 1863-75 & 1876-96.

<sup>124</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes - 1836, p. 22.

<sup>125</sup> Powys County Archives (PCA): R/NC/4/KP/D/8-43: Knighton Branch – Annual Return, 1869.

<sup>126</sup> PCA: R/NC/4/KP/D/8-43: Knighton Branch – Annual Return, 1869.



position of the circuit' was 'such as to occupy time and labour which might be better spent.' Moreover, they noted that the residency of the second itinerant in Clun, located to one side of the circuit, made it more difficult for him to work the station as a whole.<sup>127</sup> The annual return of 1884 also reveals that the creation of 'smaller' circuits not only helped to limit the distances itinerant preachers were required to travel, but also enabled them to concentrate their efforts in the most needy of locations. For example, as there was great competition from both the Church, and the Wesleyans, whose minister spent 'most of his time in Clun itself', Bishop's Castle officials pointed out the importance of sustaining a strong Primitive Methodist presence in Clun.<sup>128</sup> New circuits also attempted to consolidate their geographical positions through the exchange of preaching places. In 1866, the Ludlow circuit committee meeting minuted:

'That we accede to the request of the Branch for the transference to them of Hayton's Bent, Sutton's Hill, Stoke and Blackford, societies and chapels and membership given to them.'<sup>129</sup>

Similarly in 1858, Oswestry handed over control of Lower Wych to the Whitchurch circuit:

'Our Chapel at Lower Wych with society of nine members has been given to Whitchurch circuit, it being more convenient for them to supply the said place with preachers than us.'<sup>130</sup>

The need to reduce financial pressure, and consolidate efforts within smaller, more manageable circuits, led to many divisions of Shropshire Primitive Methodist circuits during the second half of the nineteenth century. However, in certain instances, we see how some circuits had little choice in the procedure as division was ultimately thrust upon them. In 1850, the Shrewsbury circuit made a request for the restationing of Brother Pugh, noting that he had saved them from a 'virtual split', and that his continued presence would enable 'the good understanding he has restored' to be 'perfectly consolidated.'<sup>131</sup> While feuding parties could often be reconciled, in other instances such problems were not so easily remedied. The separation of Oakengates and Wellington from Wrockwardine Wood in 1864 was the result of a dispute over the four societies of Nabb, New Hadley, Snedshill and St. George's, and the division that

<sup>127</sup> SRR: NM2138/97: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Return, 1884.

<sup>128</sup> SRR: NM2138/97: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Return, 1884.

<sup>129</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/4: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1866-79, 3 Dec 1866.

<sup>130</sup> SRR: NM4219/4/2-36: Oswestry Circuit – Annual Return, 1858.

<sup>131</sup> SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Return 1850.



followed created particularly bitter relations between the two circuits.<sup>132</sup> For example, Oakengates and Wellington put preachers from Wrockwardine Wood on its own plan, giving them quarterly appointments on days when they were already planned, in the Wrockwardine Wood circuit.<sup>133</sup> In 1865, the Wrockwardine Wood annual return noted that the

‘unhappy strife between the two circuits has damaged us numerically and spiritually. We have done all we can to put down this unhappy contention but at present it seems in vain...we have offered to amalgamate the station and call it the Wrockwardine Wood and Oakengates Circuit - yet still they resist.’<sup>134</sup>

However, the acrimony continued. Oakengates and Wellington circuit listed the four societies in question upon its plan, and planned its preachers to meet with those of Wrockwardine Wood. The minutes of the Wrockwardine Wood committee reveal that this carried on for a period of six months, and noted that ‘on one occasion Mr Casewell preached a sermon at Mr Prosser’s back.’<sup>135</sup> In 1866, the Wrockwardine Wood circuit pointed out that

‘Snedshill is ours by the Minute of the December Quarterly Meeting at the time of division, and it has been confirmed by all connexional courts since, even by the last conference – but the Oakengates and Wellington circuit authorities are above all law...By their own acknowledgement they have taken from us 23 members at Snedshill, and of course they have taken the monies from those ever since...’<sup>136</sup>

Clearly, the society of Snedshill was almost split in two; 23 wanted to join with Oakengates and Wellington, while the other 27 members wished to remain within the Wrockwardine Wood circuit. There was also considerable dispute about the precise boundary line between the two circuits. While Wrockwardine Wood upheld that the boundary was ‘parallel from Wood Barracks up into Snedshill as far as Four Lane Furnace and down right into the midst of St. George’s’, Oakengates disputed this, and

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<sup>132</sup> SRR: NM3038/1/1-3: Oakengates & Wellington Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1865-93, 6 Mar 1865.

<sup>133</sup> SRR: NM3511/7: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1845-68, 16 Jan 1865.

<sup>134</sup> NM1861/15: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Annual Return 1865.

<sup>135</sup> SRR: NM3511/7: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1845-68, 7 Jul 1866.

<sup>136</sup> NM1861/16: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Annual Return 1866.



suggested that the voting to establish this line had been illegal.<sup>137</sup>

Although neither side wanted to give in, it is clear that both wished to be sure of their geographical and financial positions, and to settle the dispute. In 1866, the General Committee recommended that ‘New Hadley and all the houses below the canal’ be given up to Oakengates, and that ‘Wrockwardine Wood does not hold services nearer to Oakengates than it does now.’ Moreover, it suggested that the Oakengates and Wellington circuit withdraw its services from the society at Wood Barracks.<sup>138</sup> Although the recommendation did not mention the other societies in question, we discover from the Wrockwardine Wood quarterly accounts that Snedshill, St. George’s and the Nabb remained under its jurisdiction until the end of the century.<sup>139</sup>

Let us now examine the effect of division upon the geography of the Ludlow and Bishop’s Castle circuits during the second half of the nineteenth century. In the period between 1850 and 1906, the area originally covered by the home branch of the Ludlow circuit experienced three divisions.<sup>140</sup> In 1854, the branches of Leominster and Weobley were joined and became a new circuit in 1855.<sup>141</sup> In 1864, a second permanent division of the Ludlow circuit occurred as Leintwardine branch was made into a circuit in its own right.<sup>142</sup> The evidence of quarterly meeting minutes reveal that Leintwardine officials had been pushing for a division for several years. The first mention of this subject was made in 1861:

‘That we make application to the General Committee to become a circuit.’<sup>143</sup> In 1863, the issue of division arose again and another request to make Leintwardine a circuit was made; once more this was denied. Minutes reveal that the stumbling block in this matter was Leintwardine’s lack of travelling preachers; as we have seen branches were required to have two itinerant ministers before a division could be

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<sup>137</sup> SRR: NM3511/7: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1845-68, 7 Jul 1866 & SRR: NM3038/1/1-3: Oakengates & Wellington Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1865-93, 6 Mar 1865.

<sup>138</sup> SRR: NM3511/7: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1845-68, 7 Jul 1866.

<sup>139</sup> SRR: NM3511/16: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1875-96.

<sup>140</sup> The Worcester branch was transferred to the Kidderminster circuit in 1855, and the Bromyard mission was given up to the General Missionary Committee in 1861. However, these divisions had no impact upon the geographical development of the Ludlow, Leominster and Leintwardine branches.

<sup>141</sup> HRO: J92/26: Leominster Branch – Quarterly Branch Meeting Minutes 1848-52, 6 Mar 1854. SRR: NM3544/1/2: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1855-60, 10 Sept 1855.

<sup>142</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/3: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1860-66, 7 Mar 1864.

<sup>143</sup> HRO: K76/10: Leintwardine Circuit Minute Book 1849-65, 4 Sept 1861.



allowed to go ahead, and in 1863 Leintwardine had just one travelling preacher.<sup>144</sup> Demands were made by branch officials that they be given ‘the liberty to call out another travelling preacher’, and in 1864 a further plea for division was noted in the minutes:

‘That we use every proper means to have this branch made into a circuit with one or two preachers and we request the Home branch to use all their influence for that purpose.’<sup>145</sup>

Figure 6 shows the location of preaching places listed in the Ludlow circuit quarterly accounts of March 1860. With the removal of its branches, the Ludlow circuit was significantly reduced. In 1860, the Ludlow circuit spanned approximately 16 miles from Netchwood in the north to Bircher’s Common in the south, and 13 miles from Little Leinthall in the west to Cleobury Mortimer in the east. The circuit had 31 societies, and covered a total of 137 square miles.<sup>146</sup>

While attempts were being made in the early 1860s to create a permanent division in the western half of the Ludlow circuit, moves towards a second division in the north were also underway. In 1862, circuit officials ruled:

‘That the upper places of the circuit as presented on the draft plan be made into a branch.’<sup>147</sup>

The Primrose Bank branch of the Ludlow circuit remained in existence for over a decade, before this too was permanently divided from the home branch in 1875.<sup>148</sup> Figure 6 reveals the size of the Ludlow circuit after the separation of Peaton Strand. By March 1875, the total number of societies in the Ludlow circuit had fallen to 24, and the area it covered to 125 square miles.<sup>149</sup> The results of the Ludlow circuit’s continued missionary endeavours are also made clear, as new societies appeared at Angelbank, Ashford, Cleobury Mortimer, Hill Houses, Middleton and Sandpits. However, it is evident that division acted to limit the opportunity for outward expansion. Bounded by the circuits of Leintwardine in the west, Peaton Strand in the north, and Leominster and Weobley in the south, the only available avenue for expansion left open to Ludlow was in the east. As we can see, with the exception of Hatfield, all of the new preaching

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<sup>144</sup> HRO: K76/10: Leintwardine Circuit Minute Book 1849-65, 8 May 1863.

<sup>145</sup> HRO: K76/10: Leintwardine Circuit Minute Book 1849-65, 2 Mar 1864.

<sup>146</sup> SRR: NM2612/23: Ludlow Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1856-75, March 1860.

<sup>147</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/3: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1860-66, 8 Dec 1862.

<sup>148</sup> On becoming a circuit the Primrose Bank branch was renamed Peaton Strand.

<sup>149</sup> SRR: NM2612/23: Ludlow Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1856-75, March 1875.



places were either a relatively short distance of the town or to the east. Although Ludlow experienced no further divisions after the separation of Peaton Strand in 1875, as figure 7 shows, the contraction of the circuit continued. By 1890, the number of societies in the circuit had fallen to 21 and with the transfer of the society at Hatfield to the Bromyard circuit, and the removal of the society at Onibury, the total area spanned by the Ludlow circuit declined to approximately 84 square miles.<sup>150</sup> By 1906, the total area of the circuit had declined further. The preachers' plan which covers the quarter October to December shows that the Ludlow circuit had control of just 18 societies and spanned a mere 59 square miles.<sup>151</sup>

Bishop's Castle circuit also underwent two phases of sub-division during the second half of the nineteenth century. The first of these came in 1872 when the Church Stretton branch became a circuit in its own right; the second in 1884 when Clun was also formed into a new circuit. As we have already seen, in 1860, the Bishop's Castle circuit spanned approximately 13 miles from east to west, and 21 miles from north to south, covering a total area of 176 square miles.<sup>152</sup> However, by 1874, we can see that the Bishop's Castle circuit had been reduced to 86 square miles.<sup>153</sup> The main reason for this contraction was the separation of Church Stretton in 1872; however, the home branch also 'lost' the societies of Cefnycoed, Montgomery and Pentre Highland, which were located between three and five miles to the west of Old Church Stoke. These losses acted further to reduce the overall area covered by the circuit of Bishop's Castle. While new preaching places were formed in the period between 1860 and 1874, these were all located within the well-established confines of the circuit. After the division of Clun in 1884, the Bishop's Castle circuit was again further reduced. In 1894, the Bishop's Castle circuit had a total of 14 societies and spanned just 52 square miles.<sup>154</sup>

Figure 8 depicts the circuits of Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton and Clun in the final decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>155</sup> It not only demonstrates the way in which the Bishop's Castle circuit became fragmented, but also makes clear the compact nature of

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<sup>150</sup> SRR: NM2612/24: Ludlow Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1875-94, March 1890; HRO: W66/22: Bromyard Circuit – Annual Return 1883.

<sup>151</sup> Ludlow preachers plan of 1906 has been obtained from the collection held at Englesea Brook Primitive Methodist Chapel & Museum.

<sup>152</sup> SRR: NM2138/69: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, Apr-Jul 1860.

<sup>153</sup> SRR: NM3675/4: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, Jan-Apr 1874.

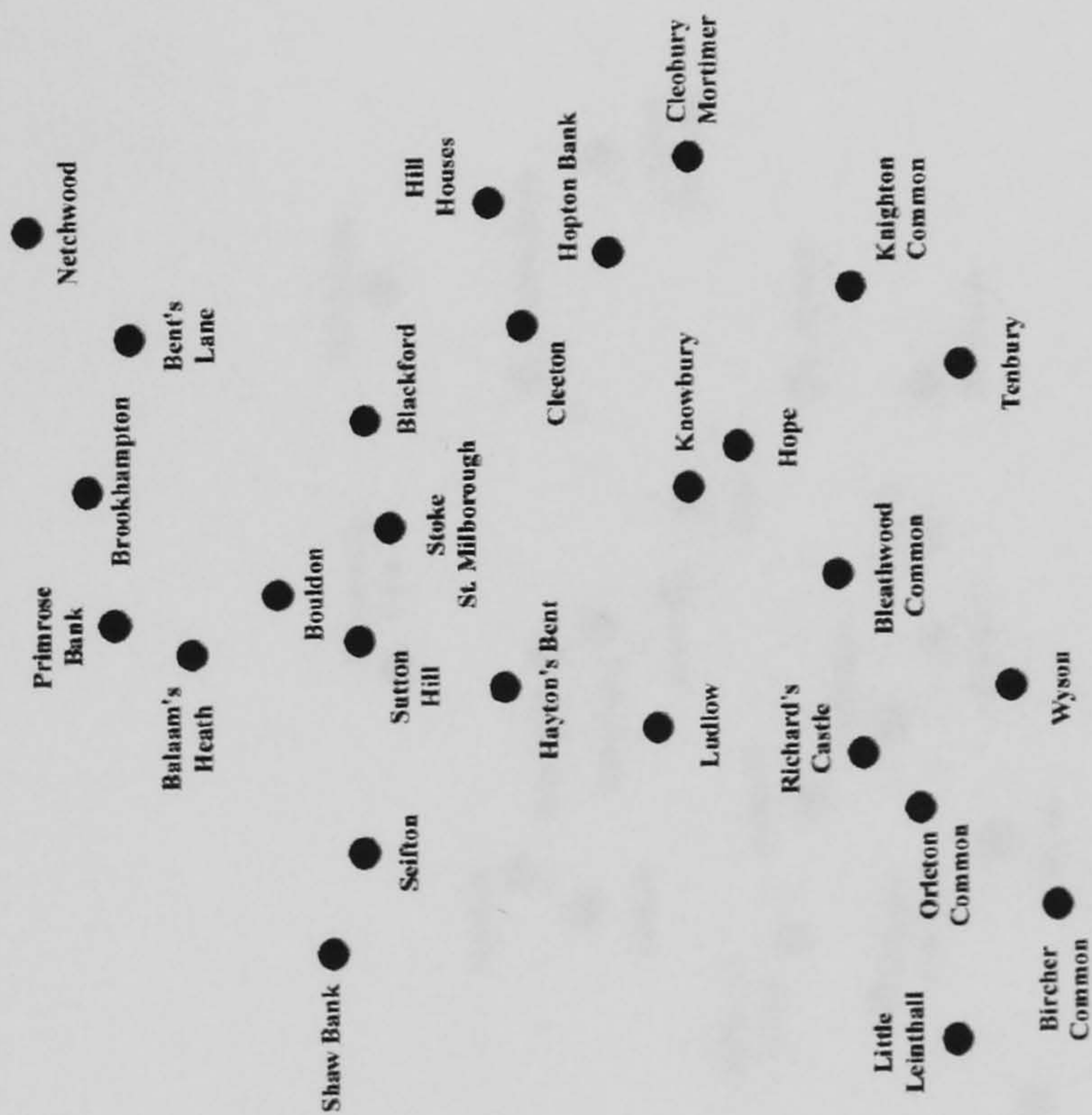
<sup>154</sup> SRR: NM2138/111: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Return 1894.

<sup>155</sup> SRR: NM2138/111: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Return 1894, NM2333/39: Clun Circuit – Preachers Plan, Apr-Jul 1894; NM3219/4: Church Stretton Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts, March 1895.



Figure 6

Ludlow Primitive Methodist  
Circuit – 1860



Ludlow Primitive Methodist  
Circuit – 1875





Figure 7

Ludlow Primitive Methodist  
Circuit – 1906



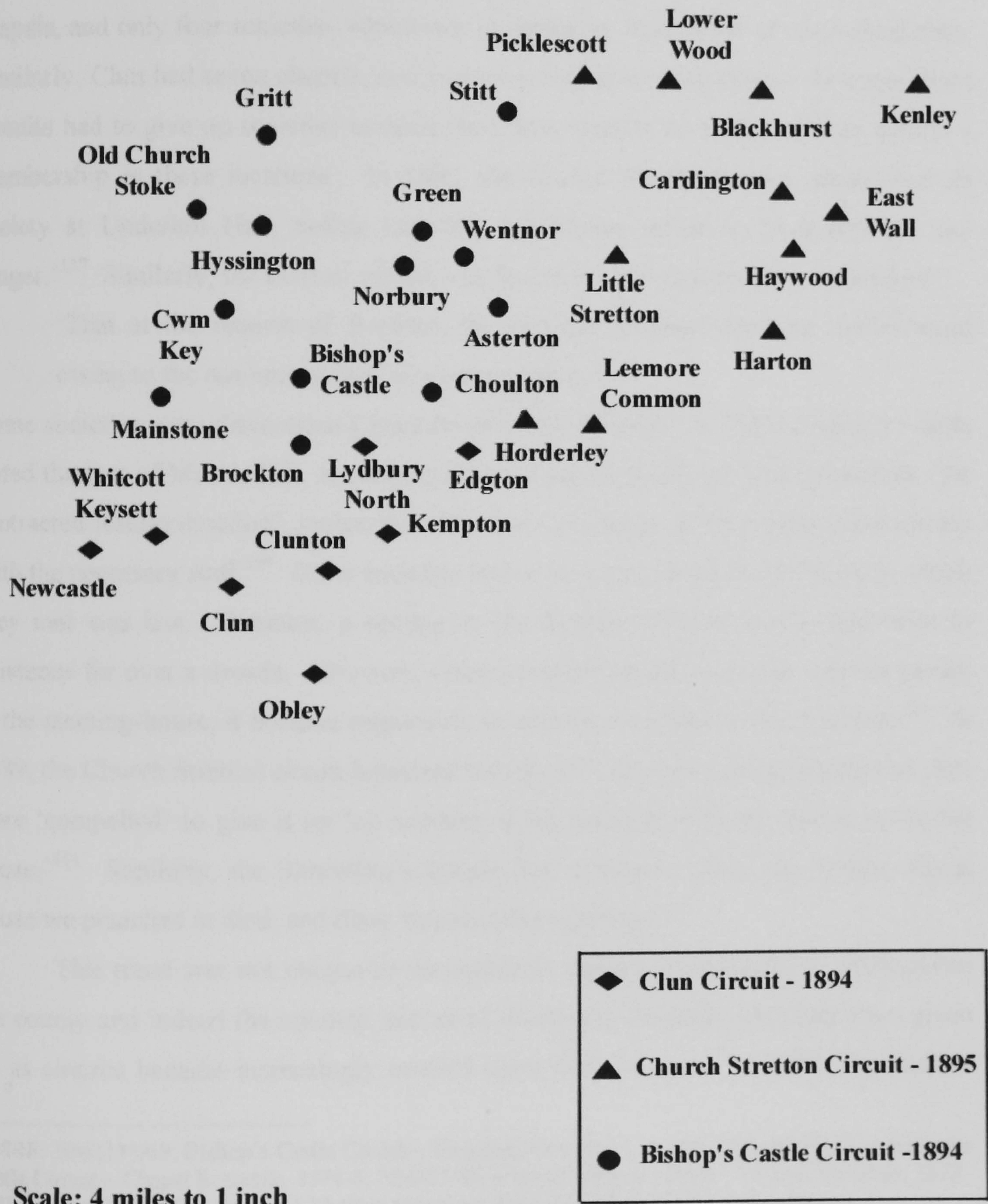
Ludlow Primitive Methodist  
Circuit – 1890





Figure 8

# The Division of Bishop's Castle Circuit





Primitive Methodist circuits at this time. One of the most interesting points which is revealed by the evidence of the Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton and Clun circuits between 1984 and 1895, is the extent to which the chapel now dominated. In 1860, only 30 per cent of the societies and preaching places listed on the Bishop's Castle preachers' plan had a chapel.<sup>156</sup> However, 65 per cent of the societies shown on figure 8 were locations with Primitive Methodist chapels. In 1894, Bishop's Castle had 10 chapels, and only four societies, which met in rented or other types of accommodation. Similarly, Clun had seven chapels, and just two other preaching places. In many cases circuits had to give up societies because they were simply no longer able to sustain a membership in these locations. In 1882, the Church Stretton circuit abandoned its society at Underhill Hall, noting that the 'inhabitants refuse to have services any longer.'<sup>157</sup> Similarly, the Ludlow circuit was forced to give up its society at Burford:

'That at the request of Burford, the services planned there be discontinued owing to the non-attendance of a congregation.'<sup>158</sup>

Some societies were discontinued because of a lack of staff. In 1884, Bishop's Castle noted the loss of Moat's Hill, explaining that the expulsion of two local preachers, 'for protracted insubordination', meant that they were no longer able to supply this society with the necessary staff.<sup>159</sup> Other societies had to be given up when the house in which they met was lost. Wentnor, a society in the Bishop's Castle circuit, had been in existence for over a decade. However, when a dispute erupted between various parties at the meeting-house, it became impossible to continue worship in this location.<sup>160</sup> In 1889, the Church Stretton circuit lamented the loss of Leebotwood, explaining that they were 'compelled' to give it up 'on account of the conduct of those who lived in the house.'<sup>161</sup> Similarly, the Shrewsbury circuit lost a society when 'the person whose house we preached in died, and there was no other opening.'<sup>162</sup>

This trend was not unique to the southern regions of Shropshire. Throughout the county and indeed the country, scores of Primitive Methodist societies were given up as circuits became increasingly centred upon their chapels. In 1881, the Ludlow

<sup>156</sup> SRR: NM2138/69: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, Apr-Jul 1860, NM 2138/155-6: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1874-5; NM3219/6: Church Stretton Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1873. In 1860, there were 14 chapels and 32 other preaching places in the Bishop's Castle circuit.

<sup>157</sup> SRR: NM3219/6: Church Stretton – Annual Return, 1882.

<sup>158</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/5: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1890-99, 2 Jun 1892.

<sup>159</sup> SRR: NM2138/97: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Return, 1884.

<sup>160</sup> SRR: NM2138/73: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Return, 1864.

<sup>161</sup> SRR: NM 3219/6: Church Stretton Circuit – Annual Return, 1889.

<sup>162</sup> SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Return, 1884.



circuit had a total of 14 chapels, and 15 societies which met in houses or other rented accommodation. However, while the number of chapels changed little, there was a dramatic reduction in the number of societies without a permanent place of worship during the final decades of the century; by 1890 the Ludlow circuit had 15 chapels, and just 6 other preaching places.<sup>163</sup> By the time of the 1906 circuit plan, these other places had been further reduced; only the societies at Richard's Castle, Bircher's Common and Hill Houses did not meet in a chapel.<sup>164</sup> Similarly, other circuits such as Minsterley, Shrewsbury and Wrockwardine Wood all went through a similar process, as the number of chapels increased and the preaching places declined. By the turn of the century, the Minsterley circuit had 13 chapels and two other preaching places, Shrewsbury had eight chapels and just one other preaching place, and the Wrockwardine Wood circuit had 13 chapels and six other preaching places.<sup>165</sup> Cooper has highlighted the same trend in the Saffron Waldon circuit in Essex. In 1855-6, the Saffron Walden itinerants were planned around a total of 32 societies; however, only eight of these had chapels. By 1878, the number of chapels had risen to nine, while the number of societies held in meeting houses or rented accommodation had fallen to seven. In 1896, there were 10 chapels and just one other preaching place in the circuit.<sup>166</sup>

On a national scale, chapel-building within the Primitive Methodist Connexion peaked in the years between 1863 and 1872; chapels finally outnumbering rented rooms in 1868.<sup>167</sup> Obelkevich has argued that as outward expansion declined, the chapel became the focus of Primitive Methodist endeavours. Providing status and security, a chapel was the aspiration of many societies.<sup>168</sup> As the experience of the Molverley society in the Oswestry circuit reveals, even those which could not be deemed particularly successful strove to build a chapel:

'This is a small and thinly populated parish, and our society is rather weak, but having no certainty of a place wherein to worship, land was obtained...whereon

<sup>163</sup> SRR: NM2612/24: Ludlow Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1875-94, March 1890.

<sup>164</sup> Ludlow preachers plan - 1906.

<sup>165</sup> SRR: NM4111/4/1-2: Minsterley Circuit – Annual Returns, 1852-68 & 1872-99; NM2123/379-90: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Returns, 1840-90 & 1890-1900; NM1861/11-101: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Annual Returns, 1861-1904.

<sup>166</sup> J. Cooper, "'A Fine Field for Usefulness". Primitive Methodism in the Saffron Walden Circuit, 1838-1900', in *Family and Community History*, (2002).

<sup>167</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 456.

<sup>168</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society* p. 251.



to build a chapel.’<sup>169</sup>

It is clear from the evidence of several Shropshire circuits that there was considerable demand from members to worship in chapels. As the 1881 annual return of the Leintwardine circuit shows, societies that did not have their own chapel often chose to amalgamate with those that did:

‘The Park Lane society request to worship at the Craven Arms chapel, it being one mile away.’<sup>170</sup>

In 1885, the Shrewsbury circuit was forced to discontinue the society at Rock Terrace as it was located too near to the Belle Vue chapel.<sup>171</sup> Similarly, the Wrockwardine Wood circuit gave up societies at New Hadley and Bunter’s Row, both of which were deemed as being situated too close to other chapels.<sup>172</sup>

## Conclusion.

So what general trends in the geographical development of circuits, can be ascertained from the experience of Shropshire Primitive Methodism during the nineteenth century? During the first half of the century, Primitive Methodist circuits often covered huge expanses of territory, and were made up of scores of preaching places, as travelling preachers and missionaries attempted to form societies in many different locations. However, as a core of viable societies was established and these were given permanency as a result of chapel building, the nature of missionary activity changed and the work of the circuit became increasingly inward looking. The decline in outward expansion which began before 1850 was exacerbated during the second half of the nineteenth century, as sub-division created a plethora of new Primitive Methodist circuits in Shropshire. This trend divided circuits into smaller, more manageable geographical areas, which could often be manned by a single itinerant minister. Finally, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, Primitive Methodist circuits underwent a phase of contraction, as preaching places were given up and the work became focused on the chapel.

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<sup>169</sup> PMM, 1866, p. 690.

<sup>170</sup> HRO: K76/34: Leintwardine Circuit – Annual Return, 1881.

<sup>171</sup> SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Return, 1885.

<sup>172</sup> SRR: NM1861/20: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Annual Return, 1870.



## **Chapter 9: Cementing the Future:**

### **Primitive Methodist Chapel-Building**

The era of Primitive Methodist chapel building should be seen as an inevitable development. As Kendall observes:

‘So much ground had been quickly covered during the specially missionary period, that the housing of the converts, the making provision for their needs, and the creation of the plant needful for future working were practical matters admitting of little delay.’<sup>1</sup>

In 1847, the majority of Primitive Methodist meetings were held in rented chapels and rooms. However, from this point Primitive Methodist building activity began to increase and in 1868 the number of connexional chapels (which rose from 1421 in 1847 to 3235 in 1868), exceeded the number of rented places for the first time.<sup>2</sup> Gilbert has argued that the organisational consolidation of nineteenth-century Nonconformist denominations was ‘exemplified most obviously in chapel-building.’<sup>3</sup> In this chapter I will examine the impetus to cement the future by way of chapel building, looking in particular at the financial implications of this activity for Primitive Methodism at the local level. While it will become clear that chapel building certainly ‘heightened the need for caution and routine’, and placed considerable financial burdens upon a local society, we must question the extent to which the chapel drained the ‘spiritual resources’ of the Primitive Methodist Connexion.<sup>4</sup> I will also examine the effect of chapel-building upon the nature of worship provided by Primitive Methodism as the nineteenth century advanced, for example by looking at the increasing specialisation of the ministerial role and at the growing demand for a more educated and professional ministry.

As we have seen, the acquisition of a chapel provided Shropshire Primitive Methodist societies with a permanent place of worship, and enabled them to remain an effective presence within the local setting. A chapel was of considerable benefit to a Primitive Methodist community for several different reasons. Not only did it remove

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<sup>1</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 455.

<sup>2</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 456.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 160.

<sup>4</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 251.



the pressure from those attempting to carry out worship in tied cottages, but it also provided a greater flexibility and freedom from conflict with domestic activity. Moreover by enabling greater numbers to be accommodated, a chapel created a new base for further recruitment. Perhaps one of the most important benefits was that a chapel bestowed 'some social standing to many who in other ways had been dispossessed.'<sup>5</sup> However, due to the extreme poverty of many village societies, the majority of Primitive Methodist chapels built during the early years were much smaller and cheaper than those of other Nonconformist bodies.<sup>6</sup> In many instances, the chapels erected were 'humble places not far removed from the intimate cottage meetings which they replaced'.<sup>7</sup> In his work on Nonconformist communities in north Shropshire, Yalden has highlighted the considerable disparity between the Primitive Methodists and other Nonconformist denominations in the expenditure on chapels. Taking a sample of 32 chapels built between 1831 and 1891, Yalden has calculated that the mean expenditure of the Primitive Methodists was £204. In comparison the Wesleyan Methodists spent an average of £402 on nine buildings, while the Congregationalists spent an average of £496 on 20 chapels. Yalden points out that this low level of expenditure was a feature of Primitive Methodist building throughout the country, citing the example of Norfolk where the average cost of 16 chapels was just £218.<sup>8</sup> Watts has also arrived at a similar figure, calculating that the median cost of a sample of 72 Primitive Methodist chapels constructed before 1850 was just £200.<sup>9</sup>

Primitive Methodist chapel schedules for the central and southern regions of Shropshire also reveal a very similar pattern of building to that highlighted by both Yalden and Watts. Taking a sample of 65 chapels built between 1822 and 1899, we discover that the mean expenditure was £198 13s 2d.<sup>10</sup> However, the calculation of an average figure conceals considerable diversity in the sums spent on individual buildings. Chapels at the head of a circuit were often much bigger buildings, providing

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<sup>5</sup> S. Hatcher, *God is building a house: from Mr Smith's kitchen to Vision 2000* (9<sup>th</sup> Chapel Aid Lecture: Englesea Brook, 1999), p. 12; Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> Lysons, *A Little Primitive*, p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> Yalden, 'Nonconformity in north Shropshire', p. 141.

<sup>8</sup> Yalden, 'Nonconformity in north Shropshire', pp. 140-1.

<sup>9</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 223.

<sup>10</sup> This sample is taken from the circuits of Bishop's Castle, Leintwardine, Leominster and Weobley. Minsterley, Shrewsbury and Wrockwardine Wood. The figure calculated excludes any expenditure on renovation or rebuilding. SRR: NM2138/130-200: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1855-1900; NM4111/4/1-2: Minsterley Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1860-1896; NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1853-90; NM1861/10-86: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1859-93; HRO: K76/34: Leintwardine Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1853-1900; W66/35-39: Leominster



sittings for a large number of people; for example, the chapel erected at Wrockwardine Wood in 1822 cost a total of £370, and could accommodate a total of 500 people. Similarly, the chapel at Shrewsbury cost £850, and could accommodate 300 people.<sup>11</sup> However, the majority of chapels in the sample examined here were much more modest buildings, and a significant number cost well below the average sum of £198 13s 2d. 34 chapels (or 52 per cent) cost less than £150, and 12 (or 18 per cent) less than £100. In 1831, the society at Howle spent just £54 on its chapel. Similarly, the society at Clunton built a chapel in 1853, which cost just £73 17s 1d.<sup>12</sup> Inevitably such chapels were relatively small buildings with few sittings. For example, the chapel at Howle could seat just 60 people, while the chapel at Clunton could accommodate 70 attendants. Such low expenditure was not unique to the southern and central regions of Shropshire, but was a feature of Primitive Methodist building throughout the county. As Yalden has pointed out, in the north Shropshire circuit of Oswestry circuit, the chapels built at Treflach Wood, Knockin Heath, Cloy and Haughton in the period 1831 and 1833 all cost between £60 and £87.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the low level of expenditure, and the relatively small size of the chapels erected, the effort involved in building a new chapel was considerable:

‘What planning, what saving, what toiling, what sacrifices and what prayers went into the building of the little place, which was, perhaps, only a few yards square!’<sup>14</sup>

In his work *A History of Primitive Methodism in Guiseley*, Myers provides an insight into the great difficulties faced by many congregations attempting to raise the necessary finances for a new chapel. Although the society at Guiseley was able to get construction underway its meagre funds did not last long, and before the chapel had reached the height of the windowsills, their resources came to an end. Myers remarks:

‘They “clubbed” up among themselves, went on a little farther, and again were stuck fast, and for several weeks the sound of the hammer and trowel was unheard.’<sup>15</sup>

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& Weobley Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1859-69.

<sup>11</sup> SRR: NM1861/10: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1859; NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1853.

<sup>12</sup> SRR: NM1861/19: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1869; NM2123/131: Bishop’s Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1855.

<sup>13</sup> Yalden, ‘Nonconformity in north Shropshire’, p. 140; SRR: NM4219/4/1: Oswestry Circuit – Circuit Chapel Book, 1836-54.

<sup>14</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, pp. 229-31.

<sup>15</sup> Myers, *History of Primitive Methodism*, p. 21.



The poverty of the congregation hindered all initial attempts to secure a mortgage. However, the Guiseley members did not lose heart, and being eventually favoured with a loan, they were able to complete their chapel.<sup>16</sup>

Chapel schedules provide us with information about each of the chapels within a circuit at a given time. These are a valuable source, which not only enable us to establish the rate of Primitive Methodist building activity, but also provide information about the costs involved, the level of debt incurred, the amount spent on renovations and rebuilds, and also about the number of local inhabitants, members and hearers. Using the evidence of Shropshire chapel schedules, it is possible to ascertain that debt was a universal feature of Primitive Methodist building activity in the county. In 1837, a chapel was erected at Hopton Bank in the Ludlow circuit. This cost a total of £117; however, very little money was raised while the chapel was being constructed, and after it was opened 91 per cent of the original debt incurred remained. Similarly, the chapel built at Stoke St Milborough in 1842 cost just £67, but 85 per cent of this remained to be raised after the chapel was completed.<sup>17</sup> Similarly at Bishop's Castle, the new chapel built in 1831 cost £120, however 83 per cent of the total sum spent remained as debt.<sup>18</sup> It is clear from the evidence of chapel schedules that the majority of societies had little choice but to build chapels on faith.<sup>19</sup> The significant level of debt incurred as a result of chapel building was a reflection of the great optimism that penetrated the Primitive Methodist Connexion, particularly during the early decades of the century. As we have seen from the evidence of Shropshire, the provision of a permanent place of worship could indeed have a dramatic effect upon the size of a local society. The society at Bircher's Common increased by 167 per cent in the two years after its chapel was constructed; similarly, the society at Leintwardine also underwent considerable expansion after a chapel was opened. This idea is supported by Woodcock, who highlights the benefits of a new chapel for the struggling society at Nafferton:

‘For many years we worshipped here in a dilapidated building, and at times our cause was small and feeble. In 1858 the Rev. W. Garner built a commodious galleried chapel at a cost of £460. The society soon enlarged itself, and, filled

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<sup>16</sup> Myers, *History of Primitive Methodism*, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> SRR: NM5166/1/6/10: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1852.

<sup>18</sup> SRR: NM2138/130: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1855.

<sup>19</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 230.



with a warmer ardour and a brisker life, the cry was often heard, “What must we do to be saved?””<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that the level of debt that remained on completion of the building project bore no relation to the total amount spent. For example, both of the chapels built at Exford’s Green in the Shrewsbury circuit and at Howle in the Wrockwardine Wood circuit had a debt of 100 per cent; however, while the former cost a total of £125, the latter cost just £54.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, as Ambler has pointed out, the level of debt incurred ‘in a spirit of expansive optimism’ bore no relation to the ‘strength of the local societies that carried them’. Ambler cites the example of the chapel built at Gosberton Clough in 1868. With a deficit of £290, Gosberton Clough had the largest debt in the Donington Primitive Methodist circuit; however, despite this there were just eight members to support it.<sup>22</sup> If we divide the total debt incurred in the building of the chapel at Gosberton Clough by the number of its members, we can see that this was equal to £36 5s per person; this was indeed a massive burden for such a small society. Ambler has argued that the effort involved in the construction of a chapel and in servicing the debt incurred as a result, not only placed an immense strain upon a congregation but ‘also created tensions by laying emphasis on local needs at the expense of wider denominational commitments.’<sup>23</sup> He notes:

‘Such debts were to become an oppressive burden that made chapel life less positively attractive.’<sup>24</sup>

The considerable pressure that was placed upon societies struggling to pay for and maintain their chapel is exemplified most clearly by the case of the Ludlow chapel. In December 1835, the Ludlow society purchased a chapel located in Old Street, for the sum of £570. Despite this significant outlay, the Ludlow society enthusiastically set in motion an ambitious building project, which not only involved considerable repairs and alterations to the chapel, but also the construction of seven houses. This building and alteration work doubled the original price paid for the chapel, and 12 trustees became responsible for a debt which totalled £1123; this was equal to approximately £37 8s 8d for each of the 30 members. By incurring such a high level of debt the Ludlow society

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<sup>20</sup> Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry*, p. 142.

<sup>21</sup> SRR: NM1861/10: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1859; NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1853.

<sup>22</sup> Ambler, *Churches*, p. 227.

<sup>23</sup> Ambler, *Churches*, pp. 226-7.

<sup>24</sup> Ambler, *Churches*, p. 227.



had set itself a most difficult task. The nature of the problem is made clear by some of the figures. For example, while the seven cottages were expected to provide a regular annual income of £42 6s 8d, this did not even cover the annual interest upon the sums loaned, a total of £59 15s per year.<sup>25</sup> This left a considerable sum to raise, even before the other demands on the society's income were taken into account. Moreover, minutes of the Ludlow circuit committee reveal that the Ludlow society also had other outstanding debts:

‘That this meeting advise the society to give up their preacher's house as soon as possible and as honourably as they can...that Williams, Russell and Pardoe see to it and they have permission to beg where they can towards paying off the Back Rent.’<sup>26</sup>

This situation clearly did not bode well for the future of the new Ludlow chapel.

Inevitably, the financial imbalance noted above quickly began to take its toll. In the period from 1836, the Ludlow trustees struggled to meet all of the necessary expenses, and as a result were not only unable to reduce the original sum of debt, but also got themselves into considerable arrears with their interest payments. In 1840, the principal debt remained at £1123, and the Ludlow trustees owed many pounds in interest.<sup>27</sup> The extent of their difficulties is made clear by the chapel accounts of 1843 and 1844. In 1843, the annual income was just £48 14s 5d. However, a total of £36 5s was required to pay Mrs Adams for one and a half years interest on the loan of £500. This left just £12 9s 5d to meet all other bills. In 1843, Ludlow circuit officials discussed the troubles of the Ludlow chapel, and ruled:

‘That this meeting recommend the next trustee's meeting to nominate some other trustees in the town to assist in the management of the business of the chapel.’<sup>28</sup>

Considerable arrears in interest were again evident in the Ludlow chapel accounts of 1844; Mr Norgrove received £5 ‘to make up half years interest’, and a further £7 10s for interest due 16 July 1842.<sup>29</sup> Minutes of the Ludlow circuit committee meeting reveal the extent of the worry about this situation at circuit level:

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<sup>25</sup> SRR: NM5166/2/13/2: Ludlow Circuit – Ludlow Chapel Accounts, 1836-1944.

<sup>26</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 2 Aug 1834.

<sup>27</sup> SRR: NM5166/2/13/2: Ludlow Circuit – Ludlow Chapel Accounts, 1836-1944; NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 5 Oct 1840.

<sup>28</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 22 Jul 1843.

<sup>29</sup> SRR: NM5166/2/13/2: Ludlow Circuit – Ludlow Chapel Accounts, 1836-1944.



‘That we send a statement to the General Committee that we are still in deep distress with the Ludlow chapel.’<sup>30</sup>

In 1846, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* reported upon a tea meeting held at the Ludlow chapel to raise vital funds. The magazine clearly revealed the extent of the society’s predicament:

‘We have 50 members in society; but many of them are so poor that they contribute nothing to any of our funds. Two and a half years ago, the chapel and premises was burdened with £1123 debt besides a serious sum owing for interest, and several old outstanding debts; the property was in chancery. We prayed to God for help, and used all our means to lessen expenses and increase our income.’<sup>31</sup>

The article also provides precise information about the various outstanding debts paid off during the year:

‘We have paid £16 5s 8d the balance owing to the attorney for making the chapel deed, £9 9s for 21 years ground rent, and £37 10s for mortgage arrears and current interest.’

Moreover, the magazine also reveals that the Ludlow trustees had not only reduced the principal chapel debt by £15, but also secured a reduction in the interest on more than one half of the remaining deficit.<sup>32</sup>

Although such positive steps had been taken to improve the financial plight of the Ludlow chapel, the situation continued to deteriorate. In 1851 legal proceedings against the Ludlow Trust property were initiated. The general anxiety about this situation is made clear by the Annual Report of that year which noted that the consequences of this action were ‘uncertain’ and that the present prospects were ‘very gloomy’.<sup>33</sup> In 1852, further details about the Ludlow chapel case were published in the connexional magazine:

‘Our chapel case has been more than ordinarily trying during the past year. The trustees have been sued for £300 borrowed on note, and back interest of £100, making £400 in total. Much anxiety was felt before an arrangement favourable to the trustees could be made. However at length the party suing (the brother of

<sup>30</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828–44, 21 Sept 1843.

<sup>31</sup> PMM, 1846, p. 163.

<sup>32</sup> PMM, 1846, p. 163.

<sup>33</sup> SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1844–59, 7 Mar 1847;



a deceased trustee) agreed to accept £230 as full payment...The embarrassed situation of the Ludlow chapel property militates very much against the peace and prosperity of our circuit.’<sup>34</sup>

Chapel schedules for 1852 reveal that the debt on the Ludlow chapel now stood at £1018. Therefore, in a period of 16 years the trustees of the Ludlow chapel had managed to lower the principal debt by just nine per cent.<sup>35</sup> By 1860, the debt had fallen to £941, a decrease of eight per cent in eight years from 1852.<sup>36</sup> This was an obvious improvement, however despite this the Ludlow chapel continued to owe many pounds in interest.

Clearly, as the case of the Ludlow chapel reveals chapel building could have major financial implications and seriously affect the long-term health of a local cause. Angered by the disasters such as those at Louth, where John Stamp built several chapels which did not have the necessary finances, title deeds or legal trustees, connexional officials quickly recognised the need for legislation which could prevent chapel building enthusiasm from having disastrous consequences. As Kendall remarks,

‘It was high time a stop was put to the building of chapels without leave asked, without trustees, without any reasonable prospect of paying for them.’<sup>37</sup>

In the period from 1824, the Annual Meeting of the Primitive Methodist Conference gradually began to tighten its grip upon chapel building. From 1824, any preacher found guilty of erecting a chapel without permission would be required to forfeit one half of his salary.<sup>38</sup> In 1828, regulations were passed concerning the begging of money, and the employment of the various anniversaries and collections as sources of additional income.<sup>39</sup> As the minutes of the Ludlow circuit committee reveal, after 1835, all new building projects had to be approved by both the circuit and the District Building Committee:

‘That this meeting sanction an application to the Building Committee respecting building a chapel at Bent Lane.’<sup>40</sup>

Each District Building Committee was composed of persons appointed by the

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NM5166/1/6/9: Ludlow Circuit – Annual Report, March 1851.

<sup>34</sup> PMM, 1852, p. 182.

<sup>35</sup> SRR: NM5166/1/6/10: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1852.

<sup>36</sup> SRR: NM5166/1/6/17/1: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1860.

<sup>37</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 1, pp. 451-4 & vol. 2, p. 456.

<sup>38</sup> PMACM, Large Minutes, 1824, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> PMACM, General Minutes, 1828, p. 35-6.

<sup>40</sup> SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 18 Aug 1838.



Conference whose responsibility it was to authorise and supervise

‘the building, buying or leasing of such Connexional chapels, preaching houses, school-houses, dwelling houses or tenements, with the land or lands appertaining thereto.’<sup>41</sup>

The authority of the District Building Committee was total, and it is clear that this body maintained effective control over the spending of local societies:

‘That Mr Temperton inform the building committee that we have been compelled to go beyond the amount sanctioned by them to the amount of £70 and as we pledge ourselves to raise the one third we kindly solicit their sanction.’<sup>42</sup>

In 1843, a further measure to stop enthusiastic societies from spending amounts which far-exceeded their fund-raising capabilities was implemented, as the Annual Conference ruled that one third of the total cost of a chapel be raised within one year of opening.<sup>43</sup> However despite attempts to curb local chapel-building activities, it is clear from the local evidence that societies continued to construct chapels without having secured the necessary permission to do so:

‘That the Worcester branch have permission to build a chapel at Kempsey Green providing they comply with Rule... That as we have learnt that the chapel referred to above is already built, we disapprove of the conduct of the Kempsey Green friends in building unconnexionally.’<sup>44</sup>

### Securing the Finance.

As we have seen, the provision of a permanent place of worship with its associated debt and costs of maintenance placed a considerable financial burden upon a local cause. Therefore the prosperity and indeed the very survival of Primitive Methodism at the local level depended upon the constant accumulation and careful application of funds. Green has argued that the theory of organisational finance was ‘rooted in the Christian duty of self-sacrifice’. Each person was expected to give as much and as often as they could, so that ‘through the sum of individual donations the

<sup>41</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes, 1849, p. 147.

<sup>42</sup> SRR: NM2123/525; Shrewsbury Circuit – Trustees Meeting & Building Committee Minutes, 1862-76, 18 May 1863.

<sup>43</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 456-8; Hatcher, *God is building a house*, pp. 10-1; Lysons, *A Little Primitive*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>44</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/1; Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1850-55, 11 Dec 1854.



work of God's church on earth could proceed'. However as Green points out, while the offerings of the religious person were changeable and uncertain, the 'needs of the voluntary religious organisation were universal and constant.' As a response to this, religious organisations were forced to establish a variety of financial institutions which could compensate for the 'vast range and frequent uncertainty of personal motivation and individual competence.'<sup>45</sup> Therefore as we shall see, vital revenue was not only secured from the donations of wealthy private supporters and the contributions and subscriptions of individual society members and adherents, but also from various collections among the wider congregation.

Let us now investigate the various ways in which Primitive Methodism serviced its chapel debts and maintained church fabric during the nineteenth century. It is clear from the evidence of Shropshire that local chapels received significant financial assistance by means of private efforts and donations.<sup>46</sup> For example, in 1859 the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* paid homage to the dedication and hard work of Ann Harrison of Bickley in the Whitchurch circuit noting that

'the removal of debt from Willimoor chapel was an object of special interest to her for several years. She and her husband had tea meetings at their house when residing at Norbury, the profits of which were devoted to that object.'<sup>47</sup>

The Bishop's Castle circuit in particular was blessed with the support of some important characters who were willing to make significant contributions to circuit funds. For example, annual returns reveal that in 1880 a Mr Thomas Chester gave the Bishop's Castle circuit a house, which was valued at £250.<sup>48</sup> Clearly, this was a significant individual contribution. Another important benefactor was the Reverend Edward Williams, who also blessed the Bishop's Castle circuit with considerable financial contributions. In 1871, the Reverend Edward and Mrs Martha Williams donated land and the sum of £100 to build a chapel in the village of Clunton.<sup>49</sup> Three years later, the couple also gave £200 towards the erection of a minister's house in Bishop's Castle, and a further £100 for a new chapel at Clun.<sup>50</sup> As a character of considerable note, when the Reverend Edward Williams died in 1875 the General

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<sup>45</sup> S. J. D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 132-4.

<sup>46</sup> PMM, 1867, pp. 732-3.

<sup>47</sup> PMM, 1859, p. 60.

<sup>48</sup> NM2138/92: Bishop's Castle Circuit - Annual Return, 1880.

<sup>49</sup> NM2138/80-1: Bishop's Castle Circuit - Annual Return, 1871.

<sup>50</sup> NM2138/84: Bishop's Castle Circuit - Annual Return, 1874.



Minutes of the Annual Conference praised his life and gave special consideration to the major financial contributions he had made to the Primitive Methodist cause. He not only helped the Bishop's Castle circuit, but also donated £100 to the Ludlow chapel, and contributed £350 to the Itinerant Preacher's Friendly Society. Moreover, the obituary reveals that he had bequeathed the sum of £450 to the General Missionary Fund.<sup>51</sup>

The evidence of Ludlow also emphasises the immense importance of individual donations for chapel finances. In 1862, as the Ludlow chapel continued to be crippled with high levels of debt, circuit officials decided to take positive action in order to reduce the burden:

'That we take up the Ludlow chapel affair and endeavour to reduce the debt to £700 the General Chapel Fund having offered us £50.'<sup>52</sup>

Each preacher on the circuit plan was 'affectionately requested to try to beg one pound towards that object'.<sup>53</sup> The accounts of the Ludlow chapel reveal that as many as 13 different individuals did indeed donate £1 as circuit officials hoped. Moreover, chapel trustees also received a great number of other donations which ranged from 2s 6d to £54. Some of the largest contributions were made by men and women who had been unwavering in their support of the Ludlow chapel. For example, accounts reveal that Mr Jones of Sutton's Hill and Mr Jones of Boulden who donated £8 and £5 respectively, had supported the Ludlow chapel since it was erected in 1836; both had regularly loaned significant sums of money, and always made generous donations. Others such as Mr Dolphin who gave £40 and Mrs Bird who contributed £54 were also both long-term supporters of the Ludlow chapel.<sup>54</sup> Clearly such individuals played a vital role in the fight to lower chapel debts and to maintain financial prosperity, and as Green has argued these characters represented 'the life-blood of a society of support'.<sup>55</sup> However, while certain individuals provided significant financial support the help that they offered was not dependable and local chapels needed a more regular source of income.

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<sup>51</sup> PMACM, General Minutes, 1875, pp. 12-3.

<sup>52</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/3: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1860-66, 12 May 1862.

<sup>53</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/3: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1860-66, 12 May 1862.

<sup>54</sup> SRR: NM5166/2/13/2: Ludlow Circuit – Ludlow Chapel Accounts, 1836-1944.

<sup>55</sup> Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 134.



As Primitive Methodist contemporaries such as Church and Myers have noted, one of the main sources by which chapels secured a regular income was from the pew rent.<sup>56</sup> The pew rent was a quarterly payment which secured the payee exclusive access to one or more seats in the chapel. Snell and Ell have argued that the Victorians were 'fascinated with internal seating arrangements', and were eager not only to ascertain the availability of sittings, but also the level of pew appropriation. Moreover, they were concerned about the 'symbolic and social connotations of church seating', blaming the pew rental system for the lack of religiosity amongst the working-classes. In 1851, the Census of Religious Worship enabled the Victorians to tackle this question directly, and to 'confirm the reality of this phenomenon'.<sup>57</sup> The census revealed that 53 per cent of all sittings in England and Wales were appropriated in some way. Moreover, it firmly established that seat appropriation was not solely a feature of Anglican worship, but that the pew rent was vital source of income for all religious denominations.<sup>58</sup>

Using the enumerator's returns to analyse the level of appropriation of places of worship in 2,443 parishes in 15 different counties, Snell and Ell have established that about 46 per cent of the sittings of the Established Church were free, and that the Anglicans had relatively low levels of appropriation nationally. In comparison, 56 per cent of sittings of the Primitive Methodist Connexion were free.<sup>59</sup> In his research on religious provision and practice, Burrows has pointed to the low level of seat appropriation in the Primitive Methodist chapels of the lowland Marches. Taking a sample of 146 chapels, Burrows discovered that 54 (or 37 per cent) had accommodation that was entirely free, and a further 41 (or 28 per cent) had over half the sittings free. He also notes that there were only two chapels that had no free accommodation at all. With just two exceptions, in all other chapels over 40 per cent of the sittings were free.<sup>60</sup> The evidence of Shropshire clearly confirms the picture presented by Burrows. Using the information provided in the chapel schedules, I have ascertained the number of free and appropriated sittings in 98 Primitive Methodist chapels located throughout the county of Shropshire. From a total of 14,130 sittings, 9,940 (or 70 per cent) were free seats, and 4,190 were seats which could be appropriated. Chapel schedules reveal that accommodation was entirely free in a total of 31 of these chapels; while in a further

<sup>56</sup> Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 92 & Myers, *History*, p. 47.

<sup>57</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 325.

<sup>58</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 325.

<sup>59</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 347-8.

<sup>60</sup> Burrows, 'Religious provision and practice', p. 206.



56, half or more of the accommodation was free. With the exception of just four locations, all other chapels had over 40 per cent of the sittings allocated as free seats.<sup>61</sup> While these figures show that appropriation provided an important source of income for a significant proportion of Primitive Methodist chapels throughout the county, it is clear that many were reluctant to make a charge for seats, and all wished to provide at least some free accommodation.

Hatcher has argued that Hugh Bourne felt deeply about the issue of pews and regularly warned about the danger of 'over-pewing'.<sup>62</sup> As Hatcher points out, it is clear from Bourne's writings that he viewed 'the letting of pews as a necessary evil':

'It was his firm conviction that if income depended upon pews, spiritual health depended upon space, and the balance found must not be to the detriment of the latter.'<sup>63</sup>

While the need for flexible space certainly played a role in the level of seat appropriation in Primitive Methodist chapels in Shropshire, it is likely that internal seating arrangements had much more to do with the ability of the congregation to pay a pew rental. It is interesting to note that those societies which built relatively inexpensive buildings but were nevertheless encumbered with considerable levels of debt, were very often those chapels where all of the sittings were free. For example, if we look at the chapel at Stoke St Milborough, we can see that the small membership was struggling to service the debt incurred when the chapel was constructed; between 1842 to 1852, the principal debt had been reduced by just £2. However, despite having a significant number of hearers at both its Sabbath and weeknight services, all of the seating in the chapel remained free. While funds derived from pew rents would no doubt have provided this society with a vital income, chapel trustees probably recognised the inability of the small population of predominantly farmers and

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<sup>61</sup> This sample is taken from the circuits of Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton, Clun, Leintwardine, Llanymynech, Ludlow, Minsterley, Oswestry, Shrewsbury and Wrockwardine Wood. SRR: NM2138/130-200: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1855-1900; NM3219/6: Church Stretton Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1873-90; NM2333/68: Clun Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1885; NM4444/5/1: Llanymynech Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1880; NM3544/8a-36 & NM5166/1/6/10-33: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1852-1908; NM4111/4/1-2: Minsterley Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1860-1896; NM4219/4/27: Oswestry Circuit, Chapel Schedule, 1891; NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1853-90; NM1861/10-86: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1859-93; HRO: K76/34: Leintwardine Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1853-1900.

<sup>62</sup> Hatcher, *God is building a house*, p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> Hatcher, *God is building a house*, p. 17.



agricultural labourers to pay such a rent.<sup>64</sup>

Using the information about sittings contained in the Religious Census of 1851, Snell and Ell have explored the context of seat appropriation. In particular, they have challenged the ‘implicit assumption’ that the highest levels of Anglican seat appropriation were in ‘closed’ agricultural parishes with a strong hierarchical social order, and have found that they were to be found in ‘more variegated parishes’, that had ‘diverse gradations of wealth’ and higher population levels. They argue that the social structure in the more ‘closed’ parishes was such that the inhabitants did not feel the need to reinforce the social hierarchy in this way; while those living in ‘open’ parishes may ‘have been more attracted by the demonstrative aspect of appropriated seating.’ Snell and Ell have shown that certain socio-economic variables had a considerable effect upon the level of seat appropriation across all the denominations. For example, seat appropriation was greater in locations where a significant proportion of the population was in retail and handicraft employment; the higher incomes received enabling the payment of a pew rent. Moreover, the appropriation of Nonconformist sittings in particular ‘tended to be more pronounced in parishes of relatively rapid population growth.’ Similarly, the degree of urbanisation also played a crucial role: seat appropriation being higher in urban rather than in rural situations.<sup>65</sup> The evidence of the Shropshire chapel schedules supports the findings of Snell and Ell. As we have seen, chapels located in predominantly agricultural areas were generally unable to charge pew rents. In contrast, those chapels which had the highest proportions of appropriated sittings, tended to be situated in the market towns of the county where the pressure upon seats would have been greater and the congregations more able to pay a pew rent. For example, over 50 per cent of the sittings in the chapels of Clun, Ellesmere, Newport and Oswestry were appropriated. Similarly, the two chapels in the county town of Shrewsbury also had significant levels of appropriation.<sup>66</sup>

However, while we are able to ascertain the number of seats which were available for let in each building, this did not always accurately reflect the actual number for which a regular income was received. In 1836, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* published a letter from Thomas Russell detailing his experiences in the

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<sup>64</sup> SRR: NM5166/1/6/10: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1852; G. C. Baugh, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England – A History of Shropshire*, vol. X (Oxford, 1998), pp. 380 & 388-9.

<sup>65</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 351-5.

<sup>66</sup> SRR: NM2333/68: Clun Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1885; NM4219/4/27: Oswestry Circuit, Chapel Schedule, 1891; NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1853-90; NM1861/10:



Longton branch of the Prees Green circuit. The letter clearly reveals the disinclination amongst the congregation to pay rent for a seat in the chapel. When Russell arrived in Longton only 30 (or 27 per cent) of the 112 sittings available for appropriation were actually let. To increase the revenue received from pew rents Russell set in motion a plan 'for the better letting of the sittings', dividing the 112 sittings amongst four seat-letters whose responsibility it was to make a monthly collection, and to keep a precise record of all transactions. By these means Russell was able to increase the total number of sittings let to 81; however, while this was a considerable improvement, it is clear that many seats remained vacant.<sup>67</sup>

Throughout most chapels the sum paid for the rental of a seat varied according to its position.<sup>68</sup> In 1843, the Ludlow chapel charged four different prices for its sittings. Seats in the gallery cost between 1s and 1s 6d a quarter, while those on the ground floor cost between 6d and 1s.<sup>69</sup> Green has argued that the grading of the price of seats in Primitive Methodist chapels

'succeeded in differentiating what might otherwise have been a homogenous good into a multi-form product.'<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, by taking account of what people could pay, Snell and Ell have argued that:

'The Primitive Methodists, and other such denominations, could...rely on levied appropriation without detriment to their attendances, making a safe and clever use of small nuanced differences of rank and income within the working and lower-middle classes.'<sup>71</sup>

However despite the staggering of prices, it is clear that the appropriation of a sitting did not necessarily guarantee a regular income.<sup>72</sup> In 1849, the Annual Primitive Methodist Conference 'strongly urged' chapels to request a quarter's payment in advance.<sup>73</sup> However, pew rent books indicate that particular individuals regularly accumulated arrears. For example, the accounts of the Ludlow chapel reveal that in 1843, Sarah Archer had arrears of 3s for the two seats she appropriated on the ground floor of the chapel. Similarly, Mrs Price who rented a seat in the gallery for 1s

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Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1859.

<sup>67</sup> PMM, 1836, pp. 34-5.

<sup>68</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 340-1 & Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 147.

<sup>69</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Ludlow Seat Rent Accounts, 1843-8.

<sup>70</sup> Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 148.

<sup>71</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 360.

<sup>72</sup> Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 342.

<sup>73</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes 1849, p. 120.



3d a quarter, paid just 2s during the course of 1843. Many others were also required to pay for arrears in their seat rent.<sup>74</sup> However, while the problem of arrears would have affected the level of income obtained by the means of the pew rents, it is clear that this system granted a certain leniency for those who unexpectedly found themselves in an uncertain financial predicament. As Green has commented, the institution of pew rents

‘succeeded in combining financial efficiency with social flexibility in a way which marked it out as the most ethically appropriate.’<sup>75</sup>

The total income secured by means of the pew rent inevitably varied according to the number of seats available for appropriation and also the location of the chapel. Evidence of this disparity can be found in the Shrewsbury circuit. The Primitive Methodist chapel located in the county town of Shrewsbury had 300 sittings; of these 174 were available for appropriation, and as the trustees’ accounts of this chapel reveal, these sittings provided the local society with a significant regular income. In the year from October 1842 to October 1843, we see that a total of £41 14s 9d of the society’s annual income was derived from pew rents.<sup>76</sup> In contrast, the Primitive Methodist chapel at Exford’s Green, a small settlement located four miles to the south of Shrewsbury, had just 16 sittings available for appropriation, securing an annual income of £1 15s.<sup>77</sup> As we have already seen, chapels located in the market towns of the county generally had a larger number of appropriated sittings and were as result, able to procure a reasonable income from pew rents. In the town of Ludlow, 47 per cent of the sittings in the chapel were available for appropriation, securing in 1852 a total income of £6 7s. Similarly at Clun, 67 per cent of the sittings were appropriated, providing in 1855 an income of £4 6s. However as we may expect, chapel schedules reveal that the level of income secured from pew rents at the majority of Primitive Methodist chapels in the county, was in fact much closer to that earned at Exford’s Green. In 1852, chapels at Knowbury and Hopton Bank in the Ludlow circuit had a total income of £1 10s and £1 17s respectively; while in 1855, the chapels at Asterton and Clunton in the Bishop’s Castle circuit earned £1 12s 2d and £1 15s 6d respectively.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Ludlow Seat Rent Accounts, 1843-8.

<sup>75</sup> Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 148.

<sup>76</sup> SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1853; NM2123/528: Shrewsbury Circuit – Trustee’s Accounts, 1826-62.

<sup>77</sup> In total the chapel at Exford’s Green had 100 sittings. SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1853.

<sup>78</sup> SRR: NM2138/130-200: Bishop’s Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1855-1900; NM2333/68: Clun Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1885; NM3544/8a-36; NM5166/1/6/10-33: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1852-1908.



Green has appraised the pew rent system, observing that  
‘because of its ubiquity, because of its comprehensiveness, and because of its  
regularity, no single institution raised more money for more contemporary  
religious institutions.’<sup>79</sup>

However, while the appropriation of sittings certainly provided a vital regular revenue for many Primitive Methodist chapels in Shropshire during the nineteenth century, it is clear that the pew rent provided a mere fraction of the income necessary to maintain church fabric and service the massive debts. Therefore chapel stewards had no alternative but to appeal to the general congregation for contributions in the form of various collections. The evidence of Shropshire Primitive Methodism reveals that one of the most important regular collections made at chapels throughout the county was that for lighting and cleaning. This annual collection helped cover the costs of essential chapel expenses; however, it is clear that the money collected barely covered all the necessary outlay required for the lighting and cleaning of a chapel each year. The steward’s accounts of the Bishop’s Castle chapel show that 14s 9½d was collected for lighting and cleaning in 1856. However during this year, a total of £1 16s 6d was spent on candles, and a further £1 on cleaning the chapel.<sup>80</sup> While the lighting and cleaning collection certainly helped meet these costs, chapel officials still had a significant amount to find in order to pay all the necessary bills. It appears that this was typical of many other chapels. For example in 1860, the chapel at Clun secured 15s during the year by means of the lighting and cleaning collection, however a total of £1 17s was spent. Similarly, at Asterton in 1889, 19s 8d was spent on lighting and cleaning the chapel, while just 11s was collected to cover these expenses.<sup>81</sup>

While it is inevitable that the poverty of many Primitive Methodist members in Shropshire would have affected the amounts gathered in for the lighting and cleaning of the chapel, it is apparent that this was one of many different collections towards which members were expected to contribute. This is made clear by the evidence of the Ludlow circuit committee meeting minutes:

‘That Mr J. Morris preach at Tenbury next and make collections to pay for the harmonium.’<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 147.

<sup>80</sup> SRR: NM2138/51: Bishop’s Castle Circuit – Bishop’s Castle Chapel Steward’s Accounts, 1843-64.

<sup>81</sup> SRR: NM2138/136 & 184-5: Bishop’s Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1860 & 1889.

<sup>82</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/9: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee, Leaders & Trustees Meeting Minutes. 1866-87, 29 Nov 1869.



One of the best opportunities for a chapel to obtain a significant income by means of a collection was at the chapel anniversary. The chapel anniversary was an annual event organised to celebrate and commemorate the opening of the chapel.<sup>83</sup> Guest speakers were invited to deliver the anniversary sermons and also to offer an appropriate address. In 1854, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* gave an account of the anniversary celebrations of the chapels of Asterton, Bishop's Castle and Clun, noting that 'thrilling discourses' were given at each by the eminent Miss Buck.<sup>84</sup> As the connexional magazine also reveals, a tea meeting often followed the anniversary sermons:

'In connection with the anniversary at Clun, we held a very interesting tea-meeting in a spacious tent erected on the old Castle Green, near to the ruins of the old castle. Upwards of two hundred persons attended.'<sup>85</sup>

The addition of a tea meeting added an extra social dimension to the anniversary celebrations, and thereby provided greater interest for local community members who were not connected with the chapel. The appeal of the Primitive Methodist chapel anniversary is made clear by the example of the anniversary celebrations at the Twitchen chapel, located in the Leintwardine branch of the Ludlow circuit:

'The day was very fine, and the people from the villages around flocked to help the Twitchen friends.'<sup>86</sup>

While anniversary celebrations clearly provided spiritual uplift for the local chapel society, they also benefited the cause by drawing in community members. However, by enabling local chapels to raise significant sums of money, the chapel anniversary also had serious financial implications. In 1856, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* reported on the chapel anniversary at Maesbrook in the Oswestry circuit, noting:

'This chapel, which stands in a rather thinly peopled neighbourhood, was erected in the year 1844, at a cost of about £200, and by the results of this anniversary it is rendered debtless.'<sup>87</sup>

The chapel schedules of the Bishop's Castle circuit provide evidence for the amounts raised at these events. For example, in 1855 chapels in this circuit raised between £2 18s 4d and £16 2s 9d. The smallest amount was collected at Leemore Common, a

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<sup>83</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 229; Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, p. 65.

<sup>84</sup> PMM, 1854, p. 748.

<sup>85</sup> PMM, 1854, p. 748.

<sup>86</sup> PMM, 1854, p. 561.

<sup>87</sup> PMM, 1856, p. 150.



small society of just 18 members located in a remote neighbourhood with only 200 inhabitants.<sup>88</sup> In contrast, the greatest amount was raised in the market town of Clun where the membership and the pool of potential adherents were both much larger. The amount collected was, however, subject to yearly fluctuations. In 1860 the chapel at Bishop's Castle collected £1 18s 7d at its chapel anniversary; but, when the chapel was rebuilt in 1864, the amount raised rocketed to £29 0s 1d. However, when the interest generated by the new building had subsided, the collection returned to the previous lower levels; in 1874, the chapel anniversary at Bishop's Castle raised just £2 18s 7d.<sup>89</sup> Despite the fluctuation in the amounts raised from location to location and from year to year, the importance of this collection for chapel finances is apparent.

In 1841, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* published an article describing the 'Golden Chapel System', an innovation developed by the 'Wootton Bassett friends' to help discourage the inertia in fund-raising activities that inevitably followed the opening of a new chapel:

'When a chapel is opened it is usual forthwith to drop all further personal exertions, and to trust to seat-lettings, and anniversary collections.'<sup>90</sup>

Under the 'Golden Chapel System' members and adherents attending the chapel anniversary pledged to collect certain sums of money before the anniversary of the next year. The sums of money could be either large or small, and were to be

'raised by begging for the chapel, or given out of their own savings, or raised in such ways as Divine Providence should open before them.'<sup>91</sup>

Reporting on the implementation of the 'Golden Chapel System' at the Wrockwardine Wood chapel in 1840, the connexional magazine noted that:

'men, women and children came forward in a most hearty manner; some engaged to collect or raise £1 each, other 10s each, others 5s each... And two boys of ten and eight years old, were brought forward by their father, and they engaged to raise 3s each; and a little boy engaged to raise a shilling.'<sup>92</sup>

As a result of the willing participation of the Wrockwardine Wood friends, between £7 and £8 was 'engaged for against the anniversary of next year.'<sup>93</sup> As Yalden has

<sup>88</sup> SRR: NM2138/131: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1855.

<sup>89</sup> SRR: NM2138/142 & 155-6: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1865 & 1874-5.

<sup>90</sup> PMM, 1841, pp. 35-6.

<sup>91</sup> PMM, 1841, p. 36.

<sup>92</sup> PMM, 1841, p. 189.

<sup>93</sup> PMM, 1841, p. 189.



indicated, considerable sums of money could be raised for chapel funds by the means of this system.<sup>94</sup> For example, in 1856 the Ludlow chapel raised a total of £26 10s through the 'Golden Chapel System'.<sup>95</sup> In 1841, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* summed up praise for the innovation noting that

'This Golden Chapel System has proved itself most excellent for reducing chapel debts and raising chapels out of their difficulties. And it may be adopted without interfering with any other system or means already in use.'<sup>96</sup>

Clearly the contributions of individuals by pew rents, various collections and donations played a vital role in securing the necessary finances for chapel trustees. However, it is evident that these contributions were not a reliable or regular source of income, and to make up for this deficiency Primitive Methodism was forced to employ various special fund-raising events. As Myers commented 'When special funds are needed special efforts are made to get them.'<sup>97</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, the most common and popular of these were the tea meeting and the bazaar. Events such as these not only encouraged the collective efforts of the local Primitive Methodist society, but also involved the whole of the community at large. The tea meeting was very similar in format to the chapel anniversary and also raised important sums of money for chapel finances.<sup>98</sup> The evidence of the connexional magazine and local circuit records reveal that the tea meeting was one of the most popular special events employed to raise extra funds, and societies were encouraged to have them:

'That we ascertain from the Stoke friends whether they intend holding a tea party for the chapel, if not that they be requested to have one for the circuit funds.'<sup>99</sup>

However, despite the obvious benefits of the tea meeting for chapel finances, the Primitive Methodist Annual Conference initially displayed a cautious attitude to the event recommending that

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<sup>94</sup> Yalden, 'Nonconformity in north Shropshire', p. 142.

<sup>95</sup> SRR: NM5166/2/13/2: Ludlow Circuit – Ludlow Chapel Accounts, 1836-1944.

<sup>96</sup> PMM, 1841, p. 189.

<sup>97</sup> Myers, *History of Primitive Methodism*, p. 47.

<sup>98</sup> As with the chapel anniversary the amounts collected at the tea meeting depended on the size and location of the chapel. For example in 1848, a tea meeting held at the Oswestry chapel raised £38 14s (PMM, 1848, p. 120). Similarly, in Ludlow a tea meeting in 1850 raised £22 8s 3d (PMM, 1850, p. 246). However, in contrast those meetings held in the villages of the county raised much smaller amounts. For example, in 1853 the chapels of Exford's Green and Old Heath in the Shrewsbury circuit collected £6 3s and £2 5s respectively (SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1853).

<sup>99</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/2: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1855-60, 16 Mar 1857.



‘all our preachers and members, not encourage public tea parties, except for Sunday schools.’<sup>100</sup>

This advice was reiterated in the consolidated minutes of 1849.<sup>101</sup> However, in the following year we witness a change in policy as the Conference finally sanctioned that tea meetings could, with the authority of the Quarter Day board, be held for purposes other than the support of the Sunday school.<sup>102</sup> While societies and chapels now had the right to apply funds raised from tea meetings to a range of different projects, it is clear from the evidence of the Ludlow circuit that this ruling was merely a reaction to activities at the local level. In 1840, the Ludlow circuit committee suggested

‘That one half of the profits arising from the tea party be applied to the school in Ludlow and the other to the circuit funds.’<sup>103</sup>

Again in 1844 we see how the profits of the annual Ludlow tea meeting were again divided, this time between the funds of the school and the chapel.<sup>104</sup>

The evidence of the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* reveals that, like the chapel anniversary, the tea meeting also had a massive appeal, drawing in the local community and people from the surrounding villages. The ‘friendly’ format of the event did much to entice the crowds. The first activity of the day was the consumption of the tea. While provisions at the tea meeting in many locations were often fairly basic, it is clear that the event could indeed be a lavish affair. As Woodcock describes:

‘The trays were generally given by ladies, who, in friendly rivalry furnished them with a sumptuousness that would have astonished our friends in the South, accustomed to sit down to a tea of plain and spice bread.’<sup>105</sup>

The tea was often accompanied by music:

‘That the musicians be invited to come and play their instruments at the New Year’s Day tea meeting.’<sup>106</sup>

Similarly in 1854, the connexional magazine reported on the Ludlow tea meeting, noting that ‘the proceedings were greatly enlivened by the performances of the

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<sup>100</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes 1836, p. 60.

<sup>101</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes 1849, p. 68.

<sup>102</sup> PMACM, General Minutes, 1850, p. 18.

<sup>103</sup> SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly & Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1840-50, 21 Sept 1840.

<sup>104</sup> SRR: NM 2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828-44, 6 Jan 1844.

<sup>105</sup> Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry*, p. 251.

<sup>106</sup> SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly & Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1840-50, 15 Dec 1847.



choir'.<sup>107</sup> After tea had been consumed, there was singing and prayer, followed by a public meeting in which several of the Sabbath scholars 'recited suitable pieces', and a special guest addressed the meeting. For example in 1854 Miss M. C. Buck, 'gave an excellent speech on the advantages of juvenile education.'<sup>108</sup>

In 1857, the connexional magazine published an account of three annual tea-meetings held in the Oswestry circuit, which clearly conveys the great attraction of this event. The report notes that 200 people attended the meeting at the Moors, 300 took tea at Overton, while in the town of Oswestry, it was suggested that about '1,000 persons took tea, and more than 2,000 it is supposed, were present at the public meeting.'<sup>109</sup> Although we must make allowances for any over-enthusiasm in the reporting of numbers, the great appeal of this event cannot be denied. In *A History of Primitive Methodism in Guiseley*, Myers presents a vivid description of the phenomenon of the Primitive Methodist tea meeting:

'To walk into the school when a tea is in "full swing" is to have the ears assailed with a constant buzz of conversation coupled with the cheery rattle of crockery, while the eyes behold the cheerful becoming faces of those engaged in the homely pleasure of the tea table.'<sup>110</sup>

While Myers' description of the tea meetings held in Guiseley is somewhat exuberant, the general appeal of this event is again apparent. Another important dimension to the Primitive Methodist tea meeting was that it not only encouraged the participation of the local population, but also that of the wider religious community:

'That we invite the Wesleyan Superintendent to attend our Annual Tea Meeting. That we request the Independent friends to allow us the use of their chapel...and if it be complied with that our congregations be requested to unite with them the other parts of the day.'<sup>111</sup>

Finally, in order to raise much larger sums local Primitive Methodist societies organised a bazaar:

'That it is the opinion of this meeting that the chapel ought to be enlarged or a new one built as the present one is too small to accommodate the regular congregation and that a bazaar be got up during this year to raise funds for

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<sup>107</sup> PMM, 1854, p. 179.

<sup>108</sup> PMM, 1854, pp. 179-80.

<sup>109</sup> PMM, 1857, p. 114.

<sup>110</sup> Myers, *History of Primitive Methodism*, p. 47.

<sup>111</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1850-55, 29 Nov



carrying out the above object.’<sup>112</sup>

As the minutes of the Shrewsbury Female Bazaar Committee reveal, the scale of this event and the considerable numbers that attended over the course of the three days ensured that significant sums of money could be raised to relieve distressed chapels or to erect new ones:

‘That we try to raise £200 by the bazaar during the next 12 months.’<sup>113</sup>

It is clear from the evidence of both the Ludlow and Bishop’s castle circuits that this was not an unrealistic target. In 1876, a bazaar held in aid of the Ludlow chapel raised a total of £195 6s 7d.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, the chapel at Bishop’s Castle collected £178 14s 5½d as a result of its bazaar in 1898.<sup>115</sup>

The bazaar was clearly a much larger affair than either the chapel anniversary or the tea meeting, and therefore required a considerable level of organisation, giving opportunity for the whole of the local Primitive Methodist community to participate. As preparations for the Shrewsbury bazaar in 1862 reveal, female members in particular were given the chance to contribute in a significant way:

‘That the females of our society be kindly requested to do their best in preparing articles for the bazaar and that the following names be on the Female Bazaar Committee.’<sup>116</sup>

In order to fulfil this responsibility, the ladies had a weekly sewing meeting held in the chapel.<sup>117</sup> In 1898, Bishop’s Castle held a bazaar that had a total of eight different stalls. There were stalls for flowers, field and garden produce, poultry and dairy, large jumble, china and fancy goods, useful and fancy goods, and of course the obligatory stall for tea. Once more the involvement of the female members of the chapel community emerges, as each of the different stalls were managed predominantly by the ladies. There was also a ‘young peoples’ stall selling groceries, hardware and fancy articles, giving the younger members of the congregation a chance to make a serious

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1852.

<sup>112</sup> SRR: NM2123/525: Shrewsbury Circuit – Building Committee Meeting Minutes, 1862-76, 12 Mar 1862.

<sup>113</sup> SRR: NM2123/525: Shrewsbury Circuit – Building Committee Meeting Minutes, 1862-76, 20 Mar 1862.

<sup>114</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/9: Ludlow Circuit – Committee, Leaders & Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1866-87, 10 Nov 1876.

<sup>115</sup> SRR: NM 4942/4/3/21/2: Bishop’s Castle Circuit – Balance Sheet of Bazaar, 1898.

<sup>116</sup> SRR: NM2123/525: Shrewsbury Circuit – Building Committee Meeting Minutes, 1862-76, 12 Mar 1862.

<sup>117</sup> SRR: NM2123/525: Shrewsbury Circuit – Building Committee Meeting Minutes, 1862-76, 20 Mar 1862.



contribution to the day's activities.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, it is important to note that the event not only enabled the participation of the general membership but also that of the wider community, as local farmers and manufacturers provided items that could be sold at the bazaar.<sup>119</sup>

The obvious fund-raising potential of the chapel anniversary, tea meeting, and bazaar ensured that there was a continuous round of these events during the course of a year. However, while the pressure to service debts placed a considerable burden upon chapels, in many ways this struggle actually boosted chapel life. By providing solidarity in a common cause, and a programme of social activity these fund-raising events not only encouraged the involvement of the existing membership, but also attracted new members and adherents. Despite these benefits, historians such as Obelkevich and Ambler have argued that the increasing focus upon financial priorities did much not only to curtail the missionary endeavours and outward expansion of a local cause, but also to change the nature of the spiritual life it offered.<sup>120</sup> As Obelkevich has commented:

‘For Primitive Methodists, spiritual and financial prosperity were inseparable – and in an unintended way chapel-building may indeed have drained their spiritual as well as their financial resources.’<sup>121</sup>

Moreover, while there was a strong spiritual focus to these fund-raising events during the early phase of Primitive Methodist chapel building, it is clear that as the nineteenth century progressed, there was an increasingly secular dimension to these events as the people desired entertainment over religion.<sup>122</sup> For example, at the 1898 bazaar held at Bishop's Castle, there were various competitions, such as the ‘Hat Trimming Competition for Gentlemen’ and the ‘Washing Competition for Ladies’, and also attractions such as the ‘Fish Ponds’. There were also half-hourly concerts and short lectures on ‘Practical Phrenology’.<sup>123</sup>

The growing demand for entertainment enabled local chapels to implement new activities which appeared to have no obvious religious content at all. As Ambler has

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<sup>118</sup> SRR: NM4942/4/3/21/1: Bishop's Castle – Grand Bazaar Programme, 1898.

<sup>119</sup> PMM, 1846, pp. 238-9; Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry*, pp. 161-2.

<sup>120</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 229-30; Ambler, *Churches*, pp. 226-7.

<sup>121</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 222.

<sup>122</sup> Currie, *Methodism Divided*, pp. 132-8.

<sup>123</sup> SRR: NM4942/4/3/21/1: Bishop's Castle – Grand Bazaar Programme, 1898.



remarked, some events arranged by chapels had

‘no obvious religious content beyond their endorsement, through speeches and recitation of morally uplifting sentiments, while their form, with its emphasis on wholesome recreation uncontaminated by rough behaviour and alcohol, was one which was common to many other organisations in the period.’<sup>124</sup>

This is made clear by the evidence of the Ludlow chapel:

‘That the trustees of the Ludlow New Chapel have liberty to arrange for a trip to Swansea for the benefit of the said chapel.’<sup>125</sup>

As Gilbert has noted, contemporaries were aware of the declining spiritual value of fund-raising activities.<sup>126</sup> In his biography of the Reverend John Petty, Macpherson criticises the tea meeting which he argues often

‘degenerated into levity and hence failed to minister to the spiritual welfare of the people.’<sup>127</sup>

He suggested that those attending the tea meeting engaged in ‘trifling, unprofitable conversation’, rather than participating in ‘serious converse, exhortation, singing and prayer.’<sup>128</sup> Obelkevich has argued that the chapel anniversary in particular marked the changing nature of Primitive Methodism during the second half of the nineteenth century.

‘Now relaxing their evangelistic effort, Primitive Methodists offered entertainment rather than admonishment, raised money rather than elevating souls, and celebrated themselves and their own accomplishments.’<sup>129</sup>

Despite the efforts to reduce the burden of debt by means of the various contributions, collections and special events discussed above, it is clear that the drive to renovate existing chapels or to construct new bigger buildings, particularly after 1860, exacerbated the problem. Many chapel trustees found themselves trapped within a constant cycle of debt.<sup>130</sup> As we shall see, many societies were forced to look at ways in which to expand their chapel in order to accommodate their flourishing congregations. However, in many cases the renovation or reconstruction of a chapel

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<sup>124</sup> Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, pp. 68-9.

<sup>125</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/4: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1866-79, 5 Jun 1871.

<sup>126</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 158.

<sup>127</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Labours*, p. 333.

<sup>128</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Labours*, p. 333.

<sup>129</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 230.

<sup>130</sup> Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, pp. 66-7; Yalden, ‘Nonconformity in north Shropshire’.



reflected the changing aspirations of the society who worshipped in it.<sup>131</sup> As Ritson has noted,

‘The early chapels were plain in the extreme...The Methodist Chapel was designed for practical purposes. To get a cheap, serviceable building to hold as many people as the necessities of the case demanded.’<sup>132</sup>

The drive for respectability encouraged many societies to carry out minor improvements to their basic chapels, which although relatively inexpensive did much to enhance their character and appearance. For example, the chapel at Clunton spent money on new pews, and the chapel at Bishop’s Castle brought in gas to prevent the need for worship by candlelight. The society at Shrewsbury paid £8 14s 6d on papering and painting their chapel; while the society at Old Church Stoke spent a total of £13 12s 10½d improving the external appearance of their chapel by adding palisading and a front wall. Other chapels such as those at Asterton, and Edgton spent money on providing a new board floor.<sup>133</sup>

Many chapels looking to increase their sittings without swelling their debt built a gallery, as did the chapels at Bishop’s Castle, Clun and Knowbury:

‘That Knowbury have liberty to put a gallery in the chapel without increasing its debt.’<sup>134</sup>

As Hatcher has pointed out, the addition of a gallery to increase sittings was firmly supported by the connexional magazine.<sup>135</sup> Although many of these renovations were relatively inexpensive, they still put a strain on chapel finances. Built in 1838, the chapel at Knowbury cost a total of £153 and created a debt of £122. In 1847, the addition of an end gallery cost just £27. However, while Knowbury’s total debt did not rise as a result of this work, it is clear that this extra expense had prevented the trustees from making significant headway into its reduction. In 1852, Knowbury’s debt remained at £118; this was a decrease of just 3 per cent over the 14-year period since the opening of the chapel.<sup>136</sup>

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p. 142.

<sup>131</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, pp. 160-1.

<sup>132</sup> Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 231.

<sup>133</sup> SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1853; NM2138/136 & 142: Bishop’s Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1860 & 1865.

<sup>134</sup> SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1840-50, 13 Sept 1847; NM5166/1/6/10: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1852; NM2138/136: Bishop’s Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1860.

<sup>135</sup> Hatcher, *God is building a house*, p. 13.

<sup>136</sup> SRR: NM5166/1/6/10: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule. 1852.



In other locations, the addition of a gallery did not provide the enlargement required, and a much larger programme of work was set in motion. In the early days of chapel building, uncertainty over their future forced Primitive Methodists to deal with the very real prospect of failure. Citing the example of the building erected at Tunstall in 1811, Hatcher has suggested that the need for flexibility was a major consideration in early Primitive Methodist building.<sup>137</sup> In his work *The Gospel Among the Masses*, Key reveals that other chapels were also built with a view to their conversion at a later date. For example, at Polstead the design of the chapel was such that it could be converted into two cottages if the newly established cause should fail. Moreover, a quarter part of an adjoining field was purchased in order to provide a garden if this should indeed become the fate of the chapel.<sup>138</sup> As the denomination became more established and the fear of failure diminished, the need for flexibility still continued to inform the design of Primitive Methodist chapels. However, this flexibility was now with a view to the ultimate success and therefore the expansion of a chapel; in 1836, the Annual Conference advised circuits 'to build chapels so that enlargement will not put them out of a proportionate form.'<sup>139</sup> Moreover, it was seen as advantageous to have extra land upon which the building could be extended or perhaps a school room erected.<sup>140</sup>

In 1864, *The Primitive Methodist Magazine* published a report on the enlargement of the chapel at Exford's Green:

'The above chapel having been for some time too small to accommodate the increasing congregation, the trustees having recently paid off the whole of the old debt, resolved to enlarge the chapel by having it made ten feet longer and two feet higher, with eight new-rising pews at the end thus making additional room for 50 persons.'<sup>141</sup>

However the case of Exford's Green is quite unusual, as the majority of trustees decided to rebuild or renovate their chapel before the original debt had been fully discharged. For example, despite having a debt of £107, the society at Hopton Bank set in motion a programme of enlargement which increased their burden of debt to £155.<sup>142</sup> As we have seen, trustees of the Ludlow chapel had been involved in a serious struggle

<sup>137</sup> Hatcher, *God is building a house*, pp. 5 & 13.

<sup>138</sup> Key, *Gospel Among the Masses*, p. 98.

<sup>139</sup> PMACM, Consolidated Minutes, 1836, p. 43.

<sup>140</sup> This is made clear by the chapel schedule form which questioned whether chapels had any spare land attached to them. (SRR: NM5166/1/6/18/2-6: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1861).

<sup>141</sup> PMM, 1864, pp. 46-7.

<sup>142</sup> SRR: NM5166/1/6/10: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1852.



to reduce its debt since the building was erected, and therefore in 1862 circuit officials decided to take the problem out of their hands. This clearly had an important effect, and during the three years that followed the Ludlow debt was reduced from £931 to £694. However, while a considerable deficit remained, the ‘absolutely necessary’ decision was made to enlarge the Ludlow chapel.<sup>143</sup>

The move to increase the size of this chapel had been gaining momentum for some years, the proposal first arising in 1857:

‘That we empower the circuit committee to negotiate with the trustees respecting the enlargement of the Ludlow Chapel.’<sup>144</sup>

It is likely that chapel trustees had been encouraged in this matter by expansion in both the membership and the general congregation. In 1852, chapel schedules reveal that the Ludlow chapel had a total of 83 members; moreover 260 people attended its services on a Sabbath and between 40 and 50 came to services during the week. By 1860, membership had risen to 92, and the number of attendants on the Sabbath to 300 (the number of weekday hearers remained unchanged). Just one year later in 1861, chapel schedules reported another large increase; the total membership was now 104, while the number of attendants on the Sabbath had risen to 350 and those during the week to 60.<sup>145</sup> In 1864, the Ludlow society was given permission to enlarge its chapel and a total of £210 16s 01/2d was spent on making the building 11 feet longer at the back and 4 feet longer at the front. Moreover, the enlargement work also included the addition of two side galleries, the provision of new pews and moulding, and the fitting up of two vestries. A further £18 15s 2d was also spent on other general improvements and repairs.<sup>146</sup> Chapel accounts reveal that there was a major effort to raise the necessary finances for this work, over 200 individuals and local societies donating sums small and large to the collection. However, although these efforts were very successful, approximately £200 being raised as a result, a deficit remained and the burden of debt increased once more. The total debt in 1865 stood at £719.<sup>147</sup>

Within four years of this work being completed, the Ludlow society became unsatisfied with their chapel once more, and in 1869 permission was obtained to

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<sup>143</sup> SRR: NM5166/1/6/18/2-6: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1861; PMM, 1865, p. 753.

<sup>144</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/2: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1855-60, 16 Mar 1857.

<sup>145</sup> SRR: NM5166/1/6/10-18/2-6: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1852, 1860 & 1861.

<sup>146</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/3: Ludlow Circuit - Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1860-66, 7 Mar 1864;

NM5166/1/6/22/2-4: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1865; PMM, 1865, p. 753.

<sup>147</sup> SRR: NM5166/2/13/2: Ludlow Circuit – Ludlow Chapel Accounts, 1836-1944; PMM, 1865, p. 753.



rebuild:

‘That the quarter day give its sanction to build a new chapel at Ludlow and to sell the old premises.’<sup>148</sup>

In order to fund this new project, attempts were made in 1870 to sell the existing chapel for £800.<sup>149</sup> Unfortunately, the sale did not go through and the Ludlow society was forced to let the premises to the Temperance Society for a sum of £12 *per annum*. Clearly, this did not even cover the interest on the outstanding debt, and by 1871 the total debt on the chapel increased to £734.<sup>150</sup> In 1872, the lease on property passed to the Plymouth Brethren for £25 *per annum*, but the debt continued to rise.<sup>151</sup> Meanwhile, the Ludlow society completed the construction of its new chapel in 1871. This cost a total of £2223 19s 2d, and created a further deficit of £1165 6s 7d.<sup>152</sup> In 1874, the effort to sell the old chapel continued:

‘That Brother Barnes be empowered to write to the Building Committee for permission to sell the Old Chapel Ludlow.’<sup>153</sup>

The debt on the new chapel together with that on the old property, must have placed an enormous burden upon the Ludlow society, a point which is made clear by the various calls for financial assistance:

‘That another application for aid towards the Ludlow Trust Estate be sent to the General Chapel Fund Committee.’<sup>154</sup>

Not only did the difficult financial situation of the Ludlow chapel put an immense strain on those immediately connected with the society, it is apparent that it had a much broader effect, negatively impacting upon chapel building in the circuit as a whole. In 1860, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* recorded the long-term ‘embarrassed condition’ of the Ludlow chapel, remarking that it had seriously ‘cramped the efforts of the Church.’<sup>155</sup> As Kendall has noted, the peak of Primitive Methodist chapel-building came in the period between 1863-72, when a total of 1191 chapels were erected, an

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<sup>148</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/4: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1866-79, 6 Dec 1869.

<sup>149</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/9: Ludlow Circuit – Committee, Leaders & Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1866-87, 24 Jan 1870.

<sup>150</sup> SRR: NM5166/1/6/28/1-2: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1871.

<sup>151</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/4: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1866-79, 2 Dec 1872.

<sup>152</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/9: Ludlow Circuit – Committee, Leaders & Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1866-87, 18 Feb 1876.

<sup>153</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/4: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1866-79, 9 Mar 1874.

<sup>154</sup> SRR: NM3544/1/4: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers & Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1866-79, 21 June 1876.

<sup>155</sup> PMM, 1860, p. 176.



average of two chapels for every week of the of the decade.<sup>156</sup> The evidence of Shropshire also reveals a similar pattern. If we look at the central and southern circuits of Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton, Leintwardine, Minsterley, Shrewsbury and Wrockwardine Wood, we can see that there was a total of 27 new chapels constructed between 1860 and 1869. This was an increase of 108 per cent in the total number of chapels in these circuits.<sup>157</sup> Clearly, the 1860s were important years for the geographical consolidation of these Shropshire circuits. Six new chapels were built in the Bishop's Castle circuit between 1860 and 1869, for example, more than in any other decade of the nineteenth century. In 1867, the Reverend James Prosser reported on the building activity within the Wrockwardine Wood circuit:

‘I am happy to say that during the past five years we have erected seven new chapels at a cost of £2,910, and raised £1,366; these seven chapels will accommodate 2,270 persons.’<sup>158</sup>

Moreover, this pattern of building activity should be compared with the experience of the northern circuits of the county. For example, if we look at the Llanymynech circuit we discover that 5 new chapels were constructed during the period between 1861 and 1865. This was an increase of 80 per cent in the total number in the circuit.<sup>159</sup> Similarly at Oswestry, the number of chapels in the circuit increased by 43 per cent between 1863 and 1869.<sup>160</sup> In comparison, the Ludlow circuit built just two chapels during the 1860s, one at Tenbury Wells in 1863 and another at Middleton in 1869. A third chapel was purchased from the Wesleyan Methodists at Cleobury Mortimer in 1861.<sup>161</sup> While the financial difficulties of the Ludlow chapel did not prevent building activity within the circuit during the 1860s, it is clear that the experiences of the Ludlow chapel did much to discourage the enthusiasm which led to excessive building activity in other parts of the county.

Ludlow was not the only society to rebuild in the period after 1860. The societies at Wrockwardine Wood, Shrewsbury and Bishop's Castle each erected new

<sup>156</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 456.

<sup>157</sup> SRR: NM2138/130-200: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1855-1900; NM3219/6: Church Stretton Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1873-90; NM4111/4/1-2: Minsterley Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1860-1896; NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1853-90; NM1861/10-86: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1859-93; HRO: K76/34: Leintwardine Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1853-1900.

<sup>158</sup> PMM, 1867, p. 732.

<sup>159</sup> SRR: NM4444/5/1: Llanymynech Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1880.

<sup>160</sup> SRR: NM4219/4/27: Oswestry Circuit, Chapel Schedule, 1891.

<sup>161</sup> SRR: NM5166/1/6/28/1-2: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1871.



and more expensive chapels. As we have seen, the new Ludlow chapel cost a staggering £2223 19s 2d, a massive outlay on a new building. In 1864, a new chapel was erected at Castle Court in Shrewsbury to replace the old building used by Primitive Methodists in the town since 1826. Chapel schedules reveal that this new chapel cost approximately £800. Similarly, the chapel constructed at Bishop's Castle cost a total of £509 3s.<sup>162</sup> Although the majority of chapels built during the period from 1860 were not as expensive as those erected at Ludlow, Shrewsbury and Bishop's Castle, it is clear that there was a general trend towards a greater level of expenditure on new chapels. If we look at the chapels built at Hyssington and Mainstone in the Bishop's Castle circuit, we can see that these were relatively expensive buildings, the chapel at Hyssington costing a total of £289, while the chapel erected at Mainstone in 1892 cost £291 5s.<sup>163</sup> Similarly in the Ludlow circuit, the chapels erected at Ashford and Angel Bank in 1879 and 1881, cost £435 3s 9d and £273 1s 1d respectively.<sup>164</sup> Woodcock also notes the massive cost of several new chapels built in his area of study after 1860.<sup>165</sup>

Clearly, the Primitive Methodists in Shropshire were increasingly willing to spend significant sums on their new chapels in order to fulfil their demand for 'a style of building which did not suit the circumstances' of their fathers'.<sup>166</sup> Ambler has argued that the

'modest architectural development that took place shows an increasing consciousness of appearance and style.'<sup>167</sup>

Moreover, it was not only a sign of the changing status and position of Primitive Methodism within the local community, but also a clear indication of its growing wealth.<sup>168</sup> Figure 9 shows two Shropshire Primitive Methodist chapels which were both erected after 1870.

<sup>162</sup> SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1864; NM1861/19: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1864; NM2138/142: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1865.

<sup>163</sup> SRR: NM2138/184-5; NM2138194/2: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedules, 1889 & 1893.

<sup>164</sup> SRR: NM3544/3/33: Ludlow Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1891.

<sup>165</sup> Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry*, p. 259. It is important to note however, that even in the later stages of the century Primitive Methodism continued to build small, inexpensive chapels. For example, the chapel built at Knowle in 1879 cost £79 15s 8d, while that erected at Adley Moor in 1882 cost just £75.

<sup>166</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 161.

<sup>167</sup> Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, p. 8.

<sup>168</sup> Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, p. 274.



**Figure 9**

**Peaton Strand  
Primitive Methodist chapel  
erected 1873**



**Hopton Bank Primitive Methodist chapel erected 1881**



The evidence of the connexional magazine reveals the considerable pride of local Primitive Methodist societies in their new chapels. In 1860, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* published an account of the opening of the Hadnall chapel, giving extensive information about the new chapel and its various architectural details:

‘We believe that the model of this chapel is original. The front is of drest brick-work enriched with white polished stone, and each pilaster terminates with a spire-like finish. The roof is covered with ornamental pottery tile. The interior is lighted up with five circular-headed sash windows...one square window in the gable end, and a fan-light over the door. There is a beautiful rostrum, part canopied with a moulded arch. The windows are also moulded...There is a communion in front of the rostrum, with mahogany hand-rail and banisters. The whole of the wood-work inside and outside...is well painted, varnished, and finished oak colour. The pilasters in front of the rostrum are marbled, which greatly tells in appearance...It stands in an elevated position fronting the turnpike-road leading to Shrewsbury, and is decidedly an ornament to the village.’<sup>169</sup>

The pride of the Hadnall society in their new building is extremely clear; however perhaps most important is the reference to its ‘elevated position’. Woodcock has also noted the growing aspiration of local Primitive Methodist societies to build chapels in more central and ‘visible’ positions:

‘Our fathers were often compelled to build chapels in back lanes and streets. It is now felt that the most conspicuous spots ought to be occupied, not by public houses, or amusement halls, or even by political clubs, but by places of worship.’<sup>170</sup>

The acquisition of a chapel in more prominent sites within the local setting brought Primitive Methodism into the heart of many villages and thereby placed it at the centre of community life. As the strength and the profile of the Primitive Methodists developed, they became a significant part of the social life of local communities.<sup>171</sup> This idea is supported by the evidence of provincial newspapers which gave increasing focus to the activities of local Primitive Methodist chapels. For example, in the period from 1880, the *Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury News*

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<sup>169</sup> PMM, 1863, pp. 560-1.

<sup>170</sup> Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry*, p. 144; Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 231.

<sup>171</sup> Currie, *Methodism Divided*, pp. 130-1; Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, pp. 63-4.



reported on the rebuilding of the Hopton Bank chapel at Clee Hill. In August 1880, the newspaper presented an extensive review of the laying of the chapel's memorial stones.<sup>172</sup> In September 1880, the newspaper gave further coverage to the building progress of the new chapel, noting that 'the four top stones were laid on the New Primitive Methodist Chapel'.<sup>173</sup> Finally on April 23 1881, the *Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury News* published details about the celebratory services held when the Hopton Bank chapel was opened for worship.

'On Sunday last, the opening services of the new chapel at Hopton Bank, Clee Hill, were commenced, when two sermons were preached by the Rev. Samuel Sanders, of Ludlow. There was a crowded congregation at each service, and the proceedings were enlivened by selections of sacred music by the choir, and also by Mr B. Martin's Excelsior Brass Band. On the following day a tea meeting was held in the old chapel, when a large number of people from the surrounding district partook of the "social cup".'<sup>174</sup>

Clearly, the reporting of newspapers did much to improve and increase the profile of Primitive Methodist societies within the local community.

Events such as the Sunday school anniversary, 'a characteristically chapel-centred and non-religious Methodist occasion', provided an important opportunity for the local community to unite with the Primitive Methodists.<sup>175</sup> Held each Spring the Sunday school anniversary began with a procession around the village, as the scholars carried banners, sang hymns and collected contributions from spectators. In the afternoon, the Sunday scholars stood on a platform erected at the front of the chapel to recite various pieces that they had committed to memory during the preceding weeks, and to sing the anniversary hymns. Myers has noted that the appearance of the children on the platform encouraged the attendance of the whole neighbourhood.<sup>176</sup> The appeal of such events ensured that they quickly became part of the local social calendar, the perpetual cycle of Sunday and week-night services, prayer and class meetings interspersed with the annual round of various special events forming an integral part of

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<sup>172</sup> SRR: *Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury News*, Saturday 14 August 1880.

<sup>173</sup> SRR: *Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury News*, Saturday 11 September 1880.

<sup>174</sup> SRR: *Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury News*, Saturday 23 April 1881.

<sup>175</sup> Currie, *Methodism Divided*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>176</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 229; Myers, *History*, pp. 26-7; Patterson, *From Hayloft to Temple*, p. 79.



the social scene in the villages.<sup>177</sup> As Obelkevich has noted, Primitive Methodism had 'created its own version of sacred time'. This not only provided an alternative 'to the orthodox calendar still observed in the parish churches', but also 'to the unrespectable leisure activities of the rural populace.'<sup>178</sup>

Let us now briefly examine some of the effects of chapel building, and the various ways in which the experience provided by the Primitive Methodist Connexion changed during the second half of the nineteenth century. In the early years of the Primitive Methodist movement, the 'model layman...was pre-eminently a man of piety'. However, as Primitive Methodism solidified at the local level and matured into an established organisation, the layman became increasingly noted for his service to the cause as a class leader, local preacher, or society steward.<sup>179</sup> Chapel-building in particular brought a completely different outlook within the local Primitive Methodist community. As Graham has noted,

'The mere possession of a site and bricks and mortar meant that special office holders were needed to 'service' these buildings, so there was a proliferation of offices, of trustees, and of financial and building experts, of astute negotiators who could meet and deal with professional and business men on all aspects and levels of building projects.'<sup>180</sup>

People wished to serve their chapel and were proud to do so. Moreover, many members enjoyed increased social mobility and gained respect for this service.<sup>181</sup> One of the most numerous and perhaps most important of local Primitive Methodist officials was the trustee. As legal owners of any real estate connected with the chapel, the trustees were responsible for the management of chapel finances. Within Primitive Methodism, the office of trustee enabled large numbers of the labouring classes to gain responsibility within their community. Yalden has noted the extent to which north Shropshire Primitive Methodist chapel trusts were dominated by labourers. For example, at Porthywaen in 1865, all of the trustees were labourers. Similarly at Walford Heath, eight of the 11 trustees in 1841 were labourers. Moreover, Yalden

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<sup>177</sup> Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, pp. 63-4.

<sup>178</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 230.

<sup>179</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 252.

<sup>180</sup> E. D. Graham 'Chosen by God: the female travelling preachers of early Primitive Methodism', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 49, 1993, p. 92.

<sup>181</sup> Currie, *Methodism Divided*, p. 46.



argues that the

‘social distinction between the leadership and the general congregation of members and adherents was much less in Primitive Methodism than in either Congregational or Calvinistic Methodists.’<sup>182</sup>

As the Primitive Methodist Connexion matured after 1850, we not only witness a ‘long-term transition from piety to service’ amongst the general membership, but also a gradual development of ministerial specialisation.<sup>183</sup> In the early years of Primitive Methodism there was relatively little differentiation between the itinerant and local preacher, only the ‘functional differentiation between full-time and part-time workers.’<sup>184</sup> However, as Gilbert points out:

‘the mere fact that the ministry was a full-time activity became *in time* a basis on which a specifically religious-cultural differentiation of roles could emerge, for full-time involvement as a rule entailed a greater personal commitment to a collectivity than did part-time participation.’<sup>185</sup>

As we have seen in the previous chapter, missionary success created other kinds of work for the travelling preacher; established societies required regular preaching appointments and the provision of a permanent place of worship. The pressures of chapel building in particular affected the role of the circuit minister who often became heavily involved in new building projects. The complexities of planning and executing several building projects simultaneously within an individual circuit discouraged any form of change; this is made clear by solicitations for the restationing of certain ministers. For example, in 1883 the Wrockwardine Wood circuit committee made a request that the Rev. John Luarmby be restationed with them for a fourth year in order to help them reduce the debt on the St. George’s chapel:

‘He has been successful in securing £100 for Trench chapel and we feel sure he would be better adapted than a stranger in the St George’s case. Also it is the united wish of the circuit that he should remain a fourth year.’<sup>186</sup>

In 1884, a further request to have the Rev. John Luarmby restationed in Wrockwardine Wood was made by the circuit committee. The annual return reveals that their minister

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<sup>182</sup> Yalden, ‘Nonconformity in north Shropshire’, pp. 168-170. See also R. W. Ambler, ‘The social composition of Church Leadership: Nonconformist trustees in Lincolnshire, 1800-70’, in the *Bulletin of John Ryland’s University Library of Manchester*, 75, 1993.

<sup>183</sup> Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 252 & Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 158.

<sup>184</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 150.

<sup>185</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 151(his italics).

<sup>186</sup> SRR: NM1861/49: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Annual Return, 1883.



was not only still involved in securing £100 for the St. George's chapel, but also that he was occupied in the erection of a new school room at Donnington, 'he being in correspondence with the Duke' agent'.<sup>187</sup> This was not an isolated incidence, for example in 1895 the Shrewsbury circuit also requested that one of its itinerant preachers be restationed for a fourth year, remarking that this was vital for the success of several projects currently underway in the circuit.<sup>188</sup> It is clear that circuit ministers now played a vital role in the physical consolidation of the Primitive Methodist cause at the local level; moreover, circuit committees were reluctant to lose ministers that had formed useful alliances and gained specialist knowledge about individual building projects.

Gilbert has argued that as the 'ordinary Nonconformist member emerged into the main theatre of social life...his religious attitudes and behaviour patterns inevitably changed.'<sup>189</sup> In Primitive Methodism, this change manifested itself in several ways. In particular, along with the desire for more sophisticated chapels came a demand for 'more dignity and reverence in worship' and a more educated and professional ministry.<sup>190</sup> As Valenze has noted, later generations desired something different from that offered by the lay cottage preacher of the early period; the enthusiasm and spontaneity of the mission were to be replaced by 'prescribed behaviour and speech' and a general increase in sophistication.<sup>191</sup> As Milburn has argued, the need for greater levels of ministerial training grew as social and educational developments began to produce workers that were 'better informed, enquiring, politically conscious, eager for knowledge and self-improvement.'<sup>192</sup> During the early years of the Primitive Methodist movement it was not considered necessary that preachers be highly educated, rather that they had a 'sound constitution' and 'a burning evangelistic fervour for the saving of souls'.<sup>193</sup> As we have seen, this was clearly reflected in the type of

<sup>187</sup> SRR: NM1861/53: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Annual Return, 1884.

<sup>188</sup> SRR: NM2123/390: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Return, 1895.

<sup>189</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 158.

<sup>190</sup> G. Milburn, 'The local preacher's role and status in divided Methodism 1850-1932', in G. Milburn & M. Batty (eds.) *Workaday Preachers; the Story of Methodist Local Preaching* (Peterborough, 1995), p. 70.

<sup>191</sup> Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, p. 276; K. Young, *Chapel. The Joyous Days and Prayerful Nights of the Nonconformists in their Heyday, circa 1850-1950* (London, 1972), pp. 154-5.

<sup>192</sup> G. Milburn, *A School for the Prophets; the Origins of Ministerial Education in the Primitive Methodist Church* (Manchester, 1981), p. 7.

<sup>193</sup> E. D. Graham, 'Chosen by God: the female itinerants of early Primitive Methodism', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1986), p. 282.



sermons produced as a result.<sup>194</sup> Although travelling preachers were expected to study during the course of their ministry, the pressures of the Primitive Methodist itinerancy, along with the ‘distractions’ of life made it difficult for an itinerant preacher to spare the time for self-improvement. As Peake has pointed out a college course was not only of value because it imparted vital knowledge, but also because it taught students how to continue learning once they were left to their own devices.<sup>195</sup>

Many expressed reservations about the education of travelling preachers. For example in 1850 Church noted: ‘Of all the places the pulpit is the last in which to seek to excite admiration, or where to display profound learning.’<sup>196</sup> Similarly, in 1854 Charles Kendall commented:

‘Let us not be in too much haste to obtain smoother and finer instruments of moral culture... Would a man, standing on a chair, on a village green, with a bible in his hand, plainly dressed and plainly spoken, be as great a blessing to England as ever?’<sup>197</sup>

Opponents believed that education would not only ‘threaten the character of the ministry in fundamental ways’, but would also ‘threaten the essential unity of ministry and laity by fostering some sort of ‘priestly’ aspirations’. Moreover, many felt that a college education would act to distance Primitive Methodist preachers from their listeners.<sup>198</sup>

However from the 1850s, the idea of a formal system of training for Primitive Methodist itinerant preachers, which united the traditions of the original movement with the newest ideas, began to gather momentum and strength. As the era of outward expansion ebbed after 1850, Primitive Methodist itinerants now had to see to the maintenance of local societies and to minister to the converted:

‘Conversionist preaching, hammering the old plain truths necessary for salvation, was bound to lose its power if repeated to those who had heard the same message, indeed the same sermons, many times before.’<sup>199</sup>

Moreover, as subdivision created increasingly compact circuits during the second half of the nineteenth century, ministers found that they were regularly preaching in the

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<sup>194</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>195</sup> A. S. Peake, *Ministerial Education*, Centenary Celebration Pamphlet (London, 1907), p. 16.

<sup>196</sup> Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 161.

<sup>197</sup> Kendall, *Christian Minister in Earnest*, p. 22.

<sup>198</sup> Milburn, *A School for the Prophets*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>199</sup> Milburn, *A School for the Prophets*, p. 8.



same locations. Milburn has argued that as the Primitive Methodist itinerant became more like a resident pastor, his preaching needed a more 'solid teaching element if it was to satisfy'.<sup>200</sup> In 1863, Conference authorised the erection of a school at York; Elmfield was a residential school founded for the children of preachers and better-off members of the Connexion. With this school in place, the decision was made to take in up to twenty young candidates to train for the ministry under the guidance of the Reverend John Petty.<sup>201</sup> For advocates of ministerial training this was a significant step, but pressure for the establishment of a separate theological institute continued to mount, and on 23 July 1868 the Sunderland Institute was opened. This was a considerable success, and approximately 300 students passed through its doors during the course of its existence. In 1881, a second college was opened at Manchester, eventually replacing the Sunderland Institute when financial pressures forced it to close.<sup>202</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century the college at Manchester had, with the financial backing of Sir William Hartley, made significant strides forward. With the addition of a new wing, new entrance, dining halls, library and lecture hall, the number of students that could be accommodated doubled after 1892, as did the length of their training course.<sup>203</sup>

Primitive Methodist local preachers were not immune from these developments, during the course of the second half of the nineteenth they too were expected to extend their education in step with the increasingly refined tastes and the advancing intelligence of the times. Many local preachers lamented the fact that they had few opportunities to preach in the larger chapels. However, as Milburn has pointed out, those that did have such a chance were unable to make the most of it:

'with the sermon carrying so much weight in Methodist worship any disappointment with the preacher left congregations feeling that they had been short-changed by the entire service.'<sup>204</sup>

Demand for greater instruction and training caused unease for local preachers who recognised their failings but felt that 'Gospel piety was the vital requirement and that education might stifle it.'<sup>205</sup> However, many local preachers wished to secure the skills

<sup>200</sup> Milburn, *A School for the Prophets*, p. 8.

<sup>201</sup> Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 526.

<sup>202</sup> Milburn, *A School for the Prophets*, pp. 17-28; Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 526.

<sup>203</sup> Barber, *A Methodist Pageant*, pp. 214-6.

<sup>204</sup> Milburn, 'The local preacher's role', p. 74.

<sup>205</sup> Milburn, 'The local preacher's role', p. 77.



and sermon content which would commend their message to all who would hear, and this is reflected in the demand for material such as the lectures printed in *The Christian Ambassador* and the *Local Preacher's Manual*. Similarly, correspondence classes were provided under the direction of sub-tutors in each district by the *Christian Messenger*.<sup>206</sup>

### Conclusion:

Following in the footsteps of the original Wesleyan Connexion, during the second half of the nineteenth century Primitive Methodism evolved from a sect into an established and distinct denomination. As Milburn has noted:

'Each of the connexions, no matter how fluid and unformed its origins, developed within a few decades into an organised and structured denomination, with an increasingly sophisticated life of its own.'<sup>207</sup>

While chapel building was just one of the many ways in which the religious enthusiasm and flexibility of the early years became solidified and institutionalised as the nineteenth century progressed, its significance for the organisational consolidation of the Primitive Methodist movement cannot be understated. As we have seen, the provision of a chapel provided a permanent foothold within a community. However it also placed considerable financial pressures upon a local Primitive Methodist society. Throughout Shropshire Primitive Methodist societies endeavoured to service the debt amassed as a result of chapel building; a struggle which was in many cases exacerbated by the desire to renovate and rebuild during the second half of the nineteenth century. This burden had a considerable effect upon the character of the worship provided, the growing emphasis on fund-raising doing much to drain the spiritual resources of Primitive Methodism. Despite this it is clear that solidarity in a common cause also had positive benefits, not only encouraging the involvement of the existing membership but also helping to attract new members and adherents. Moreover, the popularity of events such as the tea meeting, bazaar and Sunday school anniversary did much to improve the status of the local Primitive Methodist congregation, thrusting the chapel and its activities into the heart of the community. Chapel building also affected the nature of worship provided by the Primitive Methodism in other ways. For example,

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<sup>206</sup> Rev. H. Yooll, *Local Preacher Training*, Centenary Celebration Pamphlet (London, 1907), p. 24 & Milburn, 'The local preacher's role', pp. 78-9.

<sup>207</sup> Milburn, 'The local preacher's role', p. 70.



the provision of a chapel created a proliferation of offices, encouraging a shift from piety to service as the way in which the general congregation demonstrated its devotion to the cause. Similarly, the erection of larger and grander chapels encouraged worshippers to demand a more sophisticated form of worship provided by a more professional and educated ministry; there was little point having more elegant places of worship if the sermons offered within them were not also improved. Clearly these developments did much to augment the nature and status of the cause within the local setting, although as Primitive Methodism became increasingly integrated within both the Nonconformist community and wider society it inevitably came to lose many of the distinctive qualities which had originally set it apart.



## **Chapter 10: Conclusions**

Using the evidence of circuit records, including committee meeting minutes and the quarterly preachers' plans, the internal organisation and structure of Primitive Methodism at the local level has been established. It has been argued that while Primitive Methodism owed much to the Wesleyan Connexion for its mode of organisation, Primitive Methodism was much more democratic and decentralised in its approach. Considerable power was given to the laity who were able to control not only many aspects of local Primitive Methodist life by their presence on the quarter day board and circuit committee, but also the higher echelons of government through their attendance at the District Meeting and the Annual Conference. As circuit stewards, chapel trustees, class leaders and Sunday school teachers, laymen were given considerable opportunities that were denied to them in other aspects of their life, and thereby given the power to shape the Primitive Methodist experience. This responsibility, along with the denomination's strict disciplinary code, encouraged a level of social control which hitherto had not been achieved by any other means. In particular, it has been argued that the laity had considerable influence in their role as local preachers. The evidence of preachers' plans reveals the extent to which Primitive Methodism relied upon its army of unpaid preachers, the vast majority of quarterly appointments being taken by a local preacher. While the travelling preachers maintained only sporadic contact with many of the societies by means of the weeknight appointment, it was the local preacher who provided much of the regular nurture. Although the level of contact between the various congregations and the itinerant minister increased as the size of circuits and the number of societies declined, it has been shown that throughout the nineteenth century the work of the local preacher remained vital to the continued presence and success of the denomination in the local setting.

As a democratic movement which provided equal opportunities for all capable volunteers, Primitive Methodism attracted many of those working-class people who felt shunned by the Anglican Church and other such 'established' bodies. Similarly, those who were disillusioned with the increasingly staid worship provided by the Wesleyan Methodists turned to Primitive Methodism to obtain the enthusiasm and 'enlightenment' for which they were longing. The evidence of Shropshire baptism



registers supports the findings of other historians such as Snell, and firmly establishes the strong appeal of Primitive Methodism for the lower classes of both rural and industrial society alike within the county. This study reveals that approximately 63 per cent of Primitive Methodists in Shropshire could be classed as unskilled workers, the vast majority being either miners or agricultural labourers. Obituaries published in the connexional magazine and contemporary literature have shown that the Primitive Methodist preacher was also drawn from the same social strata as the membership, and it has been argued that this close correlation in social profile can help to explain the success of Primitive Methodism. Local and travelling preachers alike were able to understand the problems of their congregations and were therefore able to recognise the best way in which to direct their message so that it struck home. Moreover, the hardships supported by Primitive Methodist itinerants not only enabled them to empathise with the harsh realities of working-class life, but also helped them to win the respect of their listeners who recognised the struggles endured on their behalf.

Using the Religious Census of 1851 it has been possible to establish that Primitive Methodism was the most important rival for the Established Church in Shropshire. In 1851, Primitive Methodism was the most significant form of religious dissent in this county, having nearly twice as many places of worship as the Wesleyan Methodists, and attaining the highest dissenting index of attendance on Census Sunday in six of Shropshire's registration districts. In particular, the Religious Census confirmed that the denomination did well in the northern districts of Ellesmere and Oswestry, and also in the southern district of Clun. However, while the census provides a very useful insight into the penetration of Primitive Methodism into the county by 1851, annual connexional membership figures have been used in order to obtain information about the long-term progress of the Shropshire circuits. These figures reveal that throughout the nineteenth century, Primitive Methodist membership in the county was subject to considerable fluctuation, in particular as a result of local secession and the sub-division of circuits. Taking the figures at five-year intervals, it has been argued that the experience of the denomination was different for each of the regions examined, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it has been shown that the progress of Primitive Methodism was greatly affected by economic and social developments within the county. Membership figures reveal that Primitive Methodism enjoyed continued success in the northern regions of



Shropshire during the second half of the nineteenth century, and this was the only part of the county in which the denomination continued to expand in the final decades of the century, membership being stimulated by the growing numbers employed on the Oswestry coalfield. In contrast, membership in the central and southern regions declined to 1900. While the decay of the iron industry in the east Shropshire coalfield led to a decline in Primitive Methodist membership in the central regions of the county, the greatest fall was experienced in the south where agricultural depression led to depopulation.

Having established the general location of the denomination's triumphs and the patterns of growth in membership, it was necessary to determine why Primitive Methodism was more successful in certain parts of the county than in others. In order to answer this question, the impact of both the Established Church and structures of landownership have been examined. Historical scholarship supposes that Methodism developed in regions where the Established Church was weak, where the parochial structure was ineffectual and unable to cope with the flexibility of the circuit system. It has been argued that while the Anglican Church was able to control the religious habits of parishioners in small parishes with nucleated settlements and a centrally located church, it struggled to do so in larger parishes where the inhabitants lived in scattered, irregular settlements. This idea is supported by the evidence of Shropshire, the Religious Census of 1851 revealing that the Anglicans achieved their highest indices of attendance in parishes which spanned less than a 1000 acres and had small populations. The census also indicates that Anglican strength did generally impede the penetration of religious Nonconformity, dissenting denominations being present in just 7 of the 46 parishes in which the Church attained an index of attendance of 60 or more.

The Religious Census establishes that the Primitive Methodist Connexion thrived in certain parishes where the Anglicans had low levels of attendance on Census Sunday, for example at Wrockwardine Wood and Kinnerley, but it has also been shown that the denomination did well in parishes where the Church appeared to be relatively 'successful'. For example, we have seen how the Primitive Methodists attained their highest index of attendance in Edgton, a small parish with a low population, and one in which the Anglicans performed well. Despite the relative strength of the Established Church in that parish, it has been argued that it was the inflexibility of the parish system which enabled Primitive Methodism to gain a foothold and ultimately thrive. Primitive Methodist missionaries took advantage of the vacuum



created by an ineffective parochial structure, establishing worship in settlements on the edge of parishes, miles away from the watchful eye of the Anglican incumbent. However, while it is clear that the success of Primitive Methodism ultimately depended upon Anglican weakness, it is clear that its failure to achieve high attendance levels was not a result of Anglican strength, but of that of other dissenting religious denominations. Primitive Methodism struggled in some of the parishes of the east Shropshire coalfield such as Madeley, where the Wesleyans were long established and had a strong following.

The impact of the structures of landownership has also been examined in recent historical studies. In particular, it has been argued that concentration of ownership in just one or a few hands precluded the penetration of religious dissent into a parish. This thesis has clearly demonstrated the high incidence of large gentry estates in Shropshire, and the evidence of the *Imperial Gazetteer* has established the relatively 'closed' nature of many of the parishes in the county. 70 per cent of the parishes for which we have information about structures of ownership, were classified as 'held in one hand' or 'not much divided'. However, while it can be argued that many of those parishes for which the *Imperial Gazetteer* fails to provide information should be classified as 'open', the evidence of local directories supports the hypothesis that Shropshire was predominantly closed in nature during the nineteenth century. It has also been shown that the Primitive Methodist Connexion surpassed all other Nonconformist denominations in its penetration of the county, appearing in a total of 68 different parishes. Moreover, it has been argued that many of the parishes in which the denomination appeared in 1851 can be described as relatively 'closed' in nature. 39 per cent of Primitive Methodist preaching places were situated in parishes where the land was 'divided among a few', and as we have seen, in some of these the denomination attained very high levels of attendance on Census Sunday. While it is clear that structures of landownership did not present a considerable barrier to Primitive Methodist expansion, the evidence of the Religious Census of 1851 does suggest that it did affect the denomination's ability to provide a permanent place of worship. In 1851, a total of 46 per cent of Shropshire Primitive Methodist chapels were located in the open parishes of the county, while 29 per cent were in parishes where the land was divided among a few.

This thesis has also explored the changing geography of Shropshire Primitive Methodist circuits, examining the methods used by missionaries to penetrate the county



during the first half of the nineteenth century, and also the manner in which it formed a solid and thriving network of circuits. It has been demonstrated that while the pace of change was different throughout the county, a clear pattern of development can be identified. During the early nineteenth century, the excitement and distraction provided by the enthusiastic roaming of Primitive Methodist missionaries for isolated rural communities and industrial villages alike ensured the rapid expansion of new circuits. Circuit committees were aggressive in their desire to extend territory, employing large numbers of travelling preachers to gather the people in and form new societies. The volatile character of the denomination's work during this period was reflected in the precarious state of its many local societies; preaching places were formed but often given up again when it became clear that there would be no opening of the work. However, as we have seen, continuous expansion often brought neighbouring circuits into conflict with one another, and circuit officials were quickly forced to look for consolidation within the confines of their own territory.

While new societies were formed throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the emphasis changed from expansion to maintenance and consolidation. Each circuit established a core of important societies which became the focus for much of the work carried out within it. Missionary activity became increasingly dominated by planned revivalism in the form of protracted and revival meetings. However, while it is clear that these changes impacted upon the Primitive Methodist circuit by limiting the opportunity for outward expansion, I have argued that one of the greatest factors that affected the geography of a circuit was the extent of sub-division it experienced. It has been demonstrated that the need to reduce financial pressure and consolidate the efforts of travelling preachers encouraged sub-division and led to the creation of ever-smaller circuits. By the final stages of the nineteenth century many Shropshire circuits were a fraction of their original size. Moreover, it has been argued that by the close of the century the chapel had come to dominate the Primitive Methodist circuit, as the geography of the denomination was solidified by means of building activity.

It has been observed that the chapel not only enabled Primitive Methodism to maintain an effective presence within the local setting, particularly in those locations where the denomination had been subject to persecution, but also that the chapel itself created a new base for further recruitment. However, the poverty of the Primitive Methodist membership ensured that the provision of a permanent place of worship required a mammoth effort and despite the relatively low costs involved, it has been



shown that massive debts were regularly incurred in a spirit of excessive optimism. These debts had major long-term consequences for the success of a local society, which could struggle for many years to repay the cost of building their chapel. However, despite the obvious difficulties faced by societies attempting to service debts, many chose to renovate existing chapels or even build a new one, thereby exacerbating the burden of debt. The continued prosperity and indeed the very survival of many Primitive Methodist societies therefore depended upon the constant accumulation of funds. The need to service the debt created a sense of solidarity between society members ultimately boosting chapel life. This focus upon financial concerns changed the nature of the Primitive Methodist experience: during the second half of the nineteenth century increasing numbers of fund-raising events were held, many of the activities organised having an increasingly secular dimension. Events such as the tea meeting or the bazaar helped to attract many local community members who did not otherwise attend the chapel, and as new chapels were built in more central locations, the activities of Primitive Methodism became part of the local social calendar.

Chapel building also affected the outlook of the local Primitive Methodist community in other ways. As increasing numbers of chapels were built there was a proliferation of offices, one of the most important being the trustee. It has been argued that there was a long-term transition from piety to service, as the emphasis upon being a devout and dutiful member of the congregation was replaced by the need to serve within the chapel community. The pressures of chapel building also affected the role of the itinerant minister who became increasingly involved in building projects. This development not only placed considerable pressure upon the already precious time of the circuit minister, but also led to a growing number of requests for the restationing of travelling preachers. Another development that occurred as circuits became solidified by means of the chapel, was that congregations began to desire a dignified style of worship to correspond with their increasingly 'sophisticated' chapels. Primitive Methodist preachers were also required to match the educational developments that occurred in society at large during the second half of the nineteenth century, and training became imperative to provide the desired educated and professional ministry.

Clearly, this thesis not only redresses the imbalance in historical research which has neglected Shropshire as an area of importance for the Primitive Methodist Connexion, but it also advances our understanding about the denomination in the local



setting. In particular, the work on the spatial geography of circuits adds to our knowledge about the Methodist circuit system, revealing the ways in which this system provided the necessary flexibility for Primitive Methodism to adapt to different regions, and take advantage of weaknesses in the traditional parochial structure. Moreover, it establishes some important changes in the shape and focus of circuits as Primitive Methodism became an ever more 'respectable' denomination, becoming more stable by means of its chapels.

Had time and space permitted I would have liked to explore some further areas. First, there is interest in examining more closely Primitive Methodist chapel building within the county. In particular, it would be helpful to ascertain precise changes in both their location and architecture in the nineteenth century. In many cases there was a clear improvement in the architectural design of the chapels built during the latter stages of the century, greater attention being paid to the small details. Chapels not only underwent external changes, but also internal improvements as congregations came to demand ever more sophisticated fixtures and fittings, and it would be enlightening to assess the ways in which these developments impacted upon Primitive Methodist worship. Second, I would have liked to examine the role of the Primitive Methodist Sunday school, but felt that this avenue of research provided enough material for an entirely separate thesis. For example, it would be instructive to establish the location of the earliest Sunday schools, the rate at which new schools were formed, their educational material, the changing number of scholars, and to determine the reasons for the failure of certain schools. Third, there is scope to explore further the 'content' of the Primitive Methodist experience - in particular, to look at the material used by both travelling and local preachers in their sermons, and to assess how their message evolved in response to more general developments within the denomination. The role of hymns, their subject matter and content, and their links with popular music and folklore, is another fascinating topic. Finally, I would have liked to compare the Primitive Methodist Connexion more closely with the other Methodist denominations. For example, it would be valuable to contrast the progress made by the Primitive Methodist circuits in Shropshire with that of the circuits of the Wesleyan Methodists. How did the two denominations compare in the size of their circuits and in the organisation of their internal work? Did the changes that occurred in the geography of Primitive Methodist circuits correspond with the developments within Wesleyan circuits? There is indeed scope for a comparative national study of Primitive Methodism and Bible



Christianity, contrasting the experience provided by each denomination, and also comparing their structures of organisation, and apparently similar ideology and occupational profiles. Any study like the one I have engaged in here throws up such questions and themes that deserve further attention. This thesis will help to resolve some issues in the religious history of Primitive Methodism for a neglected area, while also pointing the way to other topics that now call for historical research.



# CWM CIRCUIT.

Primitive Methodist Preachers Plan.  
1826.

Lord's Day PLAN.	Time	April				May.				June.				July.		
		23	30	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	2	9	16		
PLACES.																
Cwm	6	4	3	2	5	1 S	4	4	2 C	3	1	5	4	2 L		
Cloddock	2	4	3	2	5	1	4	4	2 C	3	1	5	4	2 L		
Maescoeds	2	2	4	7	3	2	3	1 C	4	5	2	3	1	4		
Longtown	6	2	4	4	3	2	3	1 C	4	5	2	3	1	4		
Coed Robin	10	4		2		1 C		8	9		3	12		2		
Birches	10		3		5		4		2 C		1		4			
Turnaston	6	3	1	5	2s	4	1 C	7	3	2	4	1	5	3		
Dorston	11 6	3	1	5	2	4	1 C	5	3	2	4	1	5	3		
Snodhill	2	3	1	5	2	4	1 C	5	6	2 L	4	1s	5	3		
Bredwardine.	2	5	2	3	1	10 11	5	2 C	5	1	7	4	2	5		
Blakemere	6	5	2	3	1	10 11	5	2 C	5	1	6	4	2	5		
Darkley	2	1	5	1	7	5	2	3	1 C	6	10 11	2	7	1		
Brobury	6	1	5	1	6	5	2 L	3	1 C	7	10 11	2	6	1		
WEEK NIGHT PLAN.																
Longtown	M.	2		1			2 T		1		2		1			
Coed Robin	T.	2		1			2 T		1		2		1			
Cloddock	W.	2		1			2 T		1		2		1			
Maescoeds	T.	2		1			2 T		1		2		1			
Cwm	F.	2					2 T		1		2		1			
Langairn	M.	1		2			1	2 T			1		2			
Hay	T.	1		2			1	2 T			1		2			
Dorston	W.	1		2			1	2 T			1		2			
Turnaston	T.	1		2			1	2 T			1		2			
Snodhill	F.	1		2			1	2 T			1		2			
Blakemere	M.	1		2		1		2 T		1		2		1		
Darkley	T.	1		2		1		2 T		1		2		1		
Brobury	W.	1		2		1		2 T		1		2		1		
Staunton	T.	1		2		1		2 T		1		2		1		
Bredwardine.	F.	1		2		1		2 T		1		2		1		

"Be ye Holy."

Preachers.

- 1 T. Procter
- 2 J. Harrison
- 3 T. Meredith
- 4 W. Gilbert
- 5 J. Gilbert

Prayer Leaders.

- 6 T. Lanwarn
- 7 J. Lanwarn
- 8 C. Gilbert
- 9 H. Phillips
- 10 T. Jenkins
- 11 J. Virrel
- 12 T. Williams

"We then as workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain."—2 Cor. vi. 1.  
C. Collection. L. Love Feast. T. Ticket. S. Sacrament. P. Prayer Meeting.  
Quarter-day Meeting to be held June 19. A Camp Meeting will be held on the 2nd day of July if the weather permit.  
Preachers and Leaders are requested to pay particular attention to the giving out of all Collections and Tickets, the week before they are made, and in making the same.

T. DAVIES and SON Britannia Printing-Office, Hereford.



# PREES GREEN CIRCUIT, PRIMITIVE METHODIST PREACHERS' PLAN OF APPOINTMENTS, 1874.

"They are the Messengers of the Churches, & the Glory of Christ."—II Corinthians 8—23.

## LORD'S DAY PLAN.

PLACES & TIME	JANUARY.				FEBRUARY.				MARCH.					Apr.
	11	18	25		1	8	15	22	1	8	15	22	29	5
Prees Green	2 34	42	28		1 45	10	29	MS 81	43	88	2 19	51		51
School Lecture	6 34	42	28		1 45	10	29	MM	91	32	2 19	51		51
Wem	11	1												
Braden Heath	2 31	72	1 65	50	24	88	73	40	16	22	78	76		
Welsh End	6 37	51	18	2 60	16	66	86	RM	78	54	26	37		
Pool Head	2 32	PM	PM	26	54	40	1 65	58	73	50	46	31		
Lineal	6 91	PM	17	26	54	40	1 65	58	73	50	46	31		
Butler's Bank	2 77	RM	75	82	36	2 53	52	67	MS 1	63	79	4 38		
Bronington	6 66	40	15	58	76	PM	PM	22	26	31	1 47	46		
Ellerdine	10 4	2 42	67	15	21	75	63	RM	84	77	88	56		
Prees	6 88	88	76	61	90	91	10	1 66	18	29	17	2 2		
Kenstone	10 78	22	55	46	65	81	31	40	47	22	26	2 50		
Northwood	6 78	58	91	46	65	81	31	40	47	9	26	2 50		
Wollerton Wood	2 82	10	77	RM	18	34	86	7	56	80	51	45	1 1	
Hatton Heath	6 82	10	77	RM	18	34	43	7	56	80	51	45	1 1	
Noneley	2 65	89	2 81	72	32	18	60	50	54	31	55	73		
Hopton	6 9	89	2 81	72	32	18	76	50	17	31	91	73		
Rowton	2 75	7	71	21	33	63	38	68	41	20	79	6	36	
Bettisfield	2 6	22	24	73	31	47	26	22	72	78	46	76	16	54
Lower Heath	2 6	18	34	79	13	51	77	13	54	18	34	45	43	MS 15
Paper Mills	6 36	20	19	68	42	79	61	80	36	MS 2	82	84	32	32
Moston	2 6	23	67	53	38	28	20	56	64	7	68	71	61	28
Booley	6 23	67	53	38	28	20	56	64	7	68	71	61	28	28
Whixall	6 46	17	65	47	73	78	44	17	72	37	65	40	47	47
Cotton	2 6	73	65	45	32	69	46	51	44	16	36	40	37	71
Higher Heath	2 6	69	86	51	40	14	25	54	45	87	76	18	34	52
Peplow Lodge	2 6	MS 63	52	56	41	20	64	7	35	79	71	67	21	53
Barkers' Green	6 54	47	86	87	43	85	65	91	54	44	40	32	91	91
Marchamley	6 61	64	RM	56	MM	7	67	77	34	52	23	13	43	43
School Lecture	2 6	CH	37	66	16	2 14	37	25	10	13	69	44	SS	SS
Quina Brook	6 53	43	63	91	56	88	82	51	23	36	35	80	91	91

## WEEK NIGHT PLAN.

PLACES and TIME.		JANUARY.			FEBRUARY.				MARCH.					Apr.
Services to commence at 7 p.m.		12	19	26	2	9	16	23	2	9	16	23	30	6
Wem	Monday	15	81	2	1r	1	32	2	1	54	2	15	81	1
Hopton	Tuesday	1		2r		1		2		61		2		1
Booley	Wednesday	38		2r		61		19		63		61		1
Marchamley	Wednesday	1		29		1r		2		P		2		29
Lower Heath	Thursday	13		2r		P		13		P		42		2
Wollerton Wood	Thursday	1		P		1r		2		P		2		1
Prees Green	Friday	1		2r		1		2		18		2		1
Prees H. Heath	Monday		2		P		45		P		51		1	
Prees	Tuesday		1		2r		14		2		1		2	
Cotton	Wednesday				2r					2			2	
Quina-brook	Wednesday		1		P		15		1		25		P	
Welsh End	Thursday		1		2r		76		2		1		2	
Pool Head	Friday		1		2r		17		2		1		P	
Peplow	Monday	1mm		P		63		61		P		2		4
Hatton Heath	Monday	2		1		2r		1		P		1		2
Ellerdine	Tuesday	4		1		2r		35		75		1		2
Rowton	Tuesday		67		64			1r			35		P	
Butlers Bank	Wednesday	2		1		2r		1		23		1		2
Paper Mills	Thursday	2		1		2r		1s		P		1		P
Whixall	Monday		44		76		2r		P		37		66	
Noneley	Monday		1		2r		50		2		1		2	
Bronington	Tuesday		2		1r		2		72		2		1	
Bettisfield	Tuesday		58		P		22		1r		31		22	
Braden Heath	Wednesday		2		1r		26		1		2		1	
Lineal	Thursday		2		1r		2s		P		2		1	
Northwood	Friday		2		1r		2		31		2		P	
Barkers Green	Friday	2r		15		32		1		15		32		54

QUARTERLY MEETING at Ellerdine, March 9th, at 10 a.m.

Each Preacher must attend his own appointments, but if circumstances prevent, he must himself get them supplied by a properly authorised person; and in no case except in very urgent ones, give them to the Circuit Committee, or Travelling Preachers. That Preacher who does not take his appointments, nor get them supplied, must furnish the Quarterly Meeting in writing, with the Reasons Why, by 12 o'clock a.m. Should the reasons be unsatisfactory, he shall be left without appointments the following quarter; nor shall any be given him in any subsequent quarter, unless he send in to the Preacher or Circuit Committee or Quarterly Meeting a written promise that he will take them.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

## Preachers' Names and Residences.

- 1 R. PATTERSON, Wem  
2 J. NOCK, Ditto  
3 G. Fallova, Prees Green  
4 W. Ash, Ellerdine Heath  
5 T. Sadler, Lawus  
6 W. Tudor, Butler's Bank  
7 S. Burton, Ellerdine  
8 E. Cooper, Hawkstone  
9 T. Hall, Little Mill  
10 T. Rogers, Prees Green  
11 S. Rogers, Ditto  
12 A. Richards, Northwood  
13 W. Davies, Darleston  
14 W. Powell, Prees  
15 J. Brown, Wem  
16 R. Brassey, Bronington  
17 J. Jones, Waterloo  
18 J. Humphreys, Prees Green  
19 R. Cartwright, Booley Bank  
20 W. Peplow, Ellerdine  
21 R. Weaver, Hatton Heath  
22 J. Butler, Mill House  
23 R. Higginson, Butler's Bank  
24 R. Newnes, Braden Heath  
25 J. Ashley, Cotton  
26 K. Boddow, Braden Heath  
27 W. Ikin, Welsh End  
28 T. Wilkes, Butler's Bank  
29 T. Higginson, Marchamley  
30 C. Wilkes, Hatton Heath  
31 E. Peate, Hampton Bank  
32 C. Edgerton, Barker's Green  
33 T. Pye, Besford Wood  
34 S. Ashley, Prees Green  
35 J. Buttery, Rowton  
36 G. Jones, Butler's Bank  
37 T. Powell, Welsh End  
38 J. Powell, Hineheath  
39 J. Hamer, Hazles  
40 S. Powell, Pool Head  
41 S. Adams, Prees  
42 W. Barnett, Butler's Bank  
43 W. Adams, Prees Green  
44 J. Parsons, Whixall  
45 J. Cakrall, Prees Higher Heath  
46 T. Stokes, Pool Head  
47 J. Stokes, Ditto  
48 J. Maddox, Butler's Bank  
49 J. Hinton, Bettisfield  
50 T. Stevenson, Lineal  
51 W. Jones, Prees Higher Heath  
52 T. Latham, Hodnet  
53 T. Williams, Butler's Bank  
54 H. Hewitt, Wem  
55 R. Thomas, Loppington  
56 J. Holbrook, Butler's Bank  
57 T. Cooper, Booley Bank  
58 T. Speak, Braden Heath  
59 J. Hackney, Prees  
60 R. Jones, Pool Head  
61 J. Weston, Hineheath  
62 W. Edge, Northwood  
63 G. Owen, Peplow  
64 J. Tudor, Watnupton  
65 C. Edwards, Noneley  
66 H. Hall, Welsh End  
67 W. Pritchard, Watnupton  
68 G. Wilkes, Hatton Heath  
69 J. Jones, Cotton  
70 J. Lovatt, Hatton Heath  
71 T. Pardo, Ellerdine  
72 W. Edge, Bronington  
73 I. Humphreys, Ditto  
74 E. Richards, Northwood  
75 B. Pardo, Ellerdine  
76 J. Parsons, Whixall  
77 T. Jones, Cotton  
78 J. Millington, Bronington  
79 T. Jones, Muckleton  
80 W. Owen, Hatton Heath  
81 W. Lawrence, Wem  
82 B. Shotton, Stanton
- EXHORTERS.**  
83 A. Burton, Ellerdine  
84 T. Davies, ditto  
85 G. Ridgeway, Hineheath
- EXHORTERS ON TRIAL.**  
86 R. M. Prees  
87 T. S. Welsh End
- AUXILIARIES.**  
88 G. Ball, Prees Green  
89 J. Crowe, Wem  
90 T. Jones, Prees  
91 Mr. Gregory, Wem

## SCHOOL SERMONS.

Braden Heath—Feb. 22nd, Mrs. Howlett, of Ellesmere.  
Ellerdine—March 29th, Rev. J. Quarmby, of Hadnal.  
Prees—Jan. 11th, Rev. J. R. Taylor, of Whitchurch.  
Quina Brook—April 5th, Mrs. Pardo, of Ellerdine.

## TEA MEETINGS.

Braden Heath—Good Friday, Nos. 22, 24, 26, 31, 58  
Pool Head—Shrove Tuesday, Nos. 17, 37, 46, 66  
Lineal—Good Friday, Nos. 9, 37, 50, 66, 76  
Bronington—Good Friday, Nos. 2, 16, 25, 72, 73  
Prees—Good Friday, Nos. 1, 10, 14, 15, and Rev. G. Smith

## JUBILEE TEA MEETING.

Butlers Bank—March 18th, Nos. 1, 4, 6, 7, 10, 23, 36

## LECTURE

Prees—Jan. 19, Rev. J. R. Taylor, Subject—"Memories of Calvary."

## MISSIONARY MEETINGS.

### AFRICAN FUND.

Prees Green—March 1st, Nos. 10, 18, 43, 81  
Lower Heath—April 5th, Nos. 13, 15

### GENERAL FUND.

Wem—April 11th,  
Butlers Bank—March 15th, Nos. 1, 6, 15  
Paper Mills—March 15th, No. 2, 81  
Peplow Lodge—January 12th, Nos. 1, 63  
Marchamley—February 8th, Nos. 10, 29, 52

## PROTRACTED MEETINGS.

Pool Head—Jan. 18, No. 44, 60 | Mon 76 | Tu 1 | Wed 40 | Th 47  
Fri 46—Jan 25, No. 17, 76  
Bronington—Feb. 15, No. 44, 72 | Mon 73 | Tu 2 | Wed 2 | Th 72  
Fri 16—Feb 23, No. 50, 73  
Hatton Heath—Jan 11, No. 20, 79, 85 | Mon 2 | Tu 2 | Wed 90 | Th 68  
Fri 21—Jan 18, No. 30, 64

## REVIVAL MEETINGS.

Wem—Feb 1, No. 73, 78 | Wollerton Wood—Feb 1st No. 23, 84  
Welsh End—Mar 8, No. 1, 15 | Hopton—Mar 1, No. 13, 20, 71  
Butlers Bk—Jan 18, No. 15, 81 | Moston | Jan 11, No. 23, 84  
Ellerdine—Mar 8, No. 20, 25 | Booley |  
Kenstone & | Jan 25, No. 36, 80 | Quina Brook—March 1, No. 25, 26

**STATION FINANCIAL COMMITTEE.**—Messrs. J. Powell, J. Ashley, T. Speaks, T. Stevenson, W. Tudor, J. Buttery, J. Humphreys, and J. Huntbach.

**BAZAAR.**—The Friends at Hineheath and Hopton are necessarily building a Chapel at a cost of more than £400, towards which they will raise with the Opening not less than £200, but they are still desirous of lessening the remaining responsibility by holding a Bazaar in May 1874. It is hoped that all the friends will assist in this laudable enterprise. Articles or Donations may be sent to Mrs. POWELL, of Booley, or to either of the Circuit Ministers, or to any of the Friends.

## CIRCUIT COMMITTEE.

All the accredited male Preachers on the Plan to meet when and where it is planned.

Circuit Steward—J. ASHLEY. Circuit Secretary—J. NOCK

Sub-Missionary Treasurer & Station Book Steward.—R. PATTERSON.

Sub-Missionary Secretary.—J. NOCK.

**REFERENCES.**—P. Prayer Meeting. Q. Quarterly Collection. L. Lovefeast. S. Sacrament. R. M. Revival Meetings. P. M. Protracted Meetings. M. S. Missionary Sermons. M. N. Missionary Meetings. T. Tickets Renewing. \* Committee Meeting. L. C. Preacher to lead Class. G. General Chapel Fund Collection. A. S. Anniversary Sermons. S. S. Sunday School Sermons. L. C. Lighting and Cleansing Collection. F. Conference and Relief Fund Collection. Trustees' Meeting. D. Leaders'. B. Beneficent Fund. O. B. Opening Services. a. Supernumery.

## SOCIETY STEWARDS.

T. Rogers, Prees Green  
M. Nock, Wem  
R. Newnes, Braden Heath  
T. Powell, Welsh End  
J. Jones, Pool Head  
T. Hall, Lineal  
Ed. Onslow, Butler's Bank  
Rd. Brassey, Bronington  
W. Ash, Ellerdine Heath  
John Buttery, Rowton  
J. Huntbach, Prees  
T. Higginson, Kenstone  
Edward Peate, Northwood  
John Hinton, Bettisfield

T. Higginson, Marchamley  
John Evanson, Lower Heath  
J. Barnett, Besford Wood  
T. Pritchard, Hopton  
R. Cartwright, Moston  
John Parsons, Whixall  
R. Weaver, Hatton Heath  
J. Powell, Cotton  
W. Jones, Prees Higher-Heath  
F. Jervis, Peplow Lodge  
J. Evanson, Wollerton Wood  
H. Thomas, Noneley  
C. Edgerton, Barker's Green  
A. Hall, Quina Brook

The duties of Society Stewards are to have all Collections, Special Services, and Lovefeasts given out; take into their care all Collections, provide for Lovefeasts and Sacraments; and forward their Accounts and Society Reports to the Quarterly Meeting in due time.

## HYMN.

Oh! give me a harp on the bright hills of glory,  
A home when life's sorrows are o'er,  
Where joys that await the meek and the lowly  
Will more than lost Eden restore.

Where the new song of glory is the theme of the  
And the ransomed are safe evermore. (holy.)

Oh! there let me roam on the banks of the river  
Escorted by Angels along.  
And with them adore the bounteous Giver,  
Whose love is rehearsed by the throng.

Where the new song is given by the loved ones in  
And the Angels re-echo the song. (heaven.)

There sweetly we'll rest in those Mansions for ever,  
And bask in the fulness of love,  
Where fields are all bright with flowerets that never  
Shall wither in Eden above.

When the new song of pardon is the theme over  
And each heart swells the chorus of love. (Jordan)

Oh! who has prepared this banquet of pleasures  
In Heaven's sweet tower of rest?  
And bids us partake of all its rich treasures  
And waits now to welcome each guest;

It is Jesus our Saviour, and we'll praise him for ever,  
When we're safe in those mansions of rest.



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