

**Model Lives: The Changing Role and Experience of the
Wives of Itinerant Preachers in Mainstream Methodism,
1750-1880.**

Janet Kelly

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the neglected group of women who were the wives of Methodist itinerant preachers in the mainstream movement during the period from 1750 until 1880. Drawing primarily on biographical accounts of such women published in the denomination's major periodical, the *Arminian Magazine* between 1780 and 1880,¹ it identifies the daily challenges and experiences they faced in circuit life alongside their husbands, examining their devotional and domestic practices and the scope of their public service within the Methodist Society and their wider communities. Through an analysis of texts and by using a range of other methods and sources, the thesis also investigates the roles of these women's lives, both textual and actual, in modelling Evangelical ideals of piety, domesticity and propriety, and their contribution to the wider cultural shift taking place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by which Evangelical modes and manners led to Victorian values. An initial overview explores the work and mission of Methodism's travelling evangelists during the period of the study, the demands of the itinerant system, and official views regarding the characteristics and role of these men's wives. Subsequent chapters deal with attitudes to marriage within Methodism, Methodist ideas concerning home and family life, and changing notions of female service within the movement, situating these within the framework of wider religious and social ideals. A consideration of the literary context of Methodist life-writings and their editorial then follows with evidence from the long-term survey of accounts presented. The main body of the thesis is devoted to an extensive analysis of the seventy-four accounts of preachers' wives identified by the research. Two further detailed case studies employ additional primary sources and methods to consider the life and times of two of the ministers' wives uncovered during the study. Presenting evidence relating to the spiritual and domestic practices of these women and the range of their public labours in British circuits and overseas, the thesis argues for the significance of the subjects of the research, suggesting that in their homes, churches, and local communities, and after their deaths through published versions of their lives, the women who became collectively 'the preacher's wife' were important exemplars of Methodist ideals, helping to consolidate the movement's values, and also effect wider ideological change in the contemporary period.

¹ Founded by Wesley in 1778 the *Arminian Magazine*, later re-titled the *Methodist Magazine* (1798) and *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (1821) was the major denominational periodical of the mainstream Methodist movement throughout the period of the study.

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Abbreviations used

- AM* *Arminian Magazine* (1778 - 1797)
- DMBI* Vickers, John A., ed., *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000).
- EC* Ward, W. R. ed., *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting.*, Camden 4th Series, vol. 11 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1972).
- EMP* Jackson, Thomas, ed., *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers* 3rd edition, with additional lives. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1878); 6 vols.
- EVM* Ward, W. R. ed., *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting, 1830 - 1858* (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 1976).
- Hall* Hartley, T. Galland, ed., *Hall's Circuits and Ministers: An Alphabetical List of the Circuits in Great Britain with the Names of the Ministers Stationed in Each Circuit.* (London: Methodist Publishing House, n.d.).
- HMCGB* Davies, Rupert, George, Raymond A., and Rupp, Gordon, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (London: Epworth Press, 1965-88); 4 vols.
- IGI* *International Genealogical Index*: <http://www.familysearch.org/>
- J & D* Wesley, John, *Journal and Diaries*, eds., W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988-); vols. 18-24 of the Bicentennial Edition of *The Works of John Wesley*.
- Letters* Wesley, John, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley A.M.*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931); Standard Edition, 8 vols.
- MM* *Methodist Magazine* (1798 – 1821)
- PL* Bowmer, J. C. and Vickers, John A. eds., *The Letters of John Pawson (Methodist Itinerant, 1762 - 1806)* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1994-5); 3 vols.
- PWHS* *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* (Cheshire and London) 1893–2008.
- Sermons* Wesley, John, *Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler , ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-7); vols. 1-4 of the Bicentennial Edition of *The Works of John Wesley*.
- Societies* Davies, Rupert, ed., *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); vol. 9 of the Bicentennial Edition of *The Works of John Wesley*.
- WHS* Wesley Historical Society.
- Works* Wesley, John, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley A.M.*, ed. Thomas Jackson (John Mason, 1856); 11th edn. 15 vols.
- WMM* *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (1822 – 1880)

Part One

Chapter One: Introduction

In the autumn of 1806 a young woman called Ann Fildes came to an important decision about her future. Ann, who was in her early twenties at the time had started to receive offers of marriage, but had been orphaned some years earlier, and therefore had no parents to turn to for advice. From a staunch Methodist family, Ann had recently made her own commitment to this way of life, and was clear about the most important characteristic that she desired in a husband. She determined that she would leave her eventual matrimonial choice to God trusting that guidance would be provided through prayer alone. As Ann later explained, events then took a surprising turn:

I resolved not to marry any one who did not love God. I sought counsel at His hand; praying that He would direct my steps. The Lord heard my prayer and made my way plain; but not as I expected¹

A new suitor had come forward, William Leach, a young man who had recently completed his probationary period as a Methodist travelling preacher. Ann reported that she was ‘much surprised, not expecting to be called to so public a position,’ and that ‘a great struggle took place in [her] mind at the prospect of leaving [her] friends and native place’.² Despite these initial misgivings Ann agreed to William’s proposal and the couple wed on 16 October 1806 believing that their union was ‘in accordance with the will of God’.³ Thereafter, Ann embarked fully on an itinerant life, accompanying her husband in all his various circuit appointments until the latter’s retirement from active ministry in 1841.⁴

Ann’s obvious apprehensions about the demands placed upon a preacher’s wife are not surprising. Quite apart from the public nature of the position of such women, and the many privations that the Methodist itinerant system imposed, preachers’ wives were expected to be key exemplars of the standards of piety and domesticity articulated in the Society’s rules, being enjoined not only to embody such standards personally, but to set a ‘pattern’ for those within the Methodist movement and the wider community. Accompanying their husbands into different rural and urban areas throughout Britain and beyond, they thus became significant figures in the promulgation of the Methodist mode of life.⁵ Moreover, from the last quarter of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, accounts of the lives of many such women were presented for public consumption in the pages of Methodism’s major denominational periodical,

¹ “Memoir of Mrs. Leach, late of Wakefield: by Rev. Robert Willcox”, *WMM* 89 (1866): 867.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 867-872.

⁵ The different aspects of the itinerants’ role, and that of their wives, are discussed in chapter three of the thesis.

the *Arminian Magazine*,⁶ and consequently their role as patterns of excellence continued even after death.

The lives and published accounts of these remarkable women and the impact they had upon those in the Methodist movement and contemporary society, both in Britain and abroad, form the focus of the present thesis. The travelling preachers' wives were ambassadors of the essential pietistic Methodist modes both within Wesley's societies and society at large. By necessity they were called to be homemakers, often in the direst circumstances, and to present the domestic ideals enshrined in the movement's rules and other policies. However, for such women there was a difficult balancing act to perform. Within Methodism, not only could piety and domesticity conflict, but the ability to reconcile personal needs, care for family and husband, and remain true to one's own vocation was a tricky task. At the same time these individuals were operating under the keen, and not always sympathetic, scrutiny of Methodist members and the general public. During the time-frame of the present study notions of piety, domesticity, and the proper boundaries of female service were widely debated and subject to change in both Methodist circles and society at large. The key question is how important were these women in helping to redefine such key values and the scope of female service both within Methodism and wider society?

It should not be surprising that the wives of travelling preachers became significant figures despite their often unacknowledged status. From the early days of the Methodist movement Wesley had depended upon his itinerant preachers, laymen who were carefully chosen and 'set apart' for full-time evangelism. Such individuals were expected to serve in any circuit within the Methodist Connexion, going not only to preach the gospel, but to uphold Methodist doctrine and the movement's discipline.⁷ In Wesley's eyes these men, his 'Sons in the Gospel', were the true spiritual and moral guardians of the Methodist people, and with his sanction they oversaw all aspects of Society life. It was partly to ensure their effectiveness and impartiality in this latter respect that all the itinerants were moved regularly throughout the connexion and were eventually paid. Meanwhile, in compliance with Wesley's wishes, many of the early married preachers travelled without their wives.⁸

⁶ Later the *Methodist Magazine* from 1798, and the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* from 1821.

⁷ John Lawson, "The People Called Methodists: 2. 'Our Discipline.'" in *HMCGB*, 1: 98–201 and Frank Baker, "The People Called Methodists: 3. Polity," in *ibid.*, 1: 230–32.

⁸ The rules governing the work of the itinerants are contained in G. Latham, "The Twelve Rules of a Helper", *PWHS* 7 (Dec. 1909): 82–3; and J. A. Vickers, "Documents and Source Material," in *HMCGB*, 4: 116–19. John Lenton, "*My Sons in the Gospel*": *An Analysis of Wesley's Itinerant Preachers*. (Loughborough: Wesley Historical Society, 2000) is also a recent study of Wesley's itinerants.

Given the strict terms and close supervision regulating the lay itinerants, it is little wonder that once wives began to accompany their spouses into the circuits regularly, attention then began to focus upon the kinds of attributes and behaviours that these women should display. In 1753 when considering financial support for the preachers' wives, the Methodist Conference noted that such women should be 'as exemplary as possible', adding that they 'ought never to be idle' and should: 'constantly ... attend the morning preaching'.⁹ In 1776, by which time approximately a quarter of the itinerant preachers were married, some specific points had also been incorporated into the movement's official policy. A revised version of the *Large Minutes*, which was the preachers' guide to authorised doctrine, discipline and practice, contained the rule that preachers' wives should be 'a pattern of cleanliness' and a 'pattern of industry'.¹⁰ Writing some years later the preacher William Fish envisaged a much wider range of desirable qualities. Advising a younger colleague in a letter, Mr Fish drew 'a picture of a preacher's wife ...' that began: 'She must be a woman of solid piety' and continued to list no less than sixteen desirable traits.¹¹

Thus, it is apparent that the personal characteristics befitting a preacher's wife and the nature of her role as the partner of one of Methodism's roving evangelists formed part of official discourse from the earliest decades of the movement. Moreover, as the wording of the Conference extract and the rule within the *Large Minutes* quoted above make quite clear, such women were already being identified as figures who should not only adhere to a particular standard of behaviour themselves, but also act as 'patterns' or role models for others within the movement. As Ann Fildes was aware, preachers' wives were very public figures, their conduct and modes of living under constant scrutiny. The latter point was underlined by Jabez Bunting, a young minister in 1803, who wrote to his fiancée cautioning her that '... though a private individual may be lost in the surrounding crowd, a preacher's wife is as a city on a hill that cannot be hid.'¹²

This public examination continued even after death in many cases, for the lives of these women were often commemorated in biographical accounts and memoirs. Such narratives formed a regular feature within the *Arminian Magazine*, Methodism's first periodical, which Wesley began to produce in 1778. Where William Fish's letter provides only one 'picture' of a

⁹ W. L. Doughty, *John Wesley: His Conferences and His Preachers* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), 60.

¹⁰ *Works*, 8: 319.

¹¹ Leslie F. Church, *The Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth Press, 1949), 231. Letter to Alexander Kilham dated 1788. Interestingly, Lenton, "*Sons in the Gospel*" reveals that Mr Fish obviously did not find such a paragon himself as he remained single. (23).

¹² T. P. Bunting and G. S. Rowe, eds., *The Life of Jabez Bunting DD* (London: Woolmer, 1887), 151. As shown in chapter three below, Bunting later became hugely influential in the movement and was President of Conference on several occasions.

preacher's wife, in the pages of this major denominational magazine there is a veritable gallery of portraits to appreciate. Here the dedication of such women is revealed and the many ways in which they rose to the challenges of their position. Their personal histories also illustrate the part played by the wives of travelling preachers, both in life, and *after* their decease, as role models for those within the Methodist movement and beyond. As these commemorative accounts from the *Magazine* constitute the major primary sources for the present study, it is important to consider briefly the context in which they were produced.

Wesley began to compile and publish works of a devotional and didactic nature during the 1730s, even before the inauguration of societies to nurture those responding to the evangelism of field preaching.¹³ From 1739, however, he set up his own publishing department or 'Book Room' within the premises of the London society at the Foundery. He was soon issuing a variety of devotional literature and other material to his followers, which found its way to the Methodist people via the saddlebags of the itinerant preachers. As chapels began to be constructed, storage for such publications was a requisite part of the buildings and the Book Room system gradually expanded to become an effective Methodist institution.¹⁴

The *Rules* of Wesley's United Societies enjoined all members to avoid reading 'those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God'¹⁵ and Wesley had no qualms about his ability to provide an adequate range of appropriate works for his followers. Through the Book Room system he was in a powerful position, effectively the only source of literature to the preachers and societies.¹⁶ Throughout the movement members were enjoined to give precedence to Methodist publications, described as 'our books', and 'our tracts.'¹⁷ Meanwhile, Wesley monitored and regulated the Book Room system generally through the annual Conference.¹⁸ As Isabel Rivers has suggested, Wesley effectively controlled the literary environment of the movement as a whole.¹⁹

¹³ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 45. Wesley's first published work was his *Collection of Forms of Prayers for Every Day of the Week*, published in 1733.

¹⁴ On these developments and the operation of the Book Room system generally see especially Frank H. Cumbers, *The Methodist Book Room. The Story of the Methodist Publishing House and Epworth Press*. (London: Epworth Press, 1956), chapter 2.

¹⁵ Vickers, "Documents," 61.

¹⁶ Isabel Rivers: "'Strangers and Pilgrims': Sources and Patterns of Methodist Narrative," in J. R. Watson, ed., *Augustan Worlds* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), 192-4.

¹⁷ *Ibid*; Cumbers, *Book Room*, 50. Wesley was publishing tracts regularly from 1745, but the first Methodist Tract Society was not begun until 1794. Norma Virgoe, "The Yarmouth Circuit Booklist, 1806", *PWHS*, 53:4 (Feb 2002): 127-136 provides an example of the range of literature available in one circuit.

¹⁸ Cumbers, *Book Room*, 13; Rivers, "Strangers", 193.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

Among Wesley's earliest publications, his *Journal* first printed in 1738, became an important literary model for the Society's members. The second volume provided an account of the author's own conversion experience at Aldersgate, and within its later twenty-one volume run were numerous 'embedded narratives' relating the spiritual experiences of others.²⁰ Wesley's sermons, tracts and other works were also afforded a wide circulation. His *Sermons on Several Occasions* was published in 1746 and other early texts included *The Character of a Methodist* (1742), and *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* (1754).²¹ Not all of Wesley's publications were devotional. *Primitive Physick* (1747) offered practical health advice and remedies.²² Wesley also drew heavily on the work of other authors, frequently abridging or reworking their texts without acknowledgment.²³ His *Christian Library* published from 1749, included adaptations of a wide spectrum of Christian writers including many Puritan authors,²⁴ whilst the later *Works of the Revd. John Wesley* contained versions of the lives of David Brainerd, a missionary to the Indians, and Monsieur de Renty, two of Wesley's favourite religious biographies.²⁵ Wesley's last major publishing venture, and the most important for the present study, began in 1778 with the publication of the first edition of the *Arminian Magazine*.

Wesley's new enterprise was in tune with the times. The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed an expansion in the press generally, with newspapers, and periodicals becoming more widely available through booksellers, libraries and reading clubs, at both the national and provincial level.²⁶ Within this general boom, from 1760 onwards, there was also a surge in the number of publications that were specifically devoted to religious issues.²⁷ In part this was a result of the same social factors that fuelled growth in the secular press. Literacy

²⁰ For Wesley's conversion on 24 May 1738 see *J & D*, 18: 249-50. On the literary context and form of Wesley's *Journal* see especially W. R. Ward's introduction in *ibid.*, 1-119. Other pertinent considerations include Rivers, "Strangers", 194; and D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "'My Chains Fell Off, My Heart was Free': Early Methodist Conversion Narrative in England", *Church History* 68: 4 (Dec. 1999): 915-6. It is from the latter that I have borrowed the term 'embedded narratives'.

²¹ For the context of these publications see Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 176-8, 129, and 212-13 respectively.

²² On *Primitive Physick* see *DMBI*, 282. Henry Rack discusses Wesley's role as a preacher, author and editor in *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* 3rd edn. (London: Epworth Press 2002), 343- 353.

²³ *Ibid.*, 346. Rack suggests that Wesley 'silently abridged, adapted, and altered pieces, which were then presented as if from his own pen.'

²⁴ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 178-9; Rivers, "Strangers", 194. This series was printed in fifty volumes from 1749-55.

²⁵ *Ibid.* This series was published in thirty-two volumes from 1771-4.

²⁶ Studies dealing with the growth of the press generally include: Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800 - 1900* (Chicago, 1957); and M. Harris, and A. Lee, eds., *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (Associated University Presses, 1986).

²⁷ Studies of the religious press include Francis Mineka, "'News from Heaven,'" chap. 1 in *The Dissidence of Dissent* (Chapel Hill, 1844); Louis Billington, "The Religious Periodical and Newspaper Press, 1770-1870," chap. 5 in Harris and Lee, eds., *Press*, 113-132 and Joseph Altholz, *The Religious Press in Britain, 1760-1900* (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1989).

rates generally were rising, for example.²⁸ But the growth in the religious press was also related to alterations in patterns of religious observance. The Evangelical Revival of the 1730s, which generated widespread interest in matters of religion, also led to increasing religious pluralism with the result that there were many more groups seeking to articulate and justify their particular beliefs, and legitimize their movements within the public domain.²⁹

It was not only the *numbers* of religious publications that grew. The range and format of such literature also became more diverse with material offered in denominational ‘intelligencers’, religious miscellanies, and theological journals, as well as essays, polemical periodicals, and reviews.³⁰ As the number of special interest groups grew the market expanded further, producing magazines for juveniles, Sunday schools, tract societies, and a myriad of other philanthropic and religious bodies.³¹ The spiritual needs of a wide social spectrum were catered for, from ministers to maids.³² As the period of the present study progressed, cheaper production methods fuelled further interest and competition in the religious market. By the end of the time-frame under consideration, literally hundreds of religious publications were in production, serving a wide diversity of denominations and audiences.³³

Wesley’s decision to launch the *Arminian Magazine* in 1778 was prompted by several developments. Firstly, despite the strength of the Book Room organization and his keen oversight, by 1777 Wesley had lost money on the *Christian History*, and sales of other Methodist publications were also beginning to slump.³⁴ A further spur to action was the intense criticism that Wesley was suffering from sections of the Calvinist press.³⁵ It was with these issues in mind that Wesley inaugurated his new periodical. With the title *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*, Wesley clearly signalled his own theological stance. He used his first prefatory statement to answer his

²⁸ Altick, *Common Reader*, 44-5; Margaret P. Jones "Women in the *Arminian/Methodist Magazine*, 1778-1821," unpublished M. Phil thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992, 10; David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom. A Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography* (Methuen, 1982), 8.

²⁹ Billington, "Religious Press", 113; Mineka, "News", 29-30. *The Christian's History or Weekly History* (1741-1748) was started by George Whitefield, for example. Later Evangelical periodicals included the *Christian Observer* (1802-77) and the *Christian Remembrancer* (1819).

³⁰ *Ibid.* An early example of this type of magazine was the *Baptist Annual Register* (1751-1836). Joseph Priestley’s *Theological Repository* of 1769 is an early theological journal.

³¹ Billington, "Religious Press", 116.

³² Mineka, "News", 47. *Mrs Trimmer's Family Magazine* was a religious miscellany targeting "serving maids and laborers." [sic]

³³ Altholz, *Religious Press*; Billington, "Religious Press," 113.

³⁴ Mineka, "News", 43.

³⁵ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 450 – 470 gives the background to the disputes with the Calvinists.

Calvinist critics,³⁶ stressing the fact that his own denominational magazine would proclaim the message that: ‘*God willeth all men to be saved....*’ [Wesley’s emphasis]³⁷ Whilst the main aim of the new magazine was polemical, Wesley also hoped to improve morale and unity within the Methodist Connexion, and provide the members with an educational and uplifting periodical.³⁸ By using the relatively new format of a religious miscellany, keeping the language straightforward, and the cost moderate, he aimed to attract a large audience. Each monthly issue cost one shilling and comprised approximately eighty pages.³⁹

Wesley’s initial plan was to make the *Magazine* available at booksellers as well as the Methodist preaching houses,⁴⁰ but this idea was abandoned and the periodical, like other Methodist literature, was promoted solely through the Book Room system and the movement’s chapels. Nevertheless, this did not preclude a wider readership.⁴¹ The habit of sharing copies, common in this period, makes the precise number of readers difficult to ascertain,⁴² but this was clearly one way in which the *Magazine* reached those outside the movement.⁴³ In 1808 the *Edinburgh Review* quoted a circulation figure for the *Methodist Magazine* of between eighteen and twenty thousand copies per month.⁴⁴ As this claim was made within an anti-Methodist article, however, the figure is somewhat suspect. An attempt to broaden the appeal of the *Magazine* was made in 1811 when a cheaper sixpenny version became available, intended to reach those lower down the social scale.⁴⁵ Looking back in 1877, Benjamin Gregory suggested that the early 1820s was a ‘culminating point of popularity and circulation’ for the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*.⁴⁶ Frances Mineka’s survey of the periodical press lends credence to this view, concluding that by 1820, the *Magazine*’s circulation was ‘probably larger than any other

³⁶ *AM* 1 (1778): iii - iv. Referring to his attackers in the *Spiritual Magazine* and the *Gospel Magazine*, Wesley suggested that they used: ‘... Arguments worthy of *Bedlam*, ... and Language worthy of *Billingsgate*.’ [Wesley’s emphasis]

³⁷ *Ibid*, iv.

³⁸ Billington, “Religious Press”, 115; Mineka, “News,” 43 - 5.

³⁹ Cumbers, *Book Room*, 7 and 145.

⁴⁰ *AM* 1 (1778). The first issue announced that it was ‘sold by the booksellers in town and country.’

⁴¹ J. M. Turner, “Methodist Religion 1791-1849,” in *HMCGB*, 2: 99. Turner notes that one reader of Methodist magazines from a different denomination was Charlotte Brontë.

⁴² Altick, *Common Reader*, 168. Altick suggests a figure of ten families to one newspaper in 1821.

⁴³ Margaret Jones, discusses this issue in “Women in the *Magazine*”, 11-12, and in “From ‘The State of My Soul’ to ‘exalted Piety’: Women’s Voices in the *Arminian/ Methodist Magazine*,” in *Gender and Christian Religion* ed. R. N. Swanson, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press for the Society, 1998), 274. Evidence of sharing copies with those outside the movement is found in *A Memoir of Mrs. Claxton*, *MM* 41 (1818): 918 which relates how Diana, an Anglican, was caught reading a copy of the *Magazine* borrowed from a ‘pious female’. The account of Mrs. Mary Weeldon, reports that she was a subscriber to the *Magazine* and lent it to her neighbours. *MM* 41 (1818): 367-71.

⁴⁴ B. D. Hatchard, “Review of ‘Causes of the Increase of Methodism, and Dissention’ by Robert Acklem Ingram,” *Edinburgh Review* 9 (1808): 341.

⁴⁵ Cumbers, *Book Room*, 7.

⁴⁶ Benjamin Gregory, “The Hundredth Year of the Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine,” *WMM* 100 (1877): 8.

monthly or quarterly publication, religious or secular.’⁴⁷ Mineka cites a circulation of 25,000 copies, a figure not including the abridged version then being vended to the ‘pious poor’.

From the outset spiritual narrative was intended to be a regular feature of the *Arminian Magazine*. Wesley planned four sections: a defence of universal redemption; an extract of biography of ‘some holy man’ regardless of theological stance; accounts and letters containing the experience of pious persons, the greatest part of whom are still alive’; and lastly, verses to explain or confirm what Wesley termed: ‘the capital doctrines we have in view’.⁴⁸ He suggested that the third section was truly innovatory, informing one of his preachers that: ‘Both the Letters and the Lives, which will make a considerable part of every number, contain the marrow of experimental and practical religion; so that nothing of the kind has appeared before.’⁴⁹ The lives in particular were intended to be as much an argument for Wesley’s Arminian stance as the formal theology, modifying the existing Puritan form with new emphasis on continuing growth in holiness and the conclusion of a ‘happy death’.⁵⁰

Wesley soon altered his original plan due to public pressure. Significantly he limited the space devoted to polemical argument, to allow more room for the lives of preachers and others.⁵¹ By 1781 the range of religious narrative was extended to include the first posthumous biographical accounts of Society members.⁵² Towards the end of Wesley’s life in 1790 the *Magazine’s* contents typically included sermons, selections of theological works, autobiography of preachers and other shorter Christian biography. Further regular features were poetry (including hymns), letters, anecdotes, and engravings of the preachers. Short articles covered subjects such as travel, providential deliverances, historical events or characters, medical matters, or strange phenomena.⁵³ The *Magazine* was also the main vehicle for the dissemination of connexional policy and news. The Minutes of the Conference were included⁵⁴ as well as articles on other current developments.⁵⁵ Though Wesley had initially vetoed any political content, current affairs and ideas were present by this time.⁵⁶ In Henry Rack’s words the

⁴⁷ Mineka, “News”, 72.

⁴⁸ *AM* 1 (1778): vi – vii.

⁴⁹ *Letters* 6. Letter to Thomas Taylor dated 15 Jan. 1778.

⁵⁰ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 427-9; Jones, “State of my Soul”, 274.

⁵¹ “A Letter to a Reader”, in *AM* 3 (1780): iii.

⁵² *AM* 4 (1781).

⁵³ The 1790 edition, for example, contained the following articles: “Thoughts on the Account of the Pelew Islands”; “A strange providence in an earthquake”; “An Anecdote of Queen Elizabeth”; “An Account of a sleeping woman”; and “Thoughts on the Magic Art.” See *AM* 13 (1790): 545; 436; 46; 138 and 607 respectively.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 492.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 103, for example, contains an account of the legal situation regarding the preaching house at Dewsbury.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26 and 419 contain a review of Joseph Priestley’s *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity*, and the report of “An attempt to assassinate the king of Poland.”

Magazine under Wesley's editorship was: 'a kind of *Readers' Digest*, a sanctified version of the *Gentleman's Magazine* for pious persons of moderate means and education, especially Methodists.'⁵⁷

With Wesley's death in 1791 responsibility for the Book Room passed to Conference. An editor was appointed with a Book Steward and a Book Committee to manage Book Room affairs.⁵⁸ A number of important changes in the format of the *Magazine* during the same period affected the balance and range of spiritual narrative that was being published. Under the first editor, George Storey, for example, two separate 'departments' for such accounts were introduced.⁵⁹ The 'Biography' section at the beginning of each monthly issue implicitly conferred more status on its subjects and texts included here were usually long, often extending over several issues.⁶⁰ The 'Experience and Happy Death' section printed later contained shorter accounts of individuals, which rarely continued into another edition. The overall gender balance of religious biography was further skewed with the 1792 Conference decision to include an annual tribute to deceased itinerants in the form of obituaries after the printed Minutes of Conference.⁶¹ In 1798 Wesley's original title for the denominational organ was jettisoned and the periodical became known as the *Methodist Magazine*.

With the advent of Joseph Benson as editor in 1804 the format of the *Magazine* was standardized, each issue being divided into distinct sections such as 'The Word of God Illustrated'; and 'The Providence of God Asserted': a formula that continued until Benson's death in 1821.⁶² The first of these departments remained the 'Biography' section, whilst a second instalment of commemorative accounts, was again placed further inside each issue under a different title: 'The Grace of God Manifested'. Meanwhile, more biographical content was included from 1805 when a section devoted to the obituaries of ordinary Methodist members was added.

There is a hint in the *Magazine* of 1830 that the regular biographical section was beginning to lose its appeal. 'Biography', the editor stated, will still be 'found very useful to all who value the confirmation and enlargement of their own personal piety', even 'if the articles are not much marked by *variety*...' [My emphasis]⁶³ Significantly, this suggests that this genre

⁵⁷ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 349.

⁵⁸ Billington, "Religious Press," 115.

⁵⁹ Storey was editor from 1791 until 1803.

⁶⁰ See *AM* 17 (1794), for example, where the biography of Mr Garretson continued through nine issues.

⁶¹ Jones, "State of My Soul", 251.

⁶² *MM* 27 (1804). Among other departments were "Divinity"; "The Truth of God Defended"; "The Works of God Displayed"; and "The Kingdom of God Enlarged".

⁶³ *MM* 53 (1830): iv.

of spiritual narrative was by this time becoming more formulaic. Material from this period onwards, underscores the wider contemporary religious issues concerning the Methodists with articles dealing with temperance, the sacredness of the Sabbath, the Tractarian movement, Biblical criticism, and Sunday schools.⁶⁴ By the 1860s religious periodicals generally were losing ground to secular competition. The first *Magazine* of the decade, however, remained true to the *Rules* of the Society, and in the age when ‘Sensation’ literature was gaining popularity, called its readers to avoid novels and other fashionable material, and read only ‘a pure literature’.⁶⁵

At the end of the period under consideration the *Magazine* is reporting events such as the Contagious Diseases Act,⁶⁶ a Parliamentary report on the Slave trade,⁶⁷ and the coming of electric light.⁶⁸ Whilst Wesley’s second edition of the *Arminian Magazine* contained ideas for ‘A Female Course of Study’,⁶⁹ the final volume of this period of research is considering the higher education of women.⁷⁰ Perhaps bowing to the secular press, there is a serial by Sarson, an individual described as ‘an authoress.’⁷¹ The influence of Wesley remains, despite the changes, in contributions such as ‘On the devotional life – an address to Methodists’,⁷² and ‘Lessons from the Conversion, Character, and Death, of the Reverend Robert Balshaw – a sermon.’⁷³ By now, although it is the age of ‘The Microphone of Professor Hughes’,⁷⁴ even at this stage, it is the voice of Wesley that still seems to be heard, without amplification.

Both during Wesley’s era and throughout the later period the contents of the *Magazine* were subject to close control. Though Wesley devolved responsibility for the business management and distribution side of the Book Room to two Book stewards as early as 1753, none of his editorial power over Book Room publications was relinquished, and his oversight over the *Arminian Magazine* was similarly maintained. Wesley received contributions from the preachers who were unpaid for their efforts, but a substantial part of the contents of the periodical came from his own pen. In terms of the autobiographical and biographical material that was published, Margaret Jones suggests three levels at which Wesley’s personal influence

⁶⁴ See for example, on temperance *WMM* 77 (1854): 623; on Sabbath observance, *WMM* 71 (1848):1229; on the Tractarian movement, *WMM* 71 (1848): 197; on biblical criticism, *WMM* 81 (1858): 694; and on Sunday schools, *WMM* 87 (1864): 158.

⁶⁵ *WMM* 89 (1866): 1-2.

⁶⁶ *WMM* 93 (1870): 272.

⁶⁷ *WMM* 95 (1872): 458.

⁶⁸ *WMM* 101 (1878): 928.

⁶⁹ *AM* 2 (1780): 602.

⁷⁰ *WMM* 101 (1878): 886.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 264.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 518.

came into play. By ‘actively [encouraging] correspondents to write what he wanted to hear,’ and by editing submitted manuscripts for printing, the integrity of the author’s original work could be compromised.⁷⁵ In addition Wesley also exercised choice over the kind of material to be included within the *Magazine*. He used his own letter book, for example, as a ready resource for spiritual narratives, systematically selecting letters he had received from 1738 onwards.⁷⁶

The extent of Wesley’s strict control over *all* aspects of the production of such life writings is demonstrated clearly in his treatment of his preachers’ religious narratives. They were not to go into print without Wesley’s consent,⁷⁷ and when commissioning their ‘lives’ Wesley suggested the framework for such accounts. Moreover, Wesley’s right to revise the preachers’ work, and print it on the connexional press was stressed at Conference.⁷⁸ Those itinerant preachers, who had previously published their own autobiographies, witnessed Wesley’s further scrutiny of their work, and sometimes swingeing revisions. Given Wesley’s pervasive influence Isabel Rivers has described the ensuing texts as: ‘... the product of Wesley’s disciplinary, educational, and editorial control of his preachers’ lives, reading habits, attitudes, and style’.⁷⁹

In the period after Wesley’s death in 1791, there was if anything a tightening of procedures for the selection of material for the *Magazine*. The freelance publication of Alexander Kilham’s radical views prompted Conference to bar the itinerants from publishing ‘anything but what is given to the Conference and printed at our own press.’⁸⁰ The Book Committee were charged with determining ‘what is proper to be printed,’⁸¹ examining every item submitted for publication, including any material intended for the *Magazine*.⁸² Meanwhile, the prospect of yet another layer of editorial interference arose as preachers were given an allowance for their contributions to the *Magazine*, and submissions became more likely to be channelled through them.⁸³ Under the editorship of figures such as Joseph Benson (1804-21) and Jabez Bunting (1821-24) the Book Committee became a powerful body, vetoing any inappropriate or unorthodox contributions. Bunting in particular disliked ‘free discussion’,

⁷⁵ Jones, “State of my Soul”, 276.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 277. Thus Daniel Bumsted’s account of his wife, Sarah’s death is included in the 1786 volume, but is dated 4 Oct. 1773. See *AM* 9 (1786): 136-7.

⁷⁷ *Works*. 8: 305. ‘Print nothing without my approbation’.

⁷⁸ See Hindmarsh, “Chains”, 911; Rivers “Strangers”, 195.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Cumbers, *Book Room*, 76. Kilham’s publications are discussed in chapter three below.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Billington, “Religious Press,” 115.

⁸³ Jones, “State of My Soul”, 251.

writing: ‘It betrays great practical inattention to the doctrine of our natural depravity when men boldly assert that truth has nothing to fear from *any kind* of discussion.’ [Author’s emphasis]⁸⁴ Ministers who were out of favour, or who did not toe the official policy lines could not get published.⁸⁵ References to women preachers disappeared,⁸⁶ and reports of vibrant lay revivalism were stifled.⁸⁷ Several different branches of Methodism had now developed, prompting another change in the title of the mainstream periodical to the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*.⁸⁸

As the above details well illustrate, in both its production and editorial the *Magazine* was firmly under masculine control. Yet, largely due to Wesley’s editorial choices it was also a place where female voices could be found.⁸⁹ The present study concentrates on the wives of itinerants, a significant group of women, whose voices and experiences have until now been overlooked. Their importance is clearly signalled by the biographer of Mrs Ruth Revill, who noted in 1810 that: ‘The conduct of a preacher’s wife has a very extensive influence among the female members of society.’⁹⁰ The choice of words here is significant. Mr Isaac’s use of ‘society’ rather than ‘the Society,’ indicates that the influence of individual preachers’ wives extended beyond the Methodist movement, and into society at large.

The accounts of preachers’ wives deserve serious scholarly attention and thus the present study is a very timely investigation. These life-writings allow an examination of the spiritual and material experience of such women before and after marriage, affording insights also into the practicalities of their lives within the itinerant system at different stages in the evolving Methodist movement. Such narratives provide a long-term perspective on how the role of the preacher’s wife was perceived and presented within mainstream Methodism, and thus allow an estimate of the influence of these women as exemplars as the movement altered. Even towards the end of the eighteenth century, for example, the Methodists had become more prosperous.⁹¹ In the early decades of the nineteenth century other major changes took place as the itinerant preachers moved towards an ordained ministry, and the parameters of female

⁸⁴ Mineka, “News”, 73.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Christine L. Krueger, *The Reader’s Repentance. Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth Century Social Discourse* (Chicago and London, 1992) and Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (New Jersey and London: American Theological Library Association, 1991), especially chapter seven.

⁸⁷ J. Wilkinson, “The Rise of Other Methodist Traditions,” in *HMCGB* 2: 304 - 9.

⁸⁸ This took place in 1821 as Bunting took over as editor.

⁸⁹ See especially Jones, “Women in the *Magazine*” and “State of My Soul”.

⁹⁰ D. Isaac “Memoir of Mrs Revill.” *MM* 33 (1810): 354.

⁹¹ John Walsh, “Methodism at the End of the Eighteenth Century”, *HMCGB*, 1: 308.

service within the movement were reconsidered.⁹² Meanwhile, as the nineteenth century drew on, the 'Connexion' became a distinct denomination with national and world-wide interests.⁹³ Worshipping in impressive chapels, Methodists were accepted as an integral part of 'respectable' society, involving themselves fully with municipal, philanthropic, and interdenominational enterprises. There is much value, therefore, in examining and comparing the role, experience, and impact of women who were married to the humble 'Preachers of the Gospel' and later Victorian ministers' wives.

These sources also document an era when society at large was also altering rapidly. During the first half of the nineteenth century a similar reappraisal of the fitting characteristics and modes of conduct for both men and women occurred, when the nature of each gender and their appropriate roles in society became more sharply defined and differentiated. This is a key issue, and it is therefore pertinent at this point to review the prevailing ideologies governing gender relations and domestic practice during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Exploring the dominant ideals of the early eighteenth century

Ideas about the fundamental nature and characteristics of men and women and the boundaries within which each gender can operate within society at a given time are determined by ideology, defined by one commentator as: 'a set of socially produced ideas that lend or create a group consciousness.'⁹⁴ Although ideology is socially constructed, and is specific to particular times, places, and cultures, it works to promote the power relations favoured by one section of society, usually a dominant group, and to suggest that they are universally applicable and 'the best' or 'most natural' way of doing things.⁹⁵ Ideology is thus a mechanism that both defines and perpetuates social relations, marking the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in a given society at a given time. Philippa Levine has argued that the true power of ideology is psychological, but this obviously does not negate its ability to act as a powerful influence.⁹⁶ In fact, as Susan Kingsley Kent has underlined in her recent study of gender and power, ideology works as a very potent guiding force in the lives of individuals. She suggests that

⁹² See chapter three below. Key studies of the developing role of the itinerants and changing attitudes to female ministry are J. C. Bowmer, *Pastor and People* (London: Epworth Press, 1975) and Chilcote, *Women Preachers*.

⁹³ Baker, "Polity", 230. Originally, as a safeguard against prosecution under the Conventicle Act, every local society was held to be 'in connexion' with Wesley. From 1749 Conference decided to coordinate organisation through London, and the whole Methodist network eventually became known as the 'Methodist Connexion.'

⁹⁴ Alan Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (Routledge, 1997), 184.

⁹⁵ Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900* (Fontana, 1989), 12-13. Levine quotes Penny Broumelha who has written that ideology represents: 'as obvious and natural what is partial, factitious and uneluctably social.' (13).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

... the material and emotional lives of men and women unfolded within an ideological system of beliefs and values about the natures and roles of men and women that helped people to make sense of their world and to give it order. This ideological system, while it might not correspond to the ways individual men and women behaved or thought, did act both to offer possibilities for and to circumscribe the ways individuals could imagine they could live.⁹⁷

In the early eighteenth century two concurrent and interlinked ideologies dominated beliefs about the nature of men and women and their relative positions in society. Religious discourse, notably the theology and teaching of the Christian church as developed within reformed Protestantism and the Established Church was one ideological framework.⁹⁸ Though having a different emphasis, ideology deriving from contemporary scientific and medical theories about the human body, acted to endorse and further authorise Church teaching by its stress on physical differences between the sexes, and superiority of the male.⁹⁹ In this way the patriarchal system and gender hierarchy that was embedded in English society and that governed not only the organization of family and religious life, but also the structures and practices adopted in the wider social, economic, and political domains, were doubly emphasised and sustained.¹⁰⁰

Contemporary religious and scientific teachings relating to gender issues

The theology and teaching of the Christian Church contained a paradox which had important implications for the status of women. On the one hand Christian theologians affirmed the spiritual position of women, accepting that they, like men, had been made in the image of God, and that women had an equal claim with men to salvation.¹⁰¹ Whilst acknowledging a woman's spiritual parity and her right to a place in the heavenly kingdom, the Church also made clear that in her earthly existence she was subordinate to, and dependent upon man. Writing in 1609 one commentator gave the following explanation of this conundrum: 'many women might thinke that by reason of religion, all were equall ... but Christ hath freed men and women from

⁹⁷ Kent, *Gender and Power*, 11.

⁹⁸ On religious teachings see especially Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500 - 1720*, 1993, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1996); Shoemaker, *Gender 1650 - 1850*, 16-18; Sara Mendelson, and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550 - 1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 31-34.

⁹⁹ Fletcher, *Sex and Subordination*, chapters 2 and 3; Shoemaker, *Gender 1650 - 1850*, 18 - 21 and chapter 3; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women 1550 - 1720*, 18 - 30.

¹⁰⁰ Kent, *Gender and Power*, 11-12.

¹⁰¹ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women 1550 - 1720*, 31. The important scriptural passages here are Genesis 1:27: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them', and Galatians 3:28: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus'. (Revised Standard edition)

the bondage of sinne and death, but not from outward subjection.’ [sic]¹⁰² Theologically the essential Christian view maintained that woman was: ‘... the inferior of the male by *nature*, his equal by *grace*.’ [My emphasis].¹⁰³ Despite the positive views of women put forward in many sections of both the Old and New Testaments, Church teaching emphasised a relatively small number of passages from the Bible taken mainly from the book of Genesis, and from certain Epistles in the New Testament.¹⁰⁴ These texts, as is now seen, became the backbone of Church doctrine, being used both to legitimise and sustain the message of female subordination.

The narrative in chapters one to three of Genesis is of particular importance to the religious debate surrounding the spiritual and material status of women. The chapters tell of the creation of Adam and Eve, their disobedience in eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge despite God’s express prohibition, and their subsequent ejection from the Garden of Eden. These events, known as the ‘Fall’ were used by successive Christian theologians to formulate a number of key theories about the nature of the two sexes, and were employed in particular to demonstrate women’s inherent inferiority and sinfulness.¹⁰⁵ To take the early verses describing the actual creation of the two sexes, for example,¹⁰⁶ it was argued that only Adam, the first person to be made by God, could represent the sum of true humanity. Eve, who was made after man, from man, and for man, was seen to be something ‘other’, and inherently a less perfect and dependent being.¹⁰⁷ Further grounds for the condemnation of Eve, and hence all women, followed in the depiction of Eve as the first sinner who persuaded Adam to follow suit.¹⁰⁸ These passages were held to denote inherent female pride and instability: all women were potential agents of ruin, who were always ready to ensnare men.¹⁰⁹

To theologians the later judgements on Eve in which God ordained pain in childbirth and subordination to her husband were seen to be just impositions. As they were divinely instituted they were held to be an unalterable fact of female life.¹¹⁰ Particular passages in the

¹⁰² Mendelson and Crawford, *Women 1550 – 1720*, 31 citing F. Dillingham, *Christian Oeconomy or Household Government* (1609).

¹⁰³ Denise Riley, "Am I That Name?" *Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History*, 1988, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 25.

¹⁰⁴ Major texts include: Genesis 1:27; 2:18-23; 3:16. Also 1 Corinthians 11: 7-10; 1 Timothy 2: 14; Ephesians 5: 21 –25; 1 Peter 3: 1-7.

¹⁰⁵ Cahill, *Christian Ethics*, especially chapter 6; Ann Loades, Ed, *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (SPCK, 1990).

¹⁰⁶ Genesis 1: 26 – 2: 25. Mendelson and Crawford, *Women 1550 – 1720*, 33. As the authors point out, it needs to be remembered that the Genesis narrative was believed to describe an actual historical event even up to the nineteenth century.

¹⁰⁷ Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 6; Genevieve Lloyd, "Augustine and Aquinas," in *Feminist Theology*, ed. Ann Loades, (SPCK 1996), 90 - 97; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women 1550 - 1720*, 31-33.

¹⁰⁸ Genesis 3: 1 – 13.

¹⁰⁹ Cahill, *Christian Ethics*, 172; Shoemaker, *Gender 1650 - 1850*, 18 – 21. Cahill notes that one of the Church Fathers, Tertullian, referred to women as ‘the Devil’s gateway’.

¹¹⁰ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women 1550 - 1720*, 31-33. The relevant verse is Genesis 3:16.

New Testament were used to reinforce this negativity and gender hierarchy. St Paul wrote that women were subordinate, and the first to sin, but would be saved through childbearing.¹¹¹ Women were also described as the weaker sex, women's silence in church was enjoined and wives were ordered to be subject to their husbands.¹¹² These New Testament 'household codes', though relating to specific circumstances in the early days of the Church, were repeated as universal models of conduct for subsequent generations of Christians.¹¹³ What is significant for the present study, however, is that the same sections from Genesis and the New Testament figure in Wesley's personal assessment of the nature and roles of women, and as shown later, also inform his advice to his followers.

The interpretations of women as naturally sinful and inferior beings were offset to a certain extent in the early modern period by veneration of the Virgin Mary and female saints, which offered alternative models of women imbued with purity and grace. But with the Reformation, this too was lost.¹¹⁴ The earlier discussion has indicated that Protestantism emphasised the priesthood of all believers, making the quest for salvation an individual responsibility. In this respect it can be seen to have upheld the essential spiritual equality of the sexes. However the Protestant focus on the primacy of the Bible, and the Calvinist preoccupation with original sin tended once more to underscore the message of female inferiority and subordination.¹¹⁵ The imagery of Protestantism stressed the maleness of God, and in its theology Mary became a 'passive and non-redemptive' figure.¹¹⁶ It is true that matrimony and motherhood was now held as the ideal state for all. However, Luther's teaching maintained that a life of childbearing and domesticity was the only route for female salvation.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile Protestantism granted more patriarchal power to men and an additional sacred function to husbands as they now became the authorized spiritual leaders in the home.¹¹⁸

Religious discourse, therefore, repeated the message that materially women were imperfect and inferior to men. This view was further endorsed by prevalent scientific and medical theories during the eighteenth century. Contemporary understandings of anatomy were not well developed, and medical treatises maintained that the female body was simply a

¹¹¹ I Timothy 2: 11 – 15.

¹¹² See especially: I Peter 3: 1-7; I Timothy 2: 11 – 15; and I Corinthians 11: 7 – 10.

¹¹³ Cahill, *Christian Ethics*, 160-62. Cahill discusses the particular context of these codes.

¹¹⁴ Anne Laurence, *Women in England, 1500 - 1760. A Social History* (London: Phoenix Giant, 1996), 194 – 199.

¹¹⁵ Margaret Olofson Thickstun, *Fictions of the Feminine: Puritan Doctrine and the Representation of Women* (London & Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1 – 32.

¹¹⁶ Thickstun, *Fictions*, 8.

¹¹⁷ Merry Wiesner, "Luther and Women: The Death of Two Marys," in *Feminist Theology*, ed. Ann Loades, 123 -134.

¹¹⁸ Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 25; Christopher Hill, *Society & Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (1964; reprint, London: Pimlico, 2003), chapter 13.

modified version of the male. In the humoral theories of Aristotle and Galen, which were still influential at this time, it was argued that men were hot and dry, more completely formed, and well able to keep their bodies healthy by exercise. In contrast women were cold and moist and imperfect beings, who as they lived more sedentary lives, needed to rid the body of bad humours by menstruation. Women were believed to have an inherent craving for copulation with men, and to have been created to fulfil men's sexual needs and for procreation.¹¹⁹ Thus the authority of secular 'knowledge' as well as that of the divine was claimed to support the inferior status of women.

The perceived characteristics, roles, and work of men and women

Church teaching and the scientific and religious discourse also governed eighteenth century beliefs about the 'natural' characteristics of men and women as well as informing social relations and the division of labour. Men were typically perceived as possessing reason and resilience of body and spirit, and were deemed to be fundamentally active, brave, and strong. Women, however, were characterized as weak, passive, sedentary and timid. Although females were assigned qualities such as gentleness, tenderness and kindness as befitted their nurturing role, they were viewed as intellectually feeble and ruled by their unstable bodies.¹²⁰ As dependent, less rational and weaker beings they were felt to be in need of men's protection, whilst their potentially dangerous sexuality was a further argument for constraint and male control.¹²¹ 'Proper' women, it was felt, needed to be 'modest, humble, obedient, pious, temperate, patient, silent, and above all, chaste'.¹²²

In the patriarchal and hierarchical system of eighteenth century English society man's superior position was seen as not only necessary but divinely ordained. The division of labour within society was also differentiated along gender lines. Men were viewed as possessing the 'natural' intelligence and physical capabilities to fit them for an active role in an occupation in the public domain.¹²³ In society generally a woman's status rested upon her relationship to men, via her role of daughter, sister or wife. The perceived physical and mental instability of women was seen to be a bar to public duties and responsibilities, and as a result woman's work was held to be most properly centred on the family or household enterprise.¹²⁴ As one early writer

¹¹⁹ Laqueur, *Making Sex*; Fletcher, *Sex and Subordination*, chapters 2 and 3; Shoemaker, *Gender 1650 - 1850*, 18 – 21 and chapter 3; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women 1550 - 1720*, 18 – 30.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*; Shoemaker, *Gender 1650 - 1850*, 18.

¹²¹ Fletcher, *Sex and Subordination*, chapter one; Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 7-8; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women 1550 - 1720*, 19 – 20.

¹²² Kent, *Gender and Power*, 12.

¹²³ Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 7-8; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women 1550 - 1720*, 19 – 20.

¹²⁴ Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 7; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women 1550 - 1720*, 30 and 71.

suggested, 'The office of a husbände is to go abroad in matters of profite, of the wyfe to tarry at home.' [sic]¹²⁵

Despite the challenges to religious and civil authority that had taken place during the middle of the seventeenth century, these ideas about the two sexes proved remarkably resilient to change. Whether in movements to reform the Established Church further, like Puritanism, or in the later radical churches, there was more rather than less emphasis on the Bible, and the Pauline letters were used as prime examples of early church and family organization and thus continued to justify female subordination.¹²⁶ Even the sectarian John Bunyan wrote: 'Women, therefore, whenever they would perk it and lord it over their husbands, ought to remember that both by creation and transgression they are made to be in subjection to their husbands'.¹²⁷ Meanwhile the derogatory biological theories of the female body still retained their influence. With the Restoration there was a renewed emphasis on patriarchal power, as a means of social control in both families and wider society. Patricia Crawford has suggested that this was inevitable. Writing of the early modern period she suggests: 'The significant point at the outset is that men had claimed the public sphere, both secular and religious as their domain. Any intrusion by a female was potentially a source of resentment and resistance'.¹²⁸

By the turn of the eighteenth century dissentient female voices were being raised. Mary Astell posed the astute questions: 'if absolute sovereignty be [sic] not necessary in a state, how comes it to be so in a family? If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?'¹²⁹ Her words mark a response to issues raised by the philosophical arguments of Descartes and John Locke, stimulating debate about the rights of individuals in state and home.¹³⁰ However, at the same time, scientific and medical discourse was moving from the idea of 'gender hierarchy' to that of 'gender difference', and an increasing polarisation of the sexes began. In this the dominant ideology assumed 'a natural association between women and the private sphere, domesticity and leisure ... and the identification of women with feeling and sensibility rather than reason.'¹³¹ A new 'public sphere' also began to be developed as political discourse contrasted the private world of home and market relations, with new civic ideals.¹³²

¹²⁵ Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 7.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, Mendelson and Crawford, *Women 1550 - 1720*, 432.

¹²⁷ Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 9.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Kent, *Gender and Power*, 44.

¹³⁰ Fletcher, *Sex and Subordination*, 283 – 294, quotation at 284; Kent, *Gender and Power*, 13.

¹³¹ Shoemaker, *Gender 1650 - 1850*, 19-20. Shoemaker, following Lacqueur, suggests that the 'one sex' Galenic theory in which the female body was inferior of the male, gradually moved to a 'two sex' theory of gender difference.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 305-6; Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

The Evangelical revival of the 1730s also stimulated widespread change. Unlike the Wesleys, who had taken up a roving ministry, other ministers of the Established Church who had also experienced conversion had stayed in within the Anglican system remaining in parish work. From this emerged the powerful Evangelical wing of the Established Church. Like the Wesley brothers, the Evangelicals were also fired with a reforming zeal, but their efforts were directed in particular to the higher echelons of society. Perceiving a nation suffering from a moral degeneracy, they felt that individual salvation was the only remedy. Through the dissemination of tracts, other literature, philanthropic enterprises, and legislation their aim was to bring about a widespread revolution of manners and morals. As many within the Evangelical party were from socially advantaged backgrounds they were in a strong position to influence public life.¹³³ Their ideas and zest for reform became dominant in the Victorian period to the extent that during the period from 1800 to 1860 ‘... there was hardly an area of life which they did not touch and affect.’¹³⁴

Taking their inspiration from the Puritans, the Evangelicals reintroduced the idea of a home and family life ordered by a distinctly Christian morality, and in the literature of Hannah More and William Cowper all things domestic were celebrated.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, at the heart of the home, the Evangelicals envisaged a godly wife or mother. Through Evangelical writers women were elevated to the role of spiritual and moral guardians of the family, and their frailty, innocence, and supposed angelic qualities were lauded.¹³⁶ Concurrent medical and literary texts placed new emphasis on women’s maternal role. As Ruth Perry has argued, where historically women had been perceived as ‘lascivious and lustful creatures’, by the middle of the eighteenth century they were ‘increasingly reimagined as belonging to another order of being: loving but without sexual needs, morally pure, disinterested, benevolent and self-sacrificing.’¹³⁷ As time went on such ideals became more widely adopted and translated into the ethos of Victorian respectability: a change that has been seen as partly constructed and mediated through biblical exegesis and public religious discourse.¹³⁸ This alteration in manners and mores is one in which

¹³³ On the Evangelical party see Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976); John Wolfe, Ed., *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal. Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780 -1980* (SPCK, 1995); D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Britain. A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, 1989, 3d ed. (London: Routledge, 1995).

¹³⁴ Bradley, *Call*, 17.

¹³⁵ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, especially, 162-179.

¹³⁶ John Wolfe, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain V. Culture and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 30 - 33.

¹³⁷ See "Colonising the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth Century England," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 2 (1991): 212-13.

¹³⁸ See, for example, F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830 - 1900* (Fontana, 1988); Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995) and Ben Wilson, *Decency and Disorder: The Age of Cant, 1789-1837* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007).

the wives of Christian ministers, both through their example, and engagement in different forms of religious and philanthropic enterprises, arguably played a significant role.¹³⁹

In the narratives commemorating wives of ministers, an appreciation of such ongoing ideological change can be gained. For just as the living preachers' wives were expected to act as role models, so their published 'lives' became places where key aspects of their characteristics and behaviour were articulated and promoted. This in itself reinforces the view that preachers' wives were recognised as important patterns of spiritual and domestic excellence for other members of the Society. As such accounts formed part of debates within the mainstream movement about the 'proper' attributes and scope of service for Methodist women and wives, at particular points in Methodism's history differences and similarities can be assessed. These published lives, as Margaret Jones has pointed out, became part of an ongoing circular process, informing the attitudes and behaviour of the *Magazine's* current readers.¹⁴⁰ The latter, being drawn not only from those of the rising middle class, but others lower down the social scale.¹⁴¹ Moreover, as the *Magazine* found its way into more than Methodist homes, the influence of such texts was arguably much wider.¹⁴² This is a key point, and again highlights the importance of the present investigation.

Several questions need to be asked therefore. Firstly, how was the role of a preacher's wife defined and practiced over the period 1750-1880? Secondly, what were the particular challenges and opportunities that such women faced devolving from the Methodist itinerant system? Thirdly, given that 'appropriate' behaviour for the preachers' wives was being described by Methodist officials as early as 1753, and enjoined upon others as a 'pattern', what evidence is there to suggest that the lives of such women, both real and portrayed in published materials, served to disseminate social values such as 'domestic ideology'? This is an important issue, for in their travels the preachers' wives were sent into all areas of Britain and beyond, and printed versions of their lives also circulated widely, therefore the wives' potential, and actual impact as cultural icons needs to be further explored. Finally, the pressures upon the preachers' wives can be discerned in the words of one of their number, Mrs Mary Holder, who recorded after her marriage in 1788:

¹³⁹ Jeremy Gregory, "Gender and the Clerical Profession," in *Gender and Christian Religion*, ed. R. N. Swan, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 235-71; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 123-6.

¹⁴⁰ Jones, "State of my Soul", 283.

¹⁴¹ Cumbers, *Book Room*, 145. As noted above, a cheaper, abridged edition of the *Magazine* was published from 1811-1870 for the 'pious poor'.

¹⁴² See the discussion above.

The qualifications necessary for a Preacher's wife – the going in and out before the people – and setting an example worthy their imitation, with a sight and sense of my wants for such a station affected me much. I was ready to cry 'Lord help me ...'¹⁴³

Writing later in the nineteenth century a Methodist chronicler also noted that: 'All [the ministers' wives] were expected to observe religious propriety, especially in public ...'¹⁴⁴ Given the increasing conservatism of mainstream Methodism during the nineteenth century, the wider cultural norms evolving throughout this period, and with contemporary development of moral and pietistic values, did social propriety come to supersede personal piety as the most important quality in such women?

The present study seeks to answer these questions by focusing on the itinerant preachers' wives in mainstream Methodism as a distinct group considering their role in furthering ideals of holiness, femininity and domesticity during this period. It will examine the changing role and experience of such women within the movement between the dates 1750 and 1880. Evidence will be drawn primarily from seventy-four biographical accounts of wives of itinerant preachers, texts that were published in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* during the period 1780-1880, and from other life writings. The relevant data will be used to analyse the backgrounds of these women, and compare and contrast the practicalities of the itinerant lifestyle at different points in the movement's development. The spirituality and service of the wives before and after marriage will be discussed, and it is hoped to establish the extent to which they acted as models of piety, domesticity, and propriety for other Methodist followers.

In addition to this longitudinal survey a more extensive investigation will be undertaken into the history of two individuals from the cohort of preachers' wives, to throw light on the typical life experience and roles of such women during different chronological periods. Mrs Mary Entwisle (1770-1804) has been selected from among the earlier members of the cohort along with Mrs Ann Leach (1783-1863), a nineteenth century counterpart. In these case studies a range of additional sources will be employed, including a manuscript journal, wills, local histories, and census returns, aiming to provide evidence of the practicalities of the daily lives of these women and the challenges of their position as the wives of preachers. The latter examination also seeks to determine whether these individuals embodied or transmitted various

¹⁴³ Zechariah Taft, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women* (1825, 1828) 1: 106. Quoted in Earl Kent Brown, *Women of Mr Wesley's Methodism* (Leviston, New York: Edward Mellen Press, 1983), 75. Mary Holder, formerly Woodhouse, was the wife of the itinerant preacher, George Holder (1751-1836). *IGI* records show that the couple married on 25 June 1788.

¹⁴⁴ George Slater, *Chronicles of Lives and Religion in Cheshire and Elsewhere* (Andrew Crombie, 1891), 83. Cited in Gail Malmgreen, "Domestic Discords: Women and the Family in East Cheshire Methodism, 1750 -1830", in *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, edited by Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper, and Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 66.

spiritual and social ideals and the extent to which the published accounts of their lives were faithful in representing different aspects of their experience.

To date the wives of Methodist preachers have remained largely ignored, both by mainstream and denominational researchers, yet they form an interesting and intriguing group for several reasons. Firstly, though there has been a rise in scholarship relating to women and religion generally over the last decades, as shown in Patricia Crawford's study of the period between 1500 and 1720, and Sean Gill's work on women within the Church of England, and others,¹⁴⁵ yet, as Linda Wilson points out, there is still a need for further research on female spirituality.¹⁴⁶ This assertion gains added significance in the light of other work by Michael Watts noting the importance of women, and particularly mothers, as major repositories and disseminators of spiritual values during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁴⁷

Amongst Methodist historians, meanwhile, authors such as David Hempton¹⁴⁸ and Gail Malmgreen¹⁴⁹ have long acknowledged that the experience of ordinary Methodist members, particularly of women in the movement, has not received sufficient scholarly attention: a conclusion reiterated by Paul Chilcote in his 2001 study of Methodist female autobiography,¹⁵⁰ and at the recent tercentenary Conference in Manchester on the life and legacy of John Wesley.¹⁵¹ It has also been noted by Henry Rack that very little research has focused on marriage within early Methodism.¹⁵² Whether considered as individual women, female Society members, or as wives and mothers within the movement, therefore, the lives of women who married Methodist ministers offer the researcher a variety of perspectives to increase knowledge about female experience: both before entry into the Methodist Society, and later as participating members of the movement.

Secondly, through their matrimonial contract the preachers' wives were brought into a further situation that was unique to the Methodist system. This devolved from the disciplines and responsibilities that were integral to their husband's office and from the conditions inherent

¹⁴⁵ Sean Gill, *Women and the Church of England* (London: SPCK, 1994); Crawford, *Women and Religion; Religion in the Lives of English Women*, edited by Gail Malmgreen (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1996); Linda Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal. Female Spirituality Amongst Nonconformists, 1825-75* (Carlisle: Paternoster press, 2000).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴⁷ M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

¹⁴⁸ David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750 - 1850*. (Hutchinson, 1987) and *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, 1750 -1900*. (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁴⁹ Malmgreen, "Domestic Discords", 55-70.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Her Own Story: Autobiographical Portraits of Early Methodist Women* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001).

¹⁵¹ "John Wesley: Life, Legend and Legacy", University of Manchester, June 2003.

¹⁵² Henry D. Rack, "'But Lord, Let It Be Betsy!': Love and Marriage in Early Methodism", *PWHS* 53, (Feb 2001): 1-13.

in the itinerant way of life. One American work by Leonard Sweet has been identified dealing specifically with the role of ministers' wives, and whilst some figures from the English movement are referred to, none receive an extended treatment.¹⁵³ Several other studies, such as Earl Brown's *Women of Mr Wesley's Methodism*, include preachers' wives when considering the spirituality or service of Methodist women generally.¹⁵⁴ However, only two short studies address the specific position of women who married the movement's travelling preachers. One of these by Edmund Bates is over thirty years old,¹⁵⁵ whilst the second, *The Labourer's Hire*, by A. Kingsley Lloyd includes a section on preachers' wives within a longer study of the itinerants.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, both of these works relate mainly to the early eighteenth century period. It is clear, therefore, that the practical aspects of these women's lives and especially the situation of ministers' wives of the nineteenth century merit further consideration.

The final issue relates to the position of the preachers' wives as role models and prospective agents in the transmission of various spiritual and social ideals. The important part played by Protestant clergy before and during the eighteenth century in the formation and transmission of ideas relating to marriage and gender roles has been established by Anthony Fletcher¹⁵⁷ whilst other studies of the later Victorian age by authors such as Davidoff and Hall¹⁵⁸ and Jeremy Gregory have pointed to the role of wives of Christian ministers as especially significant.¹⁵⁹ Gregory in particular notes that such women could use their position to share in their husbands' work, and thus participate in the clerical enterprise that was normally a male domain.¹⁶⁰

Though dealing mainly with the Anglican tradition, Gregory's observation also applies to the wives of Methodist ministers. Such women often speak of having entering a 'wider sphere' after marriage. However, with no fixed parish they needed to be eminently adaptable, tailoring their service to the particular circumstances encountered in new each place. As Mrs Holder's statement above makes clear, during their everyday business, or 'going in and out

¹⁵³ Leonard Sweet, *The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth Century American Evangelism* (Philadelphia, 1983).

¹⁵⁴ Brown, *Women of Wesley's Methodism* (Leviston, New York: Edward Mellen Press, 1983); Chilcote, *Women Preachers*, and *Her Own Story*; G. Milburn and M. Batty, eds., *Workaday Preachers: The Story of Methodist Local Preaching* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1995); Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal*.

¹⁵⁵ Edmund Ralph Bates, "The Wives of Wesley's Travelling Preachers" *WHS (Bristol)* 15 (1975): 1-3.

¹⁵⁶ A. Kingsley Lloyd, *The Labourer's Hire: The Payment and Deployment of the Early Methodist Preachers, 1744 - 1813* (Bunbury, Cheshire: Wesley Historical Society, 1987).

¹⁵⁷ Anthony Fletcher, "The Protestant Idea of Marriage in Early Modern England," in *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern England*, edited by A. J Fletcher, and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 161-81; *Gender, Sex and Subordination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995).

¹⁵⁸ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*.

¹⁵⁹ Gregory, "Clerical Profession," 235-71.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

among the people', preachers' wives provided the role models that were the basis of the Methodist value system: the same Evangelical value system that was remaking society at this time.

Gregory further suggests that along with the sisters and daughters of the clergy, ministers' wives: 'remain remarkably shadowy, both in the history of women and in the history of the Church, although passing reference is often made to them as the 'unpaid' curates of the clergy'.¹⁶¹ Some further investigation of the role of ministers' wives, he suggests, might provide 'a more accurate way of assessing the impact of *women* on *religion* rather than just the other way round.'¹⁶² [My emphasis] The current study aims to bring such women and the complexity of their roles and service from the shadows and out into the spotlight. Furthermore, it will investigate their significance not only as the transmitters of religious values, but as mediators of domesticity and decorum, ideals that were becoming more prevalent in society at this time.

The outline of the thesis

The thesis continues with the second chapter of **Part One** entitled *Methodologies and Approaches*, which continues to explain the rationale behind the thesis. As well as containing a more extensive literature review this chapter includes a detailed description of the research methods and sources employed during the course of the study.

The research findings in **Part Two** of the thesis provide an essential context for the more detailed examination of the accounts of preachers' wives and the case studies that follow. Chapter three, *The Methodist Itinerant Preachers and their Wives*, details the beginnings of Wesley's 'United Societies', outlining the work and responsibilities of the itinerant preachers. The practical conditions facing the preachers' wives are investigated and official statements regarding their role discussed. Later moves towards an ordained and trained itinerancy and other developments in the nineteenth century are then considered. Chapter four, *Attitudes towards Marriage within Methodism*, examines Wesley's early home life and personal relationships with women, and their influence on Methodist doctrine and policies. Official statements on matrimony and the family are discussed and the views of the Methodist preachers and people are investigated. In chapter five, *Methodist Domestic Ideals and Changing Notions of Female Service in the Movement*, Methodist ideas are further explored, looking particularly at the development of policies on domestic and family life. Key principles governing the creation

¹⁶¹ Gregory, "Clerical Profession," 258.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

of a truly Methodist home are examined. Wesley's theological stance on gender issues is discussed and an evaluation made of the range of opportunities for female service within the developing movement. The final chapter in this section, *Methodist Life Writings and their Editorial: the Primary Sources from the Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* turns to the wider context of the primary sources for the study, considering the development of spiritual narratives as a literary genre and the importance of such life-writings in Methodism's oral and written tradition. The form and editorship of such texts in the denominational magazine is further examined and the implications for the present study are explored. Key findings from the longitudinal survey of the *Magazine* during the study period are then presented and this evidence interpreted.

Part Three of the thesis presents the findings of the primary research. Chapter seven, *Life before Marriage* summarises the data from the seventy-four biographical accounts of preachers' wives uncovered during the research. Evidence is provided about these women's backgrounds and education, routes into the Methodist movement and service before marriage. Courtship patterns and the timing of the subjects' marriages are explored. Chapter eight, *The Travels and Travails of the Preachers' Wives* turns to consider evidence from the published texts concerning the subjects' roles and experiences when married women and the spouses of Methodist itinerants. The difficulties of the itinerant system for the preachers' wives within the British Isles and in missionary outposts are examined and other practical aspects of this way of life detailed. The domestic and family lives of the subjects and the participation of individuals in Methodist devotional meetings and services are explored, with analysis also of the variety of the women's public labours within the Methodist movement and in other communal enterprises.

The following chapters turn to more detailed considerations of the lives of two of the subjects, using the published texts and representations of their lives as a starting point for further research into their actual life experiences and roles. Chapter nine, the first of these case studies pertains to *Mrs Mary Entwisle (1770-1804)*, one of the earlier members of the cohort, whilst chapter ten investigates the life of *Mrs Ann Leach (1783-1863)* a later preacher's wife. By employing a wide range of methodologies and sources, both chapters explore the evolving spirituality and close family lives of each woman before and after marriage, further illustrating the practicalities of the itinerant life and consequent demands upon the preachers' wives. The subjects' differing approaches to public service and range of work they undertook is also detailed. Thus the investigation of the roles and experiences of these particular Methodist preacher's wives will provide further insights into life at different stages of the evolving Methodist movement and in wider society during the period of the research and therefore assist discussion of the study's major themes. A conclusion to the thesis then follows.

Chapter Two: Methodology and Approaches

The current study was prompted by reading chapters in *The Early Methodist People* by Leslie Church,¹ and the more recent *Reasonable Enthusiast* by Henry Rack,² both expressing the difficulty of discovering how the ideals of the Methodist movement, as expounded by Wesley and the literature of the Movement, were adopted and assimilated into the lives of ordinary members. At the same time, a consideration of the existing research on the range and forms of female service over time showed a predominance of studies focusing on the eighteenth century, with the work of female preachers receiving much attention.³ The value of the latter work is indisputable. However, it seemed clear that many more women existed who were actively engaged in different fields of work, whose efforts in the Methodist cause have not come to light. Moreover, there appeared to be a need to examine lives of women during the nineteenth century.

A longitudinal survey of autobiographical and biographical accounts within the denominational press offered a practical way of investigating a wider spectrum of women's work. Reading Mr Fish's letter to Alexander Kilham, presenting his 'picture of a preacher's wife',⁴ provided the main focus for the research. A consideration of existing studies by historians such as Obelkevich and Malmgreen, which set the lives and experiences of individuals within their particular religious, geographical, and social frameworks, suggested a second strand to the research,⁵ and an aim of reconstituting the experience of some preachers' wives through the use of a range of other sources. With these twin approaches it is hoped to shed new light on the reality behind the 'pictures' of female piety painted in the press.

The period chosen for the examination of texts in the preliminary survey 1780-1880 enables the examination of accounts after the death of Wesley, through the middle period of Methodism, and into the Victorian era. As the narratives are all retrospective accounts, they illustrate the lives of individuals that extend backwards into earlier decades of the movement:

¹ Leslie Church, (London: Epworth Press, 1949), 10-26.

² Henry D. Rack, 1989, 3d. ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002), chapter 11.

³ Wesley F. Swift, "The Women Itinerant Preachers of Early Methodism," *PWHS* 28 (1952): 89 – 94 and *PWHS* 29 (1953): 76 - 83; Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (New Jersey and London: American Theological Library Association, 1991); G. Milburn and M. Batty, eds., *Workaday Preachers: The Story of Methodist Local Preaching* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1995).

⁴ Church, *Early*, 231.

⁵ James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825 - 1875*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); Gail Malmgreen, "Domestic Discords: Women and the Family in East Cheshire Methodism, 1750 -1830," in *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, ed. Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper and Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 55-70.

the period when some of the most important policy statements were formulated. Moreover, the extended time frame of the study itself, 1750-1880, allows an exploration of the extent to which the preachers' wives (through example and practice) contributed to the longer process of wider cultural change taking place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As suggested in the previous chapter, this is a key issue, and it is hoped that work within the thesis will contribute to the continuing discussion about altering gender and domestic ideals during this period, the part played by evangelicalism, and the role of evangelical women in particular.

Literature Review

The existing denominational histories of Methodism⁶ have little to say about the female members of their ranks, and in studies of the movement generally there has been a tendency to concentrate on the 'eminent women' of the movement,⁷ a trend that has continued to some extent with the women surrounding Wesley being especially well researched.⁸ Among early works discussing the ethos of the movement and spirituality of ordinary members, meanwhile, Leslie Church's detailed study on early Methodists,⁹ still has value despite its rather hagiographical approach, whilst Henry Rack's discussion in *Reasonable Enthusiast* is a more extended evaluation of Methodist religious life, morality and service.¹⁰ Turning to studies of the nineteenth century, N. P. Goldhawk's chapter in the most recent 'official' history of Methodism provides discussion of the enduring features of Methodist piety during the Victorian age.¹¹ On *female* spirituality Chilcote's *Her Own Story* contains a useful section on the Wesleyan ethos, though concentrating on women from the early movement.¹² Work by Linda Wilson, meanwhile, includes some data on the spirituality of later Wesleyan women among her consideration of female spirituality among different nonconformist denominations from 1825 to 1875.¹³ Though having few ministers' wives among its cohort, this study provides points for comparison when considering the subjects of the current research, as well as offering effective models for analysis.

⁶ *NHM*; *HMCGB*.

⁷ A very early study, for example, was Annie E. Keeling, *Eminent Methodist Women* (C. W. Kelly: 1887).

⁸ Maldwyn Edwards, *My Dear Sister: The story of John Wesley and the Women in his Life* (Leeds: Penwork, 1980); Charles Wallace, ed., *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁹ Leslie Church, *The Early Methodist People and More About the Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth Press, 1949).

¹⁰ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, chapter eleven.

¹¹ N. P. Goldhawk, "The Methodist People in the Victorian Age: Spirituality and Worship," in *HMCGB* 2: 113 - 123.

¹² Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Her Own Story: Autobiographical Portraits of Early Methodist Women* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 18-28.

¹³ Linda Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal. Female Spirituality Amongst Nonconformists, 1825 - 75* (Carlisle: Paternoster press, 2000).

Other discussions of female experience, examining the outward expression of faith through service in the movement, as mentioned above, mainly focus on the role and ministry of women as preachers.¹⁴ Though several of these works include brief references to individuals identified by the current study, their particular position as preachers' wives is not explored. As the title of Earl Kent Brown's book makes clear, his emphasis is also on the era of Wesley, but this study examines the wider range of work undertaken by women in the movement during this time.¹⁵ The analysis of different fields of service is welcome, and Brown also indicates the importance of female networks to women within the movement. He also includes a small section on ministers' wives.¹⁶ Regrettably his treatment here is rather perfunctory, and individual examples are mainly well-researched figures.¹⁷

Studies of male ministers include K. D. Brown's social history of male nonconformist ministers. Two chapters of this work contain some relevant information about the Methodist itinerant system and the private lives of the movement's ministers.¹⁸ Much of the research about sexuality and marriage within Methodism also focuses on men within the movement. Works on John Wesley's views on marriage and his relationships continue to expand, whilst a very recent discussion focusing on Charles Wesley's marriage, reveals his very different response to married life.¹⁹ Henry Abelove²⁰ and Anna Lawrence²¹ provide the most extensive consideration to date of sexual attitudes generally within Methodism, both considering Wesley's key statements, and the views of preachers and people. The itinerant Samuel Bradburn's endearing prayer about a marriage partner: 'But Lord, Let It Be Betsy!' forms part of the title of Henry Rack's 2001 study, in which he sets out to counter some of the prevailing ideas, both contemporary, and from later historians about sexual repression within Methodism.²² Such studies indicate a real need to examine the experience of Methodist *women* as sweethearts,

¹⁴ See note 3 above and Leslie Church, *More About the Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth Press, 1949); John Lenton, "'Labouring for the Lord.' Women Preachers in Wesleyan Methodism, 1802-1932," in *Beyond the Boundaries: Preaching in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. R. Sykes. (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1998), 58-86.

¹⁵ Earl Kent Brown, *Women of Mr Wesley's Methodism* (Leviston, New York: Edward Mellen Press, 1983).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 74-83.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* For example, Mary Fletcher and Hester Ann Rogers.

¹⁸ Kenneth D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800 - 1930* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1988), chapters four and five.

¹⁹ Gareth Lloyd, "'My Dearest Sally': The Marriage of Charles Wesley and Sally Gwynne," *PWHS* 56 (Oct 2007): 113-28.

²⁰ Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire. John Wesley and the Methodists* (Stanford, California: University of Stanford Press, 1990).

²¹ Anna Lawrence, "'I Thought I Felt a Sinful Desire': The Question of Celibacy for Eighteenth Century Methodists," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library Manchester* (Manchester) 85, no. 2 & 3 (2003): 177-93.

²² Henry D. Rack, "'But Lord, Let It Be Betsy!': Love and Marriage in Early Methodism," *PWHS* 53 (Feb 2001): 1 - 13.

wives and mothers, and learn more of the tenor of ordinary family life. Work by Rosemary Raughter takes up some points within Malmgreen's earlier study to debate the possible conflicts for female converts between kin and the alternative 'household of faith' of the Methodist Society.²³ Meanwhile, John Tosh's article: "Methodist Domesticity and Middle-Class Masculinity in Nineteenth-Century England," is the only work uncovered to date that focuses on Methodist domestic life.²⁴ Though dealing with the experience of men as fathers and husbands, this is a valuable consideration. It is hoped that the present study will add to all these debates.

Leonard Sweet's: *The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth Century American Evangelism* contains some information on the position of clergy wives since the Reformation.²⁵ Whilst the author refers to some figures from the British Wesleyan movement, such as Susanna Wesley, Sweet's main assertion, (and the organising principle behind his main examples) is that are four distinctive 'types' of wives: the Sacrificer; the Companion; the Assistant and the Partner. His work is thought provoking, but rather prescriptive in approach. Only two works have been discovered dealing with the wives of British travelling preachers, both notable for their brevity of treatment. The short paper by Bates deals with early preachers' wives²⁶ whilst Lloyd's slightly longer study, as the title suggests, is mainly about the travelling preachers.²⁷ However the latter is the only source offering substantive evidence about the practicalities of life for their wives.

There has been a gradual trend away from the study of Methodism as a national movement with other research, for example the study of East Cheshire by Gail Malmgreen,²⁸ and work by Obelkevich,²⁹ providing detailed regional studies. This reflects the recognition of 'many Methodisms in many places in many times'.³⁰ The second stage of the present study aims to build upon and expand knowledge of the lives of individual women within particular localities, using similar methods. Very relevant studies of Methodism in the Leeds and

²³ Rosemary Raughter, "Women in the Household of Faith: Opportunity and Conflict in Early Irish Methodism," *WHS (Irish Branch)* 7 (Winter 2001): 20 - 33.

²⁴ John Tosh, "Methodist Domesticity and Middle-Class Masculinity in Nineteenth-Century England," in *Gender and Christian Religion: Papers Read at the 1996 Summer Meeting and the 1997 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 323-45.

²⁵ Leonard Sweet, *The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth Century American Evangelism* (Philadelphia, 1983).

²⁶ Edmund Ralph Bates, "The Wives of Wesley's Travelling Preachers" *WHS (Bristol)* 15 (1975): 1-3.

²⁷ A. Kingsley Lloyd, *The Labourer's Hire: The Payment and Deployment of the Early Methodist Preachers, 1744 - 1813* (Bunbury, Cheshire: Wesley Historical Society, 1987).

²⁸ Malmgreen, "Domestic Discords."

²⁹ Obelkevich, *Religion..*

³⁰ David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750 - 1850* (Hutchinson, 1987), 11.

Yorkshire areas during the period under consideration have been discovered by Colin Dews and Brian Greaves.³¹

Among work dealing with the period leading up to the Victorian era and contemporary cultural changes, the social history by Davidoff and Hall: *Family Fortunes* has been revised and now contains a summary of much recent research,³² plus a response to critical argument about the findings.³³ Elizabeth Langland discusses the complexities of managing the middle-class household,³⁴ and Simon Morgan's recent study sheds light on the way that women continually tested and negotiated the boundaries of the public sphere.³⁵ Studies of gender relationships during the 1750 to 1880 period by both Susan Kent³⁶ and Robert Shoemaker³⁷ also deal with issues of gender and domesticity, whilst Anna Clark concentrates on the experience of plebeian women.³⁸ The role of evangelical women as agents in cultural change is examined in Linda Wilson's analysis of the activities of nonconformist women.³⁹

Several of the above studies use obituaries as a primary source, and a variety of denominational periodicals have been examined.⁴⁰ Research by Linda Wilson and Margaret Jones, meanwhile, focuses specifically on autobiographical and biographical accounts of

³¹ B. Greaves, "Methodism in Yorkshire, 1740 - 1851," Ph. D., Liverpool, 1968); D. Colin Dews, "Methodism in Leeds from 1791 - 1861: An Analysis of the Development and Involvement of the Various Denominations and Sects Within the Methodist Movement in a Changing Urban Community," M. Phil, Bradford, 1984); D. Colin Dews, *The Spark of Grace: Two Hundred and Fifty Years of Methodism in West Yorkshire, 1738 - 1988*. (Leeds: WHS (Yorks), 1990).

³² Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780 - 1850*, 2d ed. (London: Hutchinson, 2003).

³³ See, for example, Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (1995): 383-414.

Vickery, "Golden Age"

³⁴ Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

³⁵ Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, International Library of Historical Studies, vol. 40 (London & New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007).

³⁶ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640 - 1990* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999).

³⁷ Robert B Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650 - 1850. The Emergence of Separate Spheres* (London & New York: Longman, 1998).

Shoemaker, *Gender 1650 - 1850*.

³⁸ Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches. Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

³⁹ Linda Wilson, "'She Succeeds with Cloudless Brow.' How Active Was the Spirituality of Nonconformist Women During the Period 1825-1875?" in *Gender and Christian Religion* ed., R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998), 347-59; and *Constrained by Zeal. Female Spirituality Amongst Nonconformists, 1825 - 75.*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Carlisle: Paternoster press, 2000).

⁴⁰ Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*; Brown, *Social History*; R. Watts, *The Dissenters: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Margaret P. Jones, "Women in the *Arminian/Methodist Magazine*, 1778 - 1821," M. Phil thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992); Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal*.

women. The latter is most pertinent to the present research, discussing letters and accounts of women in the *Arminian/Methodist Magazine* from 1778 to 1821. Jones' consideration of spiritual narrative in the Methodist press and her wider discussion is less partisan than Frank Cumbers' work on the Methodist publishing system, which remains the only major study of this topic.⁴¹ Francis Mineka's 1944 chapter on the development of the religious press generally is still relevant despite its age,⁴² and the same topic receives consideration by Michael Billington.⁴³ Meanwhile, questions of editorship and editorial bias in the production of the *Magazine*,⁴⁴ form part of Christine Krueger's literary study.⁴⁵ A further paper by Margaret Jones drawing on her previous research plus Linda Wilson's assessment of the presentation of women's lives,⁴⁶ have a particular resonance with the focus of the current study.⁴⁷

Methodology

The first major strand of the research, an examination of the autobiographical and biographical accounts within selected volumes of the *Arminian Magazine*, between 1780 and 1880 aimed to survey the numbers of male and female accounts and also to identify individuals who were wives of Methodist preachers. The difficulties of using such sources for historians of women's lives need to be acknowledged. Firstly, as earlier discussion has indicated, the contents of the *Arminian Magazine*, like those of other institutions or denominations, were subject to editorial bias, which altered over time according to the particular needs and stance of the developing movement. The researcher also has to be mindful of the fact that such texts, commemorating lives of members, also had a didactic function. The final point, particularly pertinent in the present case, is that most of the accounts of women were written by men.⁴⁸ Despite these drawbacks, the accounts can reveal much about the lives, and motivation of individuals. K. D. Brown and Linda Wilson both note their worth as a source of evidence.⁴⁹

⁴¹ Frank H. Cumbers, *The Methodist Book Room. The Story of the Methodist Publishing House and Epworth Press*. (London: Epworth Press, 1956).

⁴² F Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent* (Chapel Hill, 1944).

⁴³ Louis Billington, "The Religious Periodical and Newspaper Press, 1770-1870," in *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Lee Harris M, A (Associated University Presses, 1986).

⁴⁴ For ease of reference I refer only to the *Arminian Magazine*, or the *Magazine*, though, as noted above, the title altered twice during the period of the study.

⁴⁵ Christine L. Krueger, *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth Century Social Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁴⁶ Linda Wilson, "She Succeeds", 347-59.

⁴⁷ Margaret P. Jones, "From 'The State of My Soul' to 'exalted Piety': Women's Voices in the *Arminian/Methodist Magazine*," in *Gender and Christian Religion* ed. R.N. Swanson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press 1998), 273-86.

⁴⁸ The editorship of the accounts of the preachers' wives is explored in chapter six below.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Social History*, 17-18. Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal*, 40.

The longitudinal study: choice of a representative sample of volumes from the denominational magazine during the period 1780-1880

Access to the *Arminian Magazine* was readily available at Leeds City Reference Library, and it was first necessary to decide upon the number of volumes to be examined for the initial survey.⁵⁰ Originally it was hoped to concentrate on the first five consecutive years at the beginning of every second decade throughout the given period.⁵¹ However, this plan had to be abandoned because of lower numbers of accounts commemorating women than had been anticipated. This fact is itself worthy of note, and was an early indicator of the continuing predominance of male biography in the Methodist periodical throughout the years under consideration. As background reading on the Methodist movement also suggested that the years after Wesley's death in 1791 and during the first decades of the nineteenth century were particularly important to the main concerns of the research the number of years in the sample was increased. Thus biennial volumes of the *Magazine* were examined from 1780 onwards. In this way it was hoped to gain a more consistent picture over each decade, and uncover a viable number of accounts of preachers' wives for later analysis. In total fifty volumes of the *Magazine* were inspected.

The survey of autobiographical and biographical accounts in the sample years

An examination of *all* the religious biography and autobiography contained in the selected volumes was the next stage. The *Arminian Magazine* was published monthly, so each yearly volume contains twelve issues. The survey began with the edition published in January 1780, each monthly edition following, six hundred in all, being examined in turn. A variety of autobiographical and biographical narratives were found. These included autobiographical accounts; memoirs and 'connexional biography'; shorter 'biographical notices' and more condensed obituaries. It was decided to record and analyse only the longer memoirs and connexional biographies, as it was anticipated that these texts would provide more details of their subjects' lives.

During this survey information was stored on two card indexes. The first of these: *Male and Female Accounts*, recorded details of all the longer memoirs published in each sample year. The page number and names of individual memoirs were checked against the yearly index in the

⁵⁰ The majority of volumes of this important primary source were consulted at Leeds City Reference Library, which holds almost a complete run. One volume was incomplete, and in this case was examined at John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

⁵¹ Following K. D. Brown's approach in his *Social History*. Periods considered would have been 1780-85, 1800-05, 1820-25, 1840-45, and 1860-65.

Magazine.⁵² Evidence retrieved allowed analysis of the relative numbers of male and female accounts in particular volumes. This data also indicated the length of accounts and their positioning within each issue, possible signifiers of differences of status accorded to the individuals commemorated. The second card system, recording *Female Accounts* contained more details about the memoirs of women discovered, noting facts such as the marital status of each individual,⁵³ the name and status of the author of the account, and any relationship of the latter to the memoir's subject. Three hundred and forty-eight accounts of women were discovered in the sample years examined. The accumulated data from this preliminary survey, presented in chapter six below, allows a comparison of the incidence of male and female memoirs within the Methodist press in the relevant years, also indicating the frequency of accounts of preachers' wives within female biography generally.

Identification and analysis of memoirs relating to ministers' wives

During the course of the above process each account of a married woman was read to establish whether she was a preacher's wife. The lay itinerant preachers of Methodism were initially distinguished by no particular title so this was not a straightforward process. As an additional check the 'Index to the Memoirs, Obituary Notices and Recent Deaths ... 1778 – 1839' from the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*,⁵⁴ was consulted to see if any links were apparent between an individual and a minister. Seventy four preachers' wives were identified. All of their memoirs were photocopied for further examination. The subjects of these accounts and details of their lives formed the basis for the subsequent research.

To facilitate a more detailed analysis of these texts an electronic database was created using Microsoft *Access*. Data was collected regarding publication details of accounts; the maiden name of individuals, and their geographical, religious and social background. Dates of major life changes included those of conversion or entry into the Society. Among the details of marriage and family life, the name of the subject's spouse was noted; any details of childbearing; and the range of circuits mentioned. The cause and date of death of each wife, and her age at death were also included where possible.

⁵² The names of subjects were not always apparent in the early years of the magazine. See, for example, "An extract from the journal of Mr. G. C." *AM* 5 (1782): 298; and "An account of Mr. J.V...." *AM* 7 (1784): 13.

⁵³ In cases where marital status was unclear the account was read in full.

⁵⁴ The full title is: "An Index to the Memoirs, Obituary Notices and Recent Deaths together with the References to the Local Histories of Methodism, as contained in the *Arminian Magazine*, 1778 – 1797; the *Methodist Magazine*, 1798 – 1821; and the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1822–1839" in *PWHS* 7 (1910).

Other primary source material

The published texts were the primary source of information about each individual. A number of other primary and secondary sources were also used to verify points and extend knowledge about each woman in the cohort. Zechariah Taft's collection of biographical accounts published in 1827 was of some use.⁵⁵ Different sources were needed to trace and clarify details about the husbands of these women: their dates of birth and service.⁵⁶ Whilst it was originally the intention to trace any memoirs of such men within the *Magazine*, this proved too time-consuming, and had to be abandoned except for the core case studies. However, autobiographical accounts of husbands of several of the earlier preachers' wives were included in Thomas Jackson's *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers, Chiefly Written by Themselves*.⁵⁷ Those relating to Thomas Taylor and Alexander Mather in particular shedding light on the experience of their wives.⁵⁸ Another valuable find was a published memoir of Joseph Entwisle, husband of Mrs Mary Entwisle⁵⁹ whilst letters by key Methodist figures such as John Pawson and Jabez Bunting furnished additional knowledge about several individuals.⁶⁰ One electronic resource was the recently produced database on Wesley's itinerants produced by John Lenton.⁶¹ In addition, it was possible to establish some dates of birth and marriage of members of the cohort through the *International Genealogical Index*.⁶² A summary of key information was compiled and is included in Part Three of the thesis below.⁶³

The two local case studies and choice of subject

The second stage of the research, sought to go *beyond* the representation of individual women provided in texts discovered in the denominational magazine, to uncover more about the

⁵⁵ Zechariah Taft, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women* (1825, 1828)

⁵⁶ Among these were Kenneth B. Garlick, *Mr. Wesley's Preachers: An Alphabetical Arrangement of Wesleyan Methodist Preachers and Missionaries, and the Stations to which they were Appointed, 1739–1818* (London: Pinhorn, 1977); T. Galland Hartley, ed., *Hall's Circuits and Ministers: An Alphabetical List of the Circuits in Great Britain with the Names of the Ministers Stationed in Each Circuit*. (London: Methodist Publishing House, n.d.); William Hill, *An Alphabetical and Chronological Arrangement of the Wesleyan Methodist Ministers and Preachers* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Conference, 1861, 1869, 1873); *DMBI*.

⁵⁷ *EMP*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*. For Thomas Taylor see 5: 1- 107; for Alexander Mather see 2: 158-239.

⁵⁹ J. Entwisle, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwisle* 8th Ed. (London: James Nichols, 1862).

⁶⁰ *Pawson Letters*; *EC*; *EVM*.

⁶¹ John Lenton, "My Sons in the Gospel": *An Analysis of Wesley's Itinerant Preachers*. (Loughborough: Wesley Historical Society, 2000). I am grateful to Mr Lenton for sharing information about Thomas Gill, husband of Elizabeth Gill (1754-1823).

⁶² *IGI*.

⁶³ See Figure 3: 'The cohort of preachers' wives discovered in the survey of the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1780-1880.'

everyday existence of two of the preachers' wives and to understand the reality of their lives in particular circuits. In selecting the subjects for the case studies it was decided to identify women who had a connection with the Leeds area. There were several reasons for this approach. On a practical level access to a wide range of relevant local histories, local Methodist histories, maps, and other primary material was an important part of the investigative process of the case studies, and such sources were readily available from a number of libraries in Leeds and from the archives of the Yorkshire branch of the Wesley Historical Society held in the town. Initial background research showed that Leeds was also a strong Methodist centre throughout the period of the study, being made the head of a circuit in 1755 and becoming an early venue for the Methodist Conference. Moreover the town and its environs were significant for the tradition of female preaching begun in the 1760s by women such as Sarah Crosby and Mary Bosanquet.⁶⁴ All these factors suggested that a focus on the Leeds area would prove fruitful for the detailed consideration of the experience of two preachers' wives.

By using the information in *Hall's Circuits*, which lists the itinerants who were appointed to Leeds⁶⁵ in conjunction with information provided in individual accounts, it was possible to discover if any of members of the cohort of preachers' wives had links with the local Leeds area. Several individuals were identified as either having been raised or spent time in the main Leeds circuit, or those nearby. Factors then considered were the life-spans of these women, and the quality and range of available primary sources and additional information to support a detailed study. Mrs Mary Entwisle (1770-1804) was selected as the first subject, being an example of a preacher's wife from the earlier period of the study. She was brought up in a rural area near Leeds, and after her marriage in 1792 also spent part of her life in the town itself when her husband was stationed to the main Leeds circuit. The second subject for detailed examination, Mrs Ann Leach (1783-1863) spent her formative years in the urban setting of Manchester, entering upon life as the spouse of an itinerant in 1806, shortly after her earlier counterpart's demise. Her link to the Leeds area came in 1840, when she and her husband were in the Bramley circuit.

Sources for the local studies

Whilst chronological difference between the lives of these two women would provide one fruitful means of comparison, another major factor in the choice of these particular wives, related to the primary sources available for each woman. These offered the chance to employ a

⁶⁴ Dews, "Methodism in Leeds," 25; *HMCGB* 201-2.

⁶⁵ *Hall*.

wide range of methods and materials, and examine the experiences of each individual from quite different perspectives. In the compilation of both case studies a large number of local histories and Methodist histories have been consulted, both relating to the Leeds area and different parts of the country. Part of the challenge, (and delight) of undertaking these two detailed reconstructions has been the employment of different primary sources.

In the case of Mary Entwisle, for example, information about her background has been acquired through the parish records of her home town, and the wills of her father and grandfather. Other sources include a published memoir of her husband, and autobiographical accounts and letters relating to her close relatives. Most significantly, it has been possible to examine Mary's own manuscript journal.⁶⁶ These primary materials have afforded unique insights into her personal life and motivation. By necessity, a different range of sources have been used to reconstruct the experience of Ann Leach. A local history, trade directories and maps have provided information about her early years. Details of her natal family, and own children, which are scanty in the published account of her life have been uncovered through the *International Genealogical Index*. The use of maps of Bramley, a township near Leeds, a local photographic database, and the census enumerators' returns for 1841, have also allowed a solid picture to emerge of her home, surroundings, and neighbours in the township during 1840-41.⁶⁷

These twin studies and their different emphases, in conjunction with the results of the earlier overview and analysis of the wider cohort, will present a full and nuanced investigation into the roles, lives, and impact of the women in the study. Charged with embodying and promoting the ideals of the movement, these individuals were nevertheless ordinary women living often in very difficult circumstances. Their position also meant that they had to tread a fine line, managing the twin demands of personal needs and aspirations and public expectations. By means of the different approaches set out, it is possible to examine their travels and travails in detail and to discover whether they were successful in this challenging task. This process begins in the next chapter where discussion turns to examine the unique position of the travelling preachers' wives within Methodism. The nature of their husbands' ministry is discussed and the practical consequences of the itinerant system for these women and their families. Official pronouncements on the nature of the role of a preacher's wife are examined, and brief consideration is given to the key changes affecting the itinerants and the Methodist movement during the nineteenth century.

⁶⁶ Detailed references relating to all these sources are provided in chapter nine below.

⁶⁷ Detailed references relating to all these sources are provided in chapter ten below.

Part Two: Exploring the Lives, Roles and Experiences of the Preachers' Wives

1: Research Findings on the Changing Context

Introduction

Before considering the primary sources identified during the current research, and to aid a full evaluation of this material, several important areas need preliminary exploration. This process begins in chapter three, *The Methodist Itinerant Preachers and their Wives*, which follows this brief introduction. The chapter starts with an investigation of the origins and organisation of the Methodist movement and the duties of its travelling preachers. A detailed examination of the factors and practical conditions constraining the daily existence of these men's spouses follows, with consideration also of official statements regarding the role and behaviour of preachers' wives. A summary of changes during the nineteenth century brings the chapter to a close, outlining the itinerants' altering ministry, and the divisions leading to the fragmentation of mainstream Methodism.

In chapter four, *Attitudes towards Marriage within Methodism*, the discussion turns to consider Wesley's early life and relationships with women and their possible influence on Methodist doctrine and policies. Besides examining official statements on marriage and a single life, the chapter also investigates wider opinions about matrimony among the Methodist preachers and people. Chapter five, *Methodist Domestic Ideals and Changing Notions of Female Service in the Movement* is a further exploration of Methodist ideas, focusing on the development and propagation of policies on domestic and family life. The essential principles governing the creation of a truly Methodist home are considered, as are specific Methodist writings regarding relationships within the family itself. A discussion of Wesley's theological stance on gender issues leads to an evaluation of the range of opportunities for female service within the developing movement.

The final chapter in this section, *Methodist Life Writings and their Editorial: the Primary Sources from the Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* turns once more to the biographical narratives within the *Arminian Magazine* that form the main textual evidence for the study. Discussion explores the evolution of religious autobiography as a specialized literary genre and the place of oral and written testimony within Methodist culture. The form and editorship of such life-writings within the denominational magazine receives further attention, and the implications for the present study are explored. The chapter ends with a summary of key findings from the longitudinal survey of the *Magazine* with evidence from the sample years being presented and interpreted. This, with the above chapters, will establish a

sound contextual framework for the later consideration of the primary texts and deliberation of the study's major themes.

Chapter Three: The Methodist Itinerant Preachers and their Wives

One morning in June 1800 there was pandemonium in a household in Stokesley, Yorkshire. Mr Deason, a surgeon in the town, who had family connections in the Anglican clergy, had discovered his daughter, Diana, reading a Methodist magazine. The offending periodical was promptly returned to its pious owner with the instruction not to provide any more similar works.¹ A senior clergyman had previously advised Mr Deason that he should ‘turn his daughter to the door and disown her for ever’ because of her attraction to the movement.² Though not complying, the surgeon now took steps to safeguard his daughter from further contact with any Methodists. He confined Diana to the house for over two years, making sure that any time she spent outside was carefully supervised. Remarkably, Diana was undismayed, relying on a small Testament and ‘a volume of Mr Wesley’s works’ for her spiritual reading.³ Writing of this period she also recorded how she had still managed to slip out of the house:

How often, when I have known, that persons have been set to watch me, have I gone in a night to the chapel, dressed like an old person, and placed myself in the most retired corner, that I might hear ... the words of eternal life!⁴

The ministrations she had received there, she wrote, would be ‘a subject of joy and gratitude for ever’.⁵ Diana later married one of Methodism’s lay evangelists, Marshall Claxton, and acting as a class leader, played her own part in supporting newcomers to the movement.⁶

The origins of the Methodist movement

Among the issues rankling with Mr Deason and his clerical relatives concerning his daughter’s conduct may have been the fact that the founders of Methodism came from the bosom of their own denomination. The movement had its origins during the latter part of the 1730s in the evangelism of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, who were all ordained ministers in the Church of England. These men, like several other Anglican clergymen of this period, had undergone powerful evangelical conversions and inspired by this personal experience of ‘new birth’, felt compelled to spread the Gospel urgently in a new and vivid fashion. The evangelical brand of ‘vital religion’ they expounded was distinctly at odds

¹ “The Grace of God Manifested in a Memoir of Mrs. Claxton,” *MM* 41 (1818): 918. This event is recorded in Diana’s diary entry of 2 June 1800.

² *Ibid.*, 917.

³ *Ibid.*, 918.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 919. Diary entry dated 18 July 1802.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Diana Claxton (1781-1817 *m* 1803) [27]. Figures in square brackets refer to the identification number of the women in the cohort of preachers’ wives as shown in Figure 3 below. Diana’s service is discussed in chapter eight below.

with the measured spiritual tenor of the contemporary Church,⁷ evoking memories of the religious fervour that had been a feature during the Civil War of the previous century.⁸ With churches increasingly closed to them, the men began to take their message directly to the people. George Whitefield was the first to start this new endeavour, preaching to miners at Kingswood, near Bristol, a tough and unruly people.⁹ Wesley went to assist him, and after witnessing ‘...this *strange way* of preaching in the fields ...’ took up the challenge and began to address the crowds himself.¹⁰ Both the Wesley brothers and Whitefield were soon involved in more regular and widespread field preaching, operating mainly in and around the London and Bristol areas.¹¹ The growing numbers of individuals responding to this evangelism convinced Wesley that an exceptional work of grace was taking place.¹²

These activities contravened the traditional parish system and the orthodox clerical hierarchy.¹³ But when challenged about his new ministry, Wesley pointed to the spiritual poverty of the people, arguing that to refrain from preaching in these circumstances, would be a denial of his God-given calling as a priest.¹⁴ He was later to write of a special calling: ‘I look upon the whole world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation.’¹⁵ However, as clerical support for Wesley’s message and his methods was in short supply, this missionary activity soon depended upon a body of *lay preachers*: men who were willing to submit to Wesley’s authority and themselves embrace an itinerant life. With Wesley’s sanction these roving evangelists not only preached the gospel message, but oversaw the network of fellowship groups that Wesley called his ‘United Societies’.

⁷ Studies of this period include: W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); G. M. Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival*. (London: UCL Press, 1997). Chapter one of Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) contains a succinct evaluation.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13. Heitzenrater suggests that by the latter part of the seventeenth century there was ‘a conscious fear of explicit religiosity.’

⁹ Wesley later described them as: ‘neither fearing God nor regarding man.’ See *J & D*, 19: 124.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19: 50–51. The emphasis is Wesley’s.

¹¹ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 100. At places such as Moorfields, Blackheath, and Kennington Common in London the crowds attending their field preaching reached thousands.

¹² *Letters*, 5: 257. Wesley later wrote of his belief that ‘the whole work of God termed Methodism’ was an: ‘extraordinary dispensation’ of God’s providence.

¹³ A licence issued by the relevant Bishop was a necessary authorization to preach. *J & D*, 19: 472, notes that in an interview with the Bishop of Bristol the bishop informed Wesley: ‘You have no commission to preach in this diocese...’

¹⁴ *Letters*, 25: 692-3. In a letter to James Hervey dated 25 Oct. 1739 Wesley wrote: ‘I have power (through God) to save their souls from death. Shall I use it, or let them perish – “because they are not of my parish?”’

¹⁵ *J & D*, 19: 67.

Religious societies were not a new phenomenon, being introduced into the Church of England following the Restoration and becoming an accepted part of church structure by the turn of the eighteenth century. Originally intended mainly for young men who were already communicant members, these voluntary groups met under the strict direction of an Anglican clergyman, with the aim of fostering ‘a holy and serious life’.¹⁶ Wesley was familiar with such societies from those established by his father in his Epworth parish, and he had founded similar groups when a missionary in Georgia.¹⁷ At the time of his conversion he was a member of a number of societies, including one at Fetter Lane in London, and continued to preach and teach in such venues when his prospects in other pulpits were curtailed.¹⁸ These forums for spiritual development were the starting point for the first distinctly Methodist societies.

Among those responding to field preaching some individuals decided spontaneously to meet together in small groups,¹⁹ whilst others were drawn to existing societies where the Wesley brothers and Whitefield were already involved. In May 1739, however, Wesley purchased land in Bristol and built the ‘New Room’: a venue for two existing societies with space for other newcomers.²⁰ Being responsible for the management and finances of the building, Wesley gradually started referring to this new fellowship as the ‘United Society’.²¹ By July that year, he had also been persuaded to acquire additional premises at the Foundery in London to accommodate growing numbers now attending Fetter Lane.²² Following a disagreement over Moravian teaching, Wesley left the latter society, accompanied by many of its members²³ and the Foundery then became home to the first United Society in London.²⁴

Wesley’s personal theology and understanding of scripture shaped the doctrines and practices now developing. His teaching was distinctive in several respects. Firstly, Wesley’s

¹⁶ On religious societies see Henry D. Rack, "Religious Societies and the Origins of Methodism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38, no. 4 (October 1987): 582-95 and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), chapter two.

¹⁷ On Wesley’s early associations with societies in Georgia and later see *Societies* 6-9 and Frank Baker, "The People Called Methodists: 3. Polity," in *HMCGB*, 1: 215-16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 216-17; Rack, "Religious Societies", 583. The newly-founded Fetter Lane Society was not restricted to Anglicans and its rules were drawn up under the guidance of the Moravian, Peter Böhler, who also advised Wesley on his spiritual life. Wesley’s conversion took place at a meeting at another society meeting at Aldersgate Street. See *J & D*, 18: 249-50.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19: 47. After hearing Wesley preaching at Bristol Mills, for example, three women agreed to meet together weekly ‘to confess their faults one to another’ and to pray for healing.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 56. As this was the first society to be specifically under Wesley’s leadership and care it was the first distinctly Methodist society.

²¹ Baker, "Polity", 221; *Societies*, 10.

²² Baker, "Polity", 220.

²³ *Societies*, 10; Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 106. This was in December 1739. The Fetter Lane society had come under the influence of a Moravian called Molthe, who argued that the means of grace were unnecessary for people of grace, and advocated ‘stillness’.

²⁴ *J & D*, 19: 163.

Arminian beliefs caused him always to emphasise God's *universal* love and salvation.²⁵ With other evangelicals he accepted the doctrine of original sin and the atonement and divinity of Christ, stressing also the importance of the Bible, and the need for the gospel to be actively expressed.²⁶ However, Wesley maintained that at conversion an individual was not only justified by faith,²⁷ but would receive an *assurance* of God's love and forgiveness.²⁸ Furthermore, he held that a new believer began a process of sanctification,²⁹ and that the state of Christian perfection or holiness was fully attainable, even in the present life.³⁰ Whilst the latter doctrine was always a controversial aspect of Wesley's teaching,³¹ this emphasis on *continuing* spiritual growth was a hallmark of Wesleyan spirituality. It shaped the lives and outlook of the movement's members, and also influenced the pattern of the personal accounts of their lives.³²

The ethos and organisation of the growing network of United Societies also reflected Wesley's convictions. The wide conditions for membership, for example, were indicative of his Arminian stance. No prior denominational allegiance was required, and Wesley's societies were open to individuals of *both* sexes who simply expressed 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins'.³³ The structure of the societies at local level and the disciplines enjoined upon the members were intended firstly to facilitate a personal relationship with God through Jesus that was a *living* experience, and secondly to assist the development of further personal holiness.³⁴ Under Wesley's leadership or 'in connexion' with him, the United Societies operated as religious societies *within* the Established Church. By living in strict obedience to the rules of the Society, and *in conjunction* with constant attendance on the sacraments and services of the Established Church, Wesley hoped members would be able develop their full spiritual potential: an individual regeneration that would lead to further

²⁵ On Methodist doctrine generally see R. E. Davies, "The People called Methodists: 1. 'Our Doctrines'", in *HMCGB*, 1: 145–79. Wesley followed the Dutch theologian, Arminius (1560-1609), who challenged the Calvinist view that only God's 'elect' would find salvation. Hence his title for the first Methodist periodical: the *Arminian Magazine: AM 1* (1778).

²⁶ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Britain. A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, 1989, 3d ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), 2–17.

²⁷ See Wesley's sermon: "Justification by Faith", *Sermons*, 1: 181–99.

²⁸ See Wesley's sermons: "The Witness of the Spirit I", *Sermons*, 1: 267–284 and "The Witness of the Spirit II", *Sermons*, 1: 285–298.

²⁹ *Sermons*, 2: 97; Davies, "Doctrines", 167. In Wesley's view justification, or '...what God does for us through his Son' is accompanied by sanctification, or 'what he works in us by His Spirit.'

³⁰ See Wesley's sermon on "Christian Perfection", *Sermons*, 2: 97–124.

³¹ Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 1989, 3d ed.

(London: Epworth Press, 2002), 396–401. Holiness, Wesley believed, could be nurtured gradually through close attention to the various means of grace, but could also be granted instantaneously.

³² *Ibid.*, 422.

³³ Baker, "Polity", 221 and *Societies*, 11.

³⁴ John Lawson, "The People called Methodists: 2. 'Our Discipline'", in *HMCGB*, 1: 183–209.

spiritual renewal within the Church of England, and beyond.³⁵ The lay itinerants became essential to the fulfilment of this vision.

In practice individuals responding to field preaching would join other ‘awakened persons’, meeting in a society near to their home. Modifying the Moravian system, Wesley divided the more spiritually advanced members in each society into distinct ‘bands’ reflecting their progress in the religious life, groups that were further segregated according to age, gender and marital status.³⁶ From 1742 onwards the entire membership of each society was also allocated into ‘classes’ of about twelve people. Classes, which were not segregated and grouped members from the same neighbourhoods, gradually superseded bands to become the primary forum for personal religious development. Each week individuals met with their regular class members to share their spiritual experiences and problems under the guidance of a class leader.³⁷ All members paid class money to support the movement, and society stewards took care of this, distributing it to the poor and settling the society’s costs.³⁸

From the outset the responsibility for the admission and discipline of members rested firmly in Wesley’s hands.³⁹ In 1743 he drew up *Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies...*⁴⁰, which set out in practical terms the standards expected of members. Individuals were required to be faithful in attending society and class or band meetings, and other services central to the Methodist system, such as the lovefeast.⁴¹ They were also to avail themselves of ‘all the ordinances of God’. These included public worship, the ministry of the Word, and the Lord’s Supper. Other personal and domestic obligations were family and private

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 197; J. A. Vickers, “Documents and Source Material,” in *HMCGB*, 4: 69.

³⁶ *Works* 8: 259, and 262-4. The original *Rules of the Band Societies* were drawn up by Wesley for use in the Fetter Lane society in 1738. He further divided the ‘awakened persons’ in his United Societies, placing members who had ‘the remission of sins’ into bands. Among the latter, those who were judged to walk ‘in the light of God’ met also in the ‘select societies’.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 259 and *Societies*, 11 - 12. The idea of classes originated in February 1742 from one of the Bristol members suggesting a way to raise money to pay off the debt on the New Room, and provide more effective pastoral oversight of all the membership. Wesley soon saw its advantages for the societies as a whole.

³⁸ *Ibid.* The allowances for the itinerant preachers and their families were eventually a significant part of the expenses to be defrayed in this way.

³⁹ *Ibid.* On a visit to Newcastle in March 1743 Wesley wrote that he was ‘obliged to put away above fifty persons.’ (*J & D*, 19: 318.) To meet in class remained an obligatory requirement of membership of the Society throughout the period covered by the present study.

⁴⁰ *Works* 8: 259-261. *The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle upon Tyne, etc.*, dated 1 May 1743, was signed by both John and Charles Wesley.

⁴¹ A. Raymond George, “The People called Methodists: 4. ‘The Means of Grace’” in *HMCGB*, 1: 257 – 273. The ‘lovefeast’ was of Moravian origin and similar to the ‘agape’ fellowship meal of the primitive Church. Other services specific to the Methodist movement included the Watchnight and Covenant services.

prayer; the study of the Scriptures; and observing times of fasting or abstinence. These several elements were called ‘the means of grace’.⁴²

Members were also expected to confirm their desire for salvation by avoiding evil and by doing good. Prohibitions in the *Rules* included: profaning the name of God, Sabbath breaking, drunkenness, fighting, quarrelling, or brawling. Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation, costly apparel, and needless self-indulgence were to be avoided, as were any diversions, songs, or books, which did not lead to the knowledge or love of God.⁴³ Methodists were urged to do good by caring for the bodily and spiritual needs of their fellows, providing food or clothing, visiting or helping the sick or imprisoned, and ‘instructing, reproofing, or exhorting’ all they had intercourse with.⁴⁴ In particular they were called to support those ‘... of the household of faith’, in matters of employment, buying and selling and other business. Personal virtues enjoined upon all members included: diligence, frugality, patience, self-denial, and accepting reproach or suffering for the sake of the Lord.⁴⁵

These rules are clearly of great significance to the current investigation, for they became an integral part of the lives of the women who married the itinerant preachers both before and after marriage. The standard set here was the yardstick for these women’s personal spiritual practices, their outlook on life, and their conduct. As married women and the partners of itinerants they were expected to uphold such ideals rigorously and inculcate the same values in Methodist support of their husbands help to inculcate these ideals in other Methodist members.

Wesley’s acceptance of lay preaching and the first itinerant preachers

Wesley delegated a certain amount of responsibility to lay individuals almost from the beginning of the United Societies, choosing leaders for the bands and stewards. Among the societies he also allowed individuals to encourage the members ‘either by reading to them, or by prayer, or by exhortation’.⁴⁶ There was a new development in the spring of 1741 when Wesley learnt that one of the band leaders and exhorters at the Foundery, Thomas Maxfield, had ‘turned

⁴² *Ibid.* The means of grace included devotions described by Wesley as the ‘instituted means’: prayer; (public, private, family), studying the Scriptures (reading, meditating, and hearing), the Lord’s Supper, fasting, and Christian Conference, and those elements specific to the Methodist system, which Wesley designated ‘the prudential means of grace’.

⁴³ *Societies*, 71.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ G. Milburn, and M. Batty, eds., *Workaday Preachers. The Story of Methodist Local Preaching* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1995),12.

Preacher.’⁴⁷ Intending to censure him, Wesley was first advised by his mother, who suggested that he should hear Maxfield for himself and consider the ‘fruits’ of his preaching.⁴⁸ As a result Wesley decided that Maxfield did have a valid calling, concluding: ‘It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.’⁴⁹ Maxfield, and two other society members, Thomas Richards, and Thomas Westall became the first of Wesley’s first full-time lay preachers.⁵⁰ At the first Conference in 1744 an important precedent was set when four of these preachers were invited to join Wesley and other ordained ministers in their deliberations.⁵¹

It is now recognised that the dynamics of the revival, and the independent work of many individuals both lay, and ordained, led to the Methodist movement developing in a diversity of ways in different parts of the country.⁵² Gradually groups of societies owing their origins to a number of freelance evangelists also came under Wesley’s leadership. From 1746, a number of viable preaching routes were organised to cover existing societies: these ‘rounds’ became known as *circuits*.⁵³ By 1749 Wesley also began to see the advantage of a more general unity, and began to collect details regarding membership, and run other organisational matters centrally from London.⁵⁴ Thus the individual societies, formerly ‘in connexion’ with Wesley were gradually melded into a more cohesive network, and the term *connexion* found common usage as a description of the United Society as a whole.⁵⁵

As the societies grew the use of laymen as preachers became a matter of some necessity and with Wesley’s approval, some of his helpers also began to itinerate. Thus a new division arose. In 1747, there were sixty-one lay preachers of which thirty-eight men were said to ‘assist us in one place.’⁵⁶ The latter became known as *local preachers*. In the early decades of the movement there was significant fluidity between these two roles, and until 1769 it was also

⁴⁷ Frank Baker, “Thomas Maxfield’s first sermon”, *PWHS* 27 (1949–50): 7–15. The precise date is not known, although Baker suggests from the sources available that the most likely dates are 21 Jan. 1741 or 26 March 1741.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 8. By this time Susanna Wesley was living in part of the premises at the Foundery. She is reported to have said: ‘John, you know what my sentiments have been. You cannot suspect me of favouring readily anything of this kind. But take care what you do with respect to that young man; for he is as surely called of God to preach, as you are.’

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7; *EMP* 1: xi; *J & D*, 19: 186.

⁵¹ W. L. Doughty, *John Wesley: His Conferences and His Preachers* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), 1–16.

⁵² For a full, but fairly condensed summary see Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 213 – 250.

⁵³ Baker, “Polity”, 231.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁵⁶ Baker, “Polity”, 237.

possible to be a ‘half-itinerant’, that is a preacher who travelled but also engaged in some form of additional business.⁵⁷

Most of those who became itinerant preachers worked their way up to this position gradually, by being a leader of a class or band, and perhaps exhorting those gathered at a society meeting or lovefeast.⁵⁸ The difference between these actions and preaching was to ‘take a text’. Thomas Rankin, for example described his first attempt:

I went with one of the local preachers, and supplied his place on the Sabbath. I had occasionally given an exhortation before, but had never ventured to take a text till this day; so that was the first sermon I ever preached.⁵⁹

Those sanctioned for such work were chosen carefully. From 1746 all prospective preachers faced an examination to establish proof of their ‘gifts and grace’.⁶⁰ The necessary gifts included sound understanding, especially with regard to the doctrine of justification by faith, and ability for clear speech and expression. A trial sermon might be given, and some evidence of the ‘success’ of the individual sought from the local society and any of the preacher’s converts.⁶¹ Those accepted for the itinerancy, many of whom had experience as local preachers, served a probationary period *on trial*.⁶² If completing this successfully they were then received into *full connexion*.⁶³

Even in the early days of the movement there were married men among Wesley’s itinerants, but he showed little sympathy for the particular needs of these individuals or their partners. After his own marriage Wesley wrote: ‘I cannot understand how a Methodist preacher can answer it to God, to preach one sermon, or travel one day less, in a married than in a single state.’⁶⁴ For such men, Wesley went on: ‘...it remaineth that they who have wives be as though they have none.’⁶⁵ It seems that, in Wesley’s eyes, being ‘set apart’ for the work of the revival precluded regular family life. Though many of the early married preachers did comply with his wishes and travelled without their wives, this was not a policy that could be sustained for long.

⁵⁷ On local preachers see Milburn, and Batty, eds., *Workaday Preachers*; on the latter point see John Lenton, *"My Sons in the Gospel": An Analysis of Wesley's Itinerant Preachers*. (Loughborough: Wesley Historical Society, 2000), 8.

⁵⁸ See the later careers of Joseph Entwisle and William Leach, described in chapters nine and ten.

⁵⁹ *EMP* 5: 65.

⁶⁰ Baker, "Polity," 237; *Societies*, 19; Vickers, "Documents", 87;

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Lawson, "Discipline", 128. This was initially a minimum of one year, which could be extended. From 1784 the period was four years.

⁶³ Many accepted as itinerants began work in their home circuit, as they could then easily return to prior employment if any problems arose. See Lenton, *"Sons,"* 22.

⁶⁴ *J & D*, entry dated 19 March 1751.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Wesley is quoting 1 Cor. 7: 29.

Meanwhile, whether married or single, the travelling preachers were expected to conform to a demanding standard, in addition to observing the general rules of the Society.

The Rules Governing an Itinerant Life

The *Rules of a Helper* (1744) identified the personal qualities required of an itinerant.⁶⁶ These included diligence, seriousness, and punctuality.⁶⁷ The preachers were to believe the best of everyone, and speak evil of none.⁶⁸ They were urged to be ready to serve all, and to be ashamed of nothing but sin.⁶⁹ Initially the travelling preachers were allowed to accept gifts in kind in support of their work, but were warned to take ‘no money of [sic] anyone’.⁷⁰ They were cautioned to contract no debt without Wesley’s knowledge.⁷¹ The required standard was summarised thus: ‘Act in all things not according to your own will, but as a son in the Gospel.’⁷² An extra rule was added later, which stressed: ‘You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go not only to those who want you but to those who want you most.’⁷³

Rule three set out the expected standard of behaviour towards women and thus has a particular relevance to the present study. The initial edition of the *Rules* in 1744 contained a very blunt command, warning: ‘Touch no woman: be as loving as you will, but hold your hands off ’em. [sic] Custom is nothing to us.’⁷⁴ Nine years later, however, the tone was much less abrasive, advising: ‘Converse sparingly and cautiously with women.’⁷⁵ Subsequent editions added ‘... particularly young women in private’, but from 1780 onwards the words: ‘in private’ were omitted.⁷⁶ From this it seems clear that by the latter period it was not considered appropriate for Methodist preachers to be alone with young women in *any* situation.

⁶⁶ Vickers, “Documents”, 116–119 gives the 1744, and 1753 versions of the *Rules of a Helper*. Later editions are discussed in G. Latham, “The Twelve Rules of a Helper”, *WHS* 7 (Dec. 1909): 82 – 84.

⁶⁷ Vickers, “Documents”, 116–119, rules one, two and eleven.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, rules four and five.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, rules seven and eight.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* The full rule stated: ‘Take no money of [sic] anyone. If they give you food when you are hungry, or clothes when you need them, it is good. But not silver or gold. Let there be no pretence to say, we grow rich by the Gospel.’

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, rule ten. Both the latter rules were subsequently dropped and in 1752 it was agreed that every itinerant should have a yearly allowance of twelve pounds for necessities. See the discussion below.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 118.

⁷³ *Ibid.* This was added in 1745.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 117. It is noticeable that this initial version is absent from Latham’s summary of the different changes.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Latham, “Twelve Rules”, 82. The last three editions were published in 1780, 1789 and 1797.

Although Wesley preferred his itinerants to be single, by 1753 an extra rule was inserted concerning possible marriage plans,⁷⁷ stressing that any thoughts on the subject should be disclosed to the Wesley brothers. The rule cautioned: ‘Take no step towards marriage without acquainting us.’⁷⁸ By 1780, however, some wider discussion is suggested, with a revision stating: ‘without consulting with your brethren’. Interestingly, the last edition of the *Rules*, revised in 1797 after Wesley’s death, is the only one to mention any supernatural guidance on such important matters. This rule read: ‘Take no step towards marriage without solemn prayer to God and consulting with your brethren.’ The obligation to engage in prayer *first* was therefore the *last* modification to be made.⁷⁹

On a day-to-day level the preachers’ activities and responsibilities were carefully regulated. They were instructed to rise at four in the morning and to allot specific periods throughout the day for personal devotions and study.⁸⁰ Their duties included preaching morning and evening, holding weekly society and band group meetings, and visiting the classes. They had the power to re-admit the disorderly and to place any newcomers ‘on trial’. In addition, with the leaders and stewards, they were charged with overlooking society accounts.⁸¹ Wesley’s own writings formed the basis for Methodist doctrine.⁸² Whilst the itinerants’ evangelism was organised through a local preaching plan,⁸³ firm guidance was given regarding the practicalities of this work. Serious deportment was advocated and a plain text suited to the congregation. The preachers were warned against allegory or over-spiritualization in their discourses, and further cautioned to: ‘sing no hymns of your own composition.’⁸⁴

In many respects the itinerants under Wesley resembled the Old Testament prophets or preachers, calling sinners to repentance, and endowed with authority to discipline and stimulate existing believers. The latter aspects of their role were necessary, argues John Kent, because of the nature of the Wesleyan approach. It was a truly innovatory system, he suggests, in which the ‘perfected Wesleyan’

... was to live and work in the ordinary world without allowing his relation to God to be corrupted by civil society; he would attain the goal of Christian holiness within the

⁷⁷ Vickers, “Documents”, 117. Rule four.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Latham, “Twelve Rules”, 82 – 3.

⁸⁰ Vickers, “Documents”, 84-5. More discussion of the study plan set out for the travelling preachers follows in chapter six below.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 70. These obligations of office for an Assistant were decided at the 1744 Conference.

⁸² Baker, “Polity”, 243 and 249. Methodist doctrine and discipline was laid down in the *Large Minutes*, which travelling preachers read and agreed to prior to going on trial. Doctrinal texts included Wesley’s *Sermons*, *Notes on the New Testament* and other works such as *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1743) and *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1745).

⁸³ Milburn and Batty, *Workaday*, 143.

⁸⁴ Vickers, “Documents”, 87.

Wesleyan Society but without withdrawing from the world. The obvious danger ... was complacency, an individual or collective failure in self – criticism.⁸⁵

In this, Kent argues, the itinerant had a crucial role, acting as the ‘pastoral critic’ of local Methodist communities.⁸⁶ This involved not only watching over the religious development of the members, but, as Wesley’s representatives, taking corrective action when behaviour was inconsistent with the Society’s rules.⁸⁷ How important therefore, that the itinerants, and later their wives, should not fall short of the Society’s standards *themselves*, and should exhibit and uphold the prevailing rules to a high degree.

As the foregoing details demonstrate, the time and talents of the travelling preachers were firmly prescribed. Moreover, Wesley expected absolute obedience from his itinerants drawing up a covenant for them to sign.⁸⁸ His strict oversight was maintained through the yearly Conference, a gathering of his helpers and ordained ministers, where the movement’s policies were laid down.⁸⁹ At this time all the itinerants were re-examined to confirm their continuing fitness for the work. Serving preachers were then appointed or *stationed* to their appointments for the forthcoming year, some being designated to the post of Assistant.⁹⁰ Thus, not only the limits of the itinerants’ daily labour but their geographical location became subject to the will of the Conference. This was clearly signalled in the last *Rule of a Helper* in 1753, which stated:

Above all if you labour with us in the Lord’s vineyard, it is needful that you should do that part of the work which the Conference shall advise at those *times* and *places* which they shall judge most for His glory.⁹¹ [My emphasis]

This was the exacting standard of discipline that all the itinerants accepted upon their appointment. For preachers who were married, however, such heavy responsibilities were not simply a personal concern. The demands placed upon them also shaped the daily experience of their wives and families. As the discussion below now illustrates, though the women who married itinerant preachers never had to sign a covenant with Wesley or later leaders, in terms of the payment and deployment of their husbands and other practicalities of their daily existence, the decisions of the Methodist Conference also ruled *their* lives.

⁸⁵ John Kent, “The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849”, in *HMCGB*, 2: 270.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, and Lawson, “Discipline”, 198.

⁸⁸ Lloyd, *Payment*, 7 and Baker, “Polity”, 243.

⁸⁹ Vickers, “Documents”, 67. The first decision made by the six ordained clergy meeting to confer with Wesley in 1744 was to include the four lay preachers present, and to include them in all subsequent proceedings. On the Conference see Baker, “Polity”, 244-5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 240. The term *Assistant* was first used to describe the lay itinerants and then referred to the preacher in charge of a circuit. After Wesley’s death the term used was the *Superintendent* of the circuit.

⁹¹ Vickers, “Documents”, 118-19.

Financial support for the travelling preachers and their wives

For the women in the study as well as for their husbands the Methodist itinerant system entailed a life of continuous change and frequent privations. In fact the only certain feature of this way of life appears to have been its uncertainty. High on the list of factors causing particular problems was financial instability. The Methodist approach to funding the movement's itinerant preachers developed in a haphazard fashion. As late as 1753, Wesley declared 'We have barely the first outlines of a plan with regard to temporals'.⁹² In the early years of the movement the travelling preachers were afforded no regular financial support from the Society, although, as suggested earlier, they were allowed to accept gifts in kind.⁹³ In consequence many men were forced to maintain themselves largely from their own savings and some even peddled goods to survive. Whilst other individuals were lucky enough to have an existing pension or even 'a share in a ship', such ad hoc arrangements were soon recognised as impractical. In 1752, therefore, an allowance was fixed for the preachers of twelve pounds a year.⁹⁴

At the same time Conference discussed hardships faced by the itinerants' wives. In fact regulations were in place for local assessments of the requirements of the women, and for these to be funded 'out of the common stock'.⁹⁵ However in 1752 Conference decided to provide maintenance for any wife in need to the tune of ten pounds yearly with an additional allowance for children.⁹⁶ The key words were 'in need', for this could only be claimed by preachers who had no other means of support. Further limitations were imposed the following year. Such financial support was *not* to be available for any itinerant who wed without the approval of his brethren. Moreover, if a man *had* consulted with his colleagues, but had married a wife with no personal financial means there would be no support forthcoming. Any itinerant in these circumstances would be required to 'return to his temporal business and so commence a Local Preacher'.⁹⁷ From this it is clear that prospective partners of the itinerants were required to possess not only *spiritual* qualities, but also *temporal* assets.

As reported earlier, the financial support for the preachers and their families came from the local members of societies, drawn from the class money collected each week. In newly

⁹² A. Kingsley Lloyd, *The Labourer's Hire: The Payment and Deployment of the Early Methodist Preachers, 1744 - 1813* (Bunbury, Cheshire: Wesley Historical Society, 1987), 9.

⁹³ See the above discussion of the *Rules of a Helper*.

⁹⁴ Lloyd, *Payment*, 10-13; Baker, "Polity", 233-35.

⁹⁵ Lloyd, *Payment*, 19. From 1749 onwards Wesley had instructed all Assistants to assess such needs at Quarterly meetings and stewards were told to give them priority.

⁹⁶ Baker, "Polity", 234; Lloyd, *Payment*, 20.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

formed societies, thinly populated areas, or places where Methodist membership was low, such funds were often difficult to find.⁹⁸ Not surprisingly, in some circuits there was a great reluctance to accept married preachers because of the extra expense entailed. While the people generally admitted the need to support the itinerants, the extra provision for their wives and families was seen as an added and unfair imposition.⁹⁹ A partial solution was offered from 1769. Conference set a fixed allowance for wives at ten pounds per annum and agreed that any deficit in individual circuits would be made up by the Connexion as a whole. However, this left the more prosperous circuits subsidizing the poorer ones. In practice a bizarre situation arose where some circuits were funding ‘half a wife’. Moreover, this system did not extend to allowances for children, which continued to be the responsibility of the circuit in which their fathers were travelling.¹⁰⁰

By 1780, when at least a quarter of the travelling preachers were married, the problem of providing for over forty wives was even more acute. Despite a decision to accept no further married men ‘unless in defect of single preachers’,¹⁰¹ the Connexion still faced continuous deficits, and various connexional funds were raided.¹⁰² As late as 1788, Wesley called for more support for the preachers’ wives in particular, as many circuits claimed to be unable to contribute to their allowances.¹⁰³ The situation worsened as the 1790s wore on, being greatly exacerbated by the ongoing economic recession.¹⁰⁴ By 1795, the deficit between the allowances that were due to preachers’ wives and children and the money actually raised by circuits was £1,048.¹⁰⁵ Three years later, Conference noted that eighty-four, out of the total of 116 circuits, were *unable* to raise the required amount.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁹ Baker, “Polity”, 235. In fact some protests were made. In 1765, for example, some of the York stewards travelled to the Manchester Conference specifically to protest.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Lloyd, *Payment*, 22-3.

¹⁰¹ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 276; Lloyd, *Payment*, 23.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 22. Money was hived off from the Preachers’ Fund, the Contingent Fund and even the Book Room at this time.

¹⁰³ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 299; Lloyd, *Payment*, 20. Lloyd suggests that stewards looked with ‘an evil eye’ on married preachers.

¹⁰⁴ This was a period when unemployment rose, and the cost of provisions soared. See, for example, John Baxter, “The Great Yorkshire Revival, 1792 – 6”, in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* ed. Michael Hill (London: SCM Press, 1974), 61 and 66. An analysis of steeply rising bread prices in the period 1790-1804 is provided in Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1982), 392.

¹⁰⁵ M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 241.

¹⁰⁶ *MM* 24 (1801): 370.

An address in the *Methodist Magazine* of 1801 reported that the connexion was in debt to the sum of £2,000.¹⁰⁷ In the same issue, letters received from those who had received payments from the Preachers' Friend Society, gave graphic accounts of the hardship suffered by the itinerants and their families. A regular refrain was that local Methodist members were willing to support the ministers, but too poor, and the very high cost of even basic provisions was stressed.¹⁰⁸ Most importantly, such documents demonstrate that as the preachers were travelling around their circuits, the heaviest burden of managing the family budget fell on their wives at home. In a touching example, one man wrote of his spouse's tears 'on reviewing the disproportion of our Income and Expenditure' noting that this was *after* she had made significant sacrifices to curtail expenses '... by lopping off Butter, Sugar, Wheat Flour etc ...'¹⁰⁹ Other letters in the report of the following year also reveal the strain and ill health of family members resulting from an increasingly meagre diet.¹¹⁰

The same edition of the *Magazine* set out the standard allowances set for preachers and their families at this time. A married itinerant with one child was allowed thirty-four pounds to maintain his household. This excluded board and lodging payments and the cost of fuel.¹¹¹ As all itinerant preachers were expected to contribute an annual guinea to their pension fund, the total rate for the whole household was less than thirty-three pounds. Whilst the problem of providing sufficient allowances for the preachers and their families became a key issue in later discussions about ministerial status, the pressing difficulties faced by families were not finally alleviated until later in the nineteenth century.¹¹²

The deployment of the travelling preachers

Wesley's commitment to the principle of itinerancy derived from a belief that the experience of a range of preaching talents would prevent torpor and thus benefit the spiritual welfare of the people.¹¹³ However the movement's circuit system also involved regular periods of uncertainty for the preachers' wives regarding *where* their husbands would be in service and

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* This was despite the fact that the preachers themselves had subscribed over £200, some had foregone their wives' allowances, and others had given credit to the tune of £1,200.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 366-8. The Preachers' Friend Society was a benevolent fund for the relief of itinerant preachers set up in 1799.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 367-8.

¹¹⁰ *MM* 25 (1802): 334-41.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* The total (£34) was made up of the Preacher's allowance of £12, that of his wife, £10 and a child £4. By this time it was also accepted that the household would include a servant, whose allowance was £8.

¹¹² My research has not been able to uncover any detailed study of the financial situation of the itinerants during the nineteenth century.

¹¹³ Baker, "Polity", 230.

for *how long*. As the ministerial year within Methodism ran from September to August, the annual Conference in July was a pivotal point for all itinerants and their families. At this time the men learnt of their next appointments and for those changing circuits a busy time ensued. On return to their existing places it was necessary to pack up and make removal plans to be ready in the next circuit to take up office in September. As can be imagined, for the itinerants and their wives, these were stressful seasons.

During Wesley's lifetime the final decision regarding which itinerant went where rested with him alone. Writing in 1780, he made this point clear, declaring: 'It is I, not the Conference... that station the Preachers; but I do it at the time of the Conference that I may have the advice of my brethren.'¹¹⁴ After Wesley's death, a Stationing Committee was set up by the Conference to undertake the same task. In the early nineteenth century it became possible to argue for a particular move, and for those men who were popular preachers there might be several offers of appointments from circuit stewards or trustees. However, personal preferences or the wishes of other lay officials were always subject to the will of Conference.¹¹⁵ Moreover, even at a late stage unexpected changes or last minute substitutions could take place: elements that added to the anxieties and upheaval of these periods.¹¹⁶

The permitted *duration* of the itinerants' service in each posting lengthened over the period of the present study. In the early years of the movement, for example, travelling preachers changed circuits several times a year. By the 1760s, however, annual appointments had become the norm. In 1784, Wesley's *Deed of Declaration* extended the permitted time in any appointment to a maximum of three years, but a biennial term of office was most common until the nineteenth century.¹¹⁷ This meant that preachers' wives in the earlier decades of the movement underwent many annual removals.¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, despite the gradual introduction of longer postings, their nineteenth century counterparts were still likely to face numerous changes of habitation.¹¹⁹ In addition, travelling from place to place, especially in the era before rail travel, often involved long and difficult journeys for the preachers' wives. Mrs Elizabeth

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 251.

¹¹⁵ See the later discussion of William Leach's posting in Halifax in 1811 in chapter ten.

¹¹⁶ This is amply demonstrated by Joseph Entwistle's unexpected move to Colne in 1792. See chapter nine below.

¹¹⁷ Baker, "Polity," 232.

¹¹⁸ As shown in chapter eight, Elizabeth Murlin, (1710-1786 *m* 1762) [2]; and Ann Taylor (? – 1810 *m* 1767) [14] undertook many annual removals.

¹¹⁹ To take one example, Ann Leach (1783-1863 *m* 1806) [65] accompanied her husband to seventeen different circuits between her marriage in 1806 and William's retirement in 1841. See chapters eight and ten below.

Rosser, for example, went from Aberdeen to Maidstone, Kent in one circuit change in 1837.¹²⁰ Such journeys were particularly trying for women close to, or recovering from childbirth, and their offspring. Going from Ripon in Yorkshire to Bristol in 1801, Sarah Stevens and her husband spent the journey of two hundred and thirty miles riding ‘six in the same chaise’.¹²¹ Sarah’s discomfort at this time was greatly compounded by being ‘near [to] her confinement.’¹²²

Quite apart from the physical disruption that these moves between circuits entailed, there was also the regular upset of leaving friends and a familiar situation and decamping to a totally new and unknown environment. Jonathan Crowther described how after each Conference the preachers had to travel many miles back to their families and then:

... pack up their little matters, bid farewell to their friends, and late neighbours, and depart; in some few cases, to circuits they know but little about, and among people who give them no very hearty welcome. But in most places they meet with an affectionate reception.¹²³

In inhospitable circuits, or other difficult circumstances, perhaps the departure from a particular circuit would be quite welcome.¹²⁴ In general, however, it would appear that the regular upheavals demanded by the circuit system exerted a heavy emotional and physical toll upon the travelling preachers and their wives.

The practicalities of circuit life

Having arrived in a particular posting the itinerants then followed the requirements of their given preaching plan. Attending to this schedule they spent little time at home. Circuits were very large initially. In 1746 of the seven circuits listed, the final one was ‘Wales’.¹²⁵ Throughout the eighteenth century the number of circuits gradually increased with a corresponding *decrease* in the geographical area that they covered. Thus by 1762 there were thirty circuits, which were now served by a hundred itinerants,¹²⁶ whilst at the time of Wesley’s death in 1791 the total number circuits had almost quadrupled.¹²⁷ In his autobiography, Thomas Taylor described this process of change, noting how he divided the Keighley circuit in 1776

¹²⁰ William Hill, ed., *An Alphabetical and Chronological Arrangement of the Wesleyan Methodist Ministers and Preachers on Trial in Connexion with the British and Irish Conferences* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Conference, 1872). Elizabeth Rosser (1787-1867 m 1819) [72].

¹²¹ *MM*, 43 (1820): 130. Sarah Stevens (1770-1817 m 1789) [28].

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Lloyd, *Payment*, 17.

¹²⁴ See, for example, the correspondence about the Bramley circuit in chapter ten below.

¹²⁵ Vickers, “Documents,” 80. The other circuits given at the 1746 Conference were: London, Bristol, Cornwall, Evesham, Yorkshire, and Newcastle.

¹²⁶ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 216.

¹²⁷ Baker, “Polity,” 232. A total of 114 circuits existed in Britain, and this included 27 circuits in Ireland.

‘into two very compact rounds’.¹²⁸ By making Colne and the societies surrounding it into a separate circuit, Taylor remarked, ‘both the circuits are become very agreeable.’¹²⁹ However, even ten years later the preaching plan still entailed a round journey of 231 miles.¹³⁰ Little wonder, then, that one of the later rules stressed the need to attend carefully to the health and welfare of the preacher’s horse.¹³¹

Coping with their husbands’ long absences was a particular challenge for the preachers’ wives. They had their households and families to manage without the support of their partners, and other difficulties or emergencies might arise. Within the connexion as a whole certain circuits became unpopular because of their size or the difficulty of the terrain,¹³² but more concentrated urban areas could still prove arduous.¹³³ Though the itinerants’ workload was partially determined by the size of their circuit, other factors such as the frequency of preaching engagements, the membership levels in the circuit, and number of societies served, also affected their husbands’ opportunities of being at home. An itinerant’s status in a particular circuit was another important issue. Those appointed to the post of Assistant, for example, bore even more responsibilities.¹³⁴

Accommodation for the travelling preachers and their families

The standard of accommodation being offered for the itinerants and their families altered substantially over time. Initially the preachers and their wives were allocated housing in lodgings of some sort. Gradually, however, accommodation for the preachers began to be provided in, or even, as in the case of Halifax, *under* the chapel.¹³⁵ By 1776 the rule was made to provide suitable dwelling space whenever a new preaching-house was built.¹³⁶ However, this arrangement seems to have been seen as an open door invitation for some members. One complaint raised at Conference was that ‘...people crowd into the Preachers’ houses, as into coffee-houses, without invitation. Is this right?’¹³⁷ About this time different circuits began to

¹²⁸ *EMP* 5: 47.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Lenten, *Sons*, 28. This was covered over six weeks, and repeated eight times a year. Lenten suggests that an itinerant stationed in Colne at this time would travel a total of 1,808 miles annually.

¹³¹ *Works*, 8: 305. Rule 21 stated: ‘Be merciful to your beast. Not only ride moderately, but see with your own eyes that your horse be rubbed, fed, and bedded.’

¹³² *EC*, 48-52. Letters here, written in 1820, complain about the laborious work in the Hexham circuit.

¹³³ *WMM*, 71 (1848): 366. In the Manchester circuit of 1803, for example, one newly-arrived preacher found that there was ‘excessive’ labour due to the size of the town, the scattered membership, and need to support the sick and dying in conditions that were often dire.

¹³⁴ Baker, ‘Polity’, 231.

¹³⁵ Leslie F. Church, *The Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth, 1949), 73.

¹³⁶ *Works*, 8: 319.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 320.

build *separate* housing for the preachers. Alexander Mather, for example, notes the building of such accommodation in the Colne Circuit as early as 1777.¹³⁸ What was provided *in* the lodgings appears to have varied from place to place. On arrival in Bristol in 1801, for example, Mr and Mrs Stevens found their house to be ‘a small dirty cottage’, noting that they had ‘all the furniture to provide, and little to provide it with...’¹³⁹ The importance of looking after circuit fixtures and fittings is also stressed in several accounts.¹⁴⁰ When taking all the foregoing factors into consideration, therefore, it is plain that a preacher’s wife had a great deal to contend with. Furthermore, the standard expected of her in terms of personal, domestic, and spiritual life was always very high.

Official statements on the role and character of preachers’ wives

Whilst the above summary of the different aspects of the practical circumstances facing the preachers’ wives amply illustrates the complexity and hardships of their position, it also sheds light on the context of official statements about the desired role and attributes of such women. It is clear that as the itinerants’ spouses started accompanying their husbands into circuit life not only did their *needs* become more apparent, but they were much more visible, and quickly perceived as public figures. The first official statement passing comment on appropriate behaviours for preachers’ wives was made during the Conference of 1753 when the financial needs of these women were discussed. The question was put: ‘That the Societies may the more readily assist the married Preachers, ought their wives to be as exemplary as possible?’¹⁴¹ The following answer ran: ‘Certainly they ought. In particular, they ought never to be idle, and constantly to [sic] attend the morning preaching’.¹⁴² Thus sloth is deplored in a preacher’s wife, and zealous attendance at preaching sessions is enjoined. However, it is noteworthy too that the phrasing of the initial question infers that *only* a high standard of conduct will induce support from local Methodists.

The next reference to preachers’ wives occurred in 1776, when Conference noted a complaint that ‘sluts spoil our houses’.¹⁴³ This prompted the inclusion in the 1780 edition of the *Large Minutes* of the following rule:

¹³⁸ *EMP*, 2: 186.

¹³⁹ *MM* 43 (1820): 129. Sarah Stevens [28].

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, the account of Jane Vasey (1772-1857 *m* 1801) [62], particularly *WMM* 83 (1860): 580.

¹⁴¹ W. L. Doughty, *John Wesley: His Conferences and His Preachers* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), 60. Conference deliberations were recorded in question and answer form.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

A Preacher's wife should be a pattern of cleanliness in her person, clothes, and habitation. Let nothing slatternly be seen about her; no rags, no dirt, no litter. And she should be a pattern of industry; always at work, either for herself, her husband, or the poor. I am not willing any should live in the Orphan-House at Newcastle, or any preaching-house, who does not conform to this rule.¹⁴⁴

Cleanliness, industry, and activity were therefore additional attributes that the preachers' wives, should embody and model for others in the movement. Standards for the preachers' wives were still being discussed in 1802. Joseph Bradford denounced 'certain novelties' in the dress of the preachers' wives, arguing that some dressed 'like the vain women of the world.'¹⁴⁵ A further Conference resolution was passed which stated: 'We exhort our sisters to dress as becometh [sic] those who profess to walk with God; and we direct their husbands to use all the influences of love and piety in this behalf.'¹⁴⁶ The resolution continued: 'We insist upon it, that the Preachers set the best example in dress and every thing.'¹⁴⁷

By the latter Conference a reappraisal of female service within the movement had begun to take place.¹⁴⁸ It seems significant, therefore, that the importance of the part played by the wives of ministers as role models was being restated at this time. The point was certainly not lost on Jabez Bunting, then only a junior preacher.¹⁴⁹ Worried about a particular 'gaudy cloak' that his fiancée was fond of he wrote to remind her of her future position, telling her that '... though a private individual may be lost in the surrounding crowd, a preacher's wife is as a city on a hill that cannot be hid.'¹⁵⁰ This advice certainly underscored the public scrutiny that all such women faced.

The same theme was revisited in a singular fashion in the *Methodist Magazine* of 1819 in an article entitled 'An Essay on marriage.'¹⁵¹ Speaking of the general need to choose a pious and suitable spouse, the unnamed writer noted that this was especially the case for ministers. Reflecting on the position of the wives of such men, this commentator suggested that: 'By their union with persons of some distinction and influence, they are in a state to awaken some envy, and ill-natured remark. By their occupying a conspicuous station, they are more liable to observation than many in more common life.'¹⁵² Such factors, therefore, rendered 'it needful for [the wives] to be peculiarly circumspect and exemplary.'¹⁵³ Admitting that these women

¹⁴⁴ *Works*, 8: 319.

¹⁴⁵ Vickers, "Documents," 303.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ I discuss these developments further in chapter five below.

¹⁴⁹ See *EC*, viii. Bunting later became President of the Conference in 1820, 1828, 1836 and 1844.

¹⁵⁰ T. P. Bunting, and G. S. Rowe, eds., *The Life of Jabez Bunting DD* (Woolmer, 1887), 151.

¹⁵¹ *MM* 42 (1819): 330-7 and 405-16.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 414.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

were placed in a situation that was ‘very difficult and trying’, the writer asserted that their position, nevertheless, allowed an opportunity to ‘render themselves truly respectable and useful’.¹⁵⁴ ‘In such circumstances,’ it was argued, ‘examples of prudence, economy, order, neatness, temper, amiableness, [and] domestication, will not fail to strike and impress the minds of numbers.’¹⁵⁵

These remarks are a telling example of the way in which discussion of the position and role of preachers’ wives continued to form part of official discourse within the movement. Though perhaps not carrying the weight of a Conference decree, this article was bound to have been widely read, being published at a time when the circulation of the *Magazine* was reaching its highest level.¹⁵⁶ Like earlier statements setting out appropriate behaviour for the wives, the need for them to be ‘exemplary’ is a key point and there is emphasis on domestic virtues. Most significantly, the references to circumspection and respectability indicate that *propriety* of behaviour is now being brought to the fore.

In a further elaboration the writer explored the ways in which the character and household skills of a preacher’s wife might afford personal and *official* benefit to a minister:

Does she, by the excellency [sic] of her character reflect honour upon his choice and secure deference to his judgement? Does she, by her attention to his personal appearance, the state of his family and decorum of his children, add to his respectability and acceptance? Does she, by seasonably aiding his remembrance, contribute to the punctuality of his engagements, his visits, and his correspondence? Does she, by allowing *her husband to trust safely in her*, discharge him from secular concerns, and keep him free to pursue his work with undivided attention? Does she, by soothing him under distress, and tranquilizing him under irritation, preserve his mind in a frame favourable to reflection and study? Does she, by taking care of his health and spirits, enlarge the number, and lengthen the course of his labours?¹⁵⁷ [Author’s emphasis]

Such a female, the author concluded, ‘deserves the esteem and applause of a congregation, a neighbourhood, a country.’¹⁵⁸ Thus, the attributes and domestic capabilities identified here were necessary to support and bring honour upon members of the itinerancy, and thereby constituted a truly *public* service. Interestingly, there is no mention of any other ways in which a preacher’s wife might fulfil her personal vocation and become ‘useful’. The satisfaction of her husband’s needs is paramount. Meanwhile, the sentiments expressed above reveal as much about the way in which the itinerant preachers now perceived *themselves*, as they do about the codes of conduct being advocated for their wives. An examination of wider developments in the movement will illustrate how their role and position came to change.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 415

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ See the earlier discussion in chapter one above.

¹⁵⁷ *MM* 42 (1819): 415.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Changes affecting the movement and its preachers

As described earlier, Wesley's vision for the United Societies envisaged a radical movement for reform *within* the Established Church that would allow individuals to reach personal spiritual fulfilment, and bring about wider renewal in the Church and society at large.¹⁵⁹ However, even during Wesley's lifetime, forces were moving his societies in directions that were contrary to this grand design. Chapel-building, for example was a very significant development. Whilst Wesley noted the disparity between the new buildings and the former simple gospel message with some unease,¹⁶⁰ such edifices also introduced institutionalisation at local level, often burdening local societies with years of debt.¹⁶¹ There was a growing emphasis on congregational Sunday worship which shifted the focus in Methodist life and undermined the devotional patterns enshrined in the Society rules.¹⁶² Moreover, the constituency of local Methodist communities altered, as many drawn to the emerging chapel culture were unwilling to commit to membership of the Society.¹⁶³ Most importantly, with Methodists gathering in chapel buildings there was a very visible alternative to the parish church and thus the relationship of Wesley's societies with the Established Church and the limited nature of the itinerant ministry became contentious questions.¹⁶⁴

These issues surfaced as early as 1754, when it was found that two preachers had administered the sacrament.¹⁶⁵ In response Wesley stressed the unlawfulness of lay administration, setting out a full argument against separation from the Church.¹⁶⁶ But this policy statement was at odds with his later actions. Seeking Episcopal ordination for some lay preachers, Wesley also felt authorised to ordain individuals for America, Scotland and England.¹⁶⁷ However, despite this, he continued to stress the distinction between the offices of the preacher and the priest, urging other itinerants to be content with the former role.¹⁶⁸

¹⁵⁹ Kent, "Wesleyan Methodists", 215, and 217.

¹⁶⁰ Stuart Andrews, *Methodism and Society* (Longman, 1970), 77. On viewing the new Octagon Chapel at Norwich in 1756, for example, Wesley commented: 'How can it be thought that the old coarse gospel should find admittance here?'

¹⁶¹ Church, *Early*, chapter two.

¹⁶² Lawson, "Discipline", 197.

¹⁶³ C. D. Field, "The Social Structure of English Methodism: Eighteenth – Twentieth Centuries," *British Journal of Sociology* 28 (1977): 191. Field suggests that prior to 1900 these 'more loosely affiliated adherents... never constituted less than fifty percent of Methodist adults.' (191)

¹⁶⁴ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 191-2.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Vickers, "Documents", 119 – 120.

¹⁶⁶ *Societies*, 573. 'We cannot believe' Wesley explained, 'that all who have authority to preach have authority to administer the sacraments.' (573)

¹⁶⁷ Wesley's developing views and actions regarding ordination re discussed in A. Raymond George, "Ordination", in *HMCGB*, 2: 143-160 and A. B. Lawson, *John Wesley and the Christian Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1963), 119-124.

¹⁶⁸ Vickers, "Documents", 225.

Regarding separation from the Church, Wesley argued in 1760 that this appeared to be ‘neither lawful, expedient, or necessary.’¹⁶⁹ At the end of his life he asserted that God’s purpose in raising the Preachers called Methodists was: ‘Not to form any sect’,¹⁷⁰ and that the Methodists could not be considered Dissenters or Seceders.¹⁷¹ His fear was that ‘when the Methodists leave the Church, God will leave them.’¹⁷²

On Wesley’s death in 1791 authority for the Societies was legally vested in the Conference headed by a President. However both the itinerants and the Methodist membership were divided on how the movement should proceed.¹⁷³ ‘Church Methodists’ wanted to retain the Anglican link and have no lay administration of the sacrament. In contrast the ‘progressive’ party held that the Lord’s Supper should be available from the Methodist itinerants in societies that desired it, arguing for a total separation from the Church.¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately, these internal problems also had to be resolved during a period of wider political and social flux. Following the outbreak of the French Revolution tension was high in the country generally, and fearing renewed persecution, Methodist leaders wished to emphasise the loyalty and respectability of the movement. But the prevailing political and economic instability also fuelled radicalism among many of the artisans and labouring class from which Methodism derived much of its support.¹⁷⁵ As a result there were major challenges to the itinerants’ views regarding their own role and the way in which the Society should develop.

Writing in 1797 Joseph Entwisle reflected on the changing movement. By now, he argued, the Methodists were ‘a numerous and respectable body,’ noting that:

.... upwards of ninety thousand persons have united in Christian fellowship; and perhaps more than four times that number constantly attend preaching and approve of the doctrines they hear. Many of these are persons of fortune, respectable tradesmen, and men of good repute among their neighbours.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁹ *Societies*, 572.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 288.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 308 – 9.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 307.

¹⁷³ For the decade following Wesley’s death see especially J. C. Bowmer, *Pastor and People* (London: Epworth, 1975), chapter one; John Walsh, “Methodism at the end of the eighteenth century”, in *HMCGB*, 1: 274- 315; and David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750 - 1850* (Hutchinson, 1987), especially chapter three.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Bowmer, *Pastor and People*, 1 – 28. The former party included many of the wealthier trustees, who were nervous about change, whilst the latter group had much grass roots support.

¹⁷⁵ For longer term political and social developments see W. R. Ward, “The Religion of the People and the Problem of Control, 1790-1830”, in *Popular Belief and Practice*, eds. G. J. Cuming and D. Baker. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 237- 57, and Hempton, *Methodism*, chapters three and four.

¹⁷⁶ J. Entwisle, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwisle Fifty Four Years a Wesleyan Minister...* 1848, Eighth Edition (London: James Nichols, 1862), 59 – 60.

Suggesting increasing status and probity among the wider Methodist constituency, these words provide an indication of the movement's own assessment of itself during this crucial period.

By this time too there were grand chapel buildings in which trustees depended on pews rents and the wealthy adherents to discharge the chapel debt. The inclusion of 'free pews' however signified the distance Methodism had travelled since its inception, an indication too of greater social stratification within the chapel walls.¹⁷⁷ An indignant letter to the *Magazine* in 1817 complained about the presence of poor people at prayer meetings, saying not only that the 'proximity of the poor was unpleasant' but that the 'simple effusions' of such persons in prayer, was offensive to good taste.¹⁷⁸ Prayer meetings were a means of stimulating grass-roots revival, but as suggested here, not all such newcomers were made welcome. Indeed, at one York chapel the arrival of converts 'of the lowest order' prompted the exodus of the majority of the regular 'respectable' congregation.¹⁷⁹

Other evidence from this period indicates that the itinerants' estimation of their own position and worth was altering. In the *Magazine* of 1815, for example, one preacher argued:

A Preacher [sic] (especially in the present state of Methodism in this country) fills a respectable position in society, and he and his family are necessitated and expected to appear becoming in that station...¹⁸⁰

Detailing the requirements in the Cambridge circuit, a later writer stressed the need for 'a respectable man, rather than a good preacher.'¹⁸¹ [Author's emphasis] Such opinions were symptomatic of the itinerants' changing view of their personal ministry. In a new interpretation of their role, and defence of the principle of the 'pastoral office', the itinerants vigorously asserted their authority in the connexion, distancing themselves from the laity and especially from the local preachers.¹⁸² Their efforts to maintain control and quash unorthodoxy meant that many vibrant lay initiatives were effectively stifled.

The changing role of the itinerant preachers

In Conference debates after Wesley's death, administration of the Lord's Supper was restricted. Further ordinations were banned except in certain circumstances, and the title

¹⁷⁷ Walsh, "Eighteenth Century", 309.

¹⁷⁸ Margaret Batty, *Stages in the Development and Control of Wesleyan Lay Leadership, 1791-1878* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1988), 63 – 65 quoting *MM* 1817.

¹⁷⁹ Ward, "Religion", 244.

¹⁸⁰ Batty, *Stages*, 10.

¹⁸¹ *EC*, 80. Letter to Jabez Bunting from E. B. Lloyd dated 13 July 1821.

¹⁸² Batty, *Stages*, 249 – 52; Milburn and Batty, *Workaday*, especially chapter two.

‘Reverend’ was prohibited.¹⁸³ Though these signs of ministerial status were abandoned, in public discourse a semantic shift occurred. Through the medium of the *Magazine*,¹⁸⁴ Conference sermons,¹⁸⁵ and other writings¹⁸⁶ the word ‘minister’ or ‘pastor’ began to replace ‘preacher’ in all discussions of the itinerants’ work. In 1818 the itinerants readopted the title: ‘Reverend.’ Two years later the President, Jabez Bunting informed the itinerants that they were under ‘solemn obligations’ to conduct themselves ‘... not as the mere *Chairmen* of public Meetings, but as the *Pastors* of Christian Societies.’¹⁸⁷ [Author’s emphasis] ‘I do not believe we can be proved to be evangelists’ he later declared, ‘[our] proper office is pastors and teachers ... I believe that we are teachers to instruct and pastors to govern the people.’¹⁸⁸ Other significant moves followed. The ceremony of laying-on of hands as a visible sign of ordination, for example, became an accepted part of the service admitting preachers to ‘full connexion’ in 1836.¹⁸⁹ By this time too Conference had also accepted a recommendation for the academic training of Methodist ministers and the creation of a Theological Institute for this purpose.¹⁹⁰ Wesley’s preachers of the gospel, therefore, underwent a considerable metamorphosis. In the meantime, as W. R. Ward has also suggested, the men who once went out into the highways and hedgerows in search of the lowly and lost, had themselves become rigorous agents of social control.¹⁹¹

Tensions and divisions

The period described above also witnessed many challenges to the itinerants’ views of both their role and the way forward for the Society. Demands for more lay involvement in the movement’s governance, for example, began after Wesley’s death. They found a champion in Alexander Kilham, an itinerant who believed that the Methodists should accept a position as Dissenters, and who argued that the laity should be included in *all* aspects of policy making.¹⁹²

¹⁸³ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 312. Because of the need to baptise and administer the sacrament in stations overseas, however, preachers appointed abroad continued to be ordained. See also J. C. Bowmer, “The Ordination Service in Wesleyan Methodism, 1791-1850”, *PWHS* 39 (June 1974): 121-7.

¹⁸⁴ My own survey of the *Magazine* has revealed: “Mr Bradburn’s sermon on ‘The threefold relation of Christian Ministers’”, *MM* 17 (1794): 343, 398, and: “The Character and Encouragement of Christ’s Ministers by Mr Taylor.” *MM* 19 (1796): 527.

¹⁸⁵ Joseph Benson’s 1796 Conference sermon, for example, was on “The Character and Office of Ministers.” See *MM* 19 (1796): 527 – 580.

¹⁸⁶ Bowmer, *Pastor and People*, 59. In 1796 Jonathan Crowther wrote on *Christian Order*.

¹⁸⁷ *EVM*, 65.

¹⁸⁸ Bowmer, *Pastor and People*, 83.

¹⁸⁹ George, “Ordination”, 154.

¹⁹⁰ Dale A. Johnson, *The Changing Shape of English Nonconformity, 1825 – 1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 48 – 62.

¹⁹¹ Ward, “Religion”, 249.

¹⁹² On Alexander Kilham see *DMBI*, 191, and John T. Wilkinson, “The Rise of Other Methodist Traditions,” in *HMCGB*, 2: 280-294.

Publishing his views anonymously and then petitioning Conference, Kilham later produced *The Progress of Liberty amongst the People called Methodists*, in which he outlined a Methodist constitution based on democratic lines.¹⁹³ The work sent a wave of anxiety through the ranks of the leading preachers, particularly as the current political situation was tense. Kilham's views were examined firstly at a District meeting and then publicly at the following Conference, after which he was formally expelled.¹⁹⁴ As a result the breakaway 'Methodist New Connexion' was formed with other dissentient itinerants joining Kilham. This was Methodism's first major secession and an estimated five per cent of the membership subsequently left the mainstream movement.¹⁹⁵

During an era when the issue of public order was high on the political agenda, the Conventicle Act was still in force, and the practice of itinerant preaching was facing increasing scrutiny, the leading Methodist preachers were anxious to dissociate themselves from any varieties of evangelism that might be perceived as unorthodox or prompting civil unrest.¹⁹⁶ An upsurge of revival both in local situations and as a result of the American preacher, Lorenzo Dow caused them fresh concern. Revivals in local communities began across Yorkshire and the North West from 1794 onwards, often initiated through lay activities such as prayer and cottage meetings. In Yorkshire in particular the evangelism of a several female preachers was particularly important.¹⁹⁷ The American, Lorenzo Dow meanwhile brought the concept of 'camp meetings': large open-air revival meetings with extempore prayer and exhortation. The first of these was organized at Mow Cop in Staffordshire in 1807, and the novelty of such services had an immediate appeal for many Methodist members.¹⁹⁸

Revival, was difficult to evaluate and even harder to control, and in the contemporary political climate the Methodist leaders wanted to avoid any taint of 'Ranterism'. In 1803 Conference asked: 'Should women be permitted to preach among us?'¹⁹⁹ It was decided: 'We

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 280-85; Hempton, *Methodism*, 66 and 68 – 71. Kilham's 1795 petition was entitled: *An Earnest Address to the Preachers assembled at Conference*. It urged separation from the Church, the ordination of Methodist preachers, and the administration of the sacrament in Methodist chapels..

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 69-71; Wilkinson, "Rise," 285-7.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 289. The constitution of the New Connexion placed governance jointly in the hands of laymen and itinerants.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 306. These were the years leading to Sidmouth's 1811 Bill attempting to curtail itinerant preaching,

¹⁹⁷ Baxter, "Yorkshire Revival," *passim*. I discuss Wesley's gradual acceptance of female preaching in chapter five below. The work of female preachers such as Ann Cutler and Mary Barritt is discussed in *ibid.*, and in Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (New Jersey and London: American Theological Library Association, 1991) 225-232.

¹⁹⁸ Wilkinson, "Rise", 306; Hempton, *Methodism*, 92 – 96. Lorenzo Dow arrived in England in 1805 bringing news of the American Camp Meeting movement, and the first camp meeting took place on 31 May 1807.

¹⁹⁹ Chilcote, *Wesley and Women Preachers*, 236.

are of the opinion that in general they ought not. But if any woman among us think she has an extraordinary call from God to speak in public ... she should ... address her *own sex*, and *those only*.²⁰⁰ [Author's emphasis] The resolution went on to specify exact terms under which, even this limited work could proceed.²⁰¹ A concern with propriety is also evident in the 1807 decision to ban camp meetings, which were held to be: '... highly improper in England, and likely to be productive of considerable mischief'²⁰² Members who continued to be involved in such assemblies faced expulsion. Two of those thus ejected from the mainstream movement were Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, who had gained considerable support. By 1812 they and their followers decided to join forces, calling themselves the 'Primitive Methodist Connexion.' As this title signifies, the leaders intended a return to the values and practices of earlier Methodist days and they continued to hold camp meetings.²⁰³

The issue of revival brought concerns regarding the appropriate aims, practices and polity of Methodism into sharper focus. Local outbreaks of revival, for example, which encouraged individual spiritual renewal were a source of potential converts but also challenged the existing formality and respectability of contemporary Methodist life.²⁰⁴ The emerging Methodist sects introduced new spiritual dynamism and an alternative flexible approach. However, as one commentator has suggested, in contrast to the Primitive Methodists, the mainstream leadership adopted the policy of 'less revivalism and more denominational drill.'²⁰⁵

The changing political scene during the early decades of the nineteenth century was one reason for a significant shift of alliances within the movement. Whereas a groundswell of opinion among the general membership had arguably influenced Conference acceptance of the *Plan of Pacification*,²⁰⁶ events such as the Luddite disturbances and Peterloo brought about a different trend. In their opposition to such lay agitation the itinerants became increasingly aligned with trustees, and other wealthier adherents: supporters that were often designated 'our respectable friends'.²⁰⁷ Most significantly for the present study, the *Magazine* became a vehicle for stressing lay obedience to Methodist discipline and endorsing the scriptural validity of this

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² Wilkinson, "Rise", 306.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 304 – 313. See also J. Kent, *Holding the Fort. Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (Epworth Press, 1978), chapter two, and Julia S. Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

²⁰⁴ Ward, "Religion", 239 – 246; Hempton, *Methodism*, 92 – 6.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁰⁶ Ward, "Religion", 246. This plan adopted by Conference in 1795 allowed a compromise on the question of the administration of the sacrament.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 246 – 9. This is a common theme in the letters to Jabez Bunting (*EC* and *EVM*).

line.²⁰⁸ In addition, from 1796 onwards a ‘Loyal Address’ to the monarchy was published every year.²⁰⁹

The latter context is helpful in understanding the dynamics of a bitter dispute in the late 1820s in Leeds. This arose when trustees and pew holders from the prestigious Brunswick Chapel petitioned Conference for the installation of an organ, contrary to the wishes of other lay officials who wanted to preserve simplicity in Methodist services. Though starting as a clash of ideas about the form and style of Wesleyan worship, a more intense struggle between the local laity and central authority developed. Despite a number of meetings upholding the lay officials’ position, the trustees’ application was upheld: a decision that actually breached existing Conference rules. A strong sense of injustice at lay level was sharpened by the involvement of Jabez Bunting in the latter turn of events. But Bunting and other leaders felt that radicalism fuelled the lay objectors, their meetings were termed ‘unlawful’, and some of the key proponents were expelled. This led to another secession, and the formation of the ‘Protestant Methodists’.²¹⁰

More disputes were to follow borne of increasing frustration with the authoritarian style of the leadership, and in particular the pervasive influence of Jabez Bunting. The 1834 committee discussing the founding of the Theological Institute for the training of Methodist ministers included Dr Samuel Warren, who had agreed with the main decision to go ahead. However he objected to the nomination of Bunting, also a committee member, as both the Institute’s President and Theological Tutor. These extra appointments, Warren felt, in addition to Bunting’s existing offices, would place too much power in the hands of one individual and therefore he published a pamphlet attacking the scheme. This open opposition resulted in Warren’s suspension from office,²¹¹ but his views won wider support, re-igniting debate about lay rights and reform of the mainstream movement. Attempts to change Conference policy through proper channels failed,²¹² and Warren was one of several preachers expelled from Conference in 1835. This stimulated the formation of another breakaway group, the ‘Wesleyan Association’, a body later known as the ‘Wesleyan Methodist Association’.²¹³

²⁰⁸ Batty, *Stages*, 249.

²⁰⁹ Hempton, *Methodism*, 70.

²¹⁰ Milburn and Batty, *Workaday*, 43.

²¹¹ Wilkinson, “Rise”, 315 – 318. He was Superintendent in the Manchester circuit at the time. Although Warren took this matter to court he lost the proceedings.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 317. When deputations from Rochdale and Manchester attempted to put the case for lay representation before Conference, for example, their address was not admitted for consideration.

²¹³ *Ibid.* 317–8. Though elected as the first President, Warren’s proposals for the constitution were defeated, and he resigned in 1837, entering the ministry of the Anglican Church.

It was against this background that the last and bitterest Methodist division began. In 1844 a series of anonymous papers entitled *Fly Sheets from a Private Correspondent* were sent to all the itinerants. Vitriolic in nature, they castigated the Methodist hierarchy, especially Jabez Bunting and his allies. A full pamphlet war ensued, with Conference publishing its own series of scurrilous articles in retaliation.²¹⁴ To try and flush out the author of the *Fly Sheets* all itinerants were required to sign a declaration abhorring the publication of this literature, confirming non-involvement in its production, but by 1849 thirty-six itinerants had still refused to sign. Suspicion among these rested chiefly upon James Everett, Samuel Dunn and William Griffith, and although their authorship of the *Fly Sheets* was never proved, all three men were expelled.²¹⁵

The expulsions caused outrage in the Methodist movement and elsewhere, condemnation of Conference appearing even in the *Times*.²¹⁶ Everett, Dunn and Griffith, meanwhile toured the country finding support both personally and for the cause of reform. Those sympathetic to their cause, however, were either expelled or seceded from societies: a process costing almost third of the total Wesleyan membership.²¹⁷ From 1850 to 1856 Conference was petitioned in the hope of reconciliation, reinstatement of ministers, and further lay rights. Faced with steadfast refusal on all three points the reformers eventually sought union with other non-Wesleyan groups under the new name of the 'United Methodist Free Churches.'²¹⁸ By the last two decades of the period under discussion in this study, therefore, the original Methodist Connexion, now identified as the 'Wesleyan Methodist Connexion' was only one of many Methodist branches in Britain.

The impact of these changes on the itinerant preachers and their wives

Whilst no document summarizes the pressure imposed upon the itinerants and their families during the tensions and divisions described above, there is no doubt that the impact was especially keen. At Conference each itinerant took part in official policy-making, being pledged to uphold the decisions thus endorsed. Once stationed in their respective circuits, however, individual preachers and their families were often very isolated. Evidence points to the long-

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* The Wesleyan answer to the *Fly Sheets* was called: *Papers on Wesleyan Matters*.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 321. The *Times* wrote that Conference had taken a step that 'smacks more of the Inquisition than a British tribunal.'

²¹⁷ Currie, et al., *Churches*, 139 – 146. This episode was called the 'Great Disruption' of 1849 – 51, in which an estimated 100, 000 members were lost. (149)

²¹⁸ Wilkinson, "Rise", 321- 3.

term pressures of acrimonious meetings²¹⁹ and the difficulty of acting as the agents of Conference's collective will.²²⁰ It was not simply the problem of maintaining Methodist discipline. In some cases the preachers themselves became the subject of abuse,²²¹ and the homes of itinerants became particular targets for opposition.²²²

Many of the subjects of the present study lived through this later period of Methodist conflict. Jane Vasey's account, for example, relates her first-hand experience of the agitation during the Kilhamite disturbances.²²³ The cohort also includes women whose husbands were leading participants in the unfolding strife,²²⁴ or had relatives who were involved.²²⁵ Evidence discussed in the later case studies suggests that such connexional difficulties did overshadow the itinerants' homes and family life. In times of tension the situation of the wives was perhaps especially difficult. Though representatives of the movement's policy makers through their marriages, as individuals they lived and worked among the people. In service as prayer leaders, Sunday school teachers, or class leaders they bridged the divide between preacher and people, with all the added tensions that this intermediary position might entail.

The preceding discussion has demonstrated the unique role and responsibilities of Methodist travelling preachers, and hence the distinctive situation encountered by their wives. Through this analysis of the practicalities of these women's lives, the expectations of Methodism's leaders, and the changes occurring in the movement a sound understanding has emerged of the challenging circumstances that these women faced, and how those in authority in the movement viewed their role. It is now time to consider the factors informing Wesley's policy statements regarding marriage and the single life with further exploration of prevailing attitudes among the Methodist preachers and members of the societies. For the subjects of the study such ideas undoubtedly shaped their perceptions of courtship and married life.

²¹⁹ See, for example, *EC*, 162 and 168.

²²⁰ *E VM*, 174 and 190. John Blackett, an itinerant stationed at Bramley in 1837 wrote: 'I can assure you I have had to stand alone in supporting Methodism in this circuit'.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 408.

²²² *Ibid.*, 35. In one case three expelled members tried to force entry into a meeting at the preacher's house and both the preacher and his wife were involved in the struggles at the door. In *EC*, 25, one preacher, Mr Holroyd reports being confronted by a crowd at his gate, brandishing pikes and threatening him with 'dreadful oaths' and 'horrid groans'.

²²³ *WMM* 83 (1860): 580. Mrs Vasey [61] had to force her way through a crowd of Kilhamite supporters outside a chapel to aid the official preacher inside, who had been seriously wounded by a brick thrown through the chapel window.

²²⁴ As reported in chapter ten, the husband of Ann Leach [65] took a strong stand on Luddism at Halifax in 1811 and was personally threatened as a result. The husband of Sarah Turton (1775-1828) [37] was superintendent of the Leeds West circuit following the Brunswick organ case, and thus in the thick of the grievances that arose from disaffected local preachers and leaders. See *EC*, 156-7 and 191-2.

²²⁵ The brother of Ann Leach [65] was one of those involved in the legal case brought by Samuel Warren.

Chapter Four: Attitudes towards Marriage within Methodism

Introduction

The preceding chapter has discussed the spiritual impetus underpinning the Methodist societies and demands of membership, illustrating the additional elements affecting the existence of the itinerant preachers' wives both practically, due to the specific role and lifestyle of their husbands, and as a result of longer term developments in the movement. The present chapter now turns to examine Methodist policy and official statements on the subject of marriage as a way of life for believers. With a further assessment of prevailing attitudes towards matrimony in society at large and among the Methodist people and their preachers the chapter will provide a necessary context for later examination of the courtship and marriage of the preachers' wives.

As Henry Rack has noted, there is a remarkably little research regarding the married lives of the early Methodists.¹ This situation seems to stem partly from the reticence that contemporary historians felt in acknowledging the peculiar view that Wesley held on marriage among the believers, and also from the dismal record of his own romantic relationships and marriage, factors that may have also resulted in the loss or even destruction of much relevant primary source material.² This lack of scholarly attention underlines the need for a thorough and thoughtful assessment in the present research, an evaluation that must begin with an understanding of Wesley's personal history and relationships and this is carried out in the present chapter.

Wesley was not only the main leader of the United Societies, but he became the primary formulator of official Methodist regulations. His influence was pervasive, being exerted through the inauguration of particular policies and pastoral arrangements, through doctrinal

¹ H. D. Rack "“But Lord, let it be Betsy!”: Love and Marriage in Early Methodism”, *PWHS* 53 (Feb 2001): 1. Other relevant studies include: Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire. John Wesley and the Methodists*. (Stanford, California: University of Stanford Press, 1990), 49 – 73; Gail Malmgreen, “Domestic Discords: Women and the Family in East Cheshire Methodism, 1750 - 1830”, in *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, edited by Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper, and Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1987), 55 – 70; Rosemary Raughter, “Women in the Household of Faith: Opportunity and Conflict in Early Irish Methodism”, *Bulletin of the Wesley Historical Society (Irish Branch)* 7 (Winter 2001), 20 –33 (I owe this latter reference to Mr D. C. Dews). A recent valuable contribution is Anna Lawrence, ““I Thought I Felt a Sinful Desire’: The Question of Celibacy for Eighteenth Century Methodists,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library Manchester* (Manchester) 85, no. 2 & 3 (2003): 177-93.

² Abelove, *Evangelist*, 51; Gareth Lloyd, ““Running After Strange Women””. An Insight into John Wesley's Troubled Marriage from a Newly Discovered Manuscript Written by his Wife”, *PWHS* 53 (May 2002): 169 – 74, especially 170.

statements made in his own sermons and writings, and through the other devotional literature that he selected and provided for the societies. Furthermore, Wesley's extensive travels and his wide correspondence gave him a *personal* link to many individuals within the movement. As later illustrations from Wesley's *Journal* and *Letters* reveal, his views on marriage matters were regularly sought.

For the itinerant preachers, the special concern of the current study, however, the Wesley brothers, and later other senior preachers, played an especially significant role in any moves towards marriage. Under the *Rules of a Helper*, any travelling preacher contemplating matrimony was obliged to consult with his brethren widely. In practice the blessing of the leadership on prospective plans was a necessary precursor to any further action. Moreover, it was not only the *suitors'* reasons and fitness for marriage that came under scrutiny at this point. Evidence shows that both Wesley and later leaders used such consultations to pass judgment on these individuals' choice of wife.

It is clear therefore, that Wesley's policies and organizational practice were not the only important means of shaping attitudes within the Methodist movement generally. His personal advice was widely sought, and in the case of the itinerant preachers in particular, Wesley's preference was often a decisive factor determining the outcome of their marriage plans. It needs to be stressed, too, that as Wesley's sermons and his other writings continued to embody Methodist doctrine, and were widely available during the nineteenth century, his influence endured far beyond his own lifetime.³ The current appraisal of Methodist policies on marriage within Methodism, therefore, needs to examine the influences that informed Wesley's later policies and actions, an investigation that must begin with a consideration of the early home life and key relationships of the Wesley brothers.

The early home life of John and Charles Wesley and its lasting influence

Most commentators agree that despite the difficulties of his personal romantic relationships with women,⁴ Wesley had a natural affinity with the female sex, and enjoyed female company.⁵ This trait was undoubtedly nurtured by the predominantly female

³ See for example, N. Virgoe, "The Yarmouth Circuit Booklist, 1806", *PWHS* 53 (Feb 2002): 127 – 136. Virgoe's list shows that copies of Wesley's *Thoughts on a Single Life, A Friendly Address to Single People*, as well as his *Sermons and Notes on the New Testament*, all texts containing instruction pertinent to marriage and family life, were circulating at this time.

⁴ I discuss these relationships in the following section.

⁵ See for example, Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, (London: Scarecrow Press, 1991), 21.

environment of his early years. By the time John and Charles were growing up their only other brother, Samuel, was away at school. As their father, Samuel Wesley senior was mostly engaged in his parish affairs as the rector at Epworth in Lincolnshire, the boys' time at home was largely spent with their seven sisters, under the keen supervision of their mother.⁶ Wesley later wrote that as a young child he had said that he would never marry because, as he explained, 'I should never find such a woman as my father had.'⁷ It is a telling remark, for undoubtedly the single most important female influence on Wesley was his mother, Susanna. Through Wesley's ministry Susanna also found wider fame, being held up as a key role model for other Methodists: a figure to emulate and revere.

Susanna Wesley had been brought up in a very different religious and cultural milieu to that of Epworth. She was born in 1669, the youngest daughter of Dr Samuel Annesley, a prominent dissenting minister, and grew up in London, where her father was pastor to a large Presbyterian congregation in Spittlefields.⁸ A devoted minister and popular preacher, Dr Annesley was also a man of wide sympathies and learning and as a result Susanna received an outstanding education for a girl of the times.⁹ Dr Annesley had been ejected from the Church in 1662, and had many friends among the leading Puritan divines.¹⁰ However, when Susanna decided to convert to the Church of England, her father accepted this decision.¹¹ He later allowed her union with Samuel Wesley, an Anglican minister who had also been raised and educated within the dissenting tradition.¹² In 1691 the couple and their first child moved to Lincolnshire, where Samuel's first parish was at South Ormsby. Only four years later Samuel was appointed as rector to the crown living of Epworth.¹³

⁶ V. H. Green, *Young Mr. Wesley* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1961), 51-3; Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* 3rd edn. (London: Epworth Press 2002), 48. Until Charles was born in 1707, John was the only boy at home with five elder sisters. These were Emilia, born 1691; Susanna (Sukey), born 1695; Mary (Molly), born 1696; Mehetabel (Hetty), born 1697; and Anne (Nancy), born 1702. Martha (Patty), and Kezia (Kezzy), were born after John, and Charles was born in 1707. On the extended Wesley family see *DMBI*, 378.

⁷ Bufford W. Coe, *John Wesley and Marriage* (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 58; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 261.

⁸ On Susanna's family and upbringing see John A. Newton, *Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1968), especially 19 – 63; and Frank Baker, "Susanna Wesley: Puritan, Parent, Pastor, Protagonist, Pattern", in Hilah F. Thomas, *et al* eds., *Women in New Worlds* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 2: 112 – 131.

⁹ Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, 19 – 63; Charles Wallace, ed, *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, 19 – 31. Richard Baxter was one of Samuel Annesley's close friends. In 1682 Dr. Annesley's house was raided and goods confiscated to pay fines for conducting nonconformist worship.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 56 – 63. At the age of twelve Susanna decided that the Church of England was the true church.

¹² Green, *Young Mr. Wesley*, 41. Samuel Wesley's father, John Westley, and his grandfather, Bartholomew Westley had also lost their livings after the Restoration. Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, 66; Baker, "Susanna Wesley", 112 – 14. The date of Susanna and Samuel's marriage was 12 November 1688.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 115; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 48.

The Lincolnshire fens at that time were geographically and culturally isolated, and Samuel Wesley, though a pious and conscientious pastor, found much hostility from his rough parishioners.¹⁴ Samuel was an innovative minister, introducing a religious society at Epworth, and being an early corresponding member of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge.¹⁵ He had also had some success as a literary scholar.¹⁶ By nature he was emotional and impractical, and although affectionate within the family circle, could also be quick tempered. Meanwhile, Samuel's lack of financial acumen led to constant money troubles for his family.¹⁷ Susanna's natural disposition was completely different to that of her husband. She was practical, resourceful and level-headed. Despite a life marked by poverty, ill health, and frequent childbearing, she managed the large household successfully.¹⁸ Maintaining a strict discipline among her offspring,¹⁹ she also educated each of her ten surviving children, beginning lessons on the child's fifth birthday.²⁰

In the winters of 1710-11 and 1711-12 Samuel's absence at Convocation left Susanna to shoulder family responsibilities,²¹ and during this time she felt a new concern for the spiritual development of those around her. In an attempt to nurture her own family she began conducting evening prayers on Sunday for her family circle. This arrangement gradually began to attract a large number of parishioners and eventually resulted in Susanna leading a more formal service.²² Hearing of the development from his curate, Samuel at first objected, but his wife stood her ground. Susanna pointed out that her actions had brought over two hundred more people into church.²³ If Samuel saw fit to disband the meetings, she informed him, he should send his '*positive command*' and thus absolve her from 'all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity of doing good' when the couple appeared 'before the great and awful tribunal

¹⁴ Green, *Young Mr. Wesley*, 41 - 60; Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, 65 - 95; and Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 45 - 50.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge had been founded in 1698.

¹⁶ On Samuel's literary productions see especially Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, 71 - 8; *DMBI*, 378 and Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* On one occasion Samuel was actually imprisoned in Lincoln gaol for debt. Though Susanna sent her rings to secure Samuel's discharge he returned them, and was eventually released due to the efforts of his bishop and friends.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50. The most recent assessment suggests that in the space of twenty years of marriage Susanna bore between seventeen and nineteen children, of which ten children survived infancy.

¹⁹ A description of Susanna's household regime and her approach to the education of her children was requested by Wesley and provided in a letter dated 24 July 1732. Here Susanna wrote that from the age of one each child learned to 'fear the rod and cry softly.' Wesley later included this letter in his *Journal*, published after his mother's death in 1742. See *J & D*, 19: 286 - 291. Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, 105 - 120 provides an extended discussion of Susanna's philosophy.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 97 - 129; *J & D*, 19: 289.

²¹ Convocation was an annual assembly of all clergy held at Canterbury and York.

²² *J & D* 19: 284; Baker, "Susanna Wesley", 121-125. This included reading the Order for Evening Prayer.

²³ *Ibid.*, 124; *J & D* 19: 285.

of our Lord Jesus Christ'. [Author's emphasis]²⁴ Her argument was evidently successful, for Samuel finally dropped his objections.²⁵ This incident demonstrates Susanna's strength of character and high principles. After her death Wesley published part of a letter from Susanna to her husband justifying her actions, and referred to his mother as 'in her measure and degree, a preacher of righteousness.'²⁶ The incident undoubtedly influenced John Wesley's approach to female ministry later in his life.

Susanna provided an important role model for her children. She was a loyal wife and faced the difficulties of her married life with courage and resilience. By dint of her structured approach she also managed the household and equipped her offspring with an exceptional education. In addition, all her daily routines and duties were underpinned by a strong pattern of personal devotions. She set regular times for meditation and prayer apart from the family, kept a spiritual journal, and examined herself strictly before taking communion.²⁷ Susanna ensured that family devotions at the Rectory included daily Bible study, and private prayers, whilst the children sang psalms before and after each day's lessons. She was also her children's first religious teacher, arranging her work to give individual attention to each child on particular days of the week. In later years John Wesley looked back on these occasions fondly, remembering his own Thursday 'appointments' as a special time.²⁸

Susanna, therefore, was an early exemplar to the Wesley brothers of a godly Christian woman, a wife and mother, who was also an able educator and spiritual guide. Her actions over the Sunday meetings demonstrate she felt other spiritual responsibilities keenly, and was able to extend and defend her wider pastoral leadership. However, whilst Susanna's example and training were of the utmost importance for the spiritual development and educational attainments of her children, most commentators agree that her methods and dominant role were inhibiting factors in her children's emotional development.²⁹ It is a matter of note that out of the whole family only Samuel, the eldest son, and Charles enjoyed happy marriages themselves.³⁰

Through the ministry of her sons, and via Methodist publications such as Wesley's *Journal* and his *Sermons*, Susanna's personal attributes and methods were recalled and upheld as worthy models for others and in this way Susanna became an iconic figure to subsequent

²⁴ Baker, "Susanna Wesley", 125.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ See *J & D* 19: 284-6. Susanna's letter is dated 6 Feb. 1711/12. (Quotation at 284).

²⁷ On the various aspects of Susanna's devotional life see Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, 131 – 158.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 122 – 3; Baker, "Susanna Wesley", 120 – 122.

²⁹ Green, *Young Mr. Wesley*, 53. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 52; Green, *Young Mr. Wesley*, 54.

generations of Methodists.³¹ For the subjects of the present study, the wives of itinerant preachers, Susanna's example was perhaps especially significant as she was also a minister's wife: a woman, who, despite tough odds, still managed to develop her own spiritual vocation. Discussion turns now to examine the romantic involvements of John Wesley and their implications for the later movement.

Wesley's developing ideas at Oxford, later attachments, and marriage

Whilst Susanna Wesley was the first significant female in her sons' lives at Epworth both brothers had also shared close and lively relationships with their sisters, and had formed friendships with other women outside the family in Lincolnshire. However, it was at Oxford that their social scene really began to widen further. Through Robert Kirkham, an Oxford friend, both brothers came to spend time with families in the Cotswold area, meeting several young women of a similar age and religious inclination. John in particular was attracted to Robert's sister, Sally, who remained a close friend after her marriage, and a young widow called Mrs Pendaves.³²

Wesley's reading during this period reveals an interest in the role of women in society and their education,³³ and through Sally Kirkham he came to read Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to Ladies* (1694). He was impressed by the author's plan for the creation of all-female religious establishments, where women could receive a proper education and live independently of men.³⁴ Astell's ideas chimed with his own, for influenced by his studies of the Church Fathers, and his associates at Oxford, Wesley was increasingly led to the belief that a single life was the only course for those who were intent on holiness. Surprisingly, he also came to question the value of discussing spiritual matters with female companions,³⁵ which seems perplexing in view of his family background and Anglican training.³⁶ How this change of mind occurred is difficult to establish, but Wesley was certainly in earnest, seeking to convince his

³¹ See in particular Baker, "Susanna Wesley", 112-131. Baker emphasizes Susanna's iconic status within the movement generally, stating his aim of uncovering the reality behind Susanna, the Methodist 'saint'. The final section of his chapter assesses Susanna's role as a 'pattern' and here Baker suggests she was: 'in many respects...the devotional, theological, and ecclesiastical mother of the Methodist revival.' (131)

³² On this period of Wesley's life see especially Green, *Young Mr. Wesley*, 202 – 206; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 78.

³³ Green, *Young Mr. Wesley*, 305 – 319. Green's Appendix 1 provides details of Wesley's reading from 1725 – 1734. Other significant texts cited are his brother, Samuel's poem: *The Battle of the Sexes*, an anonymous *Essay on Woman*, and a work by Schuman, entitled: *On Female Learning*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁵ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 95.

³⁶ I discuss this aspect further in the following section.

sister, Hetty of the virtue of a single life.³⁷ However, Wesley's determination to stay celibate, was soon given a severe test when he became a missionary clergyman in Georgia in 1735.

Wesley and Sophia Hopkey

Wesley arrived in Georgia resolving: 'to have no intimacy with any woman in America',³⁸ but he later admitted to Charles: 'I stand in jeopardy every hour. Two or three [of the colonists] are women, younger, refined, God - fearing. Pray that I know none of them after the flesh.'³⁹ The hardest temptation Wesley faced came from Sophia Hopkey, one of his parishioners in Savannah.⁴⁰ Sophia, who was always referred to by Wesley as 'Miss Sophy', was seventeen years old and the niece of the chief magistrate of the colony, Mr Causton. As well as attending church regularly, Sophy joined the religious society that Wesley had started, and impressed him with her serious attitude to matters of religion. With her guardian's consent the young clergyman undertook to tutor Sophy in French and Divinity, lessons that took place on a daily basis at Wesley's house.⁴¹

During this time of close contact Wesley certainly fell in love, and whilst he gave hints to Sophy that their relationship would end in marriage, he was racked with indecision over what course to take. He consulted with friends, and retreated to spend time in prayer,⁴² eventually telling Sophy that he had resolved to remain single in order not to jeopardize his mission to the Indians.⁴³ However, Wesley still saw Sophy socially at her guardian's house, and even at this stage cast lots to determine his future action.⁴⁴ Matters came to a head when Sophy suddenly decided to marry another man, Mr. Williamson. Having the support of her guardians, Wesley could still have retrieved the situation, but took no action and consequently Sophy's wedding went ahead.⁴⁵ Wesley later sought interviews with Sophy, in the role of a pastor, but these were unwelcome and, not surprisingly, her church attendance declined. This prompted Wesley to bar

³⁷ Green, *Young Mr. Wesley*, 209. As shown below, this was a line he would promote in later Methodist policy statements.

³⁸ Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 72.

³⁹ *Letters*, 1: 454.

⁴⁰ This period of Wesley's life is described in *J & D*, 18: 365 – 71; 430 – 42; and 461 – 88. Relevant studies include Maldwyn Edwards, "The Reluctant Lover: John Wesley as Suitor". *Methodist History* 12 (Jan 1974): 46 – 62, especially 49 – 53; Alan L. Hayes, "John Wesley and Sophy Hopkey: A Case Study in Wesley's Attitude towards Women", in Thomas, *et al* eds., *Women in New Worlds* 2: 29 – 44; Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 69 – 71; Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 72 – 79; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 124ff. and 257.

⁴¹ Edwards, "Reluctant Lover", 49 – 50; Hayes, "Wesley and Sophy", 33.

⁴² Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 74 - 5.

⁴³ Edwards, "Reluctant Lover", 53.

⁴⁴ Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 76

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 76 – 8.

her from communion. As a result, however, serious charges, including that of defamation were pressed against Wesley, who fled the colony and returned to England to avoid a trial.⁴⁶

Admirers among the United Societies

For Wesley the unhappy events in Georgia led to a long period of spiritual upheaval culminating in his conversion and the beginning of his open-air evangelism. By the early 1740s both John and Charles were heavily involved with the teaching and organization of the new United Societies. As leading figures in this movement both brothers now came under more public scrutiny, and being relatively young and unattached they also attracted admirers. Although many single clergymen were the objects of romantic interest, in the case of the Wesleys, the heady climate of revival was an additional complicating factor. After her conversion Elizabeth Halfpenny developed a keen attachment to John, writing how her soul was ‘never ... at rest but when ... with him or hearing him talked of’.⁴⁷ Moreover, amongst the converts it was not only the desire of *women* that was kindled. Charles Wesley received ardent letters from John Hutchinson, a society member at Leeds, whose first letter declared:

Dear Sir *I cannot describe how I love you, my Heart is ready to break that Providence hath allotted me to be So far Separate from you, I could live and die with you.... Write to me often and love me more, let no new Convert be my Rival....*⁴⁸ [Author’s emphasis]

This letter was written in 1751 and Charles by this time was married. However Hutchinson later suggested that his own progress as a Christian would be hindered unless he became a lodger at Charles’ house in Bristol.⁴⁹

An analysis of the writings of early women members of the Bristol society, has led John Kent to suggest that the Wesleys and their fellow evangelists were partly to blame for such obsessions.⁵⁰ Pointing out that many of those drawn to the nascent movement were vulnerable individuals living precarious lives, he notes that the conversion process often caused more emotional turmoil. Kent argues that the leaders of the revival complicated matters further by attempting to control the behaviour of their followers. Thus the women in Bristol, were faced with: ‘a group of aggressive men...all of them religious rhetoricians, for the most part ordained and socially superior, *well equipped to compel emotional and intellectual surrender*’.⁵¹ [My emphasis] In such a situation it is not hard to imagine how feelings of dependence or strong

⁴⁶ The events following Sophy’s wedding are considered in some detail in Hayes, “Wesley and Sophy”.

⁴⁷ John Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans. Religion in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 108 - 9.

⁴⁸ Ablove, *Evangelist*, 69.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Kent, *Wesley and Wesleyans*, 104 – 121.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

affection on the part of the new converts could ensue. This interpretation and its implication of the element of control on the part of the ministers is especially relevant when considering the complex personal dynamics that were at play during John Wesley's second significant love relationship with Grace Murray.

Wesley and Grace Murray

Grace Murray was an early member of the United Societies at the Foundery in London and became one of the first leaders of the bands and a sick visitor.⁵² On the death of her sailor husband in 1742, Grace returned to her original home town of Newcastle, where she became the first class leader in the city, and was appointed by Wesley as housekeeper at the newly-built Orphan House. It was here that Wesley's affection for Grace deepened when she nursed him during 1748, and he intimated that he would like to marry her.⁵³ She subsequently travelled with Wesley in the north of England and in Ireland where she met and regulated the female societies. This was a happy period for Methodism's leader, who wrote: 'I saw the work of God prosper in her hands ... she was to me both a servant and friend, as well as a fellow-labourer in the Gospel.'⁵⁴

Like many of the converts in Kent's study, mentioned above, Grace was emotionally very vulnerable. She had previously suffered a great deal of loss, through several miscarriages, and the deaths of both her child and her husband.⁵⁵ It is evident that Wesley's attention placed her additionally in a singular and isolated position.⁵⁶ Of his proposal, she wrote 'I cd [sic] not believe even what I heard. It seem'd [sic] too strange to be true ... I understood him not....'⁵⁷ Matters were further complicated by the fact that Grace had another keen suitor among the itinerant preachers, John Bennet, a man whom Grace had also nursed. Faced with the strong personalities and arguments of both suitors she seems to have found it almost impossible to decide between them, giving Bennet a promise of marriage, but later changing her mind.

⁵² On Grace Murray and her relationship with Wesley see J. A. Leger, *John Wesley's Last Love* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1910); Edwards, "Reluctant Lover," 54 – 58; Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 29 – 37; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 257 – 64, and Kent, *Wesley and Wesleyans*, 122 - 139. The subject is also dealt with extensively in S. R. Valentine, *John Bennett and the Origins of Methodism and the Evangelical Revival in England*, (Lanham, Maryland and London: Scarecrow Press, 1997), chapter 16.

⁵³ Leger, *Last Love*, 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4 – 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 – 25; Kent, *Wesley and Wesleyans*, 122 – 130.

⁵⁶ Leger, *Last Love*, 58 - 9. Grace wrote that when Wesley took her travelling with him 'our Sisters were more offended than ever. And others soon caught the infection'. She later added: '... the offence increas'd, and I look'd at it more and more'.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

Eventually she and Wesley made a marriage agreement in the presence of Christopher Hopper, constituting a legally binding contract.⁵⁸

Despite Grace's wish to marry quickly Wesley would not proceed without first gaining the consent of his brother, settling things with Bennet, and explaining his action to the societies.⁵⁹ Charles, however, was horrified at the thought of John's alliance with a woman of lower social status, and of Grace's former promise of marriage to Bennet. The brothers met at Whitehaven and argued vehemently.⁶⁰ When Wesley remained to fulfil his obligations to the societies, Charles spirited Grace back to Newcastle, telling her of the scandal that her marriage to Wesley would cause. At Newcastle Grace was persuaded that Wesley had given her up, and then agreed to marry Bennet. By the time John and Charles met again Grace was Mrs. Bennet, and Wesley was devastated to discover the news.⁶¹

What is noticeable is the striking similarity between Wesley's behaviour here, and previously in Georgia. In both cases Wesley appears to have idealized the woman involved, vacillated too long, and been reluctant to make a final commitment to marriage.⁶² V. H. H. Green has argued that Wesley's early relationships indicate his: 'underlying suspicion and perhaps fear of a love that involved physical contact'.⁶³ In another appraisal, Henry Rack suggested that for Wesley, perhaps the ideal relationship consisted of: 'an intimacy of heart and mind, religious dedication with a considerable 'tutorial element' through the medium of romantic friendship, but stopping short of marriage.'⁶⁴ Whilst both assessments are credible, the latter seems especially pertinent.

In an account written in 1749 after Grace Murray had married John Bennet, Wesley described how his views on marriage had changed.⁶⁵ As a youth, Wesley said, he had had no thought of marrying, being convinced that he '... should never find such a Woman as my Father

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1 – 9; and 60 – 64 deal with the complex history of this love triangle. As well as the more recent considerations mentioned in note 51 above Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 15 – 37, discusses marriage law, the different contracts in the eighteenth century, and examines the specific case of Wesley and Grace Murray.

⁵⁹ Leger, *Last Love*, 14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 64 – 66.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 79 – 98. Charles' defence was that he was preventing his brother from making an undesirable alliance, which would have had adverse effects on the Methodist Societies and thereby hindered the progress of the revival. His motivation is discussed in Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 262 – 4.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 263; Edwards, "Reluctant Lover," 54 – 58.

⁶³ Green, *Young Mr. Wesley*, 209

⁶⁴ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 80 – 81.

⁶⁵ This account, which is in the British Library, has been edited and published in Leger, *Wesley's Last Love*.

had.⁶⁶ Then, until his late twenties, he recognised that he had no means to support a wife.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, due to his study of the primitive church and certain ‘mystic’ authors, he became persuaded that celibacy was the only lawful state for a priest, and that the sexual relationship within marriage rendered it a less perfect condition.⁶⁸ Whilst the possible impact of a wife and family on his devotional life and charitable giving had also concerned him,⁶⁹ Wesley stressed that his primary consideration had always been the implications of matrimony for his personal vocation: ‘A dispensation of the Gospel has been committed to me and I will do nothing which directly or indirectly tends to hinder my preaching the Gospel.’⁷⁰ Later experience, Wesley explained as well as further reading and the example of godly married ministers, had effected a major change in his views.⁷¹ He included a fulsome assessment of Grace Murray’s qualities, concluding: ‘The Short is this, 1. I have Scriptural Reason to marry. 2. I know no Person so proper as this.’⁷²

The implications of Wesley’s letter for Methodist doctrine and practice are discussed later, but it is important here to register Wesley’s confirmation of the key status of his mother as a role model. His earliest objection to marriage, he suggested, was overcome through ‘... some, though very few Women, whom I could not but allow to be equal to my mother, both in Knowledge and Piety.’⁷³ Wesley argued that Grace Murray was of this calibre, and as a housekeeper, nurse, companion, friend, and fellow worker in the gospel she was uniquely qualified to be his wife.⁷⁴ The fact that she was ‘low born’, Wesley explained, weighed nothing with him, as he despaired of ever finding a gentlewoman with the right kind of qualities, and Grace’s former position as his servant was some safeguard ‘... against being deceived in her.’⁷⁵ In a totally pragmatic way Wesley acknowledged that as Grace had previously travelled with him, many would assume that she was already his mistress. However, he contended that he would have required any prospective partner to demonstrate willingness and ability for the itinerant life.⁷⁶

In practical terms, Wesley explained that Grace was already in his employ, and used to living modestly, therefore there would have been little added expense involved in making her

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 68 – 9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 69 – 72.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

his wife.⁷⁷ He had her agreement to send any children born to them to the school at Kingswood, so Grace would also have been free to share his itinerant life fully.⁷⁸ Such a helper, he suggested, would not only have provided comfort and care for his ailing body, but would also have been a safeguard against his possible sinful thoughts or behaviour, and a protection from the misplaced affection of other female members of the Society.⁷⁹ As this short summary suggests, Wesley's views on marriage do appear to have changed, but no real emotional connection with Grace seems to be in evidence. Moreover, whilst Wesley's requirements from this union are amply dealt with, what Grace Murray would have wanted or expected from the marriage partnership is not to be discerned. The entire document suggests a lack of empathy, which was to be a critical factor in Wesley's later marriage.

Wesley's marriage

In his *Journal* of February 2nd 1751 Wesley referred to his change of heart regarding marriage, writing that whilst he had once believed he could be more useful as a single man, he now 'as fully believed' that he '... might be more useful in a married state.'⁸⁰ He explained that upon 'this clear conviction,' and by the advice of friends he entered upon marriage 'a few days later.'⁸¹ In fact Wesley sought counsel only from Victor Perronet, merely informing Charles of his intention to marry, and then proceeding quickly. Wesley's bride, who had also been his nurse for a short period, was Mary (Molly) Vazeille, the widow of an affluent London banker. On this occasion, therefore, Charles was not given the chance to interfere. However, Wesley was soon to rue his uncharacteristic hasty action, for whilst his previous romantic entanglements had ended unhappily, this final relationship was nothing short of disastrous.⁸²

Wesley was quite open about his intentions to continue with his itinerant life, telling Molly: 'If I thought, my dear, I should have to travel or preach less, as well as I love you I would never see your face more.'⁸³ Less than a month after their marriage, therefore, both Wesley and his wife departed on a preaching tour. This was the first of several occasions when Molly accompanied her husband on his travels, visiting the north of England, Scotland and

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 70 – 71.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 74 – 75.

⁸⁰ *J & D*, 21: 377 – 8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² On Wesley's marriage and Mary Vazeille see especially: Edwards, "Reluctant Lover," 46 - 62; Samuel J. Rogal, "John Wesley Takes a Wife," *Methodist History* 27, no. 1 (October 1988): 48 - 55; Kenneth J. Collins, "John Wesley's Relationship with His Wife as Revealed in His Correspondence," *Methodist History* 32, no. 1 (October 1993): 4 - 18; Lloyd, "Strange Women.," 169 -74.

⁸³ Edwards, "Reluctant Lover," 60.

Cornwall. However, they were not happy experiences for Mrs. Wesley. Molly, who at this time was forty-one years of age, had previously led a comfortable existence in London. She was unused to the hardships of travelling for extended periods, and also experienced at first hand the mob violence that characterized the early period of the movement.⁸⁴ Moreover, Molly was not well accepted by the Methodist people. By 1755 she had had enough and ceased to accompany Wesley. As the latter was not prepared to alter his lifestyle, their married life necessarily entailed long separations.⁸⁵

During his absence Wesley gave Molly permission to open his letters, a decision he came to regret. Molly became suspicious of Wesley's relationship with some of his female correspondents, mistrusting the affection shown in such letters.⁸⁶ As a newly found document reveals, Molly wrote of Wesley 'running after strange women,' and on one occasion she even accused Wesley of adultery.⁸⁷ Whilst Molly undoubtedly had a fierce temper, and her behaviour towards her husband was frequently violent and aggressive, Wesley made no attempts to discern the root cause of such behaviour, and no concessions regarding his own conduct. Insisting on his right to associate with whom he pleased, he listed his wife's failings, and berated her for disobedience. Molly subsequently left her husband on several occasions,⁸⁸ and despite attempts at reconciliation, they were still separated when Molly died in 1781.⁸⁹

Successive Methodist historians have laid the blame for the breakdown of Wesley's marriage firmly at Molly's door,⁹⁰ but recent commentators are less willing to accept this interpretation. Wesley's ambivalent attitude towards marriage, his inflexible pursuit of his own vocation, and his neglect of Molly's needs, are now seen as substantial factors in the failure of their relationship.⁹¹ There also seems to have been a fundamental clash of personalities. Whereas Wesley had previously approved of the fact that Grace Murray was 'teachable' and

⁸⁴ Collins, "Wesley's Relationship with His Wife," 9. In 1752 Molly and her daughter came under attack from a mob throwing rocks at their carriage.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Edwards, "Reluctant Lover," 60.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 61; Collins, "Wesley's Relationship with His Wife," 10–11; Lloyd, "Strange Women," especially 174.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Rogal, "Wesley takes a Wife," 52-3; Collins, "Wesley's Relationship with His Wife," 11-12.

⁸⁹ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 266. Rack describes their marriage as '... one of the black legends of the Wesley canon'.

⁹⁰ Rogal, "Wesley Takes a Wife," 48–9. Rogal quotes, for example, one editor of Wesley's letters who suggested: 'There can be no doubt that Mrs. Wesley's conduct points to mental unsoundness, the whole story is tragic.' (*Letters* (Tel) 3:210). Another historian of Methodism, Luke Tyerman, came to the conclusion that Molly was '... a woman capable of cruel and almost insane behaviour ... as a rule, she was a bitter, unmitigated curse.' (Quoted in Edwards, "Reluctant Lover," 62).

⁹¹ Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 124.

‘reprovable,’⁹² Molly, was a mature woman of independent means, and therefore much less pliable. Wesley’s domineering personality apparently met its match. However, Wesley’s dealings with other women within the connexion were undoubtedly a major bone of contention, and it is not clear whether he was naïve, or foolhardy in this respect. The itinerant, John Pawson later suggested that Wesley’s ‘extreme fondness of the company of agreeable young women’ was ‘an inexcusable weakness’, writing that Wesley ‘... let himself down in the esteem of those who knew him best exceedingly, and often he grieved them beyond measure.’⁹³ Meanwhile tales of Wesley’s supposed impropriety with women circulated well into his old age.⁹⁴

In the year before his death Wesley provided an insight into his motivation for marrying, and a sad reflection on the outcome: ‘I married because I needed a home in order to recover my health; and I did recover it. But I did not seek happiness thereby, and I did not find it.’⁹⁵ As the previous discussion indicates, however, Wesley’s personal misfortune was not simply a private affair. The Methodist historian, Luke Tyerman, has argued that his marriage: ‘affected and tinted thirty years of his public life.’⁹⁶ At this point it is appropriate to recall the context of the early Methodist movement, the implications of membership for family life, and how Wesley’s relationships and beliefs came to shape Methodist policy and practice.

The context of early Methodist policy on marriage and the family

As explained earlier in the thesis, the events of the seventeenth century, and especially the memory of the Civil War, cast a long shadow over the following century imbuing a general fear of civil disorder and distrust of overt religious zeal. These anxieties were rekindled by the open-air evangelism of the Wesley brothers and other Methodist preachers, especially during the early years of the movement, when tensions rose because of the Jacobite rebellion.⁹⁷ At this time Methodist principles and practices were widely misunderstood and suspected. On one hand the movement was charged with being too ascetic, puritanical, and even ‘popish’, yet there were other allegations that Wesley and his fellow preachers were using Methodist

⁹² Leger, *Wesley’s Last Love*, 71 – 2.

⁹³ Lloyd, “Strange Women,” 174.

⁹⁴ Rack, “Betsy!” 3. In 1788 Thomas Hanby informed another itinerant that: ‘Mr W. has actually made love to Miss Ritchie and there is no small stir about it in the Cabinet’.

⁹⁵ *Letters*, 8: 223. Letter to John Dickens dated 19 June 1790.

⁹⁶ Luke Tyerman *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley MA Founder of the Methodists* 4th edn. 3 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1878), 2: 114.

⁹⁷ See the discussion in Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 13 and 133.

meetings and ‘love feasts’ as a pretext to indulge in sexual excess.⁹⁸ For opponents of Methodism on all sides, therefore, the movement seemed to pose a threat: not only to the Established Church, but also to established sexual mores, the family, and wider community life.

When individuals responded to the early Methodist preachers’ message, and became associated with the movement, therefore, the decision could spark incomprehension, ridicule, or more vigorous opposition from families, friends, and those in authority. Families were often the primary site of conflict as new adherents sought to reconcile their close relatives to their personal right to religious autonomy, their allegiance to the Methodist way of life, and their membership of an entirely different ‘household of faith.’⁹⁹ There was some disruption even in the Wesley family as the conversions of John and Charles, and their entry into revival preaching caused a rift with both Susanna and their elder brother, Samuel.¹⁰⁰ At a later date, when the itinerant John Nelson defended his own lay preaching and spoke of his indebtedness to Wesley’s evangelism, the concern of his neighbours focused on the affect on families. In Nelson’s words: ‘... they said they were very sorry for me, and should be glad to knock Mr Wesley’s brains out; for he would be the ruin of many families if he were allowed to live, and go on as he did.’¹⁰¹

Such fears for the breakdown of traditional family structure were also partly a legacy of the Civil War period, when conventional family life had faced pressure due to the disruption and trauma of the war, and from major ideological challenges. During the Interregnum church marriages had been abolished altogether and replaced with civil ceremonies. New religious sects, including the Quakers, the Ranters, and Familiarists had also promoted alternatives to mainstream sexual ethics and way of life. The institution of marriage and the family however, had managed to survive these upheavals. The restoration of Charles II as head of state, which was the reintroduction of a *national patriarchy*, had been accompanied by a strong re-emphasis on the value of maintaining traditional roles within the *patriarchal family*. This was seen as a necessary basis for the nation’s future welfare and peace.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ See the discussion in Lawrence, “Sinful Desire” 177-181; J. Walsh, “Methodism and the Mob in the Eighteenth Century”, in *Popular Belief and Practice* eds. G. J. Cuming and D. Baker, *Studies in Church History* 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 224 – 6; and Rack, “Betsy!”, 1-3.

⁹⁹ Raughter, “Household of Faith”, *passim*; Malmgreen, “Domestic Discords,” 63.

¹⁰⁰ Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, 159 –174.

¹⁰¹ *EMP* 1: 15.

¹⁰² Christopher Durston, *The Family in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), especially Chapter 2.

In the social climate of the early eighteenth century, therefore, we find that many of those who were attracted to Methodism were under pressure to abandon their new ways. This was especially true of women. As seen above, there were fears for their virtue at the hands of unscrupulous preachers. A 1743 piece of doggerel described Wesley's open-air sermons thus:

Three forth parts of what attend 'em
Are female Sex, and John's to mend 'em,
For Women are most prone to fall,
Like Eve, their Mother, first of all.¹⁰³

But there was also particular concern that the new demands of the movement, and the opportunities it offered, would draw women away from their 'proper' household relationships and obligations. In Wednesbury, for example, the public grievance of one man, who returned home to find his wife absent, sparked a full-scale anti-Methodist riot.¹⁰⁴

Katherine Chidley, a seventeenth century Quaker had previously argued that although her husband exercised authority in 'bodily and civil respects,' this did not entitle him to be 'lord over her conscience'.¹⁰⁵ Wesley's strong Arminian stance also empowered women to claim the right to determine their own spiritual destiny. However, my research reveals that the religious liberty of Methodist women was often curtailed. One Methodist woman eventually refused to carry on seeing a young man who said that when she became his wife she must: 'not expect to go so often to the preaching, nor to enjoy such liberty in these respects.'¹⁰⁶ Some other individuals, however, did not have the freedom to exercise this choice.¹⁰⁷ In the middle of such domestic trials women members might well seek comfort from official Methodist policy regarding marriage and family life. What advice and support would they find there?

Wesley's policy statements on marriage and a single life

Wesley first mentioned matrimony briefly in *The Character of a Methodist* (1742) making the point that it was not a Methodist principle to abstain from marriage.¹⁰⁸ The following year, however, he published a separate pamphlet called *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life*, explaining that he had received many requests for advice regarding which was the better way of life for believers.¹⁰⁹ Wesley began by saying that no one ought to forbid marriage, which God himself had ordained, and neither should they despise marriage, for God had

¹⁰³ Hayes, "Wesley and Sophy", 30.

¹⁰⁴ Abelove, *Evangelist*, 64; See also Lawrence, "'Sinful Desire', 180.

¹⁰⁵ Durston, *English Revolution*, 13.

¹⁰⁶ *MM* 27 (1804): 467.

¹⁰⁷ *MM* 41 (1818): 917 – 19. The case of Diana Deason has already been noted in chapter three above and I include other examples in chapter seven below.

¹⁰⁸ *The Character of a Methodist* (1742) reprinted in *Societies*, 30 – 46, specifically page 34.

¹⁰⁹ *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1743), 2.

declared it honourable ‘in all Orders and Degrees of Men.’¹¹⁰ From this, Wesley explained, it followed that there could be no taint attached to conjugal love,¹¹¹ and the scriptures suggested that it was wrong to abstain from normal marital relations except for short periods and by mutual consent.¹¹² Wesley also advised that it was unlawful to divorce a spouse except in cases of adultery.¹¹³ After making these preliminary statements, however, Wesley went on to develop his main argument: that the celibate life was best for all those who were believers, and was indeed a scriptural obligation unless the individual could not be faithful to this teaching, or was already married.¹¹⁴

Wesley based these claims on an interpretation of the verse in chapter nineteen of St. Matthew’s Gospel where Jesus speaks of those who had ‘made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom.’¹¹⁵ Wesley argued that Jesus’ words: ‘He who is able to receive this, let him receive it,’ constituted not simply a recommendation of a single life, but a clear command.¹¹⁶ He further maintained that the ability to remain pure was a gift granted to every believer in Christ from the moment of justification: ‘Lust then vanishes away: And if they that are born of GOD, keep themselves, shall never return’. [Wesley’s emphasis]¹¹⁷ If the gift was lost or ‘cast away’ through lack of spiritual vigilance, then Wesley suggested, using the words of St. Paul, that it was better to ‘marry rather than to burn.’¹¹⁸ Whilst he advised believers who were already married not to seek to be ‘loosed from a wife’, and suggested that God would help them,¹¹⁹ Wesley’s message to those converts who were single or widowed was: ‘Blessed art Thou, if Thou continuest as an [sic] Eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven’s Sake.’¹²⁰ It is clear, therefore, that in the main, Wesley believed that those who chose a single life followed the better way, and were more able to serve God fully.

The timing of Wesley’s first public statement on the relative merits of celibacy and marriage is significant. By 1743 Wesley’s personal reputation was already under attack.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4-5. ‘And as *Marriage is Honourable*, so GOD himself being the Witness, the *Bed is Undeified*.’ (Wesley’s emphasis)

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* See also the discussion in Abelow, *Evangelist*, 49 – 51, and Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 58 –9.

¹¹⁵ Matthew 19:12 reads: ‘For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made so by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.’ (Revised Standard edition)

¹¹⁶ Wesley, *Marriage and a Single Life*, 7. ‘... the Word is Peremptory. ... *Let him receive it*. (Not, He *may* receive it, if he *will*.) How could a Command be more clearly exprest?’ [sic] [Wesley’s emphasis]

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9 – 10. Wesley is quoting 1 Corinthians 7: 8 - 9.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 – 11.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

Details concerning Wesley's relationship with Sophy Hopkey had become public and anti-Methodists in Bristol had made much of an affidavit suggesting that improprieties had occurred.¹²¹ In the first paragraph of *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life* Wesley wrote that he intended to offer '... what I find in Scripture on this Head ...' stating that one of his reasons for writing was to '... cut off Occasion from them that seek Occasion against me, and who have so shamefully misrepresented what I have spoken on This, as indeed on all other Subjects.'¹²² It seems that even at this early stage in the movement, Wesley's personal history was inextricably mixed with Methodist policy.

At one point in *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life* Wesley admitted that his interpretation of scripture was more scrupulous than even the 'Romish Writers',¹²³ and, his later explanation of 1749, as discussed earlier, gave a full explanation of how he had been led to these beliefs.¹²⁴ However, Wesley's personal stance ran counter to the long established view in Western Christianity that matrimony was legitimate for three main reasons: procreation, the avoidance of sin, and companionship.¹²⁵ Wesley seems to have been particularly out of step with prevailing post Reformation thought, for in the Protestant churches the value of marriage was greatly reaffirmed, and matrimony was upheld as the ideal for all believers including members of the clergy.¹²⁶

With regard to the English churches, although there had been differences of emphasis concerning the primary reason for entering into marriage, both Anglicans and Puritans had viewed matrimony in this positive light. The Puritans, for example, felt that companionship outweighed other causes for marriage. They had a very favourable attitude to marriage and sex, describing marital intercourse as a source of 'holy mutual joy as a comfort and as mutual testimony of love and goodwill'.¹²⁷ Among Anglican writers, Richard Hooker suggested that though a single life might be 'more angelic and divine', the world must be peopled.¹²⁸ In another work, Jeremy Taylor also argued against those who had previously claimed that celibacy ought to be pursued 'as a higher state than marriage'.¹²⁹ On the subject of sexuality

¹²¹ Hayes, "Wesley and Sophy", 29 – 32.

¹²² Wesley, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life*, 2-3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 6 - 7.

¹²⁴ Leger, *Last Love*, 67.

¹²⁵ Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 52.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Anthony Fletcher, "The Protestant Idea of Marriage in Early Modern England," in *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern England*, ed. A. J. Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 161-81.

¹²⁷ Levin L. Schücking, *The Puritan Family. A Social Study from the Literary Sources*. Trans. Brian Battershaw. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 38 quoting William Perkins (1558–1602).

¹²⁸ Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 52.

¹²⁹ Durston, *English Revolution*, 32.

and marriage Wesley also differed considerably from the Moravian Brethren, whose founder, Count Zinzendorf and Moravian pastors strongly endorsed married life and love.¹³⁰

Wesley's ideas did not go unchallenged. Significantly for the present study, there was a strong objection to his pamphlet from the preachers at the Conference of 1748, and this was one factor causing Wesley to rethink his position. Writing in 1749 Wesley suggested that his views on marriage were modified after 'full and friendly debate' with his brethren, and he made clear that it was from this point that he seriously began to consider marriage as an option for himself.¹³¹ Although Wesley then began a closer relationship with Grace Murray, and later took Mary Vazeille as his wife in 1751, it was not until 1765 that he published a further policy statement on the subject of marriage for the Methodist Societies.

In this later document, entitled *Thoughts on a Single Life* Wesley still maintained that the ability to abstain from marriage and remain pure was given to all believers, but he now accepted that for most individuals this gift did not continue long.¹³² Wesley wrote that he was unsure whether the gift was lost, or was withheld by God due to some fault by the believer, but now admitted that not everyone was able to remain single.¹³³ In a major change of emphasis, Wesley also conceded: 'Nor can it be doubted, but persons may be as holy in a married, as it is possible to be in a single, State.'¹³⁴

Even at the time of writing this second pamphlet, however, Wesley confessed in his *Journal* that his personal views were fundamentally unchanged.¹³⁵ Like his first policy statement, the majority of the later document concerned itself with the advantages of the 'happy Few' who were able to remain celibate.¹³⁶ The single person, Wesley suggested, was better able to serve God without distraction, and was freed from the 'Sorrow and Anxiety with which Heads of Households are intangled'. [sic]¹³⁷ Celibacy saved individuals from the danger of '... loving one Creature above all others,¹³⁸ and from the temptation to overrun the bounds of 'Christian Temperance' through excessive sexual activity.¹³⁹ In addition, those who remained

¹³⁰ Abelove, *Evangelist*, 52.

¹³¹ Leger, *Last Love*, 1.

¹³² Wesley, *Thoughts on a Single Life* (London: 1765), 4.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁵ *J & D*, 21: 494. Entry dated 5 Nov. 1764. 'My scraps of time this week I employed in setting down my present thoughts upon a single life, which, indeed, are just the same they have been these thirty years: and the same they must be, unless I give up my Bible.'

¹³⁶ Wesley, *Thoughts on a Single Life*, 4.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

single could develop their relationship with God, serve their neighbours fully, and freed from the expense of a wife and family, were also able to give all their earnings to God.¹⁴⁰ This was not Wesley's final word on the subject, for he published an article in the *Arminian Magazine* of 1785 entitled 'A Thought upon Marriage'.¹⁴¹ Here, Wesley returned to some of his earlier points, suggesting that those who searched for a spouse might actually be seeking to love a fellow creature as a substitute for a fuller love of God, the Creator.¹⁴²

In general Wesley urged his single followers to adopt a cautious approach to relationships with members of the opposite sex. *Thoughts on a Single Life* contained the warning that converts should avoid 'all needless conversation, much more Intimacy with those of the Other Sex.'¹⁴³ This was a message that Wesley emphasised in his regular pastoral work within the societies. Male converts especially were advised to live austere lives, avoid masturbation, and steer clear of all familiarity with women, which Wesley considered: 'a deadly poison both to them and to you.'¹⁴⁴ The developing organization of the Methodist societies operated as a reinforcement of these ideals, as the sexes were routinely separated for pastoral purposes. Members were allocated to a specific band or select band according to their spiritual progress, but these groups were also segregated according to sex and marital status. As preaching houses began to be built Wesley also insisted that men and women were seated separately within them, and plans had to ensure that the seating areas were divided by a rail.¹⁴⁵

It seems clear, therefore, that whilst Wesley modified official policy slightly, his own high regard for celibacy never really diminished. Even in his last year Wesley recommended this way of life to all were able to continue in it.¹⁴⁶ The irony was that Wesley was a married man from 1751. Yet only a few days after he had taken the personal decision to wed, Wesley recorded in his *Journal* how he had exhorted a group of single converts to stay single.¹⁴⁷ As described earlier, after the furore over Grace Murray, Wesley was much more circumspect regarding his plans to marry Mrs Vazeille. Explaining his reasons for taking a wife at a Society meeting after the event, Wesley suggested that he had needed to protect his reputation from those who accused him of being a womanizer. He said nothing of his wife, and described marriage as a 'cross' and a 'duty' to the great embarrassment of those present. Describing this

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 6 – 7.

¹⁴¹ *AM* 8 (1785): 533 – 535.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 534.

¹⁴³ Wesley, *Thoughts on a Single Life*, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Green, *Young Mr. Wesley*, 210.

¹⁴⁵ Abelove, *Evangelist*, 55.

¹⁴⁶ Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 125.

¹⁴⁷ *J & D*, 21: 378.

occasion Charles Wesley noted how his brother's 'lamentable apology... made us all hide our faces.'¹⁴⁸

The situation must have been especially awkward for Charles who had been instrumental in ending the Grace Murray affair. The two men and their relationships could not have been much different. Unlike his elder brother, Charles Wesley's marriage to Sarah Gwynne in 1749 was a love match and resulted in an enduring and very happy partnership, with one commentator describing Charles' relationship with his wife as 'passionate and unrestrained.'¹⁴⁹ Charles gave priority to his marriage, giving up the itinerancy completely in 1756. His affirmation of the married state was a valuable model for others in the movement.¹⁵⁰

Henry Abelove has suggested that Wesley's ambivalent attitude towards marriage could be the reason why he preferred the itinerant life. As a parish priest he would have been obliged to conduct many marriages, but Wesley's *Journal* records only four occasions during his ministerial career after conversion when he officiated or assisted at a marriage.¹⁵¹ It seems clear, however, that Wesley really believed matrimony to constitute a hindrance rather than a help to personal spiritual development and to the fulfilling of one's religious vocation. Writing to Mrs Cock after her marriage in 1789, for example, Wesley explained:

When I first heard of your marriage, I was afraid of two things: the one was, that it would hurt your soul; the other, that it would prevent your usefulness – at least that you would not be useful in so high a degree as otherwise you might be.¹⁵²

Whilst Wesley mentions similar fears in his correspondence with several ordinary members of the Society,¹⁵³ he showed special caution with regard to his itinerant preachers. As detailed earlier, at the first Conference in 1744 strict rules were laid down to regulate their general behaviour towards women, and the preachers were also enjoined to take no step towards marriage without first consulting with the Wesley brothers. The Church of England had abolished the obligation for priests to remain celibate as early as 1549 and Wesley's later work, *Popery Calmly Considered* (1779) also argued that the clergy had as much right to marry as anyone else. However, Wesley actively dissuaded his own preachers from taking a wife. When

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Footnote 51.

¹⁴⁹ Gareth Lloyd, "My Dearest Sally": The Marriage of Charles Wesley and Sally Gwynne," *PWHS* 56 (Oct 2007): 113-28.

¹⁵⁰ See later discussion in chapter nine below of Joseph Entwisle's observations after his marriage.

¹⁵¹ Abelove, *Evangelist*, 61. One of these was almost unavoidable as it was that of his brother, Charles.

¹⁵² *Letters* 8: 159. Letter dated 3 Aug. 1789.

¹⁵³ See for example, Wesley's letter to Ann Bolton dated 20 Jan. 1774. Reflecting on her possible marriage, he writes: If indeed you could enlarge the sphere of your action; if you could be more extensively useful; or if you could have closer union than you ever had yet with a person of eminent grace and understanding, I should instantly acknowledge the call of God But I can see nothing of this in your present case. *Letters* 6: 70.

Alexander Mather mentioned the strong impression he felt that God was calling him to preach, Wesley replied: 'This is a common temptation among young men. Several have mentioned it to me. But the next thing I hear of them is, that they are married, or upon the point of it.'¹⁵⁴

In part, this caution was the recognition of the practicalities of the travelling preachers' work, their need to be geographically mobile, and their uncertain financial situation. Wesley's preference for a celibate itinerancy is evident in letters to Zachariah Yewdall. Wesley commended the preacher 'for being exceeding wary with respect to marriage' on two occasions, also advising him to read and 'weigh well' *Thoughts upon a Single Life*.¹⁵⁵ Wesley commented: 'You will then feel the wisdom of St Paul's advice (especially to a preacher, and to a Methodist preacher above all), "If thou mayest be free, use it rather."¹⁵⁶ In another case Wesley congratulated one itinerant who had avoided marriage, seeing it as a lucky escape, and comparing the event to his own situation with regard to Grace Murray.¹⁵⁷ In correspondence with John Valton, Wesley went further. He warned Valton against marrying whilst he was in poor health, and claimed that for two individuals in similar circumstances marriage had proved fatal!¹⁵⁸ Paradoxically, however, Wesley can be seen on other occasions making suggestions to different Society members on finding suitable partners, and even acting as a marriage broker for another preacher, Samuel Bradburn.¹⁵⁹

When reviewing the evidence from Wesley's major writings on the subject of marriage, however, it seems clear that he never really considered matrimony except as a 'remedy for sin'. His personal convictions undoubtedly hindered his role as a pastoral leader. To those suffering the loss of a spouse or child, for example, he seems singularly lacking in compassion, often merely informing the newly bereaved of the new freedom to serve God that now ensued.¹⁶⁰ In a breathtaking example he informed his sister, Martha that the death of her children was: 'a great instance of the goodness of God towards you.'¹⁶¹ Sadly, too, as Alan Hayes has pointed out, Wesley never seems to have grasped the idea that an individual's Christian vocation might be

¹⁵⁴ *EMP* 2: 168.

¹⁵⁵ *Letters* 7: 65 dated 26 May 1781, and 7: 271 dated 21 May 1785.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7: 154. Letter dated 7 Dec. 1782.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8: 116. Letter to Thomas Roberts dated 12 Feb. 1789.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6: 42-3. Letter dated 18 Sept. 1773.

¹⁵⁹ Leslie Church, *The Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth, 1945), 231. Church makes the comment that: 'The idea of Wesley offering advice on 'marriage is grimly humorous, but he never hesitated.'

¹⁶⁰ See *Letters* 6: 200 dated 26 Dec. 1775, where Wesley advises Francis Wolfe, a bereaved preacher: 'Now give yourself up more entirely and unreservedly to God. You have nothing else to care for but the things of the Lord, how you may please the Lord.' Similarly, when Christopher Hopper's wife died, the preacher was told: 'Consider yourself now more than ever married to Christ and His dear people...' See *EMP* 1: 237 - 8.

¹⁶¹ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 542 -3.

perfected *through* marriage and family life.¹⁶² As the following discussion reveals, this important concept, which seems always to have eluded Wesley, did not go unrecognised by the Methodist people and their preachers.

Attitudes towards marriage among the Methodist people and their preachers.

Wesley's policy statements on the value of celibacy as a long-term life choice seem to have had little real impact on the Methodists as a whole although there are cases where a single life was chosen for spiritual or vocational reasons. One example is Ann Cutler, a female preacher during the 1790s, who elected to remain single.¹⁶³ Mary Bosanquet, another famous figure in the movement and woman preacher was the author of a tract recommending a life of poverty, chastity and obedience to female members of the Society.¹⁶⁴ As a young woman she founded an orphanage and school at Leytonstone, which she ran with a number of other single women and the group later moved to Cross Hall, near Leeds, continuing in this work. Whilst Mary subsequently married, some of her former companions remained single, and living next to the chapel in Leeds with other women they were known locally as the 'Female Brethren'.¹⁶⁵ As Anna Lawrence has suggested, Methodism offered support for both women and men who made such a choice.¹⁶⁶

Within Methodism generally, however, there seems to have been little support for the celibate life. This is not too surprising considering the historical context of the movement and other contemporary social and cultural trends. The Protestant affirmation of married life; its endorsement in English churches; and the way in which marriage and the family had withstood previous challenges during the period of the Civil War all signify that marriage as an institution remained strong. Recent studies of demographic change in England have also identified the latter half of the eighteenth century as a time when the percentage of women remaining single was actually dropping, and when both sexes were embarking on first marriages at an earlier age.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Hayes, "Wesley and Sophy", 42.

¹⁶³ Chilcote, *Women Preachers*, 259; *DMBI*, 85.

¹⁶⁴ On Mary Bosanquet see *ibid.*, 37 and the many references in Chilcote, *Women Preachers*. Mary's tract, published in 1766, was entitled *Jesus Altogether Lovely: Illustrated in a Letter to some of the Single Women of the Methodist Society*.

¹⁶⁵ D. Colin Dews, "Ann Carr and the Female Revivalists of Leeds", in, *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760 – 1930* edited by Gail Malmgreen (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), 68 – 87.

¹⁶⁶ "'Sinful Desire'

¹⁶⁷ Henry Abelove, "Some Speculations on the History of Sexual Intercourse during the Long Eighteenth Century", *Genders* 6 (Fall, 1989): 125-130; Neil Tranter, Review of *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580-1837* by E. A. Wrigley *et. al.* *English Historical Review* (Feb. 1998): 126-7.

In the most comprehensive discussion of Methodist sexuality to date Henry Ablove has argued that love and cross gender feeling were as strong in the Methodist movement as in wider society.¹⁶⁸ He quotes figures from the 1757 membership list at Kingswood, in Bristol, which show a mere thirty-one single members among a combined membership of a hundred and seventy-two.¹⁶⁹ Gail Malmgreen's analysis of the membership lists of societies in East Cheshire during the second half of the eighteenth century has also led her to conclude that: 'People came to the chapel to find God, and also to find friends and sweethearts.'¹⁷⁰ That they were successful in the latter enterprise is indicated in one of Malmgreen's other observations: 'After the first generation or two there emerged a new social structure in the chapels, a highly intermarried network of Methodist families...'¹⁷¹

The history of the developing organizational structures within the Methodist system also provides some evidence that Wesley's ideas were resisted by the membership. Members disliked the segregation that was practiced in Methodist chapels. That much is clear from Conference proceedings, which record questions inquiring whether there is any exception to the rules and asking: 'How can we secure their sitting apart...?'¹⁷² Wesley's answer to the last question was: 'I must do it myself. If I come into any new house and see the men and women together, I will immediately go out.'¹⁷³ Meanwhile, the early pastoral arrangements of bands and select bands, in which Society members were grouped according to their spiritual progress, and which were also segregated by gender and marital status were soon superseded by class meetings. In the latter system allocation to a class depended upon the geographical proximity of individuals, and thus allowed different sexes and ages to meet as members of the same class. The rapid success of class meetings from 1741 may be another indication of general support in the movement for mixed gender groups.¹⁷⁴

While Wesley's writings were always careful to refer to marriage as an honourable institution, Ablove has argued that the message he put forward suggested that married life was an inferior choice for converts. Wesley's strong arguments for celibacy, coupled with the pastoral arrangements of same sex band meetings and select bands, could also imply an endorsement of single sex relationships.¹⁷⁵ In these ways, Wesley's views could be said to undermine the institution of marriage, providing a rationale for members seeking to delay or

¹⁶⁸ Ablove, *Evangelist*, 49 - 73.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁷⁰ Malmgreen, "Domestic Discords", 64.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Works*, 8: 319.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Ablove, *Evangelist*, 61 - 2.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

avoid matrimony, or for others who wanted more freedom from restrictive family ties and obligations.¹⁷⁶ However, Wesley's writings were undoubtedly effective in impressing upon the Methodist people the need for a careful examination of all the reasons for embarking on a married life in the light of one's personal welfare and vocation. This was particularly true for the itinerant preachers.

Marriage and the Methodist itinerant preachers

Personal soul-searching over Wesley's policies regarding marriage, and a recognition of the need to reflect on the matter seriously are evident in many of the itinerant preachers' letters, biographies, and autobiographies. Thomas Olivers, for example, who entered the itinerancy in 1753, started to consider whether he was called to marry during 1758. He wrote:

From my first awakening, I was almost singular in my notions of marriage. I thought that young people did not consult reason, and the will of God, as much as their own foolish inclinations. ... I determined if I ever married, to act according to the rules I had so often laid down for others.¹⁷⁷

He reported that he '... weighed the reasons on both sides', eventually coming to an affirmative answer. Asking himself what sort of person he ought to marry, Thomas decided that this would be '... such a one as Christ would choose for me, suppose He was on earth, and was to undertake that business.'¹⁷⁸ He felt his Saviour would deem several 'properties' appropriate in a partner for him, and the most important of these was grace.¹⁷⁹ His wife would also need 'tolerably good common sense', and a disposition that would not enflame his own 'natural warmth' of temper.¹⁸⁰ Finally, she would need to be in possession of 'a small competency, to prevent my making the Gospel chargeable to any.'¹⁸¹ A further question was who would be '... the person in whom these properties are thus found in the most eminent degree?'¹⁸² Thomas immediately settled on Miss Green, 'a person of a good family, and noted throughout all the north of England for her extraordinary piety.'¹⁸³

Several preachers disputed Wesley's analysis of biblical texts regarding marriage. After the publication of 'A Thought upon Marriage' in the *Arminian Magazine* in 1785, for example, John Pawson commented:

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 59. See also Malmgreen, "Domestic Discords", 60-61.

¹⁷⁷ *EMP* 2: 79.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

It is an unkah [sic] thing indeed that Mr. W. should still endeavour to make us believe that marriage is sinful in the sight of God, when at the same time an Apostle tells us that it is honourable in all men.¹⁸⁴

In 1792, Joseph Entwistle also examined the reasons for and against marriage. Joseph wrote of the firm belief that he, personally, was ‘... formed for social and domestic life.’¹⁸⁵ He did not support the view that a single life is ‘... in itself more holy than the married state; because marriage was instituted, for man, in a state of innocency.[sic]’¹⁸⁶ Joseph argued that it was possible to glorify God more as a married man ‘... in the relations of a husband and father’,¹⁸⁷ and maintained that St. Paul’s words in favour of a single life had to be seen in the context of the persecution of the church at that time.¹⁸⁸ Joseph went on to suggest that the ‘most holy and useful men’ he had ever been acquainted with had been married men, as were most of ‘the pious Puritans’, and ‘many of the most holy and useful persons mentioned in the scriptures’¹⁸⁹

Meanwhile in a later journal, Jabez Bunting’s ruminations on *whether* to marry and *who* to marry were even more extensive, running to several pages. He began by asking himself:

*Shall I marry, or take any step toward marriage, at present? Is it my duty, or consistent with my duty, to engage in such a relation at all? Will it promote the glory of God and my welfare? Shall I probably be as holy, happy, and useful, in a married, as I may be in a single, state? [Author’s emphasis]*¹⁹⁰

Like Joseph Entwistle, above, Jabez began his analysis by reviewing scriptural evidence regarding marriage and celibacy. He decided that ‘[t]he general law of God ... enjoins matrimony as matter of obligation in all ordinary cases....’¹⁹¹ He argued that it might be the case that ‘unnecessary celibacy’ was actually ‘...a sinful counteraction of the purposes and plans of divine Providence.’ [Author’s emphasis]¹⁹² Jabez supported Joseph Entwistle’s assessment of St. Paul’s words to the Corinthians, deciding that St. Paul’s advice was ‘... expressly limited to what he calls *the present distress*.’ [Author’s emphasis]¹⁹³ In conclusion, therefore, Jabez felt that the Bible strongly affirmed marriage noting that: ‘... Scripture itself declares that ‘it is not good to be alone;’ and that ‘marriage is honourable in all.’¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁴ PL 1: 35. Pawson was stationed in Scotland at the time, and his use of ‘unkah’ seems to be a dialect word, but I have been unable to find its meaning.

¹⁸⁵ J. Entwistle, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwistle*, 1848, 8th ed. (London: James Nichols, 1862), 72.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ T. P. Bunting and G. S. Rowe, Eds, *The Life of Jabez Bunting DD* (London, 1887), 129.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Jabez Bunting's deliberations, as well as those of Joseph Entwisle, suggest that there were many individuals who could match Wesley's argument on biblical grounds, and who did not share his world view. One itinerant who was firmly in the latter camp was James Taylor England, a nineteenth century preacher, who was a missionary to Canada. On his wedding day, James recorded in his diary: 'This day for my personal comfort, for our mutual Society and help, and for the good of the Church, I took to myself, what every Missionary ought to have, a wife.'¹⁹⁵ He continued:

God never designed people for monks and nuns, for he has said "it is not good for man to be alone" and all who say contrary are liars. Forbidding to marry is one of the Doctrines of the Devils. Therefore all who forbid people to marry are in league with the Devil for his doctrine they believe and teach.¹⁹⁶

Clearly, this itinerant was not sympathetic to the views expressed by Methodism's founder.

Such testimonies underline the real dilemma that individual travelling preachers faced as a result of official Methodist policies. In the eighteenth century the circumstances of the developing movement also had an impact on the total numbers of married men within the itinerancy. Whilst Wesley's personal preference was for a corps of travelling preachers who were single men, the rapid growth of the Methodist movement, and the increasing demand for itinerants meant that he was obliged to accept men who were married. John Lenton's analysis of preachers found that more than a quarter of those entering the itinerancy during Wesley's lifetime were over the age of thirty, and at least seventy-eight of this group were already married.¹⁹⁷

Whilst the individual preachers whose life writings are discussed above also continued to travel after their marriages, it is also very important to note that the most common reason that preachers gave for leaving the itinerancy was marriage. This was not always due to the urge to live a settled married life. Some of the travelling preachers who married did not comply with Wesley's rules and thus were obliged to leave the itinerancy.¹⁹⁸ Others left due to the financial constraints of the itinerant life.¹⁹⁹ For those who were really intent on matrimony, as in all other respects of Methodist life, Wesley laid down specific guidance and regulations. The ideal Methodist marriage, and the ideal Methodist home, as is now shown, was set in train long before the wedding day.

¹⁹⁵ Phyllis Rogers, "The Diary of the Rev. James Taylor England (1815-1886) Wesleyan Methodist Missionary to Newfoundland and Nova Scotia," *WHS (Yorks)* 82 (Autumn 2002): 13. Diary entry dated 25 August 1841.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ John H. Lenton, *My Sons in the Gospel* (Loughborough: Wesley Historical Society, 2000), 21.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹⁹ F. Baker, "The People Called Methodists: 3. Polity," in *HMCGB*, 1: 234.

Chapter Five: Methodist Domestic Ideals and Changing Notions of Female Service in the Movement.

The foregoing chapter has highlighted the fact that although Wesley became a married man in 1751, his key writings continued to suggest that celibacy was a better life choice for individual believers. The discussion also illustrated that these ideas were resisted by the majority of Methodist people, and that many within the movement viewed married life as necessary to their personal happiness, and an essential part of their Christian calling. Every Methodist member was urged to consider any move towards matrimony prayerfully and seek counsel on this matter. Moreover, Wesley was mindful not only of the need to guide members in the search for a spouse and on aspects of courtship, but on other areas of married life. In his major policy statements and through a range of other literature, he articulated the ideals that the membership should embrace: directions covering prenuptial matters, domestic management and family life. These were the standards that the preachers' wives were expected to embody and model for others.

The current chapter, therefore, examines Wesley's ideals for members of the Society in the light of earlier Protestant ideas on domestic matters and the prevailing culture and ideology of the eighteenth century. Wesley's view of gender relations is investigated to establish how this influenced the pietistic and domestic models set out in his policy statements. Furthermore, as Wesley's policies and praxis also informed opportunities for individuals within the Society to engage in different fields of service within the movement and beyond, there will also be an evaluation of the range of work that was open to women members, establishing important changes during the period under review. Both strands of the chapter will assist in the central investigation of the thesis illuminating the ideological framework governing the experience and roles of the preachers' wives both in their home environments and in other fields of endeavour.

Protestant domestic ideals and their dissemination

Both by developing a range of material to guide the Methodist members on marriage and domestic life, and in his methods of transmitting his ideas Wesley was building upon and extending established Protestant approaches. In the early stages of the Reformation, both on the continent and in England, the proper management of gender relations and the family had been seen as the key to wider religious, moral, and social reformation.¹ Instead of the confessional,

¹ Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Anthony Fletcher, "The Protestant Idea of Marriage in Early Modern England," in *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern England*, ed. A. J. Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge:

which had been used by the Catholic Church to regulate social and sexual behaviour, leaders in reformed churches needed to find other ways to inculcate their beliefs. The pulpit was obviously a major platform for clarifying Protestant approaches. However a growing number of printed works were specifically devoted to the management of relationships between the sexes, marriage and domestic affairs.² Significantly, it was predominantly the first generation of married preachers within the English clergy that became the prime movers in these developments. It was now possible for pastors to speak about marriage and family life from personal experience, and many married clergy took this opportunity, addressing the subject from the pulpit and in print. This group became key participants in the articulation and dissemination of Protestant policies.³ In formulating policies on marriage and the family, and presenting them to the Methodist people, Wesley evidently followed the example of many earlier clergymen.

The Protestant view that marriage was not a second-rate option, but a state to be *universally* recommended was advocated in England as early as 1543. It was argued that 'Christ alloweth marriage in all men and in all tymes' [sic], and by 1563 the Church's *Homily on the State of Matrimony* had been issued.⁴ Even at this stage, there were other publications dealing with marriage and domestic management in circulation, for example Heinrich Bullinger's *The Christian State of Matrimony* (1541), and Thomas Becon's *A New Catechism*.⁵ A sermon by Henry Smith, entitled *A Preparative for Marriage*, was published in 1591, and shortly afterwards came Robert Cleaver's *A Godly Form of Household Government*.⁶ Such texts were followed by a surge of other prescriptive works in the early decades of the seventeenth century with many prominent ministers such as William Whateley and William Gouge offering guidance to aid the Protestant family in its domestic life.⁷ This fund of

Cambridge University Press, 1994), 161-81; Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500 - 1720.*, 1993, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 39.

² Studies of this early conduct material include: Levin L. Schücking, *The Puritan Family. A Social Study from the Literary Sources*, translated by Brian Battershaw (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); Fletcher, "Protestant Idea."; Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995); Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 7 and 39; Jacqueline Eales, "Gender Construction in Early Modern England and the Conduct Books of William Whately (1583 - 1639)," in *Gender and Christian Religion*, ed. R. N. Swan, Studies in Church History, 34 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 163 - 174.

³ Fletcher, "Protestant Idea," 162; Eales, "Gender Construction," 165 - 6. It has been suggested that married ministers may have felt the need to justify their marital status.

⁴ Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Fletcher, "Protestant Idea," 163 - 4.

⁶ The first edition was published in 1598.

⁷ Fletcher, "Protestant Idea," 165. For example William Whateley's work, *A Bride Bush; or, a Wedding Sermon, Compendiously Describing the Duties of Married Persons* was published in 1617. Five years later William Gouge published *Of Domesticall Duties* [sic]. Other key works include *Bethel*, by Matthew Griffiths (1633), and *Matrimonial Honour* by Daniel Rogers (1642). Further examples are given in Fletcher.

publications was extensively mined by Wesley in his search for suitable literature for the Methodist members.

Protestant social teachings on marriage and family life were disseminated in a variety of forms with homilies, catechisms and advice books being used. The sermon was a regular starting point for domestic advice. Marriage sermons, for example, naturally focused on the responsibilities of matrimonial life, and these were regularly published. Funeral sermons also played an important role in the transmission of Protestant ideals, providing descriptions of approved conduct in both the spiritual and material lives of the deceased. Printed versions became a popular literary genre, and formed the raw material for later biographical collections.⁸ Significantly, the circulation of accounts of godly women has been viewed as aiding the gradual revision of misogynistic views of the sex.⁹ Thus, even at this early stage, such texts were instrumental in promoting cultural and ideological change.

Regarding the specific teachings of Protestantism concerning gender relations in marriage and domestic life, it must be stressed that ideas were widely debated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that consequently there was no uniform Protestant or Puritan message.¹⁰ Despite this, some key principles were widely supported. In relation to the search for a spouse and courtship practice, for example, it seems to have been accepted that an individual would find the most suitable partner from those of a similar age and social status. Moreover, the ideal relationship was felt to be one of mutual love. It was stressed that young people had an obligation to seek parental approval for any intended match. However, parents had responsibilities too, being urged not to force their offspring into any unwelcome alliances.¹¹

Within marriage itself husbands and wives were taught to share companionship in their daily lives, enjoy conjugal love as a God-given blessing, and tend to their own and each other's growth in grace. A married couple were deemed jointly responsible for the material and spiritual needs of the whole household. On the matter of family order the husband was held to be the undisputed leader in all temporal and spiritual affairs. The obedience of wives, meanwhile, was considered to be divinely ordained. Wife beating was allowed by law, but the practice was increasingly disapproved. A godly Protestant wife, therefore, was expected to love and obey her husband, nurturing her own spiritual development as well as that of her spouse.

⁸ Fletcher, *Sex and Subordination*, 348 -9. Fletcher notes that popular works such as Samuel Clarke's *Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in this Later Age*, published in 1683, 'lifted biographies in many cases directly from sermons'.

⁹ *Ibid.*, chapter 17 examines this aspect in detail.

¹⁰ Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

She would care for the household, and ensure the physical and spiritual welfare of children and servants. Regarding the latter aspect, though her spouse was held to be the ‘priest’ within the family, a wife was allowed to lead prayers in his absence. In this way she could take an active part in the shared religious exercises of the household.¹² Wesley’s outlook and later writings, as is now illustrated, accorded with many of these earlier values.

The growth of Methodist literature on marriage and family life

Although Wesley’s first policy statement on marriage, published in 1743 clearly signalled his privileging of the celibate state,¹³ at the same time, he was also mindful of the needs of the wider movement, and soon afterwards began to prepare materials for members’ use in their families. His first publications were intended to aid the devotional life of households, and to give guidance on the instruction of children. Thus, in 1745 *A Collection of Prayers for Families* was published, containing morning and evening prayers for every day of the week.¹⁴ Wesley followed this with a series of didactic works including lessons and hymns for children.¹⁵ These early writings perhaps reflected Wesley’s recognition of the particular spiritual benefits of his own upbringing. They were only the start of his literary efforts on behalf of Methodist families.

Some support for the latter argument comes from a review of the bulk of Wesley’s output, which suggests that he was drawing on, and keen to perpetuate a similar model to that of his early home. As early as 1742, for example, Wesley’s published *Journal* included an outline of his mother’s childrearing and educational practices.¹⁶ The same correspondence was cited in Wesley’s later writings, constituting a continuing endorsement of Susanna’s principles and approaches.¹⁷ Susanna’s enduring influence can also be discerned in Wesley’s *choice* of conduct literature for the Methodist people. Whilst his parents were both keen converts to High Anglicanism, the distinctive ethos within the Wesley household derived from Susanna, whose devotional routines stemmed largely from her own upbringing as part of a devout Puritan family. Thus the pattern of daily life at Epworth allowed Wesley to experience something of

¹² Schücking, *Puritan Family*, 40; Fletcher, "Protestant Idea," 180; Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 39.

¹³ See the discussion in the last chapter on *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life* in (1743).

¹⁴ Richard Green, *The Works of John and Charles Wesley: A Bibliography* (London: C. H. Kelly, 1896), 41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 35, 44, and 49. These note Wesley’s *Instructions for Children*, 1745; *Lessons for Children*, 1746; and *Hymns for Children* 1746.

¹⁶ A description of Susanna’s household regime and her approach to the education of her children was requested by Wesley and provided by Susanna in a letter dated 24 July 1732. Her letter begins: ‘According to your desire I have collected the principal rules I observed in educating my family; which I now send to you...’ This was included in Wesley’s *Journal* of 1742. See *J & D*, 19: 283–291.

¹⁷ I discuss some of these other references below.

the Puritan tradition from an early age. Moreover, he is known to have increased his personal knowledge of Puritan history during the 1730s and 1740s.¹⁸ It may not be coincidental, therefore, that when expanding the range of guidance for Methodist families shortly after this date, Wesley decided to include works by several Puritan authors.

Wesley began publishing more specific advice relating to family life during the 1750s, and it is pertinent to recall that his own marriage took place in 1751. In the *Christian Library* series Wesley included a number of abridgements of Puritan works.¹⁹ *The Practice of Sanctification, of Self-Denial, of the Life of Faith, and of Family Duties* by Isaac Ambrose formed part of volume thirteen in 1752.²⁰ In the following year, Wesley published his version of William Whateley's work of 1617, originally entitled: *A Bride Bush; or, a Wedding Sermon, Compendiously Describing the Duties of Married Persons*.²¹ Extracts from *A Counsel for Personal and Family Godliness*, by Joseph Alleine were also published at this time.²²

Of these new renditions of older works, the text with the most significance for the present study is that of William Whateley, which Wesley published in 1753 as: *Directions for Married Persons, describing the Duties common to both, and peculiar to each of them*. In the preface he wrote:

I have seen nothing on the subject in any, either ancient or modern, tongue, which is in any degree comparable to it. It is so full, so deep, so closely, so strongly wrote, [sic] and yet with the most exquisite decency, even where the author touches on points of the most delicate nature that are to be found within the whole compass of divinity.²³

Besides forming part of the *Christian Library*, Whateley's work was reissued during the same year as a separate pamphlet,²⁴ which Wesley recommended to several followers. Describing the pamphlet 'as an excellent tract' in 1758, he urged Samuel Furlly to read it carefully.²⁵ In a later letter to Miss Gretton, who was shortly to be married, Wesley suggested: 'Whatever family follows those directions will be as a city set on a hill'.²⁶

¹⁸ Henry Rack, D., *Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 1989, 3rd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 307.

¹⁹ The *Christian Library* was published between 1749 and 1755.

²⁰ Green, *Bibliography*, 78. Isaac Ambrose (1604 – 64). Ambrose's work had originally been published in 1664.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 81-2, and 84. William Whateley (1583-1639). Wesley published this version as volume 22 of the *Christian Library*.

²² *Ibid.*, 84.

²³ *Ibid.*, 81-2, and 84; William Whateley, "Directions for Married Persons: Describing the Duties Common to Both, and Peculiar to Each," ed. John Wesley, *Christian Library*, 22 (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1753), 1; Bufford W. Coe, *John Wesley and Marriage* (Bethlehem & London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 99 –113.

²⁴ Green, *Bibliography*, 81.

²⁵ *Letters* 4:33. Letter dated 2 Sept. 1758.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7: 166-7. Letter dated 16 Feb. 1783.

In 1760 Whateley's work appeared again, this time in the fourth volume of Wesley's *Sermons on Several Occasions*, a compilation which seems to form almost a complete manual for the Methodist people on the spiritual and temporal aspects of family life. In addition to Wesley's abridgement of Whateley, now called *The Duties of Husbands and Wives*, there were five further tracts: *Advice to the People Called Methodists with regard to Dress*; *Directions to Children*; *Directions to Servants*; *Thoughts on Christian Perfection*; and *Christian Instructions*.²⁷ Interestingly, Wesley drew on another Puritan author from the previous century in *Directions to Servants*, extracting some paragraphs from *Of Domesticall Duties* by William Gouge.²⁸

With the birth of the *Arminian Magazine* in 1778 there was a ready outlet for the wider dissemination of Wesley's works, and in its pages he had a monthly platform to clarify and develop Methodist policies. By this stage Wesley appears to have been even more aware of the need to guide families and to ensure that the next generation stayed within the Methodist fold.²⁹ The 1780s, therefore, saw no decline in Wesley's writings on family life. In 1783, for example, the *Magazine* carried Wesley's sermon *On Family Religion*.³⁰ This was followed by "A Thought on the Manner of Educating Children,"³¹ and a longer discussion of the subject in the sermon *On the Education of Children*.³² Later considerations of family matters included Wesley's 1784 discourse *On Obedience to Parents*,³³ and the article, 'Thoughts upon Dress', which was published in 1788.³⁴

Before considering the specific messages of Wesley's main policies in more detail it is necessary to establish Wesley's views on gender relations. To what extent did these core beliefs govern the above literature and other directives regarding relationships, duties before marriage, and those within the family unit and beyond?

Wesley's policies on gender

An analysis of Wesley's doctrinal position on gender difference reveals a traditional stance. Firstly, Wesley always emphasised that men and women were spiritually equal. In his

²⁷ Green, *Bibliography*, 82 and 112 – 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 113. Additional comments on further Puritan authors that Wesley drew on can be found in the editorial note to Wesley's sermon *On Family Religion* in *Sermons*, 3: 333.

²⁹ Green, *Bibliography*, 160. The Conference of 1768 had urged the preachers to devote more time to the children of members, and in 1772 Wesley issued a new version of *Prayers for Children*.

³⁰ *AM* 6 (1783): 452- 458 and 508 -514 included in *Sermons* 3: 333- 346.

³¹ *AM* 6 (1783): 380 – 383.

³² *Ibid.*, 566 -74 and 628 – 35, included in *Sermons* 3: 347 – 360.

³³ *AM* 7 (1784): 457- 464 and 514 – 518, included in *Sermons*, 3: 361 – 372.

³⁴ *AM* 11 (1788): 484.

Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament,³⁵ for example, he makes this comment on the verse in the second chapter of Genesis which describes the creation of woman:

In token of [Adam's] acceptance of her, he gave her a name, not peculiar to her, but common to her sex; she shall be called *woman*, *Isha*, a *She-man*, differing from man in sex only, not in nature; made of *man*, and joined to man. [Wesley's emphasis]³⁶

Whilst the two sexes were made separately, Wesley held that they were part of a divinely-ordained whole, and were also interdependent: '... *all things are of God* – the man, the woman, and their dependence on each other.' [Wesley's emphasis]³⁷ He argued that men and women were 'joint heirs' of salvation,³⁸ making clear that their spiritual equality was absolute: 'Nevertheless in the Lord Jesus, there is neither male nor female - Neither [sic] is excluded; neither is preferred before the other in [God's] kingdom.'³⁹

The belief in the spiritual equality of the sexes had practical consequences. It meant that women as well as men deserved the opportunity to develop their understanding of religion and their own gifts and graces. Thus, from their inception, Wesley's United Societies welcomed female members and allowed them to take on leadership roles.⁴⁰ Wesley also made the case for the better education of women. A letter outlining 'A Female Course of Study' appeared in one of the earliest volumes of the *Magazine*.⁴¹ In the later sermon *On Visiting the Sick*, Wesley also questioned contemporary views:

...it has long passed for a maxim with many that 'women are only to be seen, not heard.' And accordingly many of them are brought up in such a manner as if they were only designed for agreeable playthings! But is this doing honour to the sex? Or is it a real kindness to them?⁴²

Arguing that the forgoing approach was 'the deepest unkindness', 'horrid cruelty' and 'mere Turkish barbarity', Wesley went on to say, 'I do not know how any woman of sense and spirit can submit to it.'⁴³ A broad appeal to female members of the movement followed:

You as well as men, are rational creatures. You, like them, were made in the image of God: you are equally candidates for immortality. You too are called of God, as you have time, to 'do good unto all men'. Be 'not disobedient to the heavenly calling'.⁴⁴

³⁵ Quotations from Wesley's *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (1763) and *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (1755) have been taken from <http://wesley.nnu.edu/JohnWesley/notes/htm>.

³⁶ Wesley, *Notes* (OT) Genesis 2:22. Wesley's emphasis in this verse provided in Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 100.

³⁷ Wesley, *Notes* (NT) commenting on 1 Cor. 11: 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, commenting on 1 Peter 3:7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, commenting on 1 Corinthians 11: 11.

⁴⁰ I discuss how the developing organisation of the movement fostered the talents of individual women in a variety of offices below.

⁴¹ "A Female Course of Study: in a letter to Miss L" *AM* 3 (1780): 602.

⁴² Sermon dated May 23, 1786, reprinted in *Sermons* 3: 396.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 396 – 7.

This strong stance on the spiritual equality of men and women, and the variety of ways in which Wesley supported females within the Methodist Society have often been applauded, and have led to the depiction of him as a progressive leader. However, other elements of Wesley's teaching reveal a very conservative strain. Wesley did assure his members that 'there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus'.⁴⁵ But he also taught that Eve's action at the time of the Fall had justly invoked a divine punishment upon the whole female sex, and that God had ordained woman's subordination to man for all time. Wesley spelt out these beliefs in many of his sermons and commentaries on Scripture. His writings thereby reinforced the traditional hierarchical view of the sexes. A number of statements provide evidence of this aspect of Wesley's convictions.

As demonstrated earlier in the thesis, key readings in the book of Genesis were routinely used by the Church to argue the case for the subordination of women. Wesley added his own observations to this debate.⁴⁶ Verse sixteen of chapter three, for example, states: 'Unto the woman [God] said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to your husband, and he shall rule over thee.'⁴⁷ Commenting on this verse in the sermon: *On the Fall of Man*, Wesley noted: 'It seems the latter part of this sentence is explanatory of the former. Was there *till now* any other inferiority of the woman to the man than that which we may conceive in one angel to another?' [My emphasis]⁴⁸ Writing in the *Explanatory Notes* Wesley's position was made even more explicit:

We have here the sentence passed upon *the woman*; she is condemned to a state of *sorrow* and a state of *subjection*: proper punishments of a sin in which she had gratified her *pleasure* and her *pride* ... the whole sex, which by creation was equal with man, is for sin made inferior. [Wesley's emphasis]⁴⁹

Wesley's explanation of other verses in the New Testament which were also routinely used to justify the subordination of women, particularly in marriage, show little deviation from the accepted view. Wives were to submit to their husbands,⁵⁰ and husbands were reminded of the physical vulnerability of the female sex.⁵¹ Wesley's commentary on Genesis 3:16 even suggests a generic susceptibility to fear and tribulation became the lot of women as an inherent part of God's judgement after the Fall:

⁴⁵ *On Visiting the Sick*, in *Sermons* 3: 396 – 7.

⁴⁶ See the discussion above in chapter one.

⁴⁷ Genesis 3: 16 (Authorised version).

⁴⁸ Sermon *On the Fall of Man* (1782) in *Sermons*, 2: 404 – 405.

⁴⁹ Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 102 quoting *Wesley Notes* (OT), 1: 18.

⁵⁰ Wesley, *Notes* (NT). On Ephesians chapter five, verse twenty-two, Wesley wrote: 'Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands - Unless where God forbids. Otherwise, in all indifferent things, the will of the husband is a law to the wife.'

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Commenting on 1 Peter 3: 7, Wesley wrote: 'Dwell with the woman according to knowledge - Knowing they are weak, and therefore to be used with all tenderness. Yet do not despise them for this, but give them honour....'

She is here put into a state of sorrow; one particular of which only is instanced in, that of bringing forth children, but it includes all those impressions of grief and fear which the mind of that tender sex is most apt to receive, and all the common calamities which they are liable to.⁵²

Whilst the examples given above illustrate Wesley's justification of the subordination of women from the authority of Scripture, a further remark in Wesley's sermon *On Redeeming the Time* indicates that he also accepted contemporary biological theories, which likewise validated female inferiority. At one point in the sermon Wesley argued the case for early rising but seemed to absolve women, making the intriguing comment: '... I have long observed that women in general want a little more sleep than men; perhaps because they are in common of a weaker as well as moister habit of body.'⁵³ Again pointing to women's weakness, the reference to a 'moister habit of body', seems a peculiar remark. However, the phrase signals Wesley's acceptance, and advocacy of conventional Galenic medicine, which as detailed earlier in the thesis, deemed female physiognomy to be simply an imperfect version of the male.⁵⁴

Within the Methodist movement, therefore, despite Wesley's strong promotion of the spiritual equality of women, his writings can be seen to employ the authority of scripture and science and thereby reiterate the conventional message of female subordination. With these findings established it is possible to turn to more specific policies that Wesley developed to govern the Methodist approach to courtship, marriage and domesticity and thus informed the home lives of the subjects of the study.

Methodist policies on courtship.

While Protestant teaching concerning the suitability of spouses advocated a search among those of a similar age and social background, Wesley went further in his guidance to the Methodists, adding the need to consider the *religious* credentials of possible marriage partners. Wesley took the text: 'Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers' seriously.⁵⁵ Both his sermons and the *Large Minutes*,⁵⁶ made clear that Methodist members should aim to look within the Society for a suitable partner. Wesley felt that even to fraternise with the ungodly was unwise, but to marry an unbeliever or 'unawakened person' was worse: a sure way of courting disaster.⁵⁷

⁵² Wesley, *Notes* (OT).

⁵³ *Sermons*, 3: 325.

⁵⁴ See the discussion in chapter one above.

⁵⁵ Wesley, *Notes* (NT) on 2 Corinthians 6:14.

⁵⁶ This was the preachers' handbook and guide to doctrinal policy.

⁵⁷ See Wesley's sermon, *In What Sense are we to leave the World?* (July 1784) in *Sermons* 3: 150. Whilst Wesley felt that it was unwise for Methodists of both sexes to converse with unbelievers, he suggested that ungodly females presented a particular danger for unmarried men among his flock.

‘Above all we should tremble at the very thought of entering into a marriage covenant, the closest of all others, with any person who does not love, or at least fear, God’, he wrote, suggesting that this was ‘the most horrid folly...’⁵⁸ For some members the effects of marrying an ungodly person had proved ‘fatal’, he argued later, and those concerned had ‘either a cross for life, or turned back to perdition.’⁵⁹ Such unwise marriage alliances were deemed to merit the expulsion of the Society members involved, and it was left to the itinerant preachers to uphold this rule and administer any disciplinary action that was necessary.⁶⁰

Wesley’s teaching on this matter was evidently taken seriously, as several individuals recount. Christopher Hopper, one of the early travelling preachers, described his attraction to his first love, Jane Richardson, a farmer’s daughter.⁶¹ She was an ‘agreeable young woman’ who, Hopper wrote, had ‘laid fast hold on [his] youthful heart.’ However, Jane was unacquainted with God, which Hopper noted ‘was a bar indeed!’ He felt it necessary to break off his correspondence with his sweetheart, but was afraid that she could not bear it. After much prayer for direction, Hopper’s dilemma was resolved happily. Jane was ‘soon awakened and found peace with God.’ The couple married in 1745 with ‘[all] objections being removed.’⁶² While this is an example from the early decades of the movement, the continuing importance of Wesley’s rule is clear in later writings. When considering the suitability of his sweetheart, Miss McLardie in 1803, for example, Jabez Bunting concluded:

I am not sure that she is eminently, but I believe she is very sincerely and truly, pious. In marrying her, if I can gain her consent, I should not transgress that precept, “Marry only in the Lord;” nor that, “Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers.”⁶³

The need to choose a partner from within the Methodist flock was not the only obligation that Wesley set out for intending suitors. He argued that the spiritual compatibility of couples was an additional consideration. In letters to Ann Bolton in 1774 Wesley highlighted such concerns. Doubtful about the attributes of Ann’s current suitor, Wesley repeated the thoughts of Mary Bosanquet on the subject of a choice of a suitable partner. Writing to Wesley earlier, Mary had suggested:

If I change my situation it must be with one I can not only love but highly *reverence* and esteem: one that is qualified to be my *guide*; one who is eminent not only in grace but likewise in understanding. [Author’s emphasis]⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Sermon 80, *On Friendship with the World* (May 1786) in *Sermons* 3: 132. See also *ibid.*, 3: 145-6.

⁵⁹ *Works*, 8: 296 quoting the *Large Minutes* of 1789.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *EMP* 1: 196. All the following quotations relating to Hopper are taken from this page.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ T. P. Bunting, *The Life of Jabez Bunting* (London: Woolmer, 1887), 32.

⁶⁴ *Letters* 6: 69. Letter dated 20 Jan. 1774. Mary sought Wesley’s advice after a proposal from John Fletcher.

Significantly, Wesley made an additional point to Ann about the need for religious freedom, writing: 'I would add, 'And one that will furnish you with full liberty of action that you may exercise your every grace.'⁶⁵ Wesley continued: 'Give me such an [sic] one for my beloved friend, and I will instantly wish you God speed!'⁶⁶ Wesley could see none of these qualities in Ann's present suitor, he later informed Ann, telling her bluntly: '[He] is not the person. He has neither such a measure of understanding nor of spiritual experience as to advance you either in divine knowledge or in the life of God.'⁶⁷ While this shows Wesley's concern for Ann's spiritual fulfilment, it also illustrates his willingness to interfere.

Methodist policies set out in the *Large Minutes* insisted that couples intent upon courtship should seek parental consent.⁶⁸ 'It is not advisable to take any step with a young woman without the full and free consent of her parents,' Wesley counselled one man.⁶⁹ Hearing that Hugh Moore had offered marriage to Kitty Davenport without the consent of her parents, Wesley contacted the preacher in the nearest circuit and requested his intervention. Mr Moore needed to be shown 'the sinfulness of such a proceeding' and reminded that, 'if he married a person without the consent of her parents, he would thereby exclude himself out of the Methodist Connexion.'⁷⁰ With this particular rule there was apparently some leeway. Marriage could proceed *without* parental consent if a woman was under 'a necessity of marrying',⁷¹ or if the parents concerned 'absolutely refuse to allow marriage to any Christian.'⁷² These provisions did not apply to the itinerants, however, who were advised *never* to marry in such circumstances.⁷³

The latter prohibition underlines Wesley's caution with respect to marriage amongst the itinerants. In the same edition of the *Minutes* an additional regulation stated that an itinerant who married during his probationary period would automatically revert to the status of a local preacher.⁷⁴ This meant a postponement of marriage for those seriously committed to the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 72. Letter dated 17 Feb. 1774.

⁶⁸ *Works*, 8: 296.

⁶⁹ *Letters* 5: 29. Letter to John Whitehead dated 15 Oct. 1766. See also *ibid.*, 8: 35 giving Wesley's letter to Thomas Roberts dated 18 Jan. 1788. Here he states: 'I commend you for entirely giving up the matter when you found her parents were absolutely against it'.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 7: 120. Letter to John Bredin dated 10 April 1782 in.

⁷¹ *Works*, 8: 296. Presumably meaning cases where a pregnancy was already under way.

⁷² *Ibid.* In this case the Christian right of the individual was evidently held to outweigh obedience to parents.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 313.

itinerancy until after their admittance into ‘full connexion.’⁷⁵ Individual travelling preachers were also cautioned to spell out the responsibilities of an itinerant life to their prospective partners. Wesley urged the preacher, William Orpe to tell his fiancée:

... immediately, either in person or by letter ‘I dare not settle in any one place: God has called me to be a travelling preacher. Are you willing to accept of me upon these terms? And can you engage never directly or indirectly to hinder me from travelling? If not, it is best for us to part. It cannot be avoided.’⁷⁶

Happily for William his sweetheart accepted his offer of marriage despite these cautions and the couple wed.⁷⁷ As the later primary sources reveal, however, information such as this often aroused trepidation and very careful deliberation by the women who were the preachers’ choice.

The creation of a Methodist home: the implications of the General Rules of membership of the Methodist Society

When Wesley drew up the *General Rules* of the Society in 1743 his main concern was to provide a clear framework for the membership, and to promote the spiritual growth of individuals within the movement.⁷⁸ However, the regulations had profound implications for those who were about to be married and for other established couples, requiring the adoption of a wide range of devotional practices. In pursuit of personal holiness all members were directed to find time for private prayer and ‘searching the Scriptures,’⁷⁹ whilst gathering the household for family prayer was another obligation to be practiced at least once a day.⁸⁰ Attendance at weekday Methodist preaching services and in the classes or bands was another requirement and members were expected to be faithful communicants at their Parish Church.⁸¹ Such activities, therefore, constituted a regular pattern of private, family, and communal religious duties that started in the home.

Other aspects of the *Rules* are noteworthy in the present discussion for their emphasis upon a distinctly counter-cultural outlook. Methodists were urged to make diligence and frugality their daily rule, to dress plainly, avoid needless self-indulgence, and observe periods of fasting or abstinence each week.⁸² Thus acceptance of rigorous self-restraint was a key

⁷⁵ As suggested in chapter three above this probationary period ‘on trial’ was initially a minimum of one year, which could be extended. From 1784 the period was four years.

⁷⁶ *Letters* 5: 62 – 63. Letter dated 2 Oct. 1767. See also Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 70.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Works* 8: 259-261. Wesley’s rules were headed: ‘The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle upon Tyne etc.’

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁸⁰ As noted above, Wesley soon provided literature to assist members in fulfilling this latter obligation publishing *A Collection of Prayers for Families* in 1745, which contained morning and evening prayers for every day of the week.

⁸¹ *Works* 8: 259 and 261.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 260-61.

principle in the members' lives. This was bound to have an impact upon the economic and social life of Methodist families, as well as governing their approach towards the management of household affairs. Meanwhile, the *Rules* stated that individuals were also to use every opportunity to do 'good of every possible sort, and as far as possible, to all men,' and therefore be charitable towards others less fortunate than themselves.⁸³ These were other key ideals governing the Methodist home.

Foundations for a happy married life

Wesley's edition of William Whateley's *Directions for Married Persons* contains guidance on other aspects of matrimonial life.⁸⁴ As Wesley republished the work on a number of occasions and strongly recommended it to individual members, he can be seen to have been strongly in favour of the author's opinions. It is pertinent, therefore, to examine Whateley's views. Whateley saw marriage as an enterprise which involved spiritual unity as much as physical union. The very basis of married love, he suggested, was *spiritual* in that it should be a response to the will and word of God rather than to any temporal attraction. Thus, for a Christian man it was not the beauty, wit, dutiful behaviour, or love being shown by his wife that should prompt a reciprocal expression of love, but rather: '... because the LORD of Heaven and Earth hath said, Husbands love your Wives.'⁸⁵ However, Whateley suggested, married love was also *matrimonial*, in the sense that next to God and Christ the wife was to have 'the highest Room in the Husband's Heart, and he in hers'.⁸⁶ Both kinds of love: the spiritual and the matrimonial, Whateley argued, needed to be nourished properly for a happy married life. In this he was in accord with other Puritan writers.⁸⁷

Whateley felt that the natural means of prospering love between married couples was cohabitation, and identified a range of mutual duties and responsibilities necessary to promote the relationship and general welfare of both husband and wife. The first duties of a married couple, he suggested, were towards each other: remaining faithful to one another, being helpful and willing to please their partners, and ready to safeguard the honour and good name of their

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁸⁴ John Wesley, ed, *Directions for Married Persons: Describing the Duties Common to Both, and Peculiar to Each*, Christian Library, 22 (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1753). I note the various editions and recommendations above.

⁸⁵ Whateley, "Directions," 25. In all following quotations from Whateley the original spelling, capitalization and emphasis has been retained.

⁸⁶ Whateley, "Directions," 25.

⁸⁷ Schücking, *Puritan Family*, 38. The author quotes Daniel Rogers, who suggested that marriage was 'a mixture of religion and nature.'

spouse.⁸⁸ Sexual love, which Whateley stressed was an important part of the married relationship, also involved mutual responsibilities. Thus partners should practice ‘due benevolence’ towards one another in conjugal love with ‘Chearfulness and willingness’ being the hallmark of these encounters.⁸⁹ Marital harmony would be assisted if the couple acknowledged God’s providence in their initial meeting and union, and sought to promote the spiritual good of their spouse. They should pray with, and for their partners, engaging also in spiritual discourse together and singing.⁹⁰ Whilst it was the husband’s primary responsibility to provide for his wife *materially*, a couple should share the labour necessary for their livelihood, Whateley argued, working together to manage their resources and affairs prudently.⁹¹

Gender relations within the family

When describing relationships within the family and household, Whateley consistently stressed the husband’s superior position. This supremacy he suggested, was validated both by supernatural and natural design.⁹² The husband must be taken for ‘... God’s immediate Officer in the House, and as it were the King in the Family ...’,⁹³ whilst a wife was to take the next place to her husband, and as a subordinate ‘... become an Helper and a Furtherer’.⁹⁴ He pointed out that whilst a husband drew his authority from God immediately, a wife acted only by the authority imparted to her by her spouse, and it was on these terms that she could account herself the husband’s ‘Deputy.’⁹⁵ Thus Whateley clearly followed Pauline teaching, endorsing the patriarchal hierarchy of the household.

Whateley stressed that both husband and wife were responsible for maintaining, governing, and guiding any children and servants, and suggested that this necessitated a joint approach.⁹⁶ It was a mark of a husband’s good government, he maintained, to leave the practicalities of family management to the discretion of his wife, directing husbands to allow their wives sufficient funds for such expenses.⁹⁷ A couple were also jointly responsible for their dependents’ spiritual needs. As the family’s spiritual head, the husband led Bible reading and prayer: a duty that his wife might assume if her husband was away. Meanwhile, the husband

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 50. In a nice phrase he suggested that: ‘All blabbing and loud accusing, must be far removed’

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-22, quotation at 22.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 and 32 – 33.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹² He explained that ‘the Lord in his Word, hath intitled him the Head’ and that nature had ‘framed the Lineaments of his Body to Superiority, and set the Print of Government in his very face ...’ See *ibid.*, 61 and 62.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁹⁶ Coe, *Wesley and Marriage*, 111.

⁹⁷ Whateley, "Directions," 84.

should also oversee teaching and catechising any children and servants, and enforce observance of the Sabbath. Expressing a sentiment that was common in his time, Whateley suggested, the husband and wife ‘must be careful to do [God] service in their little Common-wealth.’⁹⁸

Turning to a more detailed assessment of the ‘special duties’ of husbands and wives within marriage, Whateley went further in his sanction of gender inequality, maintaining that this was an integral part of the divine and natural order of the world. He drew heavily upon the imagery of St Paul, who, in the letter to the Ephesians, likened the essential relationship between a husband and wife to the bond existing between Christ and His Church.⁹⁹ Whateley argued that it was a husband’s special duty to maintain his wife and to govern her, holding fast to: ‘... that Reverence and Precedency which both GOD and Nature have assigned him.’¹⁰⁰ Right governance involved not only setting a good example by avoiding evils such as profligacy, drunkenness, gambling, ill company and frivolous behaviour,¹⁰¹ but also entailed the husband *using* his authority and deciding what was appropriate behaviour in his ‘domestick kingdom’.¹⁰²

Whateley, a married man himself, showed a deal of psychological insight here. He suggested that it was best to use authority sparingly, to request gently rather than command. A husband should not be over zealous in finding fault, but rather generous with praise. He should be mindful to restrict any correction or admonitions to an appropriate time, preferably when the couple were alone. Husbands were told to remember their own position before God, and to act: ‘... not as the Chief and absolute Commander, but as one who himself stands under a Superior Power...’¹⁰³ Their guiding principle should always be: ‘The Fruit of my ruling my Wife, must be her Comfort and Happiness’.¹⁰⁴

Writing of the special duties of the wife, however, Whateley’s tone altered significantly. He identified two key points, suggesting that the wife should first ‘acknowledge her Inferiority’ and also ‘carry herself as an Inferior’.¹⁰⁵ At issue was the special, divinely instituted position of husbands. Even if a husband was of a lower social or intellectual standing than the wife,

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58. The feeling was that once households were put under patriarchal order then societal order would follow.

⁹⁹ Ephesians 5: 23. In St Paul’s depiction the husband was equated to the head, (Christ) and the wife to the body or family (the Church). Whateley’s words were a close echo of St Paul: ‘... as our LORD Jesus is to his Church, so must [the husband] be to his Wife, an Head and Saviour.’ See also Schücking, *Puritan Family*, 32 – 33.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 64 – 69, quotation at 69.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

Whateley argued, after the couple's marriage he became her superior.¹⁰⁶ In a passage that seems quite startling to the modern reader, Whateley addressed the wives amongst his readership:

Whoever, therefore, doth desire, or purpose to be a good Wife, or to live comfortably, let her set down this Conclusion within her Soul: Mine Husband is my Superior, my Better: He hath Authority and Rule over me; Nature hath given it him, GOD hath given it to him, saying to our first Mother; *Thy Desire shall be subject to thine Husband, and he shall rule over thee.*¹⁰⁷

Moreover, it was not enough for a wife to acknowledge her inferiority to her husband inwardly. There had also to be a *visible* demonstration of submission.¹⁰⁸ Thus it was necessary to show respect and avoid endearments that were too familiar.¹⁰⁹ In her demeanour and words a wife should exhibit a 'loving fear' that would clearly signify her inferior position to all.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, Whateley argued, a wife should be obedient to her husband's commandments, and submit to his reproofs. He asked: 'Is not this Duty plainly required in those Words? *As the Church is subject to Christ, so must the Wives to their own Husbands in every Thing*'.¹¹¹ As the above examples demonstrate, Whateley again cited the authority of scripture and nature to sanction his arguments.

There is an undoubted incongruity here between Whateley's stern description of a wife's particular duties, and his former exploration of other aspects of the husband and wife relationship. Jacqueline Eales has suggested: '... by emphasising the importance of marital love as well as wifely subordination, Whately [sic] set up a series of tensions and inconsistencies in his work that he never really resolved.'¹¹² She points out, that this was a discrepancy that was also in evidence in the conduct material produced by several of Whateley's contemporaries.¹¹³ However, what is to be remarked here is the fact that Whateley's arguments and world view were being circulated among later generations of Methodist people, and in addition were highly recommended by the movement's founder. As the previous paragraphs amply illustrate, in terms of both language and sentiments, Whateley's work was very much in tune with his own time, but this in itself may have been a hindrance to the assimilation of his ideas into Methodist culture. It seems especially odd, considering Wesley's position as editor, that he did not pass any comment on Whateley's severe depiction of the particular duties of the wife.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 102. Whateley notes: '... leave *Tom* and *Dick* to call thy Boy by, and call thine Husband, Husband, or some other Name of equal Dignity.'

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 105, quoting Ephesians 5: 24.

¹¹² Eales, "Gender Construction," 164.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, Fletcher, "Protestant Idea," 175.

As described earlier, however, Wesley's other writings reveal his promulgation of the subordination of women as a result of the Fall, and his belief that females were 'naturally' the weaker sex. His comments on key verses in chapter five of St Paul's letter to the Ephesians further indicate his endorsement of the Pauline model of the husband and wife relationship. Wesley observed that the husband was: '... head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church', which meant that he was also the '... governor, guide, and guardian of the wife'.¹¹⁴ A husband was to love his wife '... even as Christ loved the Church', for this was the true model of conjugal affection.¹¹⁵ From this it followed that a wife's obedience to her husband, was at one and the same time '... paid to Christ himself'.¹¹⁶ Wesley prefaced these remarks with an explanation of the binding obligation involved: '... inferiors ought to do their duty, whatever their superiors do. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands – unless where God forbids. Otherwise, in all indifferent things, the will of the husband is a law to the wife.'¹¹⁷ It is plain therefore, that Wesley also endorsed the gender hierarchy that St Paul's words enjoined.

The matter of obedience became more pertinent for Wesley as his relationship with his wife, Molly deteriorated. Wesley's correspondence with Molly indicates that his personal views on the matter of wifely obedience accorded strongly with his public statements. With regard to his right to govern his wife, and his God-given role as a husband, for example, Wesley wrote: 'Leave me to be governed by God and my own conscience. Then shall I govern you with gentle sway.'¹¹⁸ He told Molly that every act of disobedience on her part was effectively an act of rebellion against God and the King, as well as against her husband, writing:

Alas, that to this hour you should neither know your duty nor be willing to learn it! Indeed, if you was a wise, whether a good woman or not, you would long since have given me a *carte blanche*: you would have said, 'Tell me what to do, and I will do it; tell me what to avoid, and I will avoid it. I promised to obey you, and I will keep my word. Bid me do *anything, everything*. In whatever is not sinful, I *obey*. You direct, I will follow the direction.' [Author's emphasis]¹¹⁹

This severe statement clearly has strong echoes of Whateley's rhetoric. Interestingly, Wesley's private difficulties may have been compounded by concurrent developments in the movement. From 1758 onwards a controversy arose concerning Christian Perfection, and oblique references in contemporary sources indicate that some married women, believing they had attained

¹¹⁴ *Notes* (NT) on Ephesians 5: 23, and 25.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, on Ephesians 5: 22.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Kenneth J. Collins, "John Wesley's Relationship with His Wife as Revealed in His Correspondence," *Methodist History* 32, no. 1 (October 1993): 15. Letter dated 23 Oct. 1759.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12. Letter dated 23 March 1760.

perfection, were then refusing to sleep with their husbands.¹²⁰ Thus the subject of a wife's obedience to her husband was of wider interest to the Methodist people.

Wesley's later writings offered guidance on coping with difficulties in personal relationships within marriage. In his 1783 sermon, *On Family Religion*, for example, Wesley stated that it was the duty of a husband to use every possible means to ensure that his wife might be '... freed from every spot, and may walk unblameable in love.'¹²¹ Whilst this involved restraining one's wife from outward sin, the appropriate method to achieve this was by example, argument and persuasion. He wrote: 'I cannot find in the Bible that a husband has authority to strike his wife on any account – even suppose she struck him first – unless his life were in imminent danger.'¹²² Wesley pointed out that the only grounds on which a husband could 'dismiss' his wife would be the latter's adultery. In any other cases of habitual sinning the husband had to try to overcome evil with good: '... if this evil cannot be overcome by good, we are called to suffer it.'¹²³ Wesley suggested that in due time God would '...either ... take the temptation away or make it a blessing to your soul.'¹²⁴

In situations where a wife faced difficulties with her husband, Wesley indicated that submission and perseverance were to be practised. A short article, published in the *Magazine* of 1787 offered obvious parallels. Based on the description of St Monica in the *Confessions of St Augustine*, Wesley's article praised Monica for being an obedient wife, showing no resistance to her husband when he was angry, and concealing his ill treatment: '...it was never heard, or known by any sign, that *Patricius* had ever beaten his wife, or *Monica* ever quarrelled with her husband,' Wesley wrote, '[thus] by her patient, prudent behaviour, she at last won him over to the Faith. [Author's emphasis]'¹²⁵ For a wife, therefore, the emphasis was on obedience as well as patient endurance in the hope of eventually overcoming marital strife. It was advice which must have offered little comfort to those undergoing severe problems, but Wesley obviously saw this as a true model to be emulated by married women in the movement, as he entitled the article: 'A pattern for Christian Wives'.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 333-42; Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire. John Wesley and the Methodists* (Stanford, California: University of Stanford Press, 1990), 70; Robert Glen, "Some Forgotten Wesleyan Women: Early Published Accounts of Exemplary Lives," paper presented at 'John Wesley: Life, Legend and Legacy': a Conference at the University of Manchester, 16 June, 2003.

¹²¹ *Sermons* 3: 337.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 339.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *AM* 1787 (10): 379 -10.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 379.

The care and upbringing of children

Wesley's belief that the religious ethos of the home was inextricably linked to the spiritual development of those within the Methodist movement and beyond found expression in his 1783 sermon, *On Family Religion*.¹²⁷ Wesley took for his text Joshua 24:15: 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord', arguing in his opening remarks that if Joshua's resolution was not more widely adopted, spiritual growth among the people would cease. Wesley's sermon set out to clarify what it meant truly to serve God. His examination also identified those who were to be considered as part of the household, and the ways in which all of these could be brought to 'serve the Lord'.¹²⁸ The importance of a firm spiritual basis to family life was reasserted, and Wesley's message was directed to the male heads of households, who, as noted above, were deemed to be the natural and rightful spiritual leaders in the home.

The patriarchal framework of the family and need for obedience within it were themes continued in Wesley's other writings on the care and training of children.¹²⁹ Wesley emphasised the inestimable value of children, informing parents that their offspring were: 'immortal spirits whom God hath for a time entrusted to your care, that you might train them up in all holiness ...'¹³⁰ However, Wesley's belief in the doctrine of original sin also led him to insist that even the youngest infant was also marred by a fallen nature.¹³¹ Moreover, this theological stance coloured his approach to methods of child care and training. Wesley was scathing about the new Romantic ideals expressed by Rousseau, describing his work, *Emile* as: 'the most empty, silly, injudicious thing that ever a self-conceited infidel wrote.'¹³² Instead, Wesley returned to the example of his own upbringing, frequently commending his mother's strict childrearing practices.¹³³ Susanna Wesley had insisted on the need to break a child's will

¹²⁷ *On Family Religion*, was published in *AM*, 6 (1783): 452-58 and 508-14 and is reprinted in *Sermons* 3: 333-346.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 336.

¹²⁹ Wesley's other writings include *On the Education of Children* published in *AM*, 6 (1783): 566-574 and 628-635, reprinted in *Sermons* 3: 347 – 360; *On Obedience to Parents* *AM*, 7 (1784): 457 – 64 and 514-18, reprinted in *Sermons* 3: 361 – 72; and the article: "A Thought on the Manner of Educating Children," *AM* 6 (1783): 380 – 383.

¹³⁰ *Family Religion*, *Sermons* 3: 337.

¹³¹ *AM* 6 (1783): 382. In "A Thought" Wesley wrote: '... inasmuch as the corruption of Nature is earlier than our instructions can be, we should take all pains and care, to counteract this corruption, as early as possible.' In *Education of Children* Wesley urged parents to teach their offspring 'that they are fallen spirits'. (*Sermons* 3: 355-6). On this point see John Tosh "Methodist Domesticity and Middle-Class Masculinity in Nineteenth-Century England," in *Gender and Christian Religion* ed. R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 342.

¹³² "A Thought", *AM* 6 (1783): 380.

¹³³ *Sermons* 3: 343. In *Family Religion* Wesley noted that Susanna had skilfully reared her children, pointing to her success in subduing her own offspring despite the number and feisty natures of her brood.

and instil obedience as a prerequisite to other learning,¹³⁴ and this was an approach that Wesley frequently endorsed.¹³⁵

In his 1784 sermon: *On Obedience to Parents*, Wesley stressed the need for children to show respect and obedience to both their parents equally.¹³⁶ He recognized that mothers were the primary educators in the child's early years, and wrote that in this task all mothers needed to have sense, patience, and resolution.¹³⁷ He suggested that a variety of approaches might be used to ensure that the necessary behaviour of children was inculcated, such as advice, persuasion, or reproof.¹³⁸ However, parents needed to undertake the duty with 'a proper spirit of government,'¹³⁹ and be ready in the last resort to 'correct with kind severity'.¹⁴⁰ Claiming the authority of scripture, Wesley argued that those who were remiss in this respect, not only failed their child, but acted contrary to God's word, noting that: 'He that spareth the rod hateth the child; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes'.¹⁴¹

When the time came for more formal education Wesley advised parents that the most important point in choosing schools for their offspring was the spiritual calibre of the teachers.¹⁴² In his eyes the larger public schools for boys were 'nurseries of all manner of wickedness,' and instead he recommended small private establishments where religion and learning went together under the direction of some pious man.¹⁴³ For girls, Wesley suggested that education away from home would be a possible option for those who 'cannot breed them up ... as my mother did...'¹⁴⁴ He dismissed large boarding schools for girls as places instilling 'pride, vanity, affectation, intrigue, and artifice,' providing some examples of several smaller more suitable establishments.¹⁴⁵ These educational policies were of considerable significance for the preachers' wives, as their sons were sent to Kingswood School in Bristol, which Wesley founded in 1748. Following Wesley's pedagogical approach they had a rigorous timetable, rising at four in the morning, and undergoing long periods of studying. Play was forbidden.

¹³⁴ *J & D* 19: 287. Susanna's description of her household regime included her comment that 'In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will, and bring them to an obedient temper.'

¹³⁵ Wesley echoed his mother's sentiments in *Obedience to Parents*, writing: 'Make [children] submit, that they may not perish. Break their will, that you may save their soul,' (*Sermons* 3: 367) and in *Education of Children* noted '... in the whole art of Christian education there is nothing more important than this.' (*Sermons* 3: 354).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 363.

¹³⁷ *Education of Children, Sermons* 3: 354-5.

¹³⁸ *Family Religion, Sermons* 3: 339.

¹³⁹ Wesley, "A Thought", 382.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 383.

¹⁴¹ *Family Religion Sermons* 3: 340, quoting Proverbs 13: 24.

¹⁴² *Education of Children, Sermons* 3: 349.

¹⁴³ *Family Religion, Sermons* 3: 343.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ "A Thought", 380-381, and *Family Religion, Sermons* 3: 343.

Moreover, in order to avoid parental interference, the children had no holidays and were expected to stay at the school for the entire length of their studies.¹⁴⁶

Although Wesley died in 1791, his policies lived on. Wesley's *Sermons* and *Explanatory Notes* remained the basis for Methodist doctrine, and his other prescriptive works continued to be sold.¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, throughout the period of the study, later contributors to the *Magazine* often returned to elaborate on Wesley's major themes, emphasising the importance of the home and domestic worship¹⁴⁸ and discussing the spiritual development and education of children.¹⁴⁹ Some advice material did change. Joseph Bush's 1847 manual *Courtship and Marriage* advised young men that the best time to marry was 'as soon as you have a fair prospect of being able to support a wife'.¹⁵⁰ However, most significantly, when the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* of 1836 included a sermon on 'The Duties of Husbands and Wives' the reader was advised to go back to 'a tract published by Mr. Wesley'.¹⁵¹ 'Whoever reads that treatise', the author suggested, 'will obtain much more instruction than he can reasonably expect to derive from the present discourse'.¹⁵²

Opportunities for service within the Methodist system

The foregoing analysis illustrates, therefore, the ways in which Wesley's personal theology and understanding of gender differences influenced Methodist ideas regarding courtship, relationships within the household and other areas of domestic life. However, Wesley's guiding principles and theological stance also informed the developing organisational systems of his Societies, and thus became instrumental in opening up a range of opportunities for members of the Society to develop their personal vocations through lay leadership and in many other public fields of endeavour. It is to these aspects of Methodist policy and praxis that the discussion now turns. What was the range of service open to women in the movement, and

¹⁴⁶ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 355-59.

¹⁴⁷ Norma Virgoe, "The Yarmouth Circuit Booklist, 1806", in *PWHS*, 53:4 (Feb 2002), 127 - 136.

¹⁴⁸ Among many examples one 1846 sermon treats 'Domestic worship: its obligations, mode and benefit,' (*WMM* 69 (1846): 329), whilst in 1874, another addresses 'Home piety' (*WMM* 97 (1874): 1067).

¹⁴⁹ Material in the *Magazine* after the death of Wesley includes: "On the education of children." *MM* 17 (1794): 204; a series entitled: "Letters from a parent on the education of children." *MM* 23 (1800); and "Hints for the education of children." *MM* 40 (1817): 539-41. Other articles include "The importance of teaching children to pray", *MM* 33 (1810): 519 and "Letters on the religious instruction of the young," *MM* 37 (1814).

¹⁵⁰ Kenneth D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800 - 1930* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1988), 176. Interestingly Brown also found that rules on courtship were still being strictly enforced among candidates for the Methodist ministry even in the late nineteenth century. (174)

¹⁵¹ *WMM*, 59 (1836): 333.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

to what extent did these boundaries alter during the period of the study? Such issues were of great significance to the preachers' wives.

Where the former Anglican religious societies had been closed to members of the female sex, Wesley's United Societies made them welcome.¹⁵³ His emphasis upon the spiritual equality of the sexes and the *universal* love of God was evidenced in a system where every soul was valued. Both sexes could play a prominent part in their local society, as visitors to the sick and poor, stewards or trustees, and the classes and bands provided other opportunities for both men and women to develop leadership and pastoral skills.¹⁵⁴ From the earliest days of the movement women outnumbered men and they were active both in establishing societies, and assisting their expansion.¹⁵⁵ The single sex composition of the bands meanwhile, was particularly important as a means of nurturing female talents. Moreover, some women were allowed to lead mixed classes with the safeguard from Wesley that 'You do not act as a superior, but an equal'.¹⁵⁶ Later lay initiatives such as prayer meetings and Sunday Schools also provided many other opportunities for female service.¹⁵⁷

Both Wesley's theological stance, and the organisational structures that he inaugurated, combined to empower women in other ways. Wesley's Arminian beliefs led him to emphasise that each individual was responsible for his or her own salvation: a powerful liberating force for many women, endorsing their freedom to decide their *own* spiritual destiny. Hence, individuals found the courage to assert that right in the face of patriarchal objections.¹⁵⁸ The design of the weekly class and band meetings, meanwhile, encouraged self-expression and personal witness from both sexes.¹⁵⁹ The Methodist love feast was a more public forum for individual spiritual testimony, a place of 'free and familiar conversation in which every man, yea every woman has liberty to speak what ever may be to the Glory of God.'¹⁶⁰ In public services too, both women and men were allowed to exhort the assembled company. Within these services and devotional

¹⁵³ See the earlier discussion in chapter three above.

¹⁵⁴ On the development of lay ministry generally see Margaret Batty, *Stages in the Development and Control of Wesleyan Lay Leadership, 1791-1878* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, on behalf of World Methodist Historical Society, 1988). Other works dealing with all aspects of female service include in Earl Kent Brown, *The Women of Mr Wesley's Methodism* (Leviston, New York: Edward Mellen Press, 1983); Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (New Jersey and London: American Theological Library Association, 1991) and *Her Own Story* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001).

¹⁵⁵ Chilcote, *Women Preachers*, 49-54. An early example of such initiatives by women occurred in the Leeds area. Mary Shent and her two female friends were the first to go to Birstall to hear John Nelson preach. Through their witness Nelson was invited to Leeds, and a society was formed, meeting first at Mary's home. See *EMP* 1: 60-62.

¹⁵⁶ Chilcote, *Women Preachers*, 71.

¹⁵⁷ Batty, *Stages*, 60 – 86.

¹⁵⁸ One example being Diana Claxton, whose story is related above in chapter three.

¹⁵⁹ Chilcote, *Women Preachers*, 67-71.

¹⁶⁰ Chilcote, *Women Preachers*, 98 quoting Wesley's journal entry of 19 July 1761.

groups many individuals made a gradual transition from prayer to testimony and further exhortation.¹⁶¹ As shown in chapter three, this was a familiar route for men into other work as a local or itinerant preacher.¹⁶² In time, Wesley also allowed a number of women to assume the work of preaching, although as is now demonstrated, their role was always limited.

Wesley admitted a biblical precedent for female preaching as early as 1755, noting that: ‘Evangelists and deacons preached. Yea, and women when under extraordinary inspiration ...’¹⁶³ In the 1760s, however, the issue came to the forefront when two women, Sarah Crosby and Mary Bosanquet started to attract hundreds of listeners to their class meetings, and had to abandon the usual personal system.¹⁶⁴ The former class leader wrote to Wesley in 1761 expressing her worries: ‘I was not sure whether it was right for me to exhort in so public a manner.’¹⁶⁵ Wesley’s reply was: ‘You lay me under a great difficulty. The Methodists do not allow of [sic] women preachers ...’¹⁶⁶ He was happy to let Sarah exhort or read devotional material in this more public situation, adding: ‘I do not see that you have broken any law. Go on calmly and steadily.’¹⁶⁷ However, in 1769, he further advised her: ‘Even in public you may properly enough intermix *short exhortations* with prayer; but keep as far from preaching as you can: therefore never take a text.’ [Author’s emphasis]¹⁶⁸

During the following decade Wesley’s attitude towards female preaching underwent another change as a result of appeals from Mary Bosanquet. In 1771 Mary also sought advice about the nature of her work as a result of the numbers attending her meetings, using her letter to Wesley to mount a strong argument against the blanket application of particular biblical prohibitions against female preaching. She maintained that women were occasionally called by God to preach.¹⁶⁹ Wesley accepted her point, writing: ‘I think the strength of the cause rests there on your having an *Extraordinary Call*. So I am persuaded has every one of our Lay

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 82; G. Milburn and M. Batty, eds. *Workaday Preachers: The Story of Methodist Local Preaching* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1995), 15-18..

¹⁶² On all aspects of local preaching see *ibid.*

¹⁶³ Chilcote, *Women Preachers*, 106. Studies of female preaching include Leslie Church, *More About the Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth Press, 1949), chapter four; Wesley F. Swift, "The Women Itinerant Preachers of Early Methodism," *PWHS* 28 (1952): 89 – 94 and *PWHS* 29 (1953): 76 - 83; Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) and Milburn and Batty, eds. *Workaday*, chapter eight.

¹⁶⁴ For Sarah Crosby (c 1729-1804) see *DMBI*, 83, and for Mary Bosanquet (1739-1815) *ibid.*, 37. Both of these important figures receive extensive coverage in all the studies above (note 130).

¹⁶⁵ Chilcote, *Women Preachers*, 121.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

Preachers.’ [Wesley’s emphasis]¹⁷⁰ Official sanction for female preaching came eventually in 1787 when, with Wesley’s approval, the Manchester Conference gave the following authorisation to Sarah Mallet:

We give the right hand of fellowship to Sarah Mallett and have no objection to her being a preacher in our connexion, so long as she preaches the Methodist doctrines, and attends to our discipline.¹⁷¹

It can be seen therefore, that Wesley’s evolving policy over this particular issue, like many of his other earlier decisions, was shaped by his understanding that the revival was an extraordinary outpouring of God’s grace, an acceptance of lay ministry, plus a willingness to take risks for the gospel. When asked later why he encouraged some women to preach, his reply was: ‘Because God owns them in the conversion of sinners, and who am I that I should withstand God?’¹⁷² However, Wesley never expected female preaching to develop into a widespread ministry, and continued to judge individual cases on their own merits. This left any women, who felt sure of such a vocation with the necessity of proving an *extraordinary* call to preach. Unlike the male lay preachers, women like Sarah Mallet were never licensed for the itinerancy. They continued in intermittent and unlicensed work, however, and Wesley recognised that their ministry could be flexible and therefore more effective.

At a later date during the Great Yorkshire Revival of the 1790s women preachers such as Ann Cutler and Mary Barritt made a significant contribution to the revival’s ongoing success.¹⁷³ As detailed in chapter three above, however, the climate both in the Methodist movement and in wider society was very different at this later stage. From the Conference of 1803 it was decided that ‘if any woman among us think she has an extraordinary call from God to speak in public ... she should ... address her *own sex*, and *those only*.’ [Author’s emphasis]¹⁷⁴ A recent paper by John Lenton has thrown light on events after this ruling, giving evidence that many existing women preachers continued to engage in this work despite the decree. He notes:

It is clear that most continued to preach after 1806 but only with the consent of the local Superintendent. In addition it was usually at special evangelistic services, often on a

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 195. For brief biographical details of Sarah Mallett (1768-1845) see *DMBI* 221. Her life and work receive much consideration in the studies above (note 130).

¹⁷² Church, *More*, 98 – 99.

¹⁷³ On the revival see John Baxter, "The Great Yorkshire Revival, 1792 - 6: A Study of Mass Revival Among the Methodists," in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain.*, ed. Michael Hill (London: SCM Press, 1974), 46 – 76; For Ann Cutler (1759-94) see *DMBI*, 85, and for Mary Barrit (1772-1851) see *ibid.*, 21. The work of these women is also discussed in other studies mentioned above and in Chilcote, *Women Preachers*, especially chapter 7.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 236.

week-night, sometimes in the open air, immediately following the evening service, or in a cottage meeting.¹⁷⁵

Thus, although women had successfully challenged the patriarchal system to a certain degree, from this point on their efforts as preachers were more circumscribed.

The preceding discussion has highlighted the ways in which Wesley's core beliefs informed the ideals that governed not only the private and domestic lives of the women in the study, but the ways in which they could articulate and express their faith through active service. As the analysis has shown, despite Wesley's emphasis on the spiritual equality of the sexes, his policies continued to sanction the gender inequalities inherent in the prevailing patriarchal system. After Wesley's death this trend continued through rulings from later leaders. Gail Malmgreen has concluded from her study of the period 1750–1825 that: '... from Wesley to Bunting, and beyond, everything that was done by and for women in Methodism was done without overturning the fundamental and traditional imbalance of power between the sexes.'¹⁷⁶ However, in other ways the ethos and organisation of the movement also empowered its members, and allowed women as well as men to fulfill a ministry among the Methodist people and in their wider communities. With this clear overview of Methodist ideals for the conduct of individuals before and after marriage, and in both the domestic and public arenas established, it is time to turn to the textual representations of the lives of the subjects of the study. The next chapter sets these 'pictures' in the *Arminian Magazine* in their wider literary and Methodist context and explores further the form and editorship of these important primary sources.

¹⁷⁵ John Lenton, "'Labouring for the Lord.' Women Preachers in Wesleyan Methodism, 1802-1932. A Revisionist View," in *Beyond the Boundaries: Preaching in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Richard Sykes, Wesley Westminster Series, vol. 8 (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1998), 62.

¹⁷⁶ Gail Malmgreen, "Domestic Discords: Women and the Family in East Cheshire Methodism, 1750 - 1830," in *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, ed. Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper and Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 68.

Chapter Six: Methodist Life Writings and their Editorial: the Primary Sources from the Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine

Introduction

Having examined the unique position of the preachers' wives within the Methodist movement, the practical factors that shaped their daily experience and the ideology that underpinned their outlook and roles, it is now time to focus upon the printed versions of their lives: the accounts in the *Arminian Magazine* that form the main textual sources for the study. In publishing such narratives Wesley claimed that "... nothing of the kind has appeared before."¹ However, these writings were not quite as groundbreaking as Methodism's leader suggested, but belonged to a much longer continuum of religious narrative. It is very necessary, therefore, before analysis of the particular accounts of preachers' wives begins, that the religious and literary roots of this genre are examined, and the features of this specialized literary form are clarified. A consideration of the implications of this discussion and Methodist editorial practices for the present study follows. Finally key research findings from the longitudinal survey of the *Arminian Magazine* are presented, setting the context for the later examination of the accounts of the preachers' wives.

The literary antecedents of Methodist life writings

Though both secular and religious autobiography has been seen by many to originate with the fourth century *Confessions of St Augustine*,² the true antecedents of the Methodist spiritual narratives under consideration in the present study were much closer to the present day and can be traced to the mid-seventeenth century. It was during this period that the first texts describing the personal experience of conversion began to appear in print. The foundation for this development was laid by the theology, teaching, and culture of the Puritans, in the period following the Reformation.³ The latter break with the Catholic Church instigated a major shift

¹ *Letters* 6. Wesley's letter to Thomas Taylor dated 15 January 1778.

² Discussions of both secular and religious autobiography can be found in Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom. A Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography* (Methuen, 1982); and W. R. Ward, "Autobiography before Wesley", in *J & D*, 18: 1-119. Additional studies of spiritual life-writings include L. D. Lerner, "Puritanism and the Spiritual Autobiography", *Hibbert Journal* (1956-57), 54: 373-86; Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "'My Chains Fell Off, My Heart was Free': Early Methodist Conversion Narrative in England", *Church History* 68: 4 (Dec. 1999): 910 – 20.

³ On the historical context after the Reformation in England see Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 2 – 17. The Puritans were those within the Established Church who wanted further reform or 'purification' in line with continental models of

of emphasis in religious life in England and in Protestant states on the continent. In general Protestantism reaffirmed the value of the laity and the significance of common life and labour, emphasising the equal importance of all believers. The authority of the Church and priestly mediation was repudiated and instead the Bible became the central moral authority and guide. Accompanying these changes was the strong belief in the ability of all Christians to explore their faith with their own intellect and spiritual insight.⁴ One commentator has described this fundamental shift: ‘Man now stood alone before his Maker with nothing but his conscience, the Bible and the preachers to guide him.’⁵ This new emphasis on the individual was most important for the development of self-expression, and for autobiography of both the secular and spiritual kind.⁶

In England the prime movers for a strict application of Protestant principles and practice were the Puritans, who became the dominant religious force in the period leading up to and during the Civil War.⁷ In common with Reformation thought, the Puritans stressed the need for each individual to engage fully in religious debate, seeking to win as many souls as possible through preaching that was both plain and powerful. Following the pattern of St Paul, Puritan sermons directed attention firstly to the nature of sin, and each person’s inherited guilt before God. Having convinced the hearers of their lost state and need for repentance, the consolations of the gospel were then revealed: God’s promise of forgiveness through Christ, and spiritual renewal.⁸ Through Puritan preaching and instruction this twofold model of conviction of sin and eventual forgiveness informed oral and written testimony and became embedded in conversion narratives.⁹ As shown later, the same pattern is discernable in the accounts that form the sources for this study.

Puritan divinity was personal and practical stressing that it was possible for individuals to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ that would give their lives new meaning. Puritan pastors aimed to assist those in their flocks to understand the Gospel plan of salvation and the practical way to achieve it, explaining the relationship between Scripture principles and their implementation in real life.¹⁰ Whilst God acts according to a universal plan, they

Protestantism, the name first being used in the 1560s. See Christopher Hill, *Society & Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, 1964, (London: Pimlico, 2003).

⁴ Cheslyn Jones, et al., eds., *The Study of Spirituality*. 4th ed. (London: SPCK, 1996), 342 – 356.

⁵ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 103.

⁶ Vincent, *Bread*, 16. Hindmarsh, “Chains”, 914.

⁷ Hill, *Society & Puritanism*, chapter one; Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 1- 17.

⁸ Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 7-9. On the wider context of Puritan preaching see Hill, *Society & Puritanism*, chapter two.

⁹ Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15 –16.

explained, each individual's experience of God's grace was personal and unique. Therefore all could further illuminate God's work with man. Through their teaching and practical illustrations the sharing of religious experience was greatly encouraged.¹¹

Two theological stances were particularly significant for the development of spiritual narrative. Taking their inspiration from the Continental reformer, John Calvin, Puritans maintained that God has *preordained* the number of those who will be saved. Great importance was placed on conversion, which was seen as an assurance of membership of the favoured 'elect' of God, with accompanying discussion of the need for conversion, and the processes involved. The belief in *sanctification* at the point of conversion and consequent life-long growth in grace, led the Puritans to emphasise the continuous monitoring of spiritual life through self-examination, reflection, and the keeping of spiritual journals.¹² Through these doctrines and devotional exercises many ordinary men and women found ways to speak and write about spiritual matters. As Watkins has observed:

... men and women of no special literary skill developed an ability to analyse and communicate their religious experience; Puritan culture provided a body of theory, a technique, and a language.¹³

Fruits of Puritan theory and praxis were seen as early as the 1570s when Puritan diaries and confessions began to be published.¹⁴ Spiritual narratives were also published prior to the Civil War. These were almost all biographical, mainly written to celebrate the lives of notable Puritan divines or scholars, most being published posthumously. Funeral sermons could also often take the form of a biography. Both types of memorial, whether printed or delivered as a funeral oration followed a broad pattern describing early providences; sin and resistance to the Gospel; conversion; the vocational call; and later ministry. This general model could be detected even in biographies of pious laymen and women.¹⁵

From the 1640s to the 1660s, however, a new type of religious literature began to emerge in the shape of autobiographical narratives describing personal spiritual experience. A large number of such accounts, now written by contemporary authors, were published, and found popularity. These came not only from the orthodox Puritans, but also from other more

¹¹ *Ibid.*, and 1 - 2.

¹² Jones, et al., *Study of Spirituality*, 437- 455; Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2; Caldwell, *Conversion Narrative*, 55. Caldwell notes that by 1616 in London individuals were able and encouraged to speak about their religious life in their own words.

¹⁴ Roger Sharrock, ed., "Introduction", *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* by John Bunyan, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), xxvii.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, xxix.

radical sects such as the Baptists, Quakers, and Seekers.¹⁶ This development may have been influenced by interest in former biographical descriptions of spiritual life, or contemporary civil and religious upheaval, which was a source of religious innovation and also created expectation of an imminent outpouring of God's grace.¹⁷ However, conversion narrative was not a uniquely British phenomenon, for similar spiritual writings were produced in the American colonies and on the continent.¹⁸

The generation of such texts was also stimulated by the oral tradition of testimony, developing in congregational or 'gathered churches' on both sides of the Atlantic. These churches, which drew their congregations from individuals who were professed believers, rather than from the householders within a particular parish,¹⁹ developed especially in England after the Restoration, as many Puritan pastors were expelled from the Established Church and gathered congregations into the Presbyterian, Independent and Baptist churches.²⁰ Prospective members of such churches were often required to give a verbal testament, describing their personal experience of God's grace.²¹ This oral tradition generated written accounts that were soon being put in print. In 1653, for example, the pastor of a Dublin Independent Church prefaced a collection of conversion documents from his congregation with an introduction explaining:

Every one to be *admitted*, gives out some *experimental* Evidences [sic] of the work of grace upon his soul (for the Church to judge of) whereby he (or she) is *convinced* that he is *regenerate*, and received of God. [Author's emphasis]²²

Writing of these new spiritual narratives, Roger Sharrock has characterised their style as 'less restrained, more introspective and given to psychological detail than their predecessors'.²³ This approach was powerfully exemplified in John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, which was published in 1666 and became an important model of spiritual

¹⁶ Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 33; Sharrock, "Introduction", xxix; Delany, *British Autobiography* discusses texts from these different traditions.

¹⁷ These are suggestions from Watkins, *Puritan*, 28–30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; Hindmarsh, "Chains", 914; Caldwell, *Conversion Narrative*, deals particularly with the growth of conversion narrative in New England.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28. Watkins describes these congregations as 'a union of hearts rather than a vicinity of houses'.

²⁰ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 15. Many Puritan pastors refused to conform to the *39 Articles*, the new doctrinal standard of the Church of England, and lost their livings due to this dissent. One such pastor was Samuel Annesley, the father of Susanna Wesley. Of the churches mentioned here the latter two were the most radical, while other radical branches of dissent at this time included the Quakers, and Seekers. See also Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 32.

²¹ Caldwell, *Conversion Narrative*, 45; Ward, "Autobiography", 9–10. Caldwell suggests that the practice was occurring in Massachusetts in 1633, but that there were few documentary references to it until the 1640s. Ward suggests that personal testimonies were being given in churches in both England and Rotterdam before the Civil War.

²² Sharrock, "Introduction", xxix–xxx.

²³ *Ibid.*

autobiography for later generations. In common with Bunyan, many of those now providing detailed accounts of the work of God in their lives were of a lower social status and had fewer educational advantages than their Puritan counterparts. Such narratives were often written not only to testify to a personal assurance of acceptance by God, but also to defend a particular religious stance, and calling which, in the case of Bunyan, included the call to preach.²⁴

During the mid-seventeenth century, there was an abundance of such personal and contemporary religious narrative, and other influential pastoral works were also coming into print. These included Richard Baxter's *A Call to the Unconverted*, published in 1658, and Joseph Alleine's *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, in print in 1672.²⁵ The flowering of spiritual autobiography in Britain, however, was surprisingly short-lived. This was due perhaps to the return to more settled times after the Restoration, the reintroduction of the Established Church, and a general climate that was tired and even wary of religious novelty.²⁶ From the 1670s onwards, apart from the Quakers, who continued to publish living authors, hardly any but posthumous spiritual narratives were produced.²⁷

The form of Puritan conversion narratives and later developments in the genre

Several writers have sought to describe the generic pattern of Puritan conversion narrative. The most succinct is the suggestion by Watkins of 'peace, disturbance, and then peace again'.²⁸ An alternative schema begins with 'serious childhood' and progression through 'sinful youth' to 'legal righteousness, (often preceded by a struggle)' and 'final illumination'.²⁹ In England the relation of personal testimony in nonconformist churches gradually became less important as a test of membership however, and more significant as an encouragement, and reinforcement of shared religious experience.³⁰ The growing familiarity of the form, in published works such as diaries, journals and conversion narratives, meanwhile, caused concern. In his *Treatise on Religious Affections* published in 1746, Jonathan Edwards suggested that what individuals had experienced was 'insensibly strained to bring all to an exact conformity to the scheme established.'³¹ Delaney has also suggested that the widespread appeal

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 32 -33.

²⁵ Hindmarsh, "Chains", 913-4. Wesley published the latter as part of his *Christian Library*.

²⁶ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, 15; Watkins, *Puritan*, 33.

²⁷ Ward, "Autobiography", 10. By 1725 they had published 80 religious confessions and journals.

²⁸ Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 37.

²⁹ Lerner, "Spiritual Autobiography", 374.

³⁰ Caldwell, *Conversion Narrative*, 30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

of seminal works such as *Grace Abounding* and Fox's *Journal* hastened the ossification of the form.³²

Whilst the tradition of conversion narrative waned in Britain, however, it continued in New England into the eighteenth century, and in continental Europe the emergence and growth of pietism provided new stimulus.³³ In 1690, August Francke, one of the principal figures in the pietist movement, published an account of his own powerful conversion experience, which was particularly important for the further development of spiritual autobiography. By dividing his narrative into specific phases Francke provided a new structure for his experience in which:

...conviction of sin was followed by anxiety, by despair of faith, the desire for redemption, and wrestling in prayer. Then came a powerful penitential struggle and a shattering breakthrough to illumination and certainty of faith.³⁴

Francke's model became an established template for the analysis of the process for later generations. More importantly for the present study, this scheme was used by the Methodist class leaders to determine the spiritual growth of their members.³⁵

A further addition to the corps of religious narrative was provided by the Moravian Brethren, a later branch of the pietist movement, who produced many 'Lebenslaufe' or life stories, testifying to the work of grace during the early eighteenth century. Wesley's connection with the Moravians played a significant part in his own conversion, and he was certainly aware of this literary tradition.³⁶ Meanwhile, as the Evangelical Revival of the 1730s got under way, there was renewed emphasis on the nature and description of spiritual rebirth and, as detailed now, a fresh generation of writers began to describe the conversion process.

The Methodist context: literary culture and conversion narrative in the early movement

With the preaching of the Wesleys, George Whitefield, and other evangelical clergy in the latter years of the 1730s, many individuals became newly aware of the need for spiritual renewal and changed lives.³⁷ Whitefield, the first of the revival preachers to address the masses

³² Delaney, *British Autobiography*, 89.

³³ Starting in the German Lutheran Church during the second half of the seventeenth century, the pietists viewed the existing church as too cerebral and spiritually sterile, and sought a new approach. The major proponents of the movement were P. J. Spener (1635–1705) and Francke, (1663–1727) who advocated the need for personal conversion and regeneration. See Jones, et al., *Study of Spirituality*, 448 – 452.

³⁴ Ward, "Autobiography", 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.* Ward makes this latter point, but his suggestion is not substantiated by any Methodist sources.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Hindmarsh, "Chains", 911–12. As already described, Wesley's contact with Moravians in the Fetter Lane Society had assisted his own conversion.

³⁷ See the discussion of the beginnings of the Evangelical Revival in chapter three above.

was famous for his powerful and emotive preaching, frequently moving his audience to tears.³⁸ Both he and the Wesley brothers followed the example set by St Paul and the Puritans: preaching first of the sinfulness of man, and then of God's love and unmerited grace.³⁹ This was the pattern that Wesley also recommended for other Methodist preachers.⁴⁰ Whilst Methodist Arminian theology differed from the Calvinism of Puritanism, the movement's approach to the instruction and nurturing of its members can also be seen to have much in common with the previous Puritan tradition. Methodist doctrine, for example, emphasized the need for conversion,⁴¹ the possibility of a living and personal relationship with God through Jesus,⁴² and a continual quest for holiness.⁴³ In addition, the Methodist system provided many practical ways for individuals to grow and develop in their religious life.

It is important to remember that those drawn to the Methodist movement through its preachers' open air evangelism needed to prove no previous religious experience or denominational allegiance. Their only qualification was a desire 'to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins'.⁴⁴ Through Methodist discipline, and organization, such individuals became part of a unique system, which was especially effective in the transmission of oral and written skills, and which also placed great value on spiritual autobiography as a model and comfort for those who were earnestly engaged in the religious life.⁴⁵ It was a literary and religious framework, in which Methodist members, even those without prior education, found the skills and encouragement to describe and record their personal spiritual journeys. As a result the existing genre of conversion narrative was not only rejuvenated and enriched, but also changed. Henry Rack has suggested that:

Wesley's peculiar blend of High Church and evangelical piety, his stress on assurance and the pursuit of perfection gave a particular shape and tone to the Methodist pattern and made it rather different from the usual Puritan one, as well as from that of Anglican Evangelicals and Calvinistic Methodists.⁴⁶

³⁸ *NMH*, 274. When Whitefield preached to the miners of Kingswood, for example, it was reported, that: 'the tears made white furrows down their smutty cheeks'.

³⁹ R. E. Davies, "The People called Methodists: 1. 'Our Doctrines'", in *HMCGB*, 1: 148.

⁴⁰ Hindmarsh, "Chains", 925. John Wesley instructed one of the itinerants: 'Let the law always prepare for the gospel'.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 164 – 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 165.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 167–173. Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection, however, held that 'entire sanctification' was possible in this present life.

⁴⁴ *Works* 8: 260.

⁴⁵ Isabel Rivers: "'Strangers and Pilgrims': Sources and Patterns of Methodist Narrative," in J. R. Watson, ed., *Augustan Worlds* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), 192 – 4; Vincent, *Bread*, 16; Hindmarsh, "Chains", 920–929.

⁴⁶ Henry Rack, D., *Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 1989, 3d ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002).

The growing Methodist movement under Wesley gradually developed particular devotional practices to build up the faith and spiritual life of the members. Preaching services were only part of this equation, and much of the regular instruction of those drawn to the movement took place in the classes or bands. The latter provided regular meetings to share one's religious experience with others. Class meetings, composed of groups of about twelve individuals were especially conducive to the cultivation of personal expression. The structure of the weekly sessions was carefully regulated to ensure that the class leader, working within a recognizable scheme, could encourage all those present to describe and analyze their current religious state.⁴⁷ Whilst classes included single and married individuals from both sexes, bands, which were designed for those seeking further sanctification or 'holiness', were segregated according to gender and marital status. These groups were forums where women especially could express themselves freely. The lovefeast offered another more public space for the articulation and sharing of personal testimony.⁴⁸ As Paul Chilcote has observed, 'Methodist women needed a language to express their innermost feelings and 'safe places' in which to tell their stories. The Wesleyan Revival fulfilled both of these needs.'⁴⁹

However, from the start of the movement Wesley was keen to assist the members of his societies not only to be articulate, but literate. He was very aware of the link between literacy and spiritual growth arguing that unless the Methodists as a whole became 'a reading people' within one generation the 'work of grace' would cease.⁵⁰ The general *Rules* of the Society enjoined all members to study the Scriptures regularly, and the preachers were expected to devote at least four hours each day to reading, meditation and prayer.⁵¹ Both Wesley brothers provided living examples of the custom of journal-keeping and reflection, and as related earlier, the elder published extracts from his journal regularly. The same practice was not only emphasized as a priority for the men who became their itinerant preachers,⁵² but was also a fundamental part of the literary tradition of the movement as a whole.⁵³

⁴⁷ Ward, "Autobiography", 14. As suggested above, by Ward, class leaders used the model of spiritual development described by the pietist, Francke.

⁴⁸ All these aspects of the movement are discussed in chapters three and five above.

⁴⁹ Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Her Own Story: Autobiographical Portraits of Earl Methodist Women* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 39.

⁵⁰ Frank H. Cumbers, *The Methodist Book Room: The Story of the Methodist Publishing House and Epworth Press*, (London: Epworth, 1956), 5.

⁵¹ John Vickers, "Documents and Source Material", in *HMCGB*, 4: 85.

⁵² Rivers, "Strangers", 194. The first Methodist Conference urged all the lay preachers to keep journals 'as well for our satisfaction as for the profit of their souls'. A later conference underlined the obligation, enquiring: 'Are you exact in writing your journal?'

⁵³ This point is illustrated by the evidence of such activities among the subjects of the study given below.

Besides inculcating the a habit of journal keeping within the Societies, both John and Charles Wesley were interested in the process of conversion, and encouraged members from an early date to provide written descriptions of their own experience, with the invitation to share details of the current 'state of their souls'.⁵⁴ The two brothers also related their personal narratives of conversion among the societies, often sparking new spiritual vitality as a result.⁵⁵ Each of the lay preachers was also asked to provide a written account, with details of his early life and the time and date of his conversion.⁵⁶ One itinerant, John Walsh, found the narration of his personal own spiritual history was especially effective in stirring up new zeal.⁵⁷ Moreover, when signs of revival were scarce, and the preachers were disheartened, Wesley urged them to turn to religious biography and to read works such as the 'Life of David Brainerd' to find new inspiration and resolve.⁵⁸

What is surprising, however, is the early date that ordinary members were providing the Wesleys with written evidence of their personal growth in faith. In 1740, for example, Charles Wesley requested such accounts from several members from the London society. One of his respondents concluded her account, describing herself as

...your young babe in Christ Margerit [sic] Austin. Awakened by the Reverend Mr. Whitefield; convicted by the Reverend Mr John Wesley; Converted by the Reverend Mr. Charles; for the truth of whose doctrine in the strength of the Lord I am ready to lay down my life".⁵⁹

Such narratives as this, collected, by both John and Charles Wesley in letters, found a wider audience within the movement, being circulated and read to the societies during the special 'Letter days' that were a regular part of Methodist life.⁶⁰ That Margaret Austin and many other later members of the Methodist movement found their own authorial voice and were able to employ the conventions of conversion narrative, however, was due also to John Wesley's indefatigable literary efforts on behalf of the societies. As earlier discussion in chapter one has demonstrated, his published *Journal* provided an early literary model for his followers, and included many conversion accounts.⁶¹ Through the Methodist publishing system Wesley inaugurated, meanwhile, a huge range of devotional literature also went to the societies,

⁵⁴ Margaret P. Jones, "'From 'The State of my Soul' to 'Exalted Piety': Women's Voices in the *Arminian/Methodist Magazine*", In *Gender and Christian Religion* ed. R. N. Swanson, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998), 275 and 277.

⁵⁵ Hindmarsh, "Chains", 920 -21. Charles Wesley's reading of his journal account of his own conversion at one band meeting, for example, was the means of converting one of the women hearers.

⁵⁶ *EMP* (1872), 1: xii.

⁵⁷ Hindmarsh, "Chains", 921.

⁵⁸ *Works*, 8: 315.

⁵⁹ Hindmarsh, "Chains", 920. Margaret Austin is the young woman who was converted at the reading of Charles Wesley's *Journal*.

⁶⁰ Jones, "'From 'The State of my Soul', 275.

⁶¹ Hindmarsh, "Chains", 921.

introducing members to the rich tradition of spiritual narrative. With the publication of the *Arminian Magazine* meanwhile, the life-writings of many individuals from within the Methodist ranks re-energised the existing genre.

Summary and implications for the present study

As a result of the previous discussion, several questions arise that need to be considered further. The first relates to the form of spiritual autobiography and its flexibility as a genre. As noted earlier, some commentators have held that the structure of Puritan conversion narrative became a prescriptive model, which hindered, rather than helped, the process of description and self-analysis. Delaney, for example has suggested that the publication of books like *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Fox's *Journal* would have a negative effect if: '... [m]en [sic] of diverse experience ... yielding to the influence of such preachers as Bunyan, [attempted] to force their life-patterns into a Procrustean pattern.'⁶² In her recent study of American women's spiritual narrative, Virginia Brereton also describes nineteenth century narratives that are 'highly formulaic, [and] composed according to the requirements of a strictly defined convention.'⁶³ She suggests that there is '... good reason to suppose that narrators – consciously or unconsciously – perceived and shaped their experiences so that they were conformable to the formula.'⁶⁴ In view of this can the Methodist models of spiritual narrative, that have been outlined here provide sufficient scope for personal expression, or are they bound to become too formulaic?

As related earlier, in the case of the published lives of the first Methodist preachers, such accounts were produced under the tight discipline and editorial control of Wesley.⁶⁵ Yet it seems that even within a model that was to some extent imposed, individuals still found sufficient scope to voice a unique contribution to the genre.⁶⁶ Hindmarsh's evaluation of early Methodist autobiography underlines this assessment, finding there is room for personal difference, even within the tightly defined, literary conventions.⁶⁷ The conclusion that Brereton draws also suggests that: 'within a narrative tradition that has been designed and dominated by

⁶² Delaney, *British Autobiography*, 89.

⁶³ Virginia L. Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation. Stories of Women's Conversions, 1800 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991): xii.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Rivers, "Strangers", 195.

⁶⁶ Francis Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838* (Chapel Hill, 1944), 43. Mineka describes the autobiographies as '... invaluable for the history of the movement and in their simple, often moving prose, not without literary merit'.

⁶⁷ Hindmarsh, "Chains", 920.

men, women still managed to find ‘surprising scope for the expression of their feelings and aspirations.’⁶⁸

Another important point to consider when examining the source material is the tight editorial control prevailing, both during Wesley’s time and later, and the many-layered editorial process involved. Initially access to the *Magazine* was determined by Wesley, who drew on his own letter-book for examples of conversion narrative, as well as encouraging contributions from his preachers and others.⁶⁹ Later, items for inclusion needed to be submitted to the Book Room by a sponsor, either a friend, relative, or minister. Any manuscripts were scrutinized by the Book Committee and Editor to determine their suitability for publication. Thus, the submitted material went through a process involving selection and possible revision at several stages prior to publication. As the discussion in chapter one has shown, the Book Committee was an exclusively male domain. After Wesley’s death, such men were not only keen to promote a particular denominational stance, but were working to promote propriety among the Methodist people, and especially among the female members. Care needs to be taken, therefore, when studying each text to remember the wider context of the movement at its time of publication.

Christine Krueger’s research indicates suppression and alteration of manuscripts, even those relating to well known figures, such as John Fletcher. Her analysis is that ‘[a]ny manuscripts... left were at the mercy of friends and relatives, of editors, biographers and publishers.’⁷⁰ Moreover, memoirs and obituaries were not always written or included for edification alone.⁷¹ Whilst allowing these observations the important point is what is being presented at the time of publication. As Linda Wilson has pointed out, such texts still provide a fund of valuable information, including journal entries, and or other ‘embedded narratives’, that allow real insights into women’s lives.⁷² Crucially too, from the point of publication the memoirs offer patterns for the *Magazine*’s readers, with the potential for shaping others’ lives. Other historians working with similar published material have argued the worth of such commemorative texts.⁷³ There are good grounds therefore, for believing that the particular narratives of preachers’ wives uncovered in the present study will also prove to be an interesting

⁶⁸ Brereton, *Sin*, xiii.

⁶⁹ Jones, “State of my Soul,” 275.

⁷⁰ Krueger, *Reader’s Repentance*, chapter 5 ‘Publishing the Word,’ 69 – 82, especially 76.

⁷¹ On this point see Margaret Batty, *Stages in the Development and Control of Wesleyan Lay Leadership, 1791-1878* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1988), 10. Obituaries of preachers, which were read out at Conference before insertion in the *Magazine*, were carefully composed to indicate which ministerial attributes were currently desirable.

⁷² Linda Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal. Female Spirituality Amongst Nonconformists, 1825 - 75* (Carlisle: Paternoster press, 2000), 40.

⁷³ Kenneth D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800 - 1930* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1988), 17-18.

and fruitful source. Discussion now turns to results of the first major strand of the research, and the findings of the overview of life-writings in the *Magazine* during the period 1780-1880.

The longitudinal study of the Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine.

The long-term study of the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, as reported earlier, involved a survey of biennial volumes of the periodical from 1780 onwards. Each monthly edition within these fifty volumes was examined, and details noted of all the longer autobiographical and biographical accounts within each issue. Over the full period 967 of these narratives were discovered. Figure 1 below, reveals the number of accounts uncovered in each of the selected volumes, showing also the gender distribution of these texts.

Figure 1: Male and Female Accounts in the Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 1780 – 1880

Year	Male	Female	Year	Male	Female	Year	Male	Female
1780	8	2	1790	12	11	1800	23	21
1782	13	5	1792	7	4	1802	12	6
1784	11	2	1794	7	6	1804	9	8
1786	11	6	1796	19	11	1806	11	8
1788	17	10	1798	17	10	1808	12	8
Totals	60	25	Totals	62	42	Totals	67	51
Year	Male	Female	Year	Male	Female	Year	Male	Female
1810	12	16	1820	15	13	1830	7	7
1812	12	14	1822	9	5	1832	10	2
1814	20	15	1824	16	6	1834	11	7
1816	13	14	1826	15	3	1836	9	9
1818	24	16	1828	16	6	1838	12	6
Totals	81	75	Totals	71	33	Totals	49	31
Year	Male	Female	Year	Male	Female	Year	Male	Female
1840	15	11	1850	11	4	1860	10	5
1842	16	5	1852	15	4	1862	10	1
1844	14	9	1854	14	6	1864	12	4
1846	7	5	1856	15	3	1866	7	5
1848	14	6	1858	13	2	1868	9	9
Totals	66	36	Totals	68	19	Totals	48	24
Year	Male	Female	Source: Sample count of memoirs in the <i>Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine</i> for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library and John Rylands University Library Manchester.					
1870	9	2						
1872	10	3						
1874	9							
1876	11	7						
1878	8							
Totals	47	12						

Addition of the decadal totals indicates that 619 or 64% of the full number of accounts were written by, or about men. In comparison 348 or 36% of the total were narratives recording women's lives. Thus, over the period as a whole there was a significant gender bias with female life-writings appearing much less frequently than those relating to members of the opposite sex. Surprisingly, even during Wesley's editorship of the *Magazine*, (1780-91) accounts of male subjects strongly outnumber those of women in most of the six sample years,⁷⁴ and it is only in 1790 that the numbers of male and female accounts come close to matching.⁷⁵ In the longer term there is a decade by decade rise in female narratives until the 1820s with the highest total noted in the 1810 period.⁷⁶ However, thereafter a sharp drop occurs,⁷⁷ a drop that might arguably be associated with the editorship of the conservative Jabez Bunting from 1821.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, numbers of female accounts can be seen to fall even lower from the 1850s.⁷⁹ By the last decade of the study life-writings concerning men outnumber those of women by a ratio of almost four to one. Moreover, two volumes from this period contained *no* female biographical accounts.⁸⁰ As this overview shows, therefore, after the 1820s women's stories became progressively scarcer in the pages of the *Magazine*. How important, then, that the writings that *were* published should be valued by researchers and find wider appreciation.

This research also indicates a number of other ways in which editorial bias operated and influenced the impact of particular texts. Numbers alone, for example, cannot reflect issues such as the length of individual narratives, or the positioning of individual accounts within the *Magazine*, factors that implicitly signify the value afforded to particular life-writings. In respect to both these aspects records of female experience can be shown to fare badly. In terms of the length and space given to accounts large numbers of the texts concerning men's lives continue through several editions of the *Magazine*.⁸¹ However, only twenty-five out of the possible 348

⁷⁴ The years 1780 and 1784, for example, show that the spiritual narratives of male subjects outnumber those of females by a ratio of 4:1 and 5:1 respectively.

⁷⁵ In 1790 twelve accounts had male subjects, as opposed to eleven with female subjects.

⁷⁶ Seventy-five female accounts occur in this period.

⁷⁷ Thirty-three female accounts have been found in the 1820s.

⁷⁸ Joseph Benson was still editor in 1820 and thirteen female accounts were discovered in this volume. The volume for 1822, when Bunting had taken over, contained only five female accounts.

⁷⁹ Nineteen female accounts were discovered in the 1850s, twenty-four in the 1860s and only twelve in the 1870s.

⁸⁰ Forty-seven accounts of men appear in the decade from 1870 in comparison to twelve accounts of women. The volumes for 1874 and 1878 contain no female narratives.

⁸¹ See *AM* 17 (1794), for example, where the biography of Mr Garrettson continued through nine issues. In terms of space, for example, Margaret Jones, found only one autobiographical account written by a woman in the 1790 volume, taking five pages, whilst fifty-seven pages were devoted to other male autobiography. See Margaret P. Jones, "Women in the *Arminian/Methodist Magazine*, 1778 – 1821," M. Phil thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992), 47.

female accounts have been found to extend beyond one issue.⁸² Not only were women's printed lives generally shorter, than those of men, however, but my research also suggests that they were less likely to occupy a prominent position within the *Magazine*. As noted in chapter one, during the editorships of George Storey and Joseph Benson there were two separate sections for connexional biography.⁸³ My research indicates that in eight of the fourteen years in the sample where this division operated, *all* the women's accounts were relegated to the less prestigious 'Experience and Happy Death' or 'Grace of God' section.⁸⁴

Further examination of all the texts with female subjects has allowed identification of those that related to preachers' wives. Seventy-four accounts were found and Figure 2 below reveals their position within the general cohort of female life-writings.

Figure 2: Female Accounts in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1780 – 1880.

Years	Total Female Accounts	Preachers' Wives	Percentage of total
1780 - 1789	25	2	4
1790 - 1799	42	4	9.5
1800 - 1809	51	4	7
1810 - 1819	75	17	22
1820 - 1829	33	9	27
1830 - 1839	31	7	22
1840 - 1849	36	11	30
1850 - 1859	19	7	36
1860 - 1869	24	9	37.5
1870 - 1879	12	4	33
Totals	348	74	21

Source: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian / Methodist / Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780 – 1880. Leeds City Reference Library and John Rylands University Library Manchester.

As this information reveals, during the period of the study the percentage of accounts of preachers' wives rose in comparison with the number of female accounts generally, showing its

⁸² Significantly, five of these are of preachers' wives.

⁸³ Storey was editor from 1791 until 1803, and introduced a Biography section which headed each edition of the *Magazine* and a separate section entitled 'Experience and Happy Death,' that came later in each issue. When Benson took over as editor in 1804 the second section was retitled 'The Grace of God Manifested.' This division continued until the end of Benson's editorship in 1821.

⁸⁴ See chapter one above. My survey shows that no female accounts were included in the Biography section in 1794, 1802, 1804, 1808, 1812, 1814, 1818, and 1820.

largest jump in the decade from 1810 onwards. Interestingly too, there is a greater number of texts relating to the wives of the preachers at the time after 1850, when the level of female accounts generally was declining. This supports the argument that the preachers' wives, and texts commemorating their lives, were increasingly perceived as valuable models for others in the movement.

However, what also needs to be recognised is the privileged access that the itinerants had to the *Magazine* and thus the greater likelihood of accounts of the lives of their spouses being submitted to the Book Committee and accepted for publication.⁸⁵ In this respect an analysis of the *authorship* of the wives' accounts is very revealing. Out of the sixty-two accounts of preachers' wives where it has been possible to establish authorship, thirty-seven were written by the husbands of the subjects. Five of the remaining accounts were written by the women's sons and two more by their brothers, but, most significantly, in all these cases the men were also itinerant preachers.⁸⁶ A further twelve accounts were submitted by other ministers, usually those stationed in the local circuit at the time of the woman's death.⁸⁷ Thus, in fifty-six cases the person writing or submitting the account was a member of the itinerancy.

The fact that these texts were also predominantly in male hands is underlined by other evidence showing that out of the remaining six accounts, three were written by men. Only two accounts in the entire cohort can be verified as being of female authorship: the account of Mrs Daniell being written by her daughter and that of Mrs Edman by her sister.⁸⁸ Thus it was the men in the Methodist ministry who were predominantly responsible for authoring these women's lives. However, as the following chapters show, this does not mean that the subjects' voices cannot be discerned. On the contrary, the accounts of the preachers' wives provide a wealth of detail, often including journal entries and letters, which articulate their personal views and really illuminate different aspects of their roles and lived experience. In part three which now follows, the thesis turns to explore these texts in detail and to examine many different facets of the women's lives both before and after their marriage to the members of the itinerant ministry.

⁸⁵ On this point see especially Jones, "Women in the *Magazine*," 48.

⁸⁶ The accounts of Mrs Lessey [17], Mrs Thompson [47], Mrs Geden [55], Mrs de Queteville [57] and Mrs Vasey [62] were written by their preacher sons. Those of Mrs Rennison [38] and Mrs Keeling [71] were compiled by the subject's brother and stepbrother respectively. (Numbers in square brackets refer to the list of the full cohort of preachers' wives shown in Figure 3 below.)

⁸⁷ The services of local ministers were often called upon if the subject's husband had predeceased her, for example Mrs Dredge [36].

⁸⁸ Mrs Daniell [46] and Mrs Edman [67]. The remaining account of Mrs Fisher [10] has been written by a friend of undisclosed sex.

Part Three: Exploring the Lives, Roles and Experiences of the Preachers' Wives 2: Research Findings from the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* and Personal Case Studies

Introduction

The following four chapters present the findings of the primary research and explore the major themes outlined in the introduction to the thesis. In chapter seven, *Life before Marriage*, which follows this introduction, the data retrieved from the biographical accounts of preachers' wives uncovered during the survey of the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* are summarised and interpreted. Evidence considered includes these women's geographical and social origins, their early spirituality, and the manner of their conversion. The ways in which individuals were drawn into the Methodist movement are outlined and the range of public service undertaken by the subjects before their marriages is discussed. Courtship patterns among the cohort are also detailed and evidence of the age and the timing of individual marriages is considered. In chapter eight, *The Travels and Travails of the Preachers' Wives* the focus shifts to consider evidence from the published texts relating to the subjects' roles and experiences as married women and the wives of Methodist itinerants. The rigors of the travelling life in home circuits and among the movement's missionary stations are discussed and other practicalities of this way of life examined. As well as investigating the domestic and family lives of the subjects and the participation of individuals in Methodist devotional meetings and services, the variety of the women's public labours within the Methodist movement and in other communal enterprises is also analysed.

The following chapters use two published accounts within the denominational magazine as a starting point for further research in order to venture *beyond* the representation of the individual women provided by the printed texts. In chapter nine, the case study is *Mrs Mary Entwisle (1770-1804)*, one of the earlier members of the cohort, whilst chapter ten investigates the life of *Mrs Ann Leach (1783-1863)* a later preacher's wife. Using a wide range of methodologies and sources, both chapters illuminate the evolving spirituality and close family lives of each woman before and after marriage, shedding further light on the practicalities of the itinerant life and the types of service undertaken by each individual. By investigating the roles and experiences of these particular Methodist preacher's wives, other insights will be revealed about life at different stages within the developing Methodist movement and wider society from the eighteenth century and into the Victorian period. A conclusion to the thesis then follows.

Figure 3: The cohort of preachers' wives discovered in the survey of the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1780-1880

ID no.	Y/o/Pub.	Page/s	Name	Née	Y/o/B	Y/o/M	Y/o/D
1	1786	136	Sarah Bumsted	Wallett			1773
2		422	Elizabeth Murlin	Walker	1710	1762	1786
3	1790	74	Dorothy Wright	Taylor		1777	1789
4		365	Mrs Mather			1753	1789
5	1794	141	Judith Valton			1786	1793
6	1796	601	Mrs Heath		1756		1796
7	1804	41; 85	Eliza Byron			1793	1803
8		368	Mary Entwistle	Pawson	1770	1792	1804
9	1806	225	Jane Stanley	Edgcome	1775	1799	1805
10	1808	557	Jane Fisher	Crisp	1777	1806	1807
11	1810	350	Ruth Revill	Hammond	1765	1787	1808
12		396; 426	Frances Derry	Fenn	1768	1806	1808
13		453; 492	Sarah Benson	Thompson	1758	1780	1810
14	1812	42	Ann Taylor	Dupuy		1767	1810
15		121; 211	Penelope Golding Coke	Smith	1762	1805	1811
16		764	Ann Hardcastle	Wailes	1768	1801	1811
17	1814	45	Eliza Lessey	Hartland	1793	1812	1813
18		207	Elizabeth Mc Allum	Livingston	1755	1784	1812
19		284	Mary Pilter	Howard	1786	1807	1813
20		860	Mary Ault	Brentnall	1789	1813	1814
21	1816	370	Margaret Hinson	Layton	1781	1811	1815
22		681	Elizabeth Mc Kitrick	Kirkpatrick	1777	1807	1815
23		767	Harriet Butler	Marshall	1781	1807	1816
24		854	Martha Lessey	Esthope		1815	1816
25	1818	129	Elizabeth Robinson	Brown	1782	1814	1816
26		676	Mrs Gartrell	Price	1767		1818
27		915	Diana Claxton	Deason	1781	1803	1817
28	1820	46; 126	Sarah Stevens	Willis	1770	1789*	1817
29		839	Margaret Worrall	Wilkinson		1814	1818
30		843	Harriet Hammont Roadhouse		1787	1814	1819
31		922	Agnes Hopwood	Willson		1810	1819
32	1822	14	Ann Horne	Hardy	1793	1817	1819
33		213	Charlotte Margaret Rowland	Barberson	1792	1818	1821
34	1824	795	Elizabeth Gill	Robinson	1754	1788	1823
35	1828	148	Elizabeth Burdsall		1785	1802	1826

Sources: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester; *EMP*; *PWHS* and *IGI*.

*Dates in italics have been estimated from evidence within the texts.

Figure 3: The cohort of preachers' wives (continued)

ID no.	Y/o/Pub.	Page/s	Name	Née	Y/o/B	Y/o/M	Y/o/D
36	1830	655	Judith Curzon Dredge		1794	1817	1827
37		449	Sarah Turton	Gibson	1775	1804	1828
38		452	Mary Rennison	Pilter	1786	1811	1828
39	1832	169	Sally Maria Crofts	Harris		1824	1829
40	1836	414	Mary Ann Cusworth	Blackley	1792	1813	1833
41		649	Anne Marsden	Lomas	1780	1797	1834
42	1838	481	Hillaria Shrewsbury	King	1802	1823	1835
43		804	Jane Wilson	Moore	1796	1820	1835
44	1840	7	Isabella Ranson	Shields	1794	1830	1837
45		379	Betsy Lofthouse	Surr		1836	1837
46		889	Bridget Daniell	Bull	1762	1801	1838
47		990	Mrs Thompson	Gorman	1774	1806	1837
48	1844	632	Helena Waugh	Richardson	1774	1814	1841
49		105	Mrs Jennings	Oldland	1802	1833	1842
50		318	Mary Swallow	Kilham	1816	1837	1843
51		1145	Mary Finch Walker	Cozens	1796	1816	1841
52	1848	593	Harriet Garbutt	Chambers	1793	1824	1845
53		825	Margaret Manly		1796	1824	1845
54		1060	Kate Thomas	Chappell		1841	1845
55	1852	1049	Kezia Geden		1796	1821	1850
56		1149	Mary Ann Cooke	Southgate	1786	1813	1850
57	1854	1	Susanna De Queteville	De Jersey	1768	1788	1843
58		289	Annie Shoar	Gordon	1782		1850
59		774	Isabella Clarkson	Abbey	1800	1824	1851
60		878	Mrs Raston	Butterfield			1851
61	1856	97	Rebecca Gladwin	Dunbar	1816	1839	1852
62	1860	577	Jane Vasey	Nicholson	1772	1801	1857
63		799	Jane Allen	Bawden	1816	1845	1858
64	1864	305	Mary Hunt	Smith	1795	1825	1861
65	1866	865	Ann Leach	Fildes	1783	1806	1863
66	1868	4	Elizabeth Samuel	Burck	1800	1831	1862
67		102	Louisa Edman	Clarke	1829	1855	1864
68		289	Mary Anne Sumner	Smith	1798	1823	1864
69		677	Elizabeth Robinson	Harrison	1834	1853	1864
70		1061	Mrs Dernaley	Threlfall	1801		1867
71	1870	385	Sarah Strather Keeling	Stamp	1799	1838	1867
72	1872	577	Elizabeth A. P. Rosser	Egan	1787	1819	1867
73	1876	193	Mrs Sumner	Monkhouse		1839	1870
74		1057	Mary Sykes	Gaskell	1815	1840	1874

Chapter Seven: Life before Marriage: Evidence from the Database of Primary Texts

Introduction

As discussion in the previous chapter has explained, during the course of the long-term survey of the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 348 autobiographical and biographical accounts of the lives of women were discovered in the sample years during the period 1780-1880. Out of this total, seventy-four narratives were identified as commemorating the wives of itinerant preachers. The earliest account within the latter cohort entitled: ‘A Short Account of the Death of Mrs. S. Bumsted’ was published in the *Arminian Magazine* of March 1786, some eight years after the commencement of the denominational magazine.¹ The final account of an itinerant preacher’s wife, printed in the last decade of the survey, was ‘A Memoir of Mrs. Mary Sykes’, which appeared in the December 1876 issue of the periodical, now named the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*.² The sources uncovered, therefore, offer an important fund of information about the lives and experiences of a large number of wives over a very long period. The *publication* period of ninety years, provides the opportunity not only to determine the extent to which the experience and roles of itinerant preachers’ wives altered during this time, but also to ascertain variations in the *presentation* of their lives and roles during the period.³ Moreover, as some of these retrospective accounts pertain to subjects who were born much earlier in the eighteenth century, there is the additional opportunity to consider the experience of individual women, the evolving Methodist Society, and wider social mores over a much longer time-frame. It is now time to examine evidence from these primary texts in greater detail.

The cohort of preachers’ wives: dates of birth of the subjects

A high proportion of the accounts of preachers’ wives, approximately 81%, provide details of the subject’s date of birth.⁴ The earliest confirmed date of birth within the cohort is that of Elizabeth Murlin, born in 1710.⁵ At the other end of the spectrum, Elizabeth Robinson was born in 1834.⁶ A breakdown of the available evidence by decade shows that the majority of

¹ *AM* 9 (1786): 136.

² *WMM* 99 (1876): 1057.

³ The full list is shown in Figure 3 above.

⁴ Fifty-eight out of the seventy-four accounts include the date of birth of the subject, and this can be estimated from internal evidence in another two cases, giving a total of sixty accounts to compare.

⁵ Elizabeth Murlin (1710-1786 *m* 1762) [2]. Figures in square brackets refer to the identification number of individual women shown in Figure 3. To save space this number, rather than full publication details of specific accounts is given, as the latter information is noted in Figure 3. To avoid a proliferation of dates the known details of individuals are given only at the first mention of each woman.

⁶ Elizabeth Robinson (1834-1864 *m* 1853) [69]. Known maiden names are given in Figure 3.

the preachers' wives commemorated in the *Magazine* during the period of the study were born between 1770 and 1800.

Figure 4: The chronological range of dates of birth of the preachers' wives within the cohort sample by decade

1700	1710	1720	1730	1740	1750	1760	1770	1780	1790
	1				4	8	9	13	14
1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	Total
5	4	1	1						60

Sources: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester; *EMP*; and *IGI*.

Looking at dates of birth alone, it can be seen that the lives of this cohort of preachers' wives span 124 years. However, the latest death among the subjects, recorded in the memoir of Mary Sykes, took place in 1874.⁷ This means that the life experience of these sixty individual women covered a period of 164 years in the movement. Obviously there was a great deal of change during this time.

Geographical area of origin

The level of information about the place of birth of individual women is also good, provided in sixty-five of the accounts, or 89% of the full cohort. This data reveals that the majority of the preachers' wives were born in the British Isles with England being the predominant country of origin: recorded in fifty-three cases.⁸ Three individuals were born in Scotland,⁹ and four more are recorded as being born in Ireland.¹⁰ None of the cohort came from Wales: a finding that might be explained by the lack of success of Methodism generally in this country.¹¹ However two preachers' wives were born on the Channel Isles.¹² In addition three of the subjects hailed from overseas. The birth of Hillaria Shrewsbury, for example, took place in

⁷ Mary Sykes (1815- 1874 *m* 1840) [74] died on 16 September 1784.

⁸ Sixty of the sixty-five accounts note a place of birth in Britain.

⁹ These individuals are: Elizabeth McCallum (1755-1812 *m* 1784) [18]; Elizabeth Burdsall (1785-1826 *m* 1802) [35]; and Annie Shoar (1782-1850) [58].

¹⁰ Subjects born in Ireland are: Ann Taylor (?-1810 *m* 1767) [14]; Ann Horne (1793-1819 *m* 1817) [32]; Mrs Thompson (no Christian name given) (1774-1837 *m* 1806) [47]; and Helena Waugh (1774-1841 *m* 1814) [48].

¹¹ John Lenton, *"My Sons in the Gospel": An Analysis of Wesley's Itinerant Preachers* (Loughborough: Wesley Historical Society, 2000), 10. Lenton notes that Wesley had little success in either Scotland or Wales: an observation reinforced by membership numbers given in R. A. Currie, *et. al.* eds., *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles from 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 138-142.

¹² Charlotte Rowland (1792-1821 *m* 1818) [33] was from Alderney and Susanna De Queteville (1768-1843 *m* 1788) [57] was born in Guernsey.

the West Indies, whilst Margaret Manly and Rebecca Gladwin were born in Canada.¹³ A further analysis of accounts of English subjects shows that the preachers' wives came from all parts of the country. Not surprisingly, a large proportion hailed from the North East, North West, and Yorkshire, places where Methodist gained much support.¹⁴ More unexpectedly the Midlands region is the least represented among this cohort, although this was also an area where the movement was generally strong.¹⁵

Figure 5: Regional differences in the place of birth of English subjects within the cohort sample

North East	North West	Midlands	East Anglia	Yorkshire	South East	South West	Total
7	10	3	6	8	10	9	53

Sources: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester; *EMP*; and *IGI*.

The roving nature of the itinerant life meant that there was little chance for preachers' wives to remain close to their original roots. As later discussion reveals, only a very small number of the cohort were living in their native place at the time of their death.¹⁶ Meanwhile, although only three individuals were originally from overseas, as the wives of missionaries, a number of the cohort travelled from Britain to different parts of the globe.¹⁷

The social status of the preachers' wives

Details regarding the social standing of the cohort of preachers' wives have been more difficult to establish, as only twenty out of the seventy-four accounts (27%) refer to the occupation of the subject's father, or give details of any employment undertaken by the woman herself. However, a similar low level of information has been recorded in other comparable studies,¹⁸ and the available evidence here still yields some interesting facts. The accounts show that the fathers of six preachers' wives were members of the professions, with the law, teaching,

¹³ Hillaria Shrewsbury (1802-1835 *m* 1823) [42] was born in Demerara, Barbados; Margaret Manly (1796-1845 *m* 1824) [53] was born in Montreal, and Rebecca Gladwin (1816-1852 *m* 1839) [61] was born in Nova Scotia.

¹⁴ Twenty five individuals or 47% of this group came from these areas.

¹⁵ See H. D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 1989, 3d ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 438.

¹⁶ I discuss the mobility of the preachers' wives in chapter eight below. Only five instances have been found where the subjects were living in their native place at the time of their death.

¹⁷ Twelve of the subjects married Methodist missionaries, travelling to Africa, the West Indies and Ceylon between 1813 and 1864. See the discussion in chapter eight below.

¹⁸ See for example, Lenton, "Sons", 16-18; Kenneth D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800 - 1930* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1988), chapter one. Linda Wilson's study of female spirituality among different nonconformist churches notes the particular problems facing researchers into the lives of women, finding little information on the social background of her subjects. See *Constrained by Zeal* (Carlisle: Paternoster press, 2000), 33-6.

the clergy and medicine being represented.¹⁹ Three preachers' wives have been found to have fathers who were employers, and engaged in different branches of industry.²⁰ The families of four more of the cohort made their living from farming or related work.²¹ In addition, a further three individuals are noted as the daughters of tradesmen.²² The fathers of Mary Rennison and Isabella Ranson, meanwhile were seafaring men, both achieving the rank of captain.²³ Given the nature of the *Magazine* it is surprising to find that only two women in the cohort, Rebecca Gladwin and Sarah Keeling, were the daughters of Methodist ministers.²⁴

Whilst the number of accounts giving firm evidence on status is small, the paternal occupations cited include the professions, farming and trade, the precise communities where C. D. Field found that 'the nascent [Methodist] movement commanded little support'.²⁵ In the later period from 1800-37 the largest number of Wesleyan Methodists were drawn from the artisan class, none of which are represented here.²⁶ Other evidence relating to the religious affiliation of the natal families of preachers' wives, however, shows that in the cases cited above the father was more often Anglican than Methodist by persuasion and this perhaps helps to explain the anomaly. What is clear is that several women originated from socially-advantaged positions, and by joining the Methodist movement they undoubtedly associated with others from very different backgrounds.²⁷ This underlines the way that personal religious conviction could outweigh normal social divisions.²⁸ However, there is little doubt that such individuals would

¹⁹ The father of Penelope Coke, (1762-1811 *m* 1805) [15] was an attorney; Charlotte Rowland's father [33] was a magistrate. Mr Price, the father of Mrs Gartrell (1767-1818) [26], held office in the Church of England as prebend of Hereford, whilst William Deason, the father of Diana Claxton (1781-1817 *m* 1803) [27] was a surgeon. William King, the father of Hillaria Shrewsbury [42] was a builder and architect. The father of Elizabeth Rosser (1787-1867 *m* 1819), James Egan was 'master at the Royal Park Academy' [72: 577].

²⁰ The father of Frances Derry (1768-1808 *m* 1806), Robert Fenn, was a shipbuilder [12], whilst John Richardson, the father of Helena Waugh [48] is recorded as being a manufacturer and employer. Harriet Garbutt (1793-1845 *m* 1824) [52] was the daughter of an iron manufacturer.

²¹ The fathers of Ann Hardcastle (1768-1811 *m* 1801) [16] and Mary Ann Cooke (1786-1850 *m* 1813) [56] are recorded as farmers whilst Henry De Jersey, father of Susanna De Queteville [57] is said to have been a farmer and landowner. Mr Thompson, the father of Sarah Benson (1758-1810 *m* 1780) [13], was a cornfactor.

²² Elizabeth Murlin [2]; Mary Ann Cusworth (1792- 1833 *m* 1813) [40]; and Ann Leach (1783-1863 *m* 1806) [65].

²³ Captain James Pilter, the father of Mary Rennison, (1786-1828 *m* 1811) lost his life 'in the German ocean' [38: 452]. Captain Shields, the father of Isabella Ranson, (1794-1837 *m* 1830) traded in the South Seas and India and was: 'one of the first mercantile Captains to sail round Cape-Horn' [44: 7].

²⁴ Rebecca Gladwin was the daughter of a missionary, who became the wife of another missionary, Francis P. Gladwin [61]. Sarah Keeling (1799-1867 *m* 1838) was the daughter of Rev. John Stamp [71].

²⁵ C. D. Field, "The Social Structure of English Methodism: Eighteenth - Twentieth Centuries," *British Journal of Sociology* 28 (1977): 194.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁷ The father of Hillaria Shrewsbury [42] was a builder and architect for the government in Barbados, but on joining the Methodists Hillaria's class mates were the local West Indian women.

²⁸ Henry Rack discusses this point in *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 441-2.

also face very different living standards to those experienced during their upbringing on entering the itinerant life.

A noticeable trait is that many of the accounts mentioned above include words such as ‘reputable’ or ‘respectable’, further reinforcing the probity and success of the subject’s family.²⁹ Furthermore, several memoirs where the precise nature of the occupation of the subject’s father is unspecified include similar terms to give a general indication of the social position of the family. Mrs Heath, for example, is noted as the child of ‘sober, steady parents’, whilst the parents of Eliza Byron are said to have lived ‘in good report among their neighbours.’³⁰ Mary Entwisle’s birth family is reported as ‘prosperous in temporal things’ and Ann Taylor’s husband writes that her father, Mr Dupuy, was remembered for his ‘respect, probity, uprightness, [and] liberality’.³¹ The parents of Elizabeth McCallum are described as ‘creditable’, whilst those of Mary Ault are said to have been ‘both respectable and moral’.³² Such examples, suggest that *reputation* and *respectability* were being signalled as important in the *Magazine* from its earliest years.³³ The silence of the majority of accounts with regard to the specific social standing of the subject, therefore, perhaps denotes a reluctance to mention more humble backgrounds.

Education and employment

Twenty-two accounts, or 29% of the full cohort, refer to a measure of formal schooling when discussing the subject’s early years. The level of information varies however. Some accounts say simply that the subject was ‘at school’,³⁴ whilst others give a more nuanced indication of the type of education received. The latter trend is exemplified in the memoir of Mrs Heath which suggests that her education was ‘decent and useful’,³⁵ and that of Mary Ault, whose parents are said to have ‘paid a considerable attention to the education of their children’.³⁶ Elizabeth McCallum is reported to have benefited from ‘the advantages of a genteel

²⁹ See for example, the accounts of Mrs Murlin [2]; Mrs Coke [15]; and Mrs Benson [13].

³⁰ Mrs Heath (no forename given) (1756-1796) [6: 601], and Eliza Byron (?-1803 *m* 1793) [7:42]. Here and later, where direct quotations have been given, the specific page number follows the identification number of the account.

³¹ Mary Entwisle (1770-1804 *m* 1792) [8: 368] and Ann Taylor [14: 43].

³² See [18: 206] and Mary Ault (1789-1814 *m* 1813) [20: 860].

³³ For example, the account of Elizabeth Murlin, published in 1786, refers to her father as ‘a reputable tradesman’ [2: 422]. The memoir of Mary Ann Cooke, written some sixty years later in 1852, notes that her father was ‘a respectable farmer’ [56: 1150].

³⁴ See the accounts of Margaret Hinson (1781-1815 *m* 1811) [21]; Charlotte Rowland [33] and Jane Wilson (1796-1835 *m* 1820) [43].

³⁵ [6:601].

³⁶ [20:860].

education',³⁷ whilst the schooling of Mary Ann Cooke must have been extensive as it did not finish until she was eighteen.³⁸

In accounts that give slightly more information it is interesting to learn that Ann Taylor, being of French extraction, attended a French school in order to learn the language.³⁹ At least eight further women attended a boarding school at some point. Elizabeth Robinson, for example, received her education first at home and later at Miss Slater's school in Margate, whilst Diana Claxton, though the family home was in Stokesley, Yorkshire was sent to Durham for her schooling.⁴⁰ Some of the boarders were even further from home as Susanna De Queteville travelled from her native Guernsey to England and Penelope Coke was sent to a school abroad.⁴¹ Other information from the accounts, such as references to the subjects' reading habits, journal-keeping or letter-writing, and evidence of individuals' roles as teachers or leaders in the movement and elsewhere, provides further indications of the educational standard of these women. Whilst the latter areas are considered in more detail later, here it is pertinent to note that there are only seven accounts that make no reference to any of the above areas of competence.⁴² Thus, it seems clear that the majority of the preachers' wives were literate and educated women.

It is not surprising to find that the *religious* credentials of various establishments are mentioned. The school attended by Margaret Worrall, for example, was specially chosen by her parents, as one: 'where moral example accompanied moral precept, and where the ceremonies of religion formed a daily part of the routine of its exercises.'⁴³ Elizabeth Robinson's school at Margate arranged for a weekly visit from a Methodist minister who used to 'give a Bible-lesson and ... lead the children to the throne of grace'.⁴⁴ However, Wesley's scepticism about the kind schooling available in many educational institutions, also finds an echo in several accounts. The severity of the regime at Penelope Coke's continental boarding school led to a rapid decline in her health and her parents brought her home. 'That public schools have their excellencies, no

³⁷ [18:207].

³⁸ [56].

³⁹ [14].

⁴⁰ [69] and [27].

⁴¹ [57] and [15]. Other individuals going to boarding school were Jane Stanley (1775-1805 *m* 1799) [9]; Jane Fisher (1777- 1807 *m* 1806) [10]; Harriet Butler (1793-1845 *m* 1807) [23]; Margaret Worrall (?- 1818 *m* 1814) [29] and Elizabeth Burdsall [35]; It is possible that Mary Hunt (1795-1861 *m* 1825) [64] and Mary Sykes [74] were also educated at boarding school, but the wording of these accounts is ambiguous.

⁴² It is fair to add that elements such as the length of the account also determine the amount of information given. The account of Sarah Bumsted (?- 1786) [1] for example is only a page long. Thus, Sarah and the other six women may also have received some education.

⁴³ [29: 839].

⁴⁴ [69: 679].

man can doubt', wrote her biographer, 'but that they have their evils also, it would be folly to deny'.⁴⁵ The school as a site which cultivates worldliness, rather than true religion, is also a common theme. Life at Jane Stanley's boarding school, for example, is said to have led to the loss of her early religious impressions,⁴⁶ whilst Mary Hunt's teachers allowed lessons in dancing that 'exposed [her] to a temptation by which she was nearly overcome'.⁴⁷ The latter example especially is a reminder of a continuing crusade within the Methodist press against involvement in fashionable accomplishments of various kinds.

In addition to the above references to schooling, four cases provide evidence of employment undertaken by women prior to their marriage. The account of Frances Derry, for example, indicates that she set up a millinery business with her sister⁴⁸ whilst that of Elizabeth McKitrick reveals that she engaged in some form of business, when living in Liverpool during the 1790s.⁴⁹ Ann Taylor, formerly Miss Dupuy, obviously benefited from her time at the French school, as she became a governess to the Gilbert family in Antigua in the early 1760s 'being recommended as a very fit person for that important station'.⁵⁰ Sarah Willis, who also needed to earn her living, went to a situation as a servant and companion to an older woman before her wedding to the itinerant, William Stevens.⁵¹ The latter case is the only example of what was a more common experience for many women during the period of the study.

Adverse family circumstances

Sarah Stevens' account, like many among the cohort, illustrates the insecurities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, revealing the occurrence of very difficult family circumstances. In fact, out of seventy-four accounts, eighteen, or 24% of the total cohort, note the death of one or both parents during the subject's youth. Sarah was one of five individuals who were orphaned at an early age.⁵² Among these cases, that of Frances Derry is especially poignant as both her parents and two of her siblings drowned in a sailing accident when she was nine.⁵³ Six other accounts show individuals who suffered the death of their father when

⁴⁵ [15: 122].

⁴⁶ [9: 227].

⁴⁷ [64: 306].

⁴⁸ [12].

⁴⁹ Elizabeth McKitrick (1777-1815 *m* 1807) [22].

⁵⁰ [14: 45].

⁵¹ Sarah Stevens (1770-1817 *m* 1789) [28].

⁵² Other women in this situation were Jane Fisher [10]; Frances Derry [12]; Charlotte Rowland [33] and Ann Leach [65].

⁵³ As noted above, Frances Derry's father was a shipbuilder. It is not known whether the family tragedy occurred in one of his own vessels.

relatively young,⁵⁴ two of these paternal deaths being related to particularly hazardous employment,⁵⁵ and another due to disease.⁵⁶ In addition seven women grew up having lost their mother.⁵⁷ Comments in the accounts allude to the emotional effect of such early traumas upon the individuals concerned,⁵⁸ and mention the effects of losing ‘the ‘watchful care of a praying and devoted parent.’⁵⁹ For Methodists, like other evangelicals, however, such bereavements emphasised the precariousness of the present life and the need to secure a place in the next. Moreover, in some cases, these losses sparked new spiritual concern in the subjects.⁶⁰

The results of such family traumas were uncertainty or extra responsibility for several individuals. Some orphaned women were placed under the guardianship of near relatives.⁶¹ However, this did not always have a happy outcome. Sarah Stevens suffered ill treatment at the hands of her uncle to the point where she considered suicide.⁶² Experiencing the loss of both parents Frances Derry and Ann Leach took charge of the household and younger siblings.⁶³ Similar responsibilities devolved to other women when family bereavements occurred. When the mother of Elizabeth Samuel died, for example, her father passed the housekeeping duties to his daughter.⁶⁴ In the Methodist press such early difficulties were portrayed as a providential preparation for the trials of the itinerant life.⁶⁵

The early spirituality and service of the preachers’ wives

Turning to examine the religious background of the women who married Methodist itinerants a wealth of fascinating information is revealed about the way their early spiritual lives developed and the diverse routes by which individuals were drawn into the Methodist movement. The available evidence suggests that in all but four cases these women had

⁵⁴ Sarah Benson [13]; Mary Rennison [38]; Mary Ann Cooke [56]; Mrs Raston (*d* 1851) [60]; and Elizabeth Rosser [72].

⁵⁵ The fathers of Mary Rennison and Mrs Raston were both sailors who lost their lives at sea.

⁵⁶ Ann Leach’s father, for example, died after contracting a ‘malignant fever’ [65: 865].

⁵⁷ Mary Ann Cusworth [40]; Isabella Ranson [44]; Betsy Lofthouse (?-1837 *m* 1836) [45]; Mary Swallow (1816-1843 *m* 1837) [50]; Kezia Geden (1796–1850 *m* 1821) [55]; Elizabeth Samuel (1800-1862 *m* 1831) [66]; and Sarah Keeling [71].

⁵⁸ [12: 396].

⁵⁹ [50: 319].

⁶⁰ I discuss the latter aspect in more detail below. On the attitudes of other evangelical traditions see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780 – 1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 77 and 90. See, for example, the accounts of the accounts of Sarah Stevens [28] and Charlotte Rowland [33].

⁶¹ See the accounts of Sarah Stevens [28]; Isabella Ranson [44]; and Kezia Geden [55].

⁶² [28].

⁶³ [12]; [65].

⁶⁴ [66].

⁶⁵ [65].

responded to the Methodist message, and had been converted prior to marriage.⁶⁶ It is clear that the experience of conversion was of seminal importance to individuals within the cohort, constituting a very personal call into God's service. Moreover, many women had recognised this calling, engaging in a variety of work within the Society and beyond even before taking up the role of a travelling preacher's wife.

An analysis of the original religious affiliation of the cohort of preachers' wives discloses a variety of backgrounds. This is to be expected when, as reported earlier, Wesley's 'United Societies' were open to those of any religious persuasion or none.⁶⁷ Two recent and very pertinent studies cast light on the extent to which Methodism benefited from different denominations. John Lenton's examination of the background of Wesley's itinerant preachers, for example, found the largest number to have been raised by Anglicans.⁶⁸ M. R. Watts' analysis of narratives relating to Wesleyan members converted between 1780 and 1850 also discovered a majority from the Established Church, leading him to conclude that: 'Methodism, particularly Wesleyanism, flourished among people whose willingness to embrace Evangelical religion was the result of preparatory work done by the Church of England.'⁶⁹ To what extent does the present study reflect these findings?

An analysis of the denominational affiliation of the subject's family is possible in fifty-three of the seventy-four accounts or 71% of the full cohort. In contrast with the findings of Lenton and Watts evidence here reveals that the largest proportion of these individuals came from families who were already affiliated to the Methodist movement, with thirty subjects noting a Methodist upbringing. However, nineteen individuals were raised by parents who were active members of the Church of England. The number coming from Dissenting churches, meanwhile, is much smaller, with only four accounts citing this tradition.⁷⁰ Unlike the earlier studies, the present research has uncovered no Roman Catholics among the cohort.⁷¹ An additional twelve accounts provide a more general suggestion of a religious or moral upbringing

⁶⁶ In cases where it has been possible to establish the date of conversion or entry into the Society only four women: Elizabeth Murlin [2]; Mrs Mather (? -1789 *m* 1753) [4]; Eliza Lessey (1793-1813 *m* 1812) [17]; and Kate Thomas (? -1845 *m* 1841) [54] were converted *after* their marriages.

⁶⁷ See earlier discussion in chapter three.

⁶⁸ Lenton, "Sons," 15- 16 and 36. Out of a total cohort of 413 itinerants Lenton could establish the religious upbringing of only 149. Fifty-seven of these were Anglicans, and thirty-nine Methodists. Thirty-five were Dissenters and nine were Roman Catholics. Nine others were said to be 'religious'.

⁶⁹ M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 51- 4. Watts analysed 326 Wesleyan conversion narratives, finding that 123 subjects were raised in the Church of England, 103 were brought up in Wesleyan homes, and twenty were raised by Dissenters. Sixty-one said they had benefited from early religious training.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth McAllum [18], Elizabeth Burdsall [35], and Annie Shoar [58] were brought up as Presbyterians. Ann Taylor [14] came from a family of French Protestant Dissenters (no further details are given).

⁷¹ Watts, *Dissenters*, 51- 4; Lenton, *Sons*, 15- 16 and 36.

without specifying a particular church.⁷² Taken as a whole, this evidence indicates that the majority of preachers' wives (approximately 88%) had some religious guidance, or a connection with a church from childhood.⁷³

Whilst a small number of Wesleyan converts in Watts' study came from *irreligious* families, no evidence suggests that any of the preachers' wives come into this category.⁷⁴ Remembering the strict injunctions to the Methodist preachers regarding the choice of spouse, their own cautious approach to marriage, and the way that prospective wives were vetted, it would appear that any such liaisons were either avoided, or stifled at an early stage.⁷⁵ Some of those from Anglican and Dissenting families report an existing link to the Methodist movement. Methodist preachers were welcomed into the home of Susanna De Queteville, an Anglican, for example,⁷⁶ and John Wesley was a guest of Elizabeth McAllum's mother even though the family were members of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.⁷⁷ Interestingly, most of the wives joining Methodism from other denominations were born before or during the 1790s.⁷⁸ This suggests that the Methodist itinerants increasingly looked to established Methodist families when searching for a spouse. Whilst earlier members of the cohort were first or second generation Methodists,⁷⁹ when the last accounts were being published, Methodist dynasties had become more extended. Louisa Edman's memoir, for example, notes that her great-grandfather had been an early convert of John Wesley.⁸⁰

Recollections of the beginning of spiritual awareness

In a succinct summary of Methodist teaching Wesley identified three main doctrines: repentance, faith and holiness.⁸¹ He wrote: 'The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third religion itself.'⁸² Many of the individuals in the present study, however, discerned nascent religious feelings well before any real awareness of the need for repentance. Such early awakenings are mentioned in fifty-two accounts, or 70% of the total

⁷² Among these, the family of Ruth Revill (1765-1808 *m* 1787) is described as 'religious' [11: 350]; whilst the parents of Mary Ault are reported to have been 'very respectable and moral.' [20: 284]. The mother of Sarah Benson read the scriptures and other devotional works to her daughter [13]; Mrs Raston had a pious mother and a home that was 'remarkable for domestic religion' [60: 877].

⁷³ Sixty-five out of the seventy-four accounts.

⁷⁴ Watts, *Dissenters*, 52.

⁷⁵ See the discussion in chapter four above.

⁷⁶ [57].

⁷⁷ [18].

⁷⁸ An exception being Mary Sykes [74].

⁷⁹ For example, Sarah Stevens, whose parents were members at the New Room in Bristol. [28].

⁸⁰ Louisa Edman (1829-1864 *m* 1855) [66].

⁸¹ *Societies*, 227.

⁸² *Ibid.*

cohort. Frances Derry's memoir, published in 1810, noted, for example, that: 'Very early in life Miss Fenn experienced powerful convictions of the depravity of her nature, accompanied with strong desires to live to the glory of the Lord ...'⁸³ In a later case, Eliza Lessey is said to have been impressed with 'a sense of the importance and value of religion' from childhood, and 'felt the necessity of a change of heart' from the age of seven.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the final account in the cohort, published in 1876, explains that Mary Sykes was 'very seriously impressed' at her confirmation into the Anglican church, feeling that she was: 'under special obligation to separate herself from the world, and dedicate herself to the service of God ...'⁸⁵ Clearly, marking the earliest beginnings of religious consciousness was felt to be of continuing importance in the Methodist press throughout the period of the present study.

As the above illustrations show, early impressions of the importance of religion are not restricted to one denomination.⁸⁶ Whilst those from a Methodist background often note an early sense of personal depravity, which is not surprising when considering Methodist teaching on this subject, other accounts indicate feelings of awe, or fear of God. Helena Waugh, an Anglican, found early inspiration in the liturgy and psalms, which impressed her not only with 'feelings of sacred delight' but also 'devout religious fear', whilst Elizabeth Gill is said to have learned to fear God 'from infancy.'⁸⁷ The influence of John Janeway's, *A Token for Children*, a book that warned its youthful readers of the torments of hell, is cited as provoking religious thoughts in two accounts.⁸⁸ In the case of Diana Claxton, frequent attendance at funerals aroused 'thoughts of death and eternity.'⁸⁹ These so convinced her 'of the vanity and emptiness of all below, that she dreaded to meet her thoughts alone'.⁹⁰ Intimations of mortality, like these, were also conducive to renewed spiritual commitment at later stages of the religious life.⁹¹

Such feelings, though transient, signify the true beginning of an individual's spiritual journey. Mary Cozens, later Mrs Walker, wrote for example:

At a very early period, I can recollect the Spirit of God convincing me of the evil and sinfulness of my nature, and of my unfitness to appear before God, without some change being wrought within me; but of its nature, or how it was to be accomplished, I was quite ignorant.⁹²

⁸³ [12: 396]. Her denomination is not clear.

⁸⁴ [17: 45]. Mrs Lessey came from a Methodist family.

⁸⁵ [74: 1057].

⁸⁶ Linda Wilson discusses examples from different denominational magazines in *Constrained by Zeal*, (Carlisle: Paternoster press, 2000), 72.

⁸⁷ [48: 632] and Elizabeth Mrs Gill (1754-1823 *m* 1788) [34: 795]. The latter's denomination is not clear.

⁸⁸ See Sarah Stevens [28] and Ann Leach [65].

⁸⁹ [27: 916].

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ These ideas are discussed later. See also Watts, *Dissenters*, 2: 72.

⁹² Mary Finch Walker (1796-1841 *m* 1816) [51: 1145].

It was only after joining the Society in 1811 and experiencing conversion four years later, however, that this conundrum was finally solved, by which time Mary had reached the age of eighteen.⁹³

Helps and hindrances in the religious life

A significant number of memoirs refer to the ways in which the subject's youthful spiritual awareness was nurtured or thwarted. Positive influences include the instruction and guidance of parents or other relatives, the encouragement of acquaintances or friends, and the influence of sermons, ministers, or other religious activities.⁹⁴ It is noteworthy that in the first two of these categories, the positive influence of *female* relationships are mentioned most often. More accounts refer to mothers, grandmothers, and sisters as spiritual examples or guides, for example than cited their male relatives.⁹⁵ Martha Lessey's elder sister was one such example '[animating] her to diligence and perseverance in the divine way'.⁹⁶ Her husband suggests 'Her deep piety and genuine experience well qualified her to be an instructor of babes; and such my dearest Martha found her.'⁹⁷ For Isabella Ranson, who lost her mother at the age of seven, the 'piety and love to the word of God' of her grandmother made a lasting impression.⁹⁸ The role of other godly women is also important.⁹⁹ Through the advice of a female friend, Eliza Byron 'embraced the privilege of meeting with a company of pious women, who assembled weekly to converse respecting their experience as Christians, and to help each other on the way to Heaven.'¹⁰⁰ Jane Vasey was introduced to Methodism by her old nurse, who took her to see Wesley preach,¹⁰¹ whilst Harriet Butler was inspired by her governess.¹⁰² Mary Anne Sumner, brought up in Madeley, Shropshire benefitted from instruction and encouragement from the godly Methodist, Mary Fletcher.¹⁰³ Such examples support the view that women were an important religious force in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁰⁴

⁹³ [51: 1146-7].

⁹⁴ The influence of parents or relatives is mentioned in twenty cases. Acquaintances or friends are said to have been helpful in sixteen accounts. The influence of sermons, ministers, or other religious activities is suggested in fourteen instances.

⁹⁵ Three women referred to the example of godly parents. There are eight references to the positive influence of a mother, stepmother, or grandmother and two to that of a sister. One account noted a female cousin's encouragement. In contrast, only eight accounts mentioned fathers, grandfathers or uncles as spiritual guides (two cases each).

⁹⁶ Martha Lessey (? 1816 *m* 1815) [24: 855].

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ [44: 7].

⁹⁹ Out of the sixteen accounts referring to godly friends or acquaintances eight mention pious females, but only one man is singled out.

¹⁰⁰ [7: 43].

¹⁰¹ Jane Vasey (1772-1857 *m* 1801) [62].

¹⁰² [23].

¹⁰³ Mary Anne Sumner (1798-1864 *m* 1823) [68].

¹⁰⁴ Watts, *Dissenters*, 56.

The beneficial influence of ministers or sermons on early religious life is also stated in several accounts, with both Anglican clergy and the Methodist preachers being mentioned.¹⁰⁵ Attending chapel services,¹⁰⁶ and special occasions such as the lovefeast, are also recalled as furnishing times of encouragement,¹⁰⁷ whilst some individuals found inspiration from hymns, the liturgy and psalms.¹⁰⁸ A variety of means, therefore, can be seen as nurturing the early spiritual lives of women in the cohort.

The predisposition to religion is also described as being thwarted by personal circumstances or temptations during youth. As suggested earlier, school is mentioned as a place where early piety could be compromised,¹⁰⁹ whilst the society of irreligious companions is also seen as detrimental.¹¹⁰ Earlier discussion of the rules of the Societies has highlighted the strong stance on dress, and diversions not tending ‘to the knowledge or love of God’.¹¹¹ Thus, accounts recounting the subject’s attraction to the theatre,¹¹² dancing,¹¹³ novel-reading,¹¹⁴ cards¹¹⁵ or fashion¹¹⁶ suggest that these proclivities hindered spiritual progress. A gender distinction that has been remarked upon by other researchers is also in evidence here. Unlike narratives of male subjects, for example, there is no mention of fighting, swearing, drinking or licentiousness. Rather the personal traits being condemned are fondness for dress and amusement.¹¹⁷ Moving on to discuss the conversion process, however, it is clear that for several women, renouncing conventional social activities or adopting a plainer style of dress was the first open declaration of following the Methodist way.

Experiences of repentance

As reported earlier, Wesleyan preaching and teaching, like that of other evangelical traditions, stressed the doctrine of original sin and the need for individuals to experience ‘new birth’.¹¹⁸ Fifty-eight of the accounts, or 78% of the full cohort, refer in some way to the period

¹⁰⁵ Harriet Roadhouse (1787-1819 *m* 1814) [30] and Agnes Hopwood (*d* 1819 *m* 1810) [31], both originally Anglicans, refer to the influence of individual clergymen, whilst the benefit from Methodist preachers or preaching is mentioned by Elizabeth Gill [34], Elizabeth Samuel [66], and Mary Sykes [74].

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Benson [13], Harriet Garbutt [52].

¹⁰⁷ Sarah Stevens [28].

¹⁰⁸ Harriet Waugh [48]; Mrs Jennings (1802-1842 *m* 1833) [49].

¹⁰⁹ Mary Entwisle [8]; Jane Stanley [9].

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth McKittrick [22]; Bridget Daniell (1762-1835 *m* 1801) [44].

¹¹¹ See the discussion in chapter three above.

¹¹² Ann Hardcastle [16].

¹¹³ Penelope Coke [15]; Charlotte Rowland [33].

¹¹⁴ Margaret Worrall [29]; Jane Allen (1816-1858 *m* 1845) [63].

¹¹⁵ Sarah Turton (1775-1828 *m* 1804) [37].

¹¹⁶ Ruth Revill [11]; Mrs Thompson [47].

¹¹⁷ Watts, *Dissenters*, 58; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 424.

¹¹⁸ See chapters three and five above.

when the subject first recognised their own inherent sinfulness and began to desire such a change of heart. The case of Eliza Byron, whose memoir was published in 1804, is an early example, recording that at the age of fourteen Eliza became:

deeply convinced of the sinfulness of her heart and life, and of her need of a new and spiritual birth ... she was made truly sensible that mankind are fallen creatures, unholy and unhappy, and that nothing short of divine Power and Grace can restore them to either the favour or image of God.¹¹⁹

From an Anglican household, Eliza's regular attendance at the Parish Church, 'attentive' study of the scriptures and 'frequent and fervent prayer' brought her no relief, and her anguish increased to the point where she 'forgot to eat her necessary food, and sleep departed from her eyes'.¹²⁰ It was some time later, that, visiting a Methodist chapel in the vicinity, she heard 'a plain man', a local preacher, who 'pointed her to the Sinner's Friend.'¹²¹ This was the encouragement she sought. As noted above, she began meeting regularly with several pious women, learning more of the 'privileges of believers', and eventually experiencing a clear sense of the 'pardoning love of God'.¹²² The realization of her own sinfulness was therefore a crucial stage in Eliza's religious journey.

Other memoirs record different circumstances, but demonstrate further keen remembrances of this stage of spiritual life. Penelope Coke's convictions of sin, for example, aroused by the counselling of her uncle, a Methodist local preacher, and her own reading, are described as 'permanent and severe'.¹²³ Charlotte Rowland described a moment during Methodist preaching when she was 'caught in the gospel-net' and 'determined through grace, to live a new life.'¹²⁴ Isabella Ranson was enlightened on her 'fallen and perishing state' by reading devotional works by Alleine and Fletcher, and found she could 'no longer rest with the form of godliness, nor with merely correct views of religion'.¹²⁵ Mary Sykes, the last member of the cohort, is reported to have been 'deeply convinced of her state as a sinner' and 'the danger to which she was exposed' during a revival.¹²⁶ These instances demonstrate not only that this aspect of religious experience was felt to be of great importance to the individuals concerned, but also that such descriptions were held to be of relevance to current readers of the Methodist denominational magazine throughout the period of the current study.

¹¹⁹ [7: 42-3].

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ [15: 125].

¹²⁴ [33:214].

¹²⁵ [44:8].

¹²⁶ [74:1057].

In previous studies by M. R. Watts and Linda Wilson, a variety of factors have been identified as catalysts for conviction of sin and conversion.¹²⁷ Watts, for example, noted the influence of family members; Sunday Schools; and the fear of death, disease, judgement or hell.¹²⁸ Whilst agreeing with Watts on the importance of the first and third of these categories, Wilson's study identified preaching as the most important catalyst.¹²⁹ Evidence from the accounts of preachers' wives here reinforces the importance of preaching, finding that thirty-one of the fifty-eight relevant accounts, referred to preaching as the primary trigger for the subject's conviction of sin.¹³⁰ The memoir of Jane Allen, published in 1860, provides a particularly evocative description of her response to a sermon:

The text took fast hold of my mind, and every word of the sermon appeared to apply to myself. I felt that I was an undone sinner; that I had frequently trifled with the Spirit of God. But when the Preacher spoke of Christ's love to sinners, and of his willingness to receive the vilest of the vile, this gave me a little comfort. I then determined to be on the side of the Lord¹³¹

Other memoirs recall the impact of particular Methodist preachers, with both leading figures and the rank and file itinerants being represented.¹³² Such examples point to the continuing efficacy of Methodist preaching throughout the period of the study.

The second most significant catalyst was the death or illness of someone known to the subject, or personal health problems.¹³³ One of the early memoirs relates for example, the devastation of Jane Stanley on the sudden death of her fiancé. Her biographer wrote that this event 'so powerfully impressed her with a sense of the instability of every earthly joy, that from this time, she sought that happiness which the vicissitudes of life cannot destroy.'¹³⁴ Frances Derry witnessed both the death of her sister, due to tuberculosis, and that of her only brother, the latter dying in 'sudden and awful circumstances.'¹³⁵ Having now a heart that was 'softened by afflictions', she was 'prepared to seek the Lord'.¹³⁶ Similarly unhappy events affected Sarah Stevens. Following the loss of both her parents she was brought 'almost to the gates of death'

¹²⁷ Watts, *Dissenters*, 56-80; Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal*, 78 -84.

¹²⁸ Watts, *Dissenters*, 56-80.

¹²⁹ Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal*, 78-84. Among the female Wesleyans within Wilson's cohort, 38% were converted through preaching, 3% through the influence of family and friends, and 5% through witnessing death or illness. Study of the Bible was another cause, but none of the Wesleyan women in her cohort cited this factor.

¹³⁰ There is some overlap as several individuals discerned a number of contributory factors.

¹³¹ [63:780]. The sermon text in question was: 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man.'

¹³² Jane Vasey [62] responded to Wesley's preaching; Mary Entwisle [8] was affected by a sermon by Joseph Benson; and Susanna De Queteville [57] became convinced of her sinfulness after hearing Thomas Coke. Dorothy Wright (c 1774 – 1789 m 1777) [3], and Hillaria Shrewsbury [42] were convicted of sin through sermons delivered by their eventual husbands. Evangelical preaching in the Established Church was the factor in the case of Harriet Roadhouse [30].

¹³³ This factor was mentioned in twelve cases.

¹³⁴ [9: 227].

¹³⁵ [12: 398].

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

by a severe fever, and during her illness recognised her need for a change of heart.¹³⁷ The sudden drowning of a neighbour led Mrs Jennings to ‘an earnest desire to flee from the wrath to come’,¹³⁸ whilst Martha Lessey ascribed her conviction of sin to an alarming dream of death and judgement.¹³⁹ These descriptions, echoing findings in Watts’ and Wilson’s studies, suggest that reminders of mortality were a significant factor in awakening the consciences of several preachers’ wives.¹⁴⁰

The role of family influence is not so pronounced in this sample, though five out of the relevant accounts refer to this as one preliminary cause. Ruth Revill and Bridget Daniell, for example, were both impelled to examine their religious condition on witnessing the conversions of their sisters.¹⁴¹ Other less common triggers for repentance include class meetings,¹⁴² a revival,¹⁴³ and spiritual reading.¹⁴⁴ Where Watts found evidence of the importance of Sunday Schools as a vehicle for the conviction of sin or conversion,¹⁴⁵ none of the accounts in the present study identify this cause.¹⁴⁶ A small number of accounts suggest a very gradual awareness of sinfulness, with no deep distress. Mary Walker, for example, ‘did not experience those powerful awakenings or great terrors by which some are moved in the early part of their religious course’, but described herself as motivated by ‘a secret desire to serve God and forsake sin’.¹⁴⁷ Elizabeth Rosser, who was also not the subject of ‘such deep conviction and overwhelming distress,’ was sometimes tempted to doubt the genuineness of her religion.¹⁴⁸ Such comments suggest this was still an unusual pattern even in the later 1800s.

Unless the subject’s family were already members of the Methodist movement, the anguish felt by those whose religious convictions had been aroused, appeared strange and almost incomprehensible. The heightened spiritual concern of Eliza Byron, for example, brought attention and censure from those around her. Family and friends offered various remedies such as amusements, company or a change of air, opining that her ‘religious disease’ would lead to madness.¹⁴⁹ When an individual already appeared to satisfy all the conventional religious requirements, such spiritual anxieties appeared especially perplexing. Penelope

¹³⁷ [28: 47].

¹³⁸ [49: 106].

¹³⁹ [24].

¹⁴⁰ Watts, *Dissenters*, 72-3; Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal*, 78-9.

¹⁴¹ [11] and [46].

¹⁴² Only one case, Ann Horne (1793-1819) [32] mentioned this.

¹⁴³ Mary Sykes [74].

¹⁴⁴ Isabella Ranson [44] and Penelope Coke [15].

¹⁴⁵ Watts, *Dissenters*, 58-64.

¹⁴⁶ As shown later, however, many women became active *after* conversion as teachers in the movement.

¹⁴⁷ [51: 1146].

¹⁴⁸ [72: 578-9]. See also Sarah Keeling [71: 389].

¹⁴⁹ [7: 42-3].

Coke's companions, for example, who had a high regard for her piety 'began to think that she was actually deranged.'¹⁵⁰ Turning to consider the descriptions of conversion it is clear that for some women there was a long time of searching and struggle before they were able to resolve such difficulties and find forgiveness and faith.

Finding faith

An indication of the importance of conversion within Methodism is shown in the fact that sixty-two of the accounts of preachers' wives, or 84% of the cohort, refer specifically to this aspect of their subject's religious experience. Whilst the amount of information given within individual memoirs varies, thirty-seven cases include details of the circumstances surrounding the subject's coming to faith. Thirty-one accounts also provide information about the age or date at which the subject was converted. Taken together, this data allows considerable insights into a significant phase of these women's lives.

In his work on nonconformist ministers, K. D. Brown suggested that: 'the majority of conversions which occurred in the first half of the [nineteenth] century were quite precisely located in time and space, and usually involved a considerable degree of emotional upheaval.'¹⁵¹ Watts also noted that unlike the Calvinist tradition, the emphasis among Arminians on the development of a personal relationship with God led them to expect a sudden dramatic change, and to view this as the crucial element in a person's religious experience.¹⁵² Wilson's study of nonconformist women appears to confirm the latter assertion, finding that a definable moment of conversion was identified more frequently in obituaries of Methodist women in her cohort than in those from her Baptist and Congregationalist subjects.¹⁵³ The present research accords with this previous scholarship, showing that thirty-four of the thirty-seven accounts with relevant details describe a clear turning point in which previous doubts and struggles ended and an assurance of forgiveness was experienced.

The period between an initial sense of sinfulness and actual conversion can be seen to vary from case to case. For some individuals the wait was relatively short. Mary Rennison, for example, 'drank of the cup of sorrow' for several weeks, but then, after a night of 'agonizing' private prayer, she found peace early in the morning, waking the family with her singing.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ [15: 125].

¹⁵¹ Kenneth D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800 - 1930* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1988), 49-50.

¹⁵² Watts, *Dissenters*, 50. Watts contrasts this with the view of Calvinists.

¹⁵³ Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal*, 86.

¹⁵⁴ [38: 453-4].

Hillaria Shrewsbury, who had been ‘awakened to a sense of sinfulness and misery’ on hearing a sermon in August 1820, was converted shortly afterwards when reading the scriptures in private.¹⁵⁵ Jane Allen experienced conversion only four days after becoming convicted of sin through the sermon mentioned above. She recorded: ‘I was meditating on my case, when the question was suggested to my mind, “Are you sincere?” It was like an audible voice. I replied, “Lord, Thou knowest I am.” Immediately joy sprung up in my soul....’¹⁵⁶

In contrast, Elizabeth Murlin is said to have ‘seen the sinfulness of her nature and her absolute need of a Saviour at the age of eleven,’ and over time Calvinist teaching convinced her that she was ‘one of those reprobates who could not be saved’.¹⁵⁷ Her burden was eventually lifted many years later in her late twenties, when hearing a sermon by George Whitefield she found: ‘peace of mind, joy in the Holy Ghost, and a hope which is full of immortality.’¹⁵⁸ Betsy Lofthouse, whose memoir was published in 1840 is reported to have ‘passed through a wilderness of doubts, and cares, and fears, on the very verge of the land of promise’ for years.¹⁵⁹ Her conversion through reading the *Life of Mr Carvosso*, enabled Betsy to write: ‘I can now praise and trust ... I no longer call in question the work of the Spirit on my heart.’¹⁶⁰ The timing of the spiritual breakthrough that all these women desired, therefore, was unique to each individual.

The evidence suggests that only two of the preachers’ wives experienced ‘new birth’ before coming into contact with the Methodist movement, one of these, Harriet Roadhouse, ascribing her conversion to evangelical preaching in the Church of England.¹⁶¹ In other accounts it is possible to trace the development of the movement. Elizabeth Murlin, for example, started attending preaching by Whitefield and Wesley during the late 1730s when both were still allowed to preach in churches in London: providing important evidence that conversions were taking place even before the formation of Wesley’s ‘United Societies’.¹⁶² Conversions of several women were due to preliminary Methodist evangelism in their neighbourhoods.¹⁶³ The early venues for meetings are represented, as well as chapel-

¹⁵⁵ [42].

¹⁵⁶ [63: 781].

¹⁵⁷ [2: 422].

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 423.

¹⁵⁹ [45: 379].

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 379-80. This appears to be the life of William Carvosso (1750-1834) one of the early itinerant preachers noted for evangelism in Cornwall. See *DMBI*, 56.

¹⁶¹ [30]; the other case is Mrs Mather [4] converted in 1753 before hearing the Methodists.

¹⁶² [2: 422].

¹⁶³ For example, Ann Taylor [14], at Cork; Elizabeth McAllum [18] in Inverness.

building.¹⁶⁴ Particular accounts reveal the efficiency of the Methodist system. Being moved by a sermon by Thomas Coke, Susanna De Queteville responded to the preacher's invitation to stay behind, and both she and her mother joined the Society 'on trial' the same night.¹⁶⁵ The memoir of Sarah Benson, meanwhile, demonstrates the practical pastoral care in the class meetings, recording that before her conversion she was placed with two of the 'most pious and sensible women leaders.'¹⁶⁶

An analysis of the catalysts for conversion shows a wide range of circumstances being recorded: another reinforcement of the very personal nature of this experience.

Figure 6: Catalysts for conversion within the cohort sample

No contact with Methodism	Preaching	Other Services	Class/Band Meeting	Private Prayer	Private Reading	Other	Gradual	Total
2	6	7	5	9	4	2	2	37

Source: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

As the above summary shows, preaching had much less of an impact at this stage, with six of the relevant accounts ascribing the subject's conversion to this means.¹⁶⁷ Seven of the preachers' wives found faith in different Methodist services, with the lovefeast, society meeting, prayer meeting and Watchnight services being identified among this group.¹⁶⁸ Class or band meetings stimulated the conversion of another five women. Nine individuals experienced the blessing whilst at private prayer, making this the largest category within the cohort. A further four preachers' wives were converted when they were reading devotional works privately.¹⁶⁹ Additional cases are those of Eliza Lessey, who found faith through prayer with her husband, and Mary Sykes, who was converted when walking in the street.¹⁷⁰

These results demonstrate that both private and public devotions were a stimulus for conversion, with communal exercises slightly outweighing those in the personal domain in these particular cases. This is not surprising considering that the lovefeast, prayer meetings, classes

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, the account of Kezia Geden [55], who started going to Methodist meetings at the Smithy in the village. The memoir of Bridget Daniell [46] tells of efforts in raising money for a preaching house and local difficulties during the chapel's construction.

¹⁶⁵ [57: 5].

¹⁶⁶ [13: 454].

¹⁶⁷ In this case, Mrs Roadhouse, converted through evangelical preaching prior to joining the movement has been included in the first column.

¹⁶⁸ The Methodist lovefeast and prayer meetings were both cited by two individuals, whilst the Watchnight service and Society meeting were both mentioned in one account. One memoir suggested its subject was converted when 'among Methodists'.

¹⁶⁹ The works mentioned were the scriptures; a sermon by Dr Watts; the *Life of Carvosso*; and a hymn.

¹⁷⁰ [17] and [74].

and bands were all occasions conducive to personal testimony and exhortation. Further credence is also given to Watts' view that a sudden dramatic conversion was *expected* among Arminians like the Methodists, by the fact that in the small number of memoirs that recorded no clear moment of conversion (two cases) the gradual process was commented upon by the biographer.¹⁷¹ In one of the latter cases, that of Sarah Keeling, the young woman's experience was stressed as having an equal validity as more dramatic examples, pointing to the biblical example of Lydia.¹⁷²

A number of relevant works discuss the *age* at which conversion occurs. Writers on the nature of conversion generally, have suggested that the religious experience may be linked to the arousal of sexual feelings and consequent guilt at puberty.¹⁷³ Patricia Crawford, examining the religious life of women during the early modern period, noted that most conversions took place in adolescence.¹⁷⁴ Discussing conversions in narratives from 1780 to 1850, M. R. Watts discovered a similar trend, finding that almost half of conversions among both men and women occurred between the ages of fourteen and twenty.¹⁷⁵ Wilson's study of female spirituality is particularly relevant to the present research, showing that whilst the majority of Wesleyan women in her cohort were converted between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, a significant number had made a commitment at a younger age.¹⁷⁶ To what extent does the evidence from the present study agree with previous research?

Forty-six accounts in the current study, or 62% of the full cohort, provide data on the age at which a commitment to a more religious way of life took place, through conviction of sin, conversion, or membership of the Society.¹⁷⁷ This evidence is shown in figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Age of conversion /joining the Society amongst the cohort sample

10 and under	11-15	16-20	21 - 25	26-30	31 - 35	36 +	Total
4	9	18	10	1	3	1	46

Source: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

¹⁷¹ Elizabeth McAllum [18]; Sarah Keeling [71].

¹⁷² [71: 389]. The reference is to Acts 16: 14.

¹⁷³ R. H. Thouless, *An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion* 3rd ed. (London: Cambridge University Press), 104-20.

¹⁷⁴ Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500 - 1720*, 1993, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 76.

¹⁷⁵ Watts, *Dissenters*, 57. 52% of men and 48% of women were converted between fourteen and twenty.

¹⁷⁶ Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal*, 91. Of these, 42% were converted between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five and 30% were younger. Unfortunately there is no breakdown of ages under sixteen.

¹⁷⁷ Of these, seven cases give details of the subject's age at conviction of sin, thirty-two indicate the age of conversion, and seven accounts include evidence of the subject's age when accepted 'on trial' or becoming an official member.

As this analysis reveals, the largest number of women for whom evidence is available were converted, or joined the Society between the ages of sixteen and twenty. Twenty-seven accounts indicate that the subjects' religious commitment commenced earlier, in the adolescent years between eleven and twenty. Strikingly, thirty-two individuals experienced conversion or were members of the society before they reached the official age of maturity at twenty-one.¹⁷⁸

Among the younger end of this cohort, Jane Wilson experienced conviction of sin at seven years old,¹⁷⁹ whilst Mary Entwisle, Margaret Worrall, and Mary Hunt were converted at ten years of age.¹⁸⁰ The oldest convert among the preachers' wives was Frances Derry, who did not experience new birth until the age of thirty-eight: a delay her biographer partly blamed on the inadequacies of the ministry at the church she attended prior to her entry into the Methodist Society.¹⁸¹ Further examination of the *denominational* background of the younger converts (those under sixteen), shows that eight of the thirteen cases were Methodists.¹⁸² This suggests that those with Methodist parents were more likely to be inculcated into the movement from infancy, perhaps stimulating the religious impulse, and making it easier to commit to this way of life at a younger age. Data relating to the chronological time span of the conversion of the preachers' wives is also helpful in considering this aspect, and determining possible changes during the period of the study.

A slightly larger number of memoirs are available to compare information about the timing of conversion or membership, with forty-nine accounts, or 66% of the cohort, providing sufficient details. A breakdown decade by decade is shown below.

Figure 8: Timing of conversion /joining the Society by decade amongst the cohort sample

1730s	1740s	1750s	1760s	1770s	1780s	1790s
1	1	1	0	3	5	7
1800s	1810s	1820s	1830s	1840s	1850s	Total
12	11	3	3	1	1	49

Source: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

Out of these instances the earliest conversion is that of Elizabeth Murlin, which took place about 1738.¹⁸³ The preacher's wife who was the latest to find faith within this group is Louisa

¹⁷⁸ This is 67% of the relevant accounts. Twenty-five individuals were converted between the ages of fourteen to twenty, bringing this to 54%, very close to the figures cited in Watts' study mentioned above.

¹⁷⁹ [43].

¹⁸⁰ [8]; [29]; and [64].

¹⁸¹ [12: 398]. Despite being 'a sincere and earnest enquirer' from 1801, she was not converted until 1806.

¹⁸² One was an Anglican, and four individuals did not give any denomination.

¹⁸³ [2]. Elizabeth's conversion can be dated from the fact that it took place when Whitefield and Wesley were still preaching in churches in London.

Edman, who experienced conversion in 1850.¹⁸⁴ The data shows that within this group the majority experienced conviction of sin, conversion, or membership *after* 1790. Most of the preachers' wives in this sample, therefore, became active in the movement after the death of John Wesley: at a period when the role and ministry of women was coming under increased scrutiny. The highest cluster in the sample, meanwhile, occurs in the period between 1800 and 1819 with twenty-three women, or 46% of this group recording that they were converted or became Methodist members during this time. Significantly, this was a period of solid gains in the movement.¹⁸⁵

An examination of the subjects' denominational background further reveals that converts after 1810 were predominantly from Methodist families.¹⁸⁶ This tends to support the view of K. D. Brown that growth within nonconformity became a matter of increase from *within*, as evangelism was targeted at younger generations from the existing constituency rather than outsiders.¹⁸⁷ The idea of focusing efforts on the young is certainly raised in the memoirs, with the biographer of Mary Hunt, for example, suggesting in 1864 that: 'converted children will give us good people for the next generation.'¹⁸⁸ However, a correlation of the *age* and *year* of religious commitment in the present sample does not show converts becoming younger over time, which might also have been expected.¹⁸⁹

Opposition

Several of the accounts of preachers' wives provide evidence of the extent of opposition facing those associating with the Methodist movement. The memoir of Elizabeth Murlin, for example, is a striking example from the early period, relating the alarm of her first husband, Mr Berrisford when his wife started to attend Wesley and Whitefield's preaching:

For, as this way was every where spoken against, her husband desired her to hear those strange men no more. And that she might not, he allowed her to go any where else: and went so far as to take her a seat in a Dissenting Meeting, accompanied her there himself; and did all in his power to oblige her in other respects.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ [66].

¹⁸⁵ Currie, *et. al.*, *Churches and Churchgoers*, 139-40. Membership in England stood at 88,334 in 1800 rising to 128,657 in 1810 and 184,998 in 1819.

¹⁸⁶ In the nineteen conversions taking place from 1810, for example, thirteen cases are recorded as coming from Methodist families and two from an Anglican background, whilst four memoirs gave no details of religious upbringing.

¹⁸⁷ Brown, *Nonconformist Ministry*, 53.

¹⁸⁸ [64: 306].

¹⁸⁹ In contrast, Linda Wilson's data on Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists confirmed this trend. See, *Constrained by Zeal*, 92-3.

¹⁹⁰ [2: 423-4].

Whilst Elizabeth's husband seems genuinely to have been trying to provide for her spiritual needs in an alternative way, this was, nevertheless, an unwelcome imposition. Moreover, it is clear that despite her spouse's actions Elizabeth stood her ground. The narrative continues: 'though she found it a great cross to disoblige him, she could not bear to be deprived of that preaching which was made so great a blessing to her'.¹⁹¹ Some time later Mr Berrisford died. At this stage Elizabeth was free to join the Society.¹⁹²

Descriptions of persecution during the early days of Methodism are to be expected, but what is surprising is how long such opposition lasted. In 1800 the father of Diana Claxton, a surgeon, was advised by 'a certain dignitary in the church' to 'turn his daughter to the door and disown her for ever' because of her attraction to the movement.¹⁹³ As reported earlier, Mr Deason did not go this far, but still restricted Diana's liberty, not allowing her to leave the house except under strict supervision for a period of two years. It was only through the mediation of a neighbour, that Diana was eventually allowed more freedom.¹⁹⁴ The account of Mary Ann Cooke, who was converted some time after 1804, relates similar family objections and restraint, telling how Mary Ann was urged to give up 'this new religion' by her mother and relatives, who sought to prevent visits to the chapel by keeping her at home.¹⁹⁵ Meanwhile, as late as 1816, Kezia Geden's attendance at Methodist meetings attracted strong opposition from the local minister and her uncle. The latter, who was Kezia's guardian, formally disinherited his niece, and showed her the door.¹⁹⁶ Prejudice and opposition, therefore were still an obstacle for Methodist followers even in the second decade of the nineteenth century.

While the description of early Methodists as 'a poor despised people' is a common trope in Methodist writings, there is evidence in the current sources that antipathy towards the movement was often based on social class as well as religious scruples. In the account of Kezia Geden a strong contrast is drawn between Kezia's Anglican family and 'their fashionable neighbours' and the 'simple minded people' of the Methodist congregation worshipping in the village smithy.¹⁹⁷ The local minister's later objections to Kezia's attachment to Methodism, meanwhile, arose not only from his belief that the movement was 'a vulgar and odious enthusiasm', but dismay that 'so *respectable* a member of his flock' should prefer the 'unworthy and dangerous fellowship of separatists and fanatics.' [My emphasis]¹⁹⁸ Opposition on the

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 424.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ [27: 917].

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 918. See chapter three above for Diana's courageous response.

¹⁹⁵ [56: 1151].

¹⁹⁶ [55: 1051].

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1051-52.

grounds of class *and* ethnicity is evident in the account of Hillaria Shrewsbury, whose father was an architect and builder employed by the government in Barbados. Mr King and his wife respected and welcomed Methodist preachers, but had no wish to see their daughter ‘so closely connected with a poor and despised people, many of whom were persons of colour and slaves.’¹⁹⁹ Significantly, though showing the subjects’ willingness to disregard matters of status when joining the Methodist community, these accounts also implicitly highlight the initial superior social standing of the women concerned. Such instances reinforce the view that the respectability of preachers’ wives was of some import. Nevertheless, as the foregoing evidence illustrates, for these individuals courage and strength of mind was needed in order to pursue their own religious path. Similar resourcefulness is in evidence when considering the different forms of service that many of these women undertook prior to marriage.

Forms of service undertaken before marriage

Information within the accounts of preachers’ wives demonstrates that the experience of conversion had a powerful impact: changing the way that these women perceived both their relationship with God and their role in the world. On the day of her conversion, for example, Martha Lessey made ‘a solemn dedication of her soul and body to the service of God’.²⁰⁰ Harriet Roadhouse recorded a similar formal covenant with her maker,²⁰¹ whilst Frances Derry prayed that God would allow his ‘poor unworthy worm’ to be ‘an instrument of some use’.²⁰² The inner spiritual change is often described as heralding a different kind of outward demeanour, as in the case of Ruth Revill, whose biographer reveals: ‘the change became visible immediately in her countenance, conversation and conduct.’²⁰³ Individuals are described as finally abandoning their former ungodly behaviour. Having been very fond of finery and fashion, for example, Charlotte Rowland became ‘a pattern of plainness and neatness’.²⁰⁴ In the same way Jane Allen conscientiously avoided ‘light amusements’, and vowed before God never again to read another novel or romance.²⁰⁵ Alteration in these women’s outlook and behaviour, therefore, is reported as one of the first fruits of the conversion process.

¹⁹⁹ [42: 481]. Hillaria still joined the Society, finding much fellowship and spiritual guidance from the ‘pious coloured females’, some of whom are mentioned by name.

²⁰⁰ [24: 856].

²⁰¹ [30: 845].

²⁰² [12: 427].

²⁰³ [11: 352]. In another example, the reality of the conversion of Judith Dredge (1794-1827 *m* 1817) [36] is said to have been ‘manifest in her renunciation of the world, conformity to Christ, and delight in the company of his people’. [36: 655].

²⁰⁴ [33: 215].

²⁰⁵ [63: 781].

The intense experience of forgiveness inspired women and prompted a desire to witness and work for others. The spiritual condition of immediate family was often a primary concern. On her conversion in 1786, for example, Susanna de Queteville was immediately convinced that: it was her duty ‘to communicate these things’ to her brothers and sisters, ‘that they might be encouraged to seek the grace which had been granted to [her],’²⁰⁶ whilst Frances Derry prayed for those in her lodging house, asking God to enable her to assist in: ‘[drawing] every soul in it to thee’.²⁰⁷ Bridget Daniell, in conjunction with her sisters, urged a more reverent observation of the Lord’s Day at home, and instigated regular domestic worship,²⁰⁸ whereas after her conversion the young and rather reticent Ann Horne found courage to speak ‘of the things of God’ to the family servants.²⁰⁹ As the latter instance suggests, such actions were not always easily undertaken. Sarah Benson also conquered a timid disposition to propose that: ‘if no one else would pray in the family ... she would, rather than there should be no prayer within.’²¹⁰ Meanwhile, in difficult years of seclusion nursing her paralysed father, Penelope Coke did her best to ‘recommend Jesus and the love of God’ whenever opportunity arose, later establishing a class meeting in her home.²¹¹ These were some of the ways that the preachers’ wives expressed their faith within their immediate circle.

The inward changes seen to be wrought by conversion also prompted many of the women in the cohort to engage in other more public work, with the particular field of such endeavour being the subject of much prayer. Mary Walker, converted in 1814, recorded her ‘great desire to do God’s will’.²¹² She wrote: ‘I feel it a privilege, as well as a duty, to endeavour to do good’ and prayed: ‘O my Father, open a way by which I may be abundantly useful!’²¹³ She later became a class leader, seeing this opportunity as an answer to prayer.²¹⁴ For Sally Crofts, ‘the pardoning love of God ... produced ... a concern for the salvation of others’.²¹⁵ As well as leading a class, her energies were directed towards fund-raising for missions and chapel building, and the distribution of bibles amongst the poor.²¹⁶ The enterprising Sarah Stevens ventured into completely different territory. She became the steward of ‘a society of females ... whose office it was to visit the sick in hospitals and prisons with other distressed objects, principally confining themselves to women; instructing, praying with,

²⁰⁶ [57: 6].

²⁰⁷ [12: 427].

²⁰⁸ [46: 803].

²⁰⁹ [32: 15].

²¹⁰ [13: 454].

²¹¹ [15: 128].

²¹² [51: 1151].

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Sally Maria Crofts (?-1829) *m* 1824 [39: 170].

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

and relieving them from their little fund.²¹⁷ Even before their link to the itinerancy, therefore, many women had active roles within the Methodist society and beyond.

Out of the seventy-four accounts there is specific information on the work undertaken by thirty women, which is 40.5% of the cohort. Several individuals are recorded as being involved in more than one area of enterprise and a summary of the full range of their endeavours is given below.

Figure 9: Public service undertaken prior to marriage among the cohort sample

Visiting sick	Relief of poor	Sunday school/ general teaching	Prayer meetings	Class/band leader	Distrib. tracts/bibles	Fund raiser missions/chapels	Evangelism	Other
9	8	13	2	11	7	8	3	3

Source: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

What is immediately noticeable from the above analysis is the variety of work being undertaken: important evidence of the opportunities for service open to young, mainly unmarried women, within the Methodist system.²¹⁸ Some areas, such as visiting the sick and relieving the poor were commended to all members of the Society, the former activity being seen as an especially suitable ministry for women in the movement.²¹⁹ Thus, it is not surprising to find seventeen references to such regular benevolence among the memoirs of this particular group of women. The accounts of thirteen women noted that work in Sunday schools, or other educational enterprises, was a part of the subject's ministry,²²⁰ with another two mentioning participation or leadership in prayer meetings.²²¹ In addition, eleven of the relevant accounts reported that the subject held office as a class or band leader.

It seems significant that such a large number among the sample held pastoral and teaching responsibilities of this kind, perhaps reflecting a higher educational standard amongst the preachers' wives. The spiritual and leadership gifts of this group are also apparent in the fact that nine women were class leaders and two led bands. The work of a class leader, for example, involved being a spiritual mentor: counselling, instructing, and admonishing those

²¹⁷ [28: 48].

²¹⁸ Judith Valton (? – 1793 m 1786) [5] was widowed at the time of the work recorded here, later marrying John Valton. Margaret Manly [53] was already married when converted, later remarrying when her first husband, Charles Tolkien, died. [53].

²¹⁹ See chapters three and five above.

²²⁰ Among these, Judith Valton [5] was a very early instigator of a Sunday School whilst Elizabeth Samuel [66] also started up and ran such an establishment.

²²¹ Helena Waugh [48] and Isabella Ranson [44].

within the group, a role which evoked a certain amount of trepidation in some cases.²²² However, leaders of the bands arguably needed even greater spiritual maturity, as meetings were a forum for those who were earnestly seeking Christian perfection. Of the two women undertaking the latter job, Elizabeth McKittrick took up the role in 1804 at the age of twenty-seven.²²³

Among other areas of work, seven individuals disseminated religious material such as tracts or bibles,²²⁴ while fundraising for either missions or chapels was mentioned on eight occasions.²²⁵ Two women offered hospitality to the Methodist preachers,²²⁶ and Sarah Stevens, as reported above, visited hospitals and prisons. Significantly, out of the thirty relevant accounts only three cases refer to the subjects' involvement with evangelism in the period prior to marriage to an itinerant. Among these, Judith Valton is said to have 'introduced the Gospel' in her neighbourhood, but the phrase almost certainly refers in this instance to the fact that she welcomed the itinerant preachers and provided a venue for Methodist preaching.²²⁷

A wider and more public engagement is suggested in the memoir of Mary Ann Cooke, an individual noted for being 'full of life and energy.'²²⁸ Mary Ann is reported to have: 'had the honour of introducing Methodism into one or more of the villages around her, commending to their benighted inhabitants a Saviour whose name had scarcely ever fallen on their ears'.²²⁹ The account of Jane Vasey, meanwhile, gives a very clearly defined summary of her activities. After her conversion in the late 1780s Jane joined with a group of female friends undertaking various forms of benevolence. Their activities included visiting the sick, making clothes for the needy, teaching adults in a poor neighbourhood and giving religious instruction in the workhouse.²³⁰ According to Jane's biographer, her son, this 'band of Methodist heroines' also travelled 'many miles from home on purely evangelising errands.'²³¹ The latter endeavours included house-to-house visiting, promoting preaching sessions and assisting in outdoor

²²² Susanna De Queteville was dumbfounded to be appointed as a class leader, insisting on a trial meeting in the presence of the itinerant minister. Rather than being convinced of her *inability*, however, the latter strongly confirmed her suitability for the job. [57: 7] Sally Crofts is also reported to have entered upon this work 'with fear and trembling', but was 'much beloved' by her class. [39: 170].

²²³ Elizabeth McKittrick [22]. Eliza Byron [7], was also a band leader before her marriage in 1793, but her age at the time is not known.

²²⁴ Such as: Sally Crofts [39] and Isabella Ranson [44].

²²⁵ See for example, Rebecca Gladwin [61].

²²⁶ Judith Valton [5], and Margaret Manly [53].

²²⁷ [5; 142].

²²⁸ [56: 1150-51]

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ [62: 579].

²³¹ *Ibid.*

services. Moreover, on some occasions they undertook to ‘recommend religion’ during prayer meetings, and at other times and places if a preacher was not available.²³²

While the number of women engaged in such public work is less than half the cohort, the data does suggest some trends emerging. A correlation of the *time* of conversion or membership and the *type* of work being undertaken, shows that the role of class leader was still being assumed by some women prior to their marriage up to about 1820.²³³ However, as time went on it appears that it was more likely for the energies of female converts, or new entrants, to be directed towards Sunday schools, the distribution of tracts or collecting for missions. Most significantly, there is a definite dearth of evidence of active evangelism, apart from that provided in the accounts of Mary Ann Cooke and Jane Vasey, described above. The role of editorial censorship on this issue has already been discussed earlier in the thesis. It is worth noting here, however, that both the latter accounts were published at a stage when such activities were a long remove from the prevailing ethos of the movement.²³⁴ In the 1850s and 60s the labours of such ‘Methodist heroines’ could safely be presented to the readership of the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* without any fear of emulation.

Courtship and marriage

As the preceding discussion has shown, the women who became the wives of Methodist travelling preachers came from a variety of backgrounds, but they were alike in having responded to the Methodist message, and in most cases, having come to a personal faith.²³⁵ For many individuals too, conversion, or commitment to the Methodist movement had prompted a desire to witness to others, and to express their own religious calling in different forms of service. The prospect of marriage, meanwhile, brought further issues to the forefront. For some among the cohort it was not the first time they had considered a change of marital status, as three individuals were widowed when receiving an offer from an itinerant preacher,²³⁶ and two others had suffered the death of their former fiancés.²³⁷ However, all single Methodist members were urged to contemplate marriage with the utmost seriousness, seeking to ascertain if this

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ Kezia Geden [55], converted in 1817, and Susanna De Queteville [57], converted in 1820, are the latest to mention this role.

²³⁴ I discuss this issue more fully below. Mary Ann Cooke’s account was published in 1852, that of Jane Vasey in 1860.

²³⁵ As indicated earlier, only Mrs Murlin [2]; Mrs Mather [4] Mrs Eliza Lessey, [17], and Mrs Thomas [54] were converted after their marriages.

²³⁶ Widowed members of the cohort who subsequently married Methodist preachers were: Elizabeth Murlin [2]; Judith Valton [5]; and Margaret Manly [53].

²³⁷ Jane Fisher (1777- 1807) [10], and Sarah Keeling (1799- 1867) [71].

course of action was of providential design.²³⁸ To marry an itinerant preacher and adopt this way of life was an extra cause for thought and prayer. An examination of the sources provides much information about the circumstances and motivation that led these women to the altar.

Wesley's teachings on the relative merits of a married or a single life for believers, made clear that the first question for unattached members of the Society was *whether* to marry. For women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this issue was complicated by additional economic and social factors. Long-term changes in agriculture and the increasing sexual division of labour meant that women in general faced fewer employment opportunities, and for some marriage was undertaken out of economic necessity.²³⁹ Two cases from the cohort highlight the additional pressures that could be brought to bear upon women. The account of Elizabeth Murlin, for example, reveals how, at the age of 'a little over twenty' she began to receive the attentions of Mr Berrisford, a cashier at the Bank of England. Despite having no inclination to change her marital state at the time, Elizabeth was browbeaten by her father, eventually agreeing to the union.²⁴⁰ Elizabeth Egan, a later member of the cohort, came under some psychological pressure *not* to marry as her elderly grandfather, also her guardian, declared that he 'could not bear the thought that she should leave his roof while he lived.'²⁴¹ Only at a later stage could both women make their marital choices freely.²⁴²

Wesley's preference for single preachers, meanwhile, caused soul-searching by the itinerants in the present study. Jean de Queteville, for example, had accepted that due to his ministry a single life would always be his lot, but on meeting Susanna de Jersey he questioned whether this was truly God's will.²⁴³ Joseph Entwisle's lengthy ruminations have already been mentioned, but his final conclusion was that 'a Christian minister's usefulness is greatly promoted by marriage, - at a proper time, and to a suitable person.'²⁴⁴ The women in the study were equally concerned to make the right decision. The memoir of Charlotte Rowland records her journal entry and prayers subsequent to a proposal from Thomas Rowland in 1815:

²³⁸ See the discussion in chapter four above.

²³⁹ Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches. Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 51 and 66. Clark's examination of plebian women's autobiographies found many women depicted marriage as 'a pragmatic effort to survive'. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780 - 1850*, (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 325.

²⁴⁰ [2: 423-4].

²⁴¹ [72: 579].

²⁴² After Mr Berrisford's death, Elizabeth and John Murlin were married. Elizabeth Egan married James Rosser in 1819.

²⁴³ Arthur Mignot, "'Mon Plaisir' and the Methodists of Guernsey," *PWHS* 53 (May 2001): 43.

²⁴⁴ See chapter four above and J. Entwisle, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwisle, 1848*, Eighth Edition (London: James Nichols, 1862), 66-67.

At present an offer is made to me to change my situation in life. But O my God, is it a call from thee? Forbid it that I should take a step of such importance without thy direction and approbation. And although it is from one of thy servants, yet I cannot, I dare not consent, without asking thy guidance. O my FATHER and my GOD, counsel thy child and direct me!²⁴⁵ [Author's emphasis]

Both the itinerants and their prospective partners, therefore, were mindful of Methodist policy, and approached the question of whether to marry or remain single with much thoughtfulness and prayer.

For individuals who had resolved upon a married life, the problem of *who* to marry then became the most significant matter. In this, Methodists also had some extra concerns to address, for in addition to the usual issues such as finding a person of a suitable age, social background and temperament, Wesley's followers were also expected to seek a spouse who was a Society member, and *spiritually* compatible. Parental consent to any proposed marriage was another requirement. The travelling preachers, however, faced added stipulations. They needed to have completed their probationary period before considering a change of status, and were obliged to 'take no step towards marriage' without consulting with their brethren. As shown earlier, Wesley's 'Sons in the Gospel' were also expected to spell out the requirements of the itinerant life to any prospective partners.²⁴⁶ To what extent were these directions followed by the couples identified by the current study?

For those in search of a spouse, it would appear that the sheer variety of regular Methodist meetings and services offered plenty of opportunities for contact with likeminded individuals. Indeed, Gail Malmgreen has suggested that many young people attended chapel not only to find God, but also to find friends and sweethearts.²⁴⁷ Moreover, the itinerant system had its benefits both for Methodist preachers looking for a wife, and for unmarried women within the movement who were seeking a partner. In the former case, the normal run of preaching and pastoral work within a given circuit, and the frequent geographical moves demanded by Conference allowed ample scope for bachelors in the itinerancy to become acquainted with members of the opposite sex.²⁴⁸ Meanwhile, single women in the Society were guaranteed new faces in the pulpit on a much more regular basis than in their parish church. Such factors played a part in allowing friendship and love to ripen in the case of individuals in this study.

²⁴⁵ [33: 216] Entry dated 12 Feb. 1815.

²⁴⁶ All these aspects are discussed in more detail in chapter six above.

²⁴⁷ Gail Malmgreen, "Domestic Discords: Women and the Family in East Cheshire Methodism, 1750 - 1830", in *Disciplines of Faith, Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, edited by Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper, and Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1987), 64.

²⁴⁸ Hence the cautions expressed in the *Rules of a Helper* (1744), described earlier, regarding appropriate behaviour towards female members.

While the circumstances in which the women and their prospective partners met are not always given, it is clear that the movement's circuit system often brought about a geographical proximity that might otherwise have been unlikely. Thus Duncan McAllum and Elizabeth Livingston became acquainted in 1776 when the itinerant introduced Methodism to Elizabeth's native Inverness.²⁴⁹ In another case Mrs Heath met her husband, William when he served in the Colchester circuit, which included her home town of Harwich.²⁵⁰ The movement's dependence on the laity to house visiting preachers also allowed close contact in a domestic setting which sometimes led to the blossoming of romance. Henry de Jersey provided lodgings for two young itinerants at his house on Guernsey, little knowing that one of them, Mr de Queteville, would fall in love and later marry his daughter.²⁵¹ Some memoirs tell of chance meetings as an itinerant journeyed between circuits, or on other official work. When Ann Dupuy returned to England from Antigua in 1763 she sought lodgings at the Methodist New Room, Bristol prior to going back to Ireland, and chanced to meet the itinerant Thomas Taylor, about to sail to Dublin. The couple were reacquainted six years later when Mr Taylor was appointed to Cork, a circuit including Bandon, Ann's home town, and here their friendship had the chance to ripen.²⁵²

Within the published accounts such events and their aftermath are frequently depicted as part of a grand providential plan. Writing on the day of her marriage to Marshall Claxton, for example, Diana Claxton suggested that their union had come about through: 'a chain of very mysterious and gracious providences', although tantalizingly, no further details are available.²⁵³ Joseph Benson also suggested that the train of events prior to his marriage to Sarah Thompson were 'providential' and 'very remarkable', recording his conviction that they were a result of his many prayers: 'for direction in that most important of all steps in human life'.²⁵⁴ Both he and Sarah, he wrote, had 'no doubt upon our minds that the matter was of the Lord.'²⁵⁵ For individuals urged to consider God's design in their lives, especially where marriage plans were involved, such statements are not surprising. However, the frequent allusions to providence arguably suggest the need to *justify* the decision to enter into matrimony, indicative perhaps of the continuing legacy of Wesley's rather peculiar views.

²⁴⁹ [18: 207-9].

²⁵⁰ Mrs Heath [6]. *Hall*, 132 shows that William Heath was stationed in the Colchester circuit from 1792-3. No information is available regarding the couple's date of marriage.

²⁵¹ See Mignot, "Mon Plaisir", 42-3 and Susanna de Queteville [57].

²⁵² Mrs Taylor [14]. Ann Dupuy had been working as a governess in Antigua, but suffered due to the climate and returned after only one year. The couple eventually married in 1767.

²⁵³ [27: 920]. Diary entry dated 6 Aug. 1803.

²⁵⁴ [13: 454-5].

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

An interesting insight into the characteristics being sought by one of the itinerants is provided in a letter by Joseph Benson, which reveals his hope (prior to meeting Sarah Thompson) of finding: ‘a person of understanding and piety capable of helping me in the ways of God and whom I can truly and affectionately love’.²⁵⁶ First impressions of a future spouse, which are sometimes recorded in published memoirs of the wives, also provide clues to the kind of qualities desired. On meeting Sarah Willis in the summer of 1788, for example, William Stevens is said to have been struck by her person: ‘which was comely’, but much more with her mind, which is described as ‘cast in the mould Divine.’²⁵⁷ From then on, Sarah’s biographer suggests: ‘[a] union of affection’ took place.²⁵⁸ Thomas Rowland described the attributes that attracted him to his wife, Charlotte, recording the impact made by ‘her engaging manners, her zealous and decided piety, and her diligence in doing good both to the souls and bodies of her poor neighbours’.²⁵⁹ It is clear from these instances that whilst piety was an important virtue for all these men, it was not the only characteristic being sought in a wife.

If spiritual gifts were high on the list of necessary qualifications for these preachers, the women in the cohort were also mindful of the importance of such qualities in a potential spouse, and were concerned to safeguard their own religious integrity and calling. Ann Leach, for example, considered the spiritual credentials of her future spouse to be of paramount importance, writing that she: ‘resolved not to marry any one who did not love God.’²⁶⁰ Another member of the cohort, Sarah Turton, who had many suitors, is said to have ‘resolved not to take a single step in so important a concern till she saw her way plain with reference to her being holy, happy, and useful in forming such a connexion.’²⁶¹ Before her own marriage, in 1816, Mary Walker read of Mr. Fletcher’s entry into the state, praying that: ‘by a similar devotedness, I might increase in holiness ...’²⁶² Similar sentiments are expressed in the later response of Kate Chappell to a proposal from the itinerant, Henry Thomas in 1841. Kate is reported to have: ‘earnestly prayed for divine guidance, and evidently considered the subject chiefly as it might be connected with her soul’s salvation.’²⁶³ These findings support Henry Rack’s observation that ‘women were just as anxious to marry in a way that preserved their religious interests and vocations.’²⁶⁴

²⁵⁶ Henry D. Rack, “‘But Lord, Let It Be Betsy!’: Love and Marriage in Early Methodism,” *PWHS* 53, (Feb 2001): 12. The letter cited is dated 21 June 1779, but unfortunately there is no indication of who the recipient of this letter was.

²⁵⁷ [28: 48].

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ [33: 215].

²⁶⁰ [65: 867].

²⁶¹ [37: 450].

²⁶² [51: 1151].

²⁶³ [54: 1060].

²⁶⁴ Rack, “Betsy,” 12.

In addition to personal prayer and contemplation regarding courtship, the itinerants and their prospective brides consulted with others on the issue of marriage. The travelling preachers were expected to confer with their brethren, which in effect meant gaining the consent of senior ministers before making any definite move towards matrimony. John Valton records seeking the blessing of both Charles and John Wesley, before proposing to Judith Purnell,²⁶⁵ while Duncan McAllum, noted that he obtained Wesley's 'full approbation' before his union, writing that it was 'then the custom to consult him as a father'.²⁶⁶ Joseph Benson was a prominent figure in the movement by the time that he contemplated marriage, but still consulted with a number of 'pious and judicious friends' about a possible union with Sarah Thompson.²⁶⁷ Other sources show that young itinerants consulted their senior colleagues before any approaches were made to their prospective sweethearts.²⁶⁸ It is evident that the travelling preachers were careful to comply with the conditions of their service.

Less information exists regarding sources of counsel for the women in the study. Whilst most individuals would be guided by their parents, the case of Elizabeth Murlin and Elizabeth Egan, related above suggests that some fathers and guardians were not always sympathetic to the wishes of their charges. Some of those within the cohort who had been orphaned in early life were deprived of *any* parental counsel. Elizabeth Kirkpatrick, for example, whose long acquaintance with William McKittrick had ripened into affection: 'prudently ... consulted her class leader, Miss Titherington on the subject, and made it a matter of prayer to God'.²⁶⁹ Ann Leach, who had also lost both parents, recounted how she settled the question of who to marry by resorting to prayer alone.²⁷⁰ This was evidently a successful strategy, for she was happily married to William Leach for the following forty years.

Available information suggests that some Methodist leaders were more willing than Wesley to facilitate a satisfactory marriage for their contemporaries. When John Valton lost his health he received a letter from John Fletcher, a leading itinerant, who not only suggested that: 'a nurse, in the quality of a wife, might be a blessing', but identified a possible candidate.²⁷¹ Philip Hardcastle also related how his wife, Ann was identified as a suitable spouse by his

²⁶⁵ [5: 143-4]. The elder Wesley took some time before agreeing to the union.

²⁶⁶ [18: 209] In this case Wesley, having visited Elizabeth's mother in Inverness, gladly consented, saying he did not know where Mr McAllum could make a better choice.

²⁶⁷ [13: 455].

²⁶⁸ Joseph Entwisle's courtship of Mary Pawson, and George Marsden's suit of Anne Lomas were initially discussed John Pawson and others. See Entwisle, *Memoir*, 68 specifically the extract from Joseph's journal dated 17 Oct. 1791. For George Marsden see *PL* 2: 100, 104 and 107.

²⁶⁹ [22: 683].

²⁷⁰ [65].

²⁷¹ [5: 143-4]. This was Mrs Purnell, who had previously nursed Fletcher. She and Mr Valton subsequently married in 1786.

former superintendent.²⁷² A senior minister also drew Joseph Entwisle's attentions to the qualities of Mary Pawson, at a time when the younger man had already secretly considered her as a possible wife.²⁷³ Such instances are important reminders of the way that the prospective wives of the preachers became subjects of public scrutiny long before their marriages.

The need to obtain the permission of parents prior to marriage was also keenly stressed within the Methodist Society.²⁷⁴ When Joseph Benson first broached the subject of marriage, Sarah Thompson declined giving him 'any answer whatever until [he] had first asked and obtained her mother's consent.'²⁷⁵ George Marsden's suit of Ann Lomas was certainly made known to her family, for his superintendent sent congratulations on the fact that he had 'met with so favourable a reception.'²⁷⁶ Parental approval was not always forthcoming, however. Bridget Bull and the itinerant, Mark Daniell became mutually attracted over a period of five years, but Bridget's parents were decidedly opposed to her uniting her fate with a wandering Methodist Preacher. Because of this Bridget reportedly 'placed a powerful restraint on her own inclination; [declining] all intercourse and engagement' with Mr Daniell.²⁷⁷ In time her parents recognised this unselfishness and adherence to filial duty and consented to the marriage.²⁷⁸

Several other members of the cohort had a lengthy period of courtship. Duncan McAllum and Elizabeth Livingston corresponded for seven years before their marriage in 1784.²⁷⁹ The union of Elizabeth and William McKitrick was similarly delayed, this time while the latter completed his four year probationary period.²⁸⁰ Meanwhile, practical considerations were an issue for Thomas Taylor. Though Ann Dupuy had consented to be his wife, Thomas reported that he postponed the date of their marriage due to his fears about imposing financial strain on the movement, and worries about bringing his future partner into 'a line of life so opposite to what she had been accustomed.'²⁸¹ One woman in the study, Mrs Purnell, refused to adopt an itinerant lifestyle, and thus John Valton thought that all his hopes of marriage were stymied. Some time later, however, he became a supernumerary in the Bristol circuit, and being settled in one place, renewed his proposal. This time his offer was accepted.²⁸²

²⁷² [16].

²⁷³ Entwisle, *Memoir*, 68. Extract from Joseph's journal dated 17 Oct. 1791.

²⁷⁴ This was a concomitant of the fourth commandment, and the obligation to honour parents. See, for example, Wesley's 1784 sermon, *On Obedience to Parents*.

²⁷⁵ [13: 454]. Sarah's father had died at an earlier date.

²⁷⁶ *P L* 2: 107. Letter dated 7 Feb. 1797.

²⁷⁷ [46:896].

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.* The couple were married in 1801.

²⁷⁹ [18: 207-9]

²⁸⁰ [22: 683-5] The couple met in 1799, but William entered the itinerancy in 1803 and so was unable to marry until 1807.

²⁸¹ [14: 46].

²⁸² [5].

Mrs Purnell was not alone in expressing qualms about the itinerant life. Several accounts articulate the subjects' initial anxieties about taking up the role of a travelling preacher's wife and the demands of the accompanying way of life. The biographer of Mary Ann Cusworth, who married in 1813, noted that: 'she at first shrank from the duties pictured on her mind, as imposed on the wife of a Christian Minister.'²⁸³ Jane Wilson is reported to have experienced similar concerns. Describing his wife's 'thought and prayer' prior to her marriage in 1820, her husband wrote:

To become the wife of a Christian Minister, and enter upon that itinerant sphere which is peculiar to the Wesleyans, were her serious and important considerations. She thought herself incompetent to the one, and shrunk [sic] from the inconveniences and difficulties of the other.²⁸⁴

Ann Leach, as described earlier, was initially perturbed by the public position occupied by such women and at 'the prospect of leaving [her] friends and native place'.²⁸⁵ In a later example Mary Walker, who married in 1816, viewed her future situation as 'solemn and important'.²⁸⁶ In her diary she recorded her thoughts on leaving home and 'going among strangers', writing: 'My own feelings, if consulted ... would shrink from the cross; yet on the other hand, I feel happy in believing that I am following the leadings of Providence.'²⁸⁷

The position of those whose prospective husbands had engaged to be missionaries meant even greater dislocation from former existence. Ann Horne was made fully aware of the difficulties of a missionary life by her prospective husband, who had been appointed to Jamaica, but worried above all that she would lack 'those endowments, which she conceived to be essential for a Minister's wife.'²⁸⁸ Receiving a marriage proposal from a missionary to Sierra Leone caused the later preacher's wife, Mrs Raston 'a season of deepest anxiety and deepest prayer for Divine direction', whilst the experience of separation 'from beloved friends cost her many a tear and many a pang'.²⁸⁹ The expectations of a preacher's wife, the public nature of the position, and the privations of the itinerant way of life were thus major issues for many women.

Most importantly, the evidence indicates that marriage was embarked upon in the hope of fulfilling God's will. Jane Wilson is reported to have set out in 'this new sphere of action' cheerfully: 'in the fear of the Lord, and with the hope of becoming more holy and useful.'²⁹⁰ In a similar manner Mary Walker prayed: 'If my way is opened for a more enlarged sphere of

²⁸³ [40: 419].

²⁸⁴ [43: 806].

²⁸⁵ [65: 867].

²⁸⁶ [51: 1151].

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ [32: 16].

²⁸⁹ [60: 878].

²⁹⁰ [43:806].

usefulness, give me every necessary aid',²⁹¹ evidently relying on God to support her in her new position. The wedding day prayer of Frances Derry, written in 1806, expresses comparable dependence upon God:

O Lord, may thy blessing this day rest on thy poor unworthy worm. Thou hast united me in hand and heart to thy servant. O do thou impart thy grace to my soul, that I may indeed be an [sic] help meet for him. Grant me strength according to my day, and such a sense of the importance of my situation, that it may lead me continually to thee, who alone cans't [sic] supply all my need.²⁹²

Charlotte Rowland, whose prayer for guidance is recorded earlier, was quite satisfied that her course of action was correct, writing on the day of her marriage: 'I believe I never felt myself nearer to God than on this important day. My mind was staid on the Lord and kept in perfect peace'.²⁹³ Meanwhile, Diana Claxton recorded that her 'connection and union' with Marshall Claxton was one for which she believed she would have 'reason to praise God for ever'.²⁹⁴ Observing that very few had been united together, 'whose religious views, feelings, and sufferings, have been more similar,' she noted her husband's appointment to Bridlington, adding: 'I bid adieu to the world, determined to live to God alone'.²⁹⁵ Such examples furnish strong evidence of the strong sense of calling and devotion with which the women entered into their new roles.

The timing of marriages within the cohort

By using a variety of sources, it has been possible to establish the year of marriage in all but six cases, allowing a comparison of sixty-eight instances or 92% of the cohort. From this it appears that the earliest recorded marriage was that of Elizabeth Walker who married John Berrisford in the early 1730s.²⁹⁶ However, when considering marriage to a *preacher* the earliest example is Mrs Mather's union with Alexander Mather in 1753.²⁹⁷ The latest date of marriage to be recorded is that of Louisa Edman in 1855.²⁹⁸ Thus, these individuals' marriages span a period of 102 years. Four instances of multiple marriages have also been found, with the accounts of Elizabeth Murlin, Judith Valton, and Margaret Manly showing that their unions to the preachers were second marriages.²⁹⁹ Mrs Mary Hunt (née Smith), meanwhile, wed three times, and in each case to an itinerant. The dates of all these unions have been included in the

²⁹¹ [51: 1151].

²⁹² [12: 427].

²⁹³ [33: 216].

²⁹⁴ [27: 920].

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ [2]. She later married the itinerant, John Murlin.

²⁹⁷ [4]. The couple's date of marriage (14 Feb. 1753) is provided in *EMP* 2: 163.

²⁹⁸ [66].

²⁹⁹ [2], [5]; and [53]. None of these women's first husbands were preachers.

summary below,³⁰⁰ bringing the final total of marriages for comparison to seventy. The chronological spread of individual marriages within this cohort is shown in figure ten below.

Figure 10: Timing of marriages by decade among the cohort sample (Marriage to preachers only)

1750	1760	1770	1780	1790	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	Total
1	2	1	7	4	14	17	8	9	4	3	70

Sources: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester; *EMP*; *IGI*.

As this analysis reveals, 15 individuals, or 21% of this group married during the eighteenth century, and as shown here only four of these individuals were active as preachers' wives in the earlier decades of the Methodist movement. Eleven women wed in the period from 1780-1799, and of these seven entered marriage as Wesley's leadership came to an end.³⁰¹ The majority of this group married during the nineteenth century, with the largest cluster of thirty-one cases taking place between 1800 and 1820. It can also be seen that in this sample more than half of the women (thirty-nine individuals) embarked on an itinerant life in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. By this time the role and ministry of women within the Methodist movement had been significantly circumscribed: a fact that may have impinged upon the scope of work of these women when they became preachers' wives. Moreover, this was also a period of tensions and divisions with the Methodist leadership asserting its authority. As the partners of the itinerants, the majority of the women would also face many challenges living through these turbulent times.

Age of marriage among the cohort

Information regarding the age of marriage of members of the cohort is available in fifty-seven of the possible seventy-four cases or 77% of the full cohort. This evidence reveals that Anne Marsden was the youngest to marry, being only seventeen at the time of her wedding in 1797.³⁰² The oldest bride found in a first marriage to a preacher was Penelope Coke, who married in 1805 at the age of forty-three.³⁰³ Second and third marriages, meanwhile, naturally occurred at a later stage in life. Margaret Manly, for example, was forty-one when she married the itinerant, Mr Manly. Mary Hunt married for the second time at the age of forty-five, whilst Elizabeth Murlin remarried when she was fifty-one years old. In addition Mary Hunt married

³⁰⁰ Mary Smith first married William Entwisle in 1825 (d. 1831), then Joseph Taylor in 1840 (d. 1845) and finally Joseph Hunt in 1852.

³⁰¹ All the subjects who married in the 1790s did so in 1792 and later.

³⁰² [41].

³⁰³ [15].

for a third time at the age of fifty-seven. These latter cases account for some of the incidences of marriage noted below in the forty to fifty-five plus age range.

Figure 11: Age on marriage among the cohort sample (Marriage to preachers only)³⁰⁴

Under 20	20 –24	25 – 29	30 – 34	35 – 39	40-44	45-49	50-55	55+	Total
7	21	11	9	5	3	1	1	1	59

Sources: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester; IGI.

Population studies suggest that the mean ages of both men and women at first marriage fell during the period between the 1675 and 1799. For women the age dropped from 26.75 to 24.1.³⁰⁵ Interestingly, the preceding summary indicates that the highest level of marriages within this group occurred within the twenty to twenty-four age range, and slightly less than half the sample marrying before their twenty-fifth birthday. If all marriages are included the average age of marriage among this sample is 27.7 years. However, if second and third marriages are excluded the average age drops to 26.2 years.

It is also pertinent to examine whether there are any noticeable differences in the age of marriage over the length of the study. In order to test this element, evidence was taken from the first twenty accounts of the cohort providing the necessary information and the last twenty accounts to provide sufficient details. Figure twelve gives details of the findings below.

Figure 12: Age on marriage among the cohort sample: a comparison

The first 20 accounts: 1780-1806

The last 20 accounts: 1818-1855

Under 20	4	Under 20	1
20 - 29	9	20-29	12
30 - 39	6	30 – 39	7
40 - 49	1	40 - 49	0
50+	0	50+	0
Total	20	Total	20

Sources: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester; IGI.

³⁰⁴ The total number includes an extra two cases from the account of Mrs Hunt.

³⁰⁵ E. A Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 423. In men the age dropped from 28 to 26.

Here it might have been expected to find marriages occurring at a younger age during the later period. However, the figures reveal equal numbers being wed before their thirtieth birthday with thirteen subjects recorded in this category in both samples. While the number of women marrying later than this also shows little discrepancy in both periods, there were actually fewer teenage marriages noted the last twenty accounts. Although this is a very small sample, it appears that as a whole the latter cohort left it later to marry.

One last point is relevant before moving on to consider the married lives of the women in the cohort in more detail. This relates to the season in which the marriages of the preachers' wives took place. In the forty-six accounts that provide information of the month of marriage, slightly more than half of the women concerned (twenty-eight) went to the altar on a date between June and September. This runs counter to the usual seasonality of marriages reported by Wrigley, who over a long period noted peaks in marriages occurring in May and October and a trough in between.³⁰⁶ There seems little doubt that in the case of the preachers' wives mid summer marriages were timed to coincide with the requirements of the Methodist ministerial year. It will be remembered that changes in the itinerants' appointments were decided at the July Conference, and the preachers then took up office in their new positions in September. Thus, the institutional needs of the movement would seem to have influenced even the choice of wedding day.

This brings the consideration of aspects of the subjects' life before marriage to a close. In the following chapter evidence from the primary sources is again examined, but in this case to discover more of the complexities and challenges of these women's roles and experiences as wives of Methodist itinerant preachers.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 298. In both the 1750-99 and 1800-34 periods numbers of marriages were lower in June July and August than the previous May.

Chapter Eight: The Travels and Travails of the Preachers' Wives: Evidence from the Database of Primary Texts

The previous chapter has examined the full range of accounts of preachers' wives discovered in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* and considered evidence pertaining to the early backgrounds and religious lives of the women who married the Methodist itinerant preachers. This includes their active roles in the Methodist movement, and their attitudes and experiences during the time of courtship. Discussion now turns to investigate the experience of these individuals as married women. Unlike the wives of ministers from other denominations, the spouses of Methodist preachers could expect no settled existence, and their daily lives were circumscribed by particular factors devolving from the Methodist connexional system. It is therefore very pertinent to begin with an examination of some of the more important features of the itinerant way of life and consider the ways in which major institutional policies shaped the daily experience of the women who are the subjects of the study.

The travelling life

For any woman marriage signifies a major change, but for the wives of itinerant preachers their wedding was usually followed by a rapid farewell to kin, close friends and neighbours and departure for a completely different way of life. As earlier discussion has indicated, this prospect was a source of anxiety for many of the women who were wooed, and eventually won by Methodist preachers. For such individuals too, the initial separation from familiar scenes was only the first disruption of many similar household moves. Their married life was characterised by frequent changes of habitation and the upheaval that journeying from place to place entailed.

The terms governing the deployment of the itinerant preachers altered over the length of the current study, and this had an important impact in determining the number of moves that were required of individual wives.¹ Elizabeth Murlin, for example, who married into the itinerancy in 1762, initially spent only a month in Bedford and 'a short time' in London, before moving to the Norwich circuit.² Travelling with her husband for the next twenty-five years, Elizabeth appears to have had at least eighteen further changes of circuit before her death in

¹ See the earlier discussion in chapter three above.

² Elizabeth Murlin (1710-1786) [2: 424]. As before, I provide known details of each woman at the first mention only. Numbers in square brackets refer to the identification number in Figure three above. Where quotations from the account are included, the page number follows the identification number.

1786. Significantly, only two of these postings lasted for a second year.³ An even greater number of removals were undertaken by Ann Taylor, another early member of the cohort. Wedded to Thomas Taylor in 1767, Ann's married life of forty-three years was punctuated by a total of twenty-eight circuit changes, out of which half were annual moves.⁴

Evidence from the accounts suggests that women travelling with their husbands later in the period were still undergoing a great number of moves, despite the possibility of longer ministerial appointments. Mary Ann Cooke, who married in 1813, experienced fifteen circuit changes during her married life,⁵ whilst later Elizabeth Rosser removed eighteen times between her marriage in 1819 and her husband's retirement in 1861.⁶ Meanwhile, the fate of Sarah Stevens seems particularly hard. 'Mr. Stevens, with all his piety and usefulness, was not a popular preacher', wrote her biographer, 'which accounts for his moving generally from a circuit after one year.'⁷ Thus, Sarah was forced to change households on an annual basis.

The geographical distances covered during these circuit changes could be significant, even for those remaining in the British Isles. Elizabeth Murlin, for example, travelled between top circuits, going regularly to Bristol, London, and Manchester as well as Newcastle, Chester, Bradford, and Leeds.⁸ Penelope Coke accompanied her husband to Ireland on several occasions despite 'an unconquerable aversion to the sea.'⁹ At a later date Elizabeth Rosser spent 1837 in Aberdeen then went to Maidstone, Kent, journeying on other occasions to circuits such as the Isle of Man and Alderney.¹⁰ Mary Sykes, who was married in 1840, can be seen to have had a singular introduction to the demands of the itinerant life, being stationed with her husband in England, Scotland and Wales in the space of just three years.¹¹

The physical and emotional strain of such household removals is apparent from several accounts. Jane Stanley's move from Newbury, Berkshire, to Haverfordwest in Wales in 1803 is described as 'a most unpleasant journey' due to Mrs Stanley's ill health, the bad state of the

³ Kenneth B. Garlick, *Mr. Wesley's Preachers: An alphabetical arrangement of Wesleyan Methodist Preachers and Missionaries ... 1739 – 1818* (London: Pinhorn, 1977), 34. Two year posts were Bristol (1774-6), and Manchester (1783-5).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 47. Ann Taylor (?-1810) [14].

⁵ Mary Ann Cooke (1786-1850) [56]; William Hill, *An Alphabetical and Chronological Arrangement of the Wesleyan Methodist Ministers and Preachers* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Conference, 1861).

⁶ Elizabeth Rosser (1787-1867 *m* 1819) [72]; Hill, *Arrangement* (1869).

⁷ Sarah Stevens (1770-1817 *m c* 1789). [28: 49].

⁸ Garlick, *Wesley's Preachers*, 34.

⁹ Penelope Coke (1762-1811 *m* 1805) [15: 216].

¹⁰ [72]; Hill, *Arrangement* (1869). Mrs Rosser went to the Isle of Man in 1846 and to Alderney in 1854.

¹¹ Mary Sykes (1815-1874) [74]; Hill, *Arrangement* (1876). Travelling from her native Lancashire to the Alnwick circuit in 1840, Mary went to Perth, Scotland in 1841, and then to Holyhead, Wales in 1842.

roads, and ‘very hot weather.’¹² Their destination reached, however, the couple found no married preacher had previously been stationed in the town, their family was not expected, and no house was available. It was only after some difficulties that lodgings were procured. ‘This was to us a day of darkness and sore trial ...’ wrote Mr Stanley.¹³ Another memoir speaks of the ‘long and painful,’ journey made by Frances Derry when going from Swansea to Rotherham in 1808,¹⁴ Changing modes of transport are in evidence over the period of the study. In 1814 Elizabeth McKitrick was forced to complete her journey to Sowerby Bridge on foot because of ‘the miserable condition of the horses’,¹⁵ but a later account refers to the new rail system being constructed.¹⁶ The account of Jane Allen, meanwhile, highlights the hazards of train journeys and her involvement in ‘a serious collision on the railway.’¹⁷

Missionary journeys

The cohort includes a number of women who covered even greater distances, going across the globe to various mission stations. The Methodist way of life first expanded overseas through unofficial means such as the preaching of Nathaniel Gilbert, on the island of Antigua, and the influence of Irish emigrants to America.¹⁸ However, in 1786 Conference agreed to sanction official work and dispatch preachers to areas including the West Indies and British North America.¹⁹ Terrible storms forced those bound for Nova Scotia to land in Antigua, and here and on neighbouring islands Methodist missions first made their mark.²⁰ Other fields were soon being opened up with a successful mission to West Africa taking place in Sierra Leone in 1811.²¹ Two years later Conference sanctioned the extension of such work to Ceylon and South Africa although efforts in the latter region did not succeed until 1816.²² By the early 1820s Methodist preachers had also reached the Gambia, founding a mission post at Bathurst.²³

¹² Jane Stanley (1775-1805 *m* 1799) [9: 230].

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Frances Derry (1768-1808 *m* 1806) [12: 430].

¹⁵ Elizabeth McKitrick (1777-1815 *m* 1807) [22: 688]. This was in 1814.

¹⁶ Mrs Cooke gave tracts to the railway men working near her home at Macclesfield in 1847. [56: 1154].

¹⁷ Jane Allen (1816-1858 *m* 1845) [63: 784]. Contextual evidence suggests this happened about 1849.

¹⁸ The following section is based on N. Allen Birtwhistle, “Methodist Missions”, in *HMCGB* 3: 1-116; and “Overseas Mission”, in *DMBI*, 263-4. See also *NHM* volume 2.

¹⁹ Birtwhistle, “Methodist Missions,” 3-5. Following a scheme devised by Thomas Coke (1747-1814) for an annual subscription to support work in the West Indies, Canada, the Channel Isles and northern Scotland. Coke, a prime mover in Methodist missions, married Penelope Goulding Smith [15] in 1805.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-6 and 18. By 1808 there were eighteen Methodist missionaries officially stationed overseas, all of these within the West Indies.

²¹ *Ibid.*, *DMBI*, 318.

²² The first journey to Ceylon, and early work in South Africa is described in Birtwhistle, “Methodist Missions”, 20 -23 and 28-36.

²³ *Ibid.*, 36; *DMBI*, 131.

These endeavours were supported by the Methodist Missionary Society, launched in 1786, and a Committee for Missions set up in 1804. Fund-raising on a local level began from 1813 when District Missionary Societies were inaugurated and juvenile divisions followed later.²⁴ Whilst the latter organisations provided funds and mobilised public interest, the role played by the *Magazine* in publishing missionary intelligence was very significant. Letters and articles describing overseas work appeared regularly from the 1790s, and from 1808 a new section covered developments within the various missions.²⁵ First-hand accounts, biographies and obituaries also fed into this growing genre of missionary literature. The stories of women in the cohort who laboured abroad alongside their husbands offer new perspectives on Methodism's expansion beyond the British Isles.

Twelve of the preachers' wives married Methodist missionaries, with individuals travelling outbound between 1813 and 1864.²⁶ Mary Ault was the earliest to leave England, accompanying her husband on the initial missionary expedition to the East Indies in December 1813.²⁷ Ann Horne travelled to the West Indies four years later,²⁸ the first of six wives in the cohort who were destined for Jamaica.²⁹ In the following decade Hillaria Shrewsbury went from her native place in Barbados, accompanying her husband to the islands of St. Vincent and Grenada.³⁰ By 1825 the couple had quitted the West Indies for good and went to South Africa where they were early Methodist pioneers.³¹ Four more of the subjects travelled to the subcontinent in the 1830s and 40s, with Jane Allen and Mrs Raston deployed in West Africa, and Mary Swallow in the Gambia.³² Their contemporary, Rebecca Gladwin journeyed to South Africa in 1840, covering the area that had formerly been the scene of Mrs Shrewsbury's work.³³ The varied histories of these individuals reveal the extra hardships in such mission fields.

All the missionaries' wives faced the prospect of at least one long sea voyage and it is evident that some individuals, like Margaret Manly and Rebecca Gladwin had crossed oceans

²⁴ Birtwhistle, "Methodist Missions", 5, 7, and 24-25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14, 30. See, for example, *MM* 23 (1800): 43: 'A Short Account of the Success of the Methodist Missionaries in the West Indies'. The section 'The Kingdom of God Enlarged' covered work overseas.

²⁶ I include in this group only those who travelled with their husbands beyond Britain and Ireland.

²⁷ Mary Ault (1789-1814 *m* 1813) [20].

²⁸ Ann Horne (1793-1819 *m* 1817) [32].

²⁹ Sally Maria Crofts (? -1829 *m* 1824) [39] travelled to Jamaica in 1824; Elizabeth Samuel (1800-1862 *m* 1831) [66] sailed in 1831; Betsy Lofthouse (?- 1837 *m* 1836) [45] went in 1836. Margaret Manly (1796-1845 *m* 1824) [53] arrived in 1844; and Louisa Edman (1829-1864 *m* 1855) [66] sailed in 1855, dying there in 1864.

³⁰ Hillaria Shrewsbury (1802-1835 *m* 1823) [42]. Hillaria, the daughter of a British architect working in Demerara, converted through the preaching of the missionary William Shrewsbury and later married him.

³¹ *Ibid.* They left the West Indies in 1824, came to England and sailed for South Africa in 1825.

³² Mary Swallow (1816-1843 *m* 1837) [50] left England for the Gambia in 1837; Jane Allen set out for West Africa in 1845; and Mrs Raston (*d* 1851) [60] landed in Sierra Leone in 1847.

³³ Rebecca Gladwin (1816-1852 *m* 1839) [61] went out to South Africa in 1840.

even prior to their entry into missionary work.³⁴ Sally Maria Harriss perhaps faced extra worries, travelling as a single woman to Jamaica, and marrying John Crofts there ‘according to a previous arrangement’.³⁵ The dangers of sea travel are well illustrated for Hillaria Shrewsbury faced ‘a stormy and perilous journey’ to South Africa in 1825, and on one trip to the Gambia Mary Swallow encountered a ‘terrible hurricane.’³⁶ Outward bound for Jamaica, Elizabeth Samuel noted that several missionaries and their wives had perished shortly before reaching the coast.³⁷ Jane Allen narrowly escaped the same fate when her vessel to West Africa ran aground.³⁸ In one particularly sad case, Mary Ault never reached her planned destination, succumbing to tuberculosis and dying six weeks into the journey to Ceylon.³⁹

These accounts reveal the extra hazards of travels in primitive conditions over what could be difficult or uncharted terrain. Mrs Shrewsbury and her husband trekked over land for a fortnight to found a mission among the South African Hintsa tribe.⁴⁰ On arrival in the Gambia, Mr and Mrs Swallow went by canoe to reach their allocated station. They covered 250 miles up river, a trip that took a week.⁴¹ Local persecution or other unrest caused other major difficulties. In the West African town of British Akrah, where Jane Allen had gone to improve her health, a tribal dispute erupted and she came and under heavy gunfire.⁴² Rebecca Gladwin’s time in South Africa from 1840 was also punctuated by wars. Her account reports the necessity of surrounding the preachers’ wagons with mattresses as a protection from flying bullets.⁴³ The tropical climate exerted its own debilitating effects, causing return voyages to England for several women.⁴⁴ As shown below, however, the majority of this group of preachers’ wives spent their remaining days away from their native shores.

A comparison of the geographical origins of individuals and their place of death allows an estimate of the mobility of the preachers’ wives generally. Although this is possible in only

³⁴ Both women were born in Canada. Margaret Manly’s husband served as an itinerant in several Canadian circuits until his health broke down in 1843. He came to England and offered himself as a missionary, and the couple went to Jamaica [53: 827]. Mrs Gladwin [61] was born in Nova Scotia, the daughter of a Wesleyan missionary. She met Francis Gladwin, and, according to *IGI* records, married him in England before going to South Africa [61: 97].

³⁵ [39: 171]. This was in 1824.

³⁶ See [42: 485] and [50: 321].

³⁷ [66: 7].

³⁸ [63: 783]. Luckily rising tides enabled it to refloat.

³⁹ [20: 862-8].

⁴⁰ [42: 486].

⁴¹ [50: 320]. River travel ‘in a native canoe’ is also recorded in the account of Jane Allen. See [63: 783].

⁴² [63: 784]. No date is given, but this must have occurred between 1845 and Mrs Allen’s return to England in 1848.

⁴³ [61: 100].

⁴⁴ Mrs Raston [60], Jane Allen [63], and Elizabeth Samuel [66] returned to England for good after a period overseas. Mary Swallow [50] and Louisa Edman [66] came back to England briefly, but returned to their former stations in the Gambia and Jamaica respectively.

fifty cases, or 67.5% of the cohort as a whole, some interesting findings emerge. A summary is given in figure 13 below.

Figure 13: Mobility of the preachers' wives within the cohort sample

No change	Change of UK region	Change of region in UK	Change of country in UK	Overseas from UK	Overseas from other	Total
5	9	24	3	6	3	50

Sources: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester; EMP; IGI; Hall and Hill, *Arrangement*.

What is most striking is that forty-five of this group, or 90% of the total, were living at some distance from their native place at the time of their demise. Of these, the largest proportion, twenty-four individuals, had moved to a different region of the British Isles. Nine other women had changed their place of residence *within* a region, whilst three had moved to a different country within Britain.⁴⁵ When considering the missionaries' wives six women from the British Isles ended their lives overseas whilst three more had journeyed to the West Indies and Africa from other parts of the world.⁴⁶ Taken together these findings underline the rootless life that the Methodist system demanded. Only five of the subjects or 10% of the group, were living in their native place at the time of their death. Some of these had returned to their places of birth when widowed,⁴⁷ whilst one individual wanted to be among her natal family in her final illness.⁴⁸ Special circumstances evidently brought the travels of these particular women to an end.

Financial provision for the preachers and their families

The numerous removals and difficulties of travelling between circuits, therefore, were a major source of disruption and stress for the subjects of this study. As further analysis of their memoirs also suggests, however, a number of other factors also added to the uncertainty and strain of the itinerant way of life. Chief among these was the financial insecurity engendered by the Methodist system of funding its itinerant ministers and their families. As reported earlier, despite the fact that Conference laid down minimum allowances for the support of the preachers and their wives from the 1750s, available funding in the circuits varied from place to place. The

⁴⁵ In the latter group Ann Taylor [14] was born in Ireland. Charlotte Rowland (1792-1821 *m* 1818) [33], was a native of Alderney. Annie Shoar (1782-1850) [58] was born in Scotland. All died in England.

⁴⁶ Mrs Ault [20]; Mrs Crofts [39]; Mrs Lofthouse [45]; Mrs Swallow [50] and Mrs Edman [67] were English, whilst Mrs Horne [32] was a native of Ireland. Mrs Shrewsbury [42], born in Barbados, died in South Africa. Margaret Manly [53] and Mrs Gladwin [61] came from Canada but ended their lives in Jamaica and South Africa respectively.

⁴⁷ Bridget Daniell (1762-1835 *m* 1801) [46] and Jane Vasey (1772-1857 *m* 1801) [62].

⁴⁸ Dorothy Wright (*c* 1774-1789 *m* 1777) [3].

accounts of the preachers' wives provide many examples of the inherent insecurities of this system, and accompanying hardships.

Memoirs recounting the early years of the movement reveal the difficulties of managing *without* some form of additional funds. Thus John Murlin paid tribute to his wife, Elizabeth, who supplied basic items for the preacher's house at Norwich in 1762, also providing for any visiting itinerants. Throughout their married life, he reported, she maintained herself and bore the full cost of travelling to his different appointments.⁴⁹ There is a strong hint of a reproach to the Methodist system generally in Mr Murlin's remark that: '[in] a great measure [she] enabled me to preach the Gospel freely for more than twenty years.'⁵⁰ Thomas Taylor, an itinerant who travelled during the same era, was far more forthright, spelling out the adverse pecuniary situation facing those appointed to Ireland during the 1760s:

It ought to be noted, that in those days there was no allowance in Ireland for the board of the preachers: they had to go out for every meal, unless they could procure it at their own expense; only during my wife's lying in, the stewards provided for her, but as soon as she could crawl out, that ceased.⁵¹

This bald statement, and its palpable sense of outrage, underlines the financial vulnerability of the preachers and their families during this period. Elsewhere, Mr Taylor wrote that he lived on 'his own stock,' explaining '... for twenty years, what I have received from preaching has not kept my family with food; and I can assure my reader, we do not keep an extravagant table.'⁵²

Records of later preachers' wives shed further light on the shortcomings of the Methodist system and the impact on these women. When stationed in the Glamorgan circuit William Stevens received no allowance for his wife, Sarah, after their May marriage in 1788.⁵³ The couple later went to some of the toughest circuits in England, and the whole of their married life is said to have been characterised by 'great poverty and want'.⁵⁴ Elizabeth Burdsall is another individual who is said to have suffered 'straightened circumstances' on marrying due to the lack of circuit provision.⁵⁵ Consequently she adopted 'the plainest and least expensive mode of attiring herself,' pursuing 'the most rigidly economical method of managing her ordinary income.'⁵⁶ The biographer of Ruth Revill also reported that she was 'a rigid economist, as

⁴⁹ [2:424 - 6].

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 426. The source of Elizabeth's income is not known, but she was previously a widow, so may have had some inherited wealth.

⁵¹ [14: 48].

⁵² A. Kingsley Lloyd, *The Labourer's Hire: The Payment and Deployment of the Early Methodist Preachers, 1744 - 1813* (Bunbury, Cheshire: Wesley Historical Society, 1987), 9; *EMP* 5: 84-5.

⁵³ [28: 48].

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Burdsall (1784-1826 *m* 1802) [35: 151].

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

much from necessity as inclination.⁵⁷ It seems that the frugality enjoined upon *all* Methodist members in the Society's rules, was a pressing need for many of the preachers' wives.

Living accommodation

The job of homemaking was another significant challenge for these women as living accommodation often offered limited facilities. Few women faced Hillaria Shrewsbury's situation, of waiting for some shelter to be *constructed* in the African bush,⁵⁸ but many were lodged in very basic conditions. Reflecting on a posting to Norwich in 1762 shortly after his marriage, John Murlin wrote: 'This was a very proper place to initiate my new wife into her new office; for the Society was very poor, and the house they had provided for us had little in it but bare walls!'⁵⁹ He relates that his wife's first act in the circuit was to buy a bed, and other necessary articles.⁶⁰ Thomas Taylor and his wife, Ann suffered similarly poor facilities in a number of places. At Manchester in the 1770s they shared a small house with another family. Here, the Taylors and their child had 'but one room for every thing except the use of the kitchen fire,'⁶¹ space that had been formerly occupied by a single preacher.⁶²

Other evidence uncovered by the survey indicates similar shortcomings continuing into the nineteenth century. Jane Vasey's lodging at Sunderland in 1807, for example, consisted of 'two rooms, the one through the other', in which were no carpets, and tables and chairs 'of plain white deal.'⁶³ Her contemporary, Elizabeth McKitrick lived in a 'little cottage' from 1808, where '[the] cold flagged floor was without a carpet, and the bed without curtains. Three chairs were borrowed, and tea was taken off an old box.'⁶⁴ On arrival at Blackburn the following year, Ann Leach and her husband discovered that in their lodgings '... there was scarcely a piece of carpet in the whole house.'⁶⁵ As shown earlier, many of the wives were from quite comfortable backgrounds and thus the contrast between such conditions and their previous homes would be great.⁶⁶ It is evident that real sacrifices were demanded by this way of life.

While the preachers' wives had much to contend with, individuals sought to make the most of their situation. Living in temporary lodgings at Belper while a new preacher's house

⁵⁷ Ruth Revill (1765-1808 *m* 1787) [11: 350].

⁵⁸ [42].

⁵⁹ [2:424].

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ [14: 49].

⁶² *Ibid.* Thomas Taylor comments on inadequate housing in various circuits in *EMP* 5: 44, 45 and 48.

⁶³ Jane Vasey (1772 -1857 *m* 1801) [62: 580].

⁶⁴ [22: 686]. The circuit was New Mills in Derbyshire.

⁶⁵ Ann Leach (1783-1863 *m* 1806) [65: 867].

⁶⁶ See accounts of Elizabeth Murlin [2], Ann Taylor [14], and Elizabeth Burdsall [35].

was made ready, Diana Claxton prepared ‘beds and linen’ in order to lessen the circuit’s expense.⁶⁷ A similar vignette of domesticity in action occurs in Jane Vasey’s account, which describes her improvements to the living quarters at Sunderland in 1807. Using items from her old home, Jane ‘laid down a carpet in the front room; substituted her own fender and fire-irons for the kitchen poker, etc. [sic] and even proceeded by an infusion of logwood-chips, to stain the white table into an imitation of rosewood.’⁶⁸ To her dismay her efforts did not find favour with the local stewards, who, showed ‘unequivocal signs both of astonishment and disapproval’ on their first visit.⁶⁹ They evidently viewed these improvements as ostentatious as, ‘It soon became noised abroad through the Circuit that no good need be expected from a Preacher who had such a worldly wife!’⁷⁰ It is not possible to tell what standards of housing existed generally in the area.⁷¹ However the incident shows that models of domesticity could be resisted, indicating also the keen public scrutiny that these women faced.

Husbands’ workload

From evidence in the accounts it is clear that the women’s lives and their personal emotional wellbeing were also greatly influenced by ministerial demands upon their husbands. The latter’s strenuous preaching commitments and the need to attend Conference inevitably led to lengthy periods of separation for the couples. Local preaching schedules were heavy. Arriving in the Oxford circuit in 1791, for example, Sarah Stevens discovered that the itinerants were not at home: ‘more than three or four nights in six weeks.’⁷² At St Austell in 1801, the extensive circuit is said to have presented ‘a fine scope for the exercise of self-denial’ for the newly-married Bridget Daniell, as the Preachers were absent from home ‘six weeks at a time, riding and preaching with little intermission.’⁷³ Writing in 1868 on the arduous circuits where Mr and Mrs Dernaley were posted, their biographer noted that some benefits had come with rail travel.⁷⁴ But for many preachers’ wives it appears that time with their husbands was scarce.

Such circumstances undoubtedly led to a keen sense of isolation, as instances within the accounts reveal. Writing of her arrival in Oxford, for example, Sarah Stevens noted:

⁶⁷ Diana Claxton (1781-1817 *m* 1803) [27: 921]. Diary entry dated 6 Nov. [1807].

⁶⁸ [62: 580].

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ In a similar though earlier instance, Thomas Taylor’s attempts to improve the house at Birstall near Leeds in 1772 were construed by the stewards ‘as pride and lordliness.’ See *EMP* 5: 44.

⁷² [28: 51].

⁷³ [46: 897].

⁷⁴ See the account of Mrs Dernaley (1801-1867) [70: 1059].

The Society in the city consisted of 24 members, and we had been here some time before any of them called upon us. My body was exceeding weak, my child troublesome, my husband almost always from home, and I had no one to speak to....⁷⁵

Elizabeth McKittrick is also reported to have had a ‘very gloomy’ start to a posting to New Mills, in Derbyshire during 1808.⁷⁶ Elizabeth’s lodgings were of the most basic kind, and the morning after moving in her husband was ‘obliged to go into the circuit’, leaving Elizabeth ‘in solicitude [sic] for a week.’⁷⁷ The biographer of Mary Walker, a later member of the cohort, described the disheartening situation on arrival at Maidstone after her marriage:

The cause of religion was low, Mr Walker was much from home, and she was frequently alone. The concerns to which she had to attend, as she remarks, “were entirely new”; nor did she always find sympathy from those with whom she was placed, which she needed, to soften the trials of one in her circumstances.⁷⁸

Such examples testify that loneliness was a very real problem for the women who became the wives of Methodist itinerant preachers.

Domestic and family life

A full survey of references to domestic activities within the accounts of the preachers’ wives further illuminates the role of these women both as makers and managers of homes. As Wesley’s purpose in including lives of the Society’s members in the *Magazine* was primarily to demonstrate the *religious* development of individuals, analysis of the frequency of such references and the identification of any long-term changes also allows an estimate of the extent to which female spirituality was linked to domesticity during the period covered by the research.⁷⁹ With respect to the latter point it needs to be remembered that within Protestantism generally woman’s life and work was seen as inextricably bound up with the family or household enterprise.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, as earlier discussion has also highlighted, despite his emphasis on the spiritual equality of the sexes, Wesley’s teachings fully endorsed the household codes and patriarchal gender relations set out in scripture and in this way continued the existing tradition.⁸¹ Further evidence from the accounts throws light on how domestic responsibilities helped to shape the later spiritual development of members of the cohort when married women.

⁷⁵ [28: 51].

⁷⁶ [22: 686].

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Mary Walker (1796-1841 *m* 1816) [51: 1152].

⁷⁹ See chapter one above.

⁸⁰ Patricia Crawford, for example, notes: ‘Protestants believed that there was a rigid division between the two sexes; men were designed for sacred functions, women for domesticity.’ See *Women and Religion in England, 1500- 1720* 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 41 and 42. Other ideals are discussed in chapters one and five above.

⁸¹ See the discussion in chapter five above.

It is pertinent here to note that earlier studies of life-writings and other published material from the eighteenth and nineteenth century have pointed to a strong connection between descriptions of women's lives and roles and the domestic domain. Margaret Jones' survey of women's letters, and lives from the first two series of the *Magazine*, for example, found that females in general were frequently presented 'as private' or 'at most family-oriented beings.'⁸² Linda Wilson's analysis of female obituaries from the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* and other nonconformist periodicals between 1840 to 1870 also discovered a high proportion of references to domestic affairs generally, suggesting that the link between descriptions of women's experience and their home lives continued during the Victorian era.⁸³ How does the evidence from the present research accord with these earlier studies?

An examination of all memoirs in the cohort reveals that sixty-four out of the seventy-four narratives include some mention of matters such as the subject's management of the home or servants, the care and training of children, the support of husbands, or offering hospitality.⁸⁴ Just as in the previous studies, therefore, there appears to be a routine connection being made between the lives and characters of the women generally and their domestic environment. However, the very high proportion of references to domestic practice found in the present research, which comprises 86% of the total cohort, deserves further comment. In her examination of correspondence and accounts from the *Arminian* and *Methodist Magazine* for example, Margaret Jones has associated texts relating to preachers' wives with 'the development of the icon of domestic piety and self-sacrifice'⁸⁵ The present findings lend credence to this view. It will be further argued that these accounts were especially significant sites for the articulation and dissemination of domestic ideals, and that the preachers' wives continued to be viewed as important role models as the nineteenth century wore on.

Analysis of the *frequency* of references to domestic affairs over the time-frame of the study is also revealing. In accounts of preachers' wives appearing from 1780 until 1818, for example, 77% include some mention of domestic affairs. In the next period from 1820 to 1848, the incidence rises with 85% of this cohort including such references. Most strikingly, *all* the remaining accounts during the final 1850 to 1880 period (100%) allude to some facet of the subject's domestic arrangements. Therefore while references to domestic affairs are high even in the earliest published accounts, mention of this area of the subjects' lives increased from

⁸² Margaret P. Jones, "Women in the *Arminian/Methodist Magazine*, 1778 - 1821," (unpublished M. Phil thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992), 78.

⁸³ *Constrained by Zeal. Female Spirituality Amongst Nonconformists, 1825 - 75* (Carlisle: Paternoster press, 2000), 139. Sixty percent of Wilson's full cohort contained references to domestic affairs.

⁸⁴ This analysis has been greatly informed by Linda Wilson's discussion in *ibid.*, 136-173. I have followed Wilson in using these categories in the later analysis of the wives' domestic practices.

⁸⁵ Jones, "Women in the *Arminian/Methodist Magazine*, 76.

1820 onwards. By 1850 the domesticity of the preachers' wives appears to have been accepted as an integral part of their experience and religious development to the extent that some aspect of their domestic practice always receives comment in the account of their lives.

Earlier work by Margaret Jones has suggested that female texts within the *Magazine* placed increasing stress on the roles of women as wives and mothers from 1804 onwards.⁸⁶ Anna Clark's study of the lives of plebeian women argued that the first two decades of the nineteenth century were a key period for the development of Methodist domesticity generally.⁸⁷ My data clearly shows that domestic ideals were being discussed and defined in accounts of preachers' wives from the earliest years of the *Arminian Magazine*, suggesting a greater emphasis on domesticity occurring after the 1820s. What is most noticeable is the *universal* mention of domestic affairs in memoirs published from the 1850s. Linda Wilson's analysis of female nonconformist obituaries also discovered 'slightly more references to the home-related aspects of women's lives' in texts from her later 1870 cohort, and judged that 'from the 1850s onwards there was an increasing emphasis on the domestic nature of female spirituality.'⁸⁸ Evidence from my present research indicates a more gradual increase in emphasis on the home lives of preachers' wives was occurring in the Methodist press three decades earlier, being consolidated from 1850.

A closer examination of the range of domestic virtues and skills being identified and applauded within the accounts reinforces the view that the preachers' wives were seen as important exemplars of Methodist ideals and were significant role models for other Methodist women. Certain key behaviours, such as frugality, diligence, and self-denial for example, were enjoined upon all Methodist members.⁸⁹ Other connexional policy statements raised the standard for preachers' wives, arguing that these women needed also to be models of cleanliness and industry,⁹⁰ and should avoid all but the plainest apparel, dressing 'as becometh [sic] those

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 65, and by the same author: "From 'The State of My Soul' to 'exalted Piety': Women's Voices in the *Arminian/ Methodist Magazine*," in *Gender and Christian Religion* ed. R. N. Swanson, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 283. Jones suggests this change of emphasis occurred under the editorship of Joseph Benson (1804-1821).

⁸⁷ Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches. Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 98.

⁸⁸ *Constrained by Zeal*, 140. Wilson's sources for the Wesleyan Methodist women were obituaries published in 1850 and 1870. She noted a ten percent rise whereby 47% of the 1850 obituaries referred to domestic aspects, rising to 57% in 1870.

⁸⁹ *Works*, 8: 260-61. In the *General Rules of the United Societies ...* (1743).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 319; W. L. Doughty, *John Wesley: His Conferences and His Preachers* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), 60. Conference of 1753 noted that the wives 'ought never to be idle', and the 1780 *Large Minutes* insisted that such women should be 'patterns' of cleanliness and industry.

who profess to walk with God.’⁹¹ As the following analysis reveals, many accounts refer to some or all of these merits when discussing the subjects’ characters and lives.

Thirteen of the accounts or 17.5% of the total cohort pay tribute to the frugality or economy practised by their subject. Elizabeth Murlin, for example, is said to have exercised such a strict ‘habit of care and oeconomy [sic]’, that she attracted charges of being ‘too near.’⁹² Alexander Mather also mentioned his wife’s ‘oeconomy’, [sic] and management regarding ‘temporals’,⁹³ quoting her thoughts on managing without credit: ‘When I have my money, I can chuse [sic] not only my article, but my shop, and on most occasions, my price; but, if I have not, I must give up these at least.’⁹⁴ In a similar way the ‘industrious and frugal habits’ of Elizabeth Gill are identified as prime qualifications enabling her to provide for her family.⁹⁵ Such practices are also linked to the ability to afford a degree of comfort and hospitality for others. Rebecca Gladwin, for example, is said to have ‘combined economy with liberality.’⁹⁶ These instances illustrate how one particular facet of the subjects’ domestic lives was highlighted within the texts and commended to readers of the *Magazine*.

The need to ‘redeem the time’ and be diligent in all things were also important Methodist axioms and the preachers’ wives were expected to be especially industrious.⁹⁷ Mrs Hinson evidently matched this standard. Never wasting her time ‘in idleness, or in trifling visits’, she reportedly ‘could not be comfortable without having her hands employed.’⁹⁸ Elizabeth Gill is described as ‘diligent in all her temporal concerns’ also taking care to bring up her children ‘in habits of industry.’⁹⁹ Sarah Benson is another example, said to have been ‘most industrious and diligent in her house.’¹⁰⁰ Many biographers drew on the biblical model of a virtuous woman: ‘She looketh [sic] well to the ways of her household, and eateth [sic] not the bread of idleness.’¹⁰¹ Quoting this verse, Mr Sumner emphasised his wife’s serious approach: ‘She was no trifler. In the good providence of God she had a home; that home involved weighty duties; those duties claimed her attention; and that attention she diligently and constantly

⁹¹ J. Vickers, “Documents”, in *HMCGB*, 4: 303.

⁹² [2: 423]. The phrase means stingy.

⁹³ Mrs Mather (? -1789 *m* 1753). No Christian name is given. [4: 366].

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 367. In a similar vein, one of the ‘rules of conduct’ in the family of Margaret Worrall (?-1818 *m* 1814) was a motto from Dr Johnson: ‘Live on what you have; live if you can on less; do not borrow, either for vanity or pleasure ...’ [29: 841].

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Gill (1754-1823 *m* 1788) [34]

⁹⁶ [61: 102].

⁹⁷ See footnote 90 above.

⁹⁸ Margaret Hinson (1781-1815 *m* 1811) [21: 374].

⁹⁹ [34: 796].

¹⁰⁰ [13:455].

¹⁰¹ Rebecca Gladwin [61: 99]. The verse is Proverbs 31: 27. (KJV) See also the accounts of Jane Wilson (1796-1835 *m* 1820) [43] and Mrs Thompson (1774-1837 *m* 1806) [47].

rendered.¹⁰² The wives' practice of these virtues therefore was signalled and applauded throughout the study period.

Several accounts also mention the cleanliness and restrained apparel of the preachers' wives, recommending these traits to the general readership of the *Magazine*. Duncan Wright, an early itinerant, quoted words from the poet, George Herbert: 'Affect in things around thee cleanliness', noting that this was an axiom of his wife.¹⁰³ Ruth Revill's biographer reported that her house was always clean,¹⁰⁴ whilst the husband of Ann Horne wrote that she was always 'remarkably clean and neat in her own person, [and] ... endeavoured that everything should resemble her.'¹⁰⁵ The earlier Conference edict on the subject of plainness of dress is echoed in Harriet Butler's account which notes that 'her apparel was such as 'becometh women professing godliness,'¹⁰⁶ and Jane Wilson's personal appearance is said to have been marked by 'a becoming neatness, without any approach to gaudy show.'¹⁰⁷ Where the latter instances imply that such behaviour was worthy of imitation the biographer of Agnes Hopwood made the point expressly, declaring that his subject was: 'a model of neatness and propriety.'¹⁰⁸

My analysis reveals a number of other practices being identified and endorsed within these accounts. The value of early rising is clearly signalled in Jane Stanley's memoir, which noted her resulting ability to 'enter upon the domestic business of the day, without that hurry and confusion which attend the mornings of those who stay in bed.'¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Samuel's biographer commented approvingly upon her orderly habits and the fact that she 'had a place for everything ...',¹¹⁰ whilst Ann Marsden's husband pointed to the wider benefits of this practice, writing that she: 'kept all her household affairs in the strictest order; and none could be in her dwelling, without perceiving that it was made by her good management, the abode of peace and comforts to all its inmates.'¹¹¹

The latter virtue was clearly especially important to women who spent their lives in circuit lodgings. Mrs Mather's habit of having 'a particular place for everything' meant that

¹⁰² Mary Anne Sumner (1798-1864 *m* 1823) [68:291].

¹⁰³ [3: 79].

¹⁰⁴ [11: 354].

¹⁰⁵ [32: 18].

¹⁰⁶ Harriet Butler (1781-1816 *m* 1807) [23: 77]. Vickers, "Documents", 303. The Conference of 1802 exhorted the preachers' wives to 'dress as becometh those who profess to walk with God...'

¹⁰⁷ [43: 806].

¹⁰⁸ Agnes Hopwood (? - 1819 *m* 1810) [31: 923].

¹⁰⁹ [9: 228]. See also the account of Hilaria Shrewsbury [42].

¹¹⁰ [66:9].

¹¹¹ Anne Marsden (1780-1834 *m* 1797) [41: 656].

‘her house, or apartment, however small, was never in confusion.’¹¹² Ann Taylor is said to have showed remarkable care with ‘what belonged to the Society, such as coals, candles, furniture, and linen; never suffering the children when little, to hurt or spoil any thing,’¹¹³ whilst Ann Leach’s daughter wrote: ‘we were early taught to show the same regard for the property of others, as our own; particularly in reference to the furniture of the house provided by the Circuit.’¹¹⁴ Such evidence underlines the additional stresses of never having a home of one’s own. Writing of Mrs Sumner, her biographer suggested that she was ‘a very fine type of what a Methodist preacher’s wife should be,’ precisely because she was: ‘a clever housewife,’ and ‘her house looked and felt like a home, not merely furnished lodgings.’¹¹⁵ Quite how such transformations were accomplished with limited means and constant moves is rarely specified.¹¹⁶ However, as all the above instances show, the home-making skills of the preachers’ wives were clearly acknowledged and their approaches to household management were being widely recommended throughout the study period.

Evidence from a number of texts illustrates that domestic duties were accepted by the women as an integral part of their personal spirituality and service. When leaving lodgings for example, Dorothy Wright, an early preacher’s wife, asked: ‘If we do not leave this house and furniture ... better, if possible, than we found them; how do we love our neighbour as ourselves?’¹¹⁷ In another case, Diana Claxton wrote of preparing ‘beds and linen’ for a new preacher’s house, commenting that: ‘I feel a pleasure in doing any thing for the Lord.’¹¹⁸ A small number of the subjects considered their household responsibilities to be the most important aspect of their personal calling and concentrated their efforts exclusively on this role. Margaret Worrall, for example, was described by her husband as ‘not a publick, [sic] but a private character’, with the following appraisal:

For domestic life her mind was evidently formed, and for which she qualified herself by studying every useful branch in that department, which she considered her indispensable duty as a *female*, as a *wife*, and as a *mother*, and by which she was instrumental of affording those domestic comforts to her family which depended upon economy and decorum.¹¹⁹ [Author’s emphasis]

For Mrs Worrall this dedicated approach and satisfying the needs of all her family appears to have been a fundamental and fulfilling task. The account of Mrs Jennings suggests an attitude that was very similar, noting that she had ‘little time or inclination to mix in

¹¹² [4: 367].

¹¹³ [14: 55].

¹¹⁴ Ann Leach [65: 874].

¹¹⁵ Mrs Sumner (? -1870 *m c* 1839) [73: 196]. No Christian name is given.

¹¹⁶ In fact the only account to give such details is that of Jane Vasey [62], reported above.

¹¹⁷ [3: 75].

¹¹⁸ Mrs Claxton’s diary entry of 6 Nov. [1807], quoted in [27: 921].

¹¹⁹ [29: 841].

society.¹²⁰ Considering home as ‘her providential place’, this preacher’s wife is said to have attended to her duties conscientiously, and thus exhibited ‘the most satisfactory evidence that religion with her was practical and not a matter of speculation.’¹²¹ The link made here between spiritual vocation and the praxis of daily life at home is also strongly signalled in the memoir of Elizabeth Burdsall, who is reported to have sought whatever was ‘essential to a good domestic.’¹²² She eschewed any public work through personal conviction, judging that ‘the happiness of every wife and mother ought to flow more from the happy management of her family, and from her daily walk with God, than from any other sources whatsoever.’¹²³ As demonstrated later, many individuals within the cohort took a different view, and by engaging in a variety of work outside the home, presented different models of female piety in practice.¹²⁴ However, it is frequently the case that texts marking the subjects’ public service also point to the importance of their domestic responsibilities, with an assurance that home affairs do not suffer as a result.

Devotional exercises within the home

Good management of the household is also portrayed as being essential to the fulfilment of personal and family religious duties and there are numerous examples of how the practical organisational skills of the wives assisted both their own devotions and the spiritual life of their households. Mrs Shrewsbury, for example, who had ‘an uncommon reverence for the Sabbath-day’, is said to have been careful ‘so to arrange her domestic concerns, that no work of any kind should be done, not so much as seeking for the smallest garment of a child, on the day of the Lord.’¹²⁵ Jane Stanley’s daily routine included an early start to enable Bible reading, meditation, and prayer before breakfast, an additional thirty minutes for prayer and praise at noon, and further reading and prayer after six o’clock each evening.¹²⁶ Recalling Margaret Worrall’s devotional activities, her husband included this homely picture:

It was very common with her, when in the diligent use of her needle, to have her Bible open before her, occasionally reading a small portion, then meditating upon it, and praying that it might be applied to her heart.¹²⁷

As the above examples demonstrate, the religious practices of these individuals are not only being described and commended, but they are also being offered as very practical models to the wider readership of the *Magazine*.

¹²⁰ Mrs Jennings (1802-1842 *m* 1833) [49: 109]. No Christian name is given.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² [35: 141].

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ As I show later, tensions could often arise between the demands of home and other public work.

¹²⁵ [42: 494].

¹²⁶ [9: 228]. The information comes from Jane’s diary entry dated 16 May 1801.

¹²⁷ [29: 841].

A full analysis of the accounts, shown below in figure 14, provides evidence of the range of spiritual practices undertaken by the preachers' wives within the home.

Figure 14: References to personal and domestic devotional exercises in the full cohort in percentages

Private prayer	Bible study	Meditation	Journal	Self examination	Spiritual reading	Family/domestic prayer
59	46	11	30	8	22	22

Sources: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

The significance of private prayer in the lives of such women is attested to by the fact that 59% of the accounts, refer specifically to this aspect of the subjects' spiritual experience. Among the many examples Margaret Worrall is said to have retired into private 'three or four times in the day for prayer'.¹²⁸ With 46% of accounts mentioning Bible study, this too appears of great importance. Penelope Coke is one wife who reportedly was 'rarely, when alone, without a Bible in her hand.'¹²⁹ Whilst meditating upon the scriptures is mentioned less frequently, Isabella Ranson practiced this regularly, becoming familiar with the scriptures by 'reading them, meditating upon them, and by praying for the enlightening grace of the Holy Spirit ...'¹³⁰ References to personal diaries and the inclusion of extracts from such writings occur in 30% of the full cohort,¹³¹ and this habit is also linked to the practice of self-examination.¹³² Thus the wives can be seen to have been anxious not only to nurture their spiritual growth through prayer, Bible study, and meditation, but to record and monitor their experience.

Twenty-two percent of the accounts supply details of wider spiritual reading undertaken by the preachers' wives. Significantly, autobiographical and biographical narratives are most frequently mentioned, with lives of leading Methodists and missionaries among the commonest works cited.¹³³ Among the other literature being studied by the preachers' wives, Bible commentaries, Wesley's *Christian Library*, and the works of Hannah More are cited.¹³⁴ Not surprisingly, there are comments on the value that the subjects derived from reading the

¹²⁸ [29: 841].

¹²⁹ [15:218].

¹³⁰ Isabella Ranson (1794-1837 *m* 1830) [44: 10].

¹³¹ See, for example, the accounts of Ann Hardcastle (1768-1811 *m* 1801) [16], Martha Lessey (? 1816 *m* 1815) [24] and Judith Dredge (1794-1827 *m* 1817) [36].

¹³² Examples include the accounts of Mary Entwisle (1770-1804 *m* 1792) [8]; Harriet Garbutt (1793-1845 *m* 1824) [52]; and Jane Allen [63].

¹³³ Among prominent Methodists, the lives of John Fletcher, the itinerant William Carvosso (1750-1834), Mary Fletcher and Lady Maxwell receive mention. See [12], [45], [46] and [34]. References to the biographies of Cotton Mather, and those of the missionaries David Brainerd, Henry Martyn, and Harriet Newell occur in [8] and [66].

¹³⁴ Joseph Benson's *Essays* and other unspecified commentaries are mentioned in [3] and [15]. The account of Anne Marsden [41] suggests that she found the *Christian Library* and works of Hannah More valuable.

Magazine.¹³⁵ Such evidence again reinforces the view that the preachers' wives were educated and literate women. The above analysis as a whole, meanwhile, demonstrates the rigor with which the members of the cohort conducted their personal spiritual lives.

As Figure 14 also shows, 22% of the accounts mention the habit of family or domestic prayer. This was a custom enjoined upon all members in the Society's rules of 1743,¹³⁶ and appears to have been a valued spiritual practice among the subjects of the study. Eliza Lessey's account reveals that she experienced conversion after her marriage when engaged in family prayer,¹³⁷ whilst Margaret Hinson is described as having 'delighted in family devotions'.¹³⁸ Importantly, as shown earlier, this was one area where women's spiritual leadership was not only sanctioned but expected in the absence of their husbands. As the itinerant preachers were so often away from home the women in the study were often called to fulfil this significant role. The account of Judith Valton relates that she 'read, sung [sic] and prayed with the family, morning and evening' in her husband's absence,¹³⁹ whilst Elizabeth McAllum is reported to have performed the same duties even though she was of 'a timid disposition'.¹⁴⁰ In another memoir, Bridget Daniell is described as discharging the 'duty of chaplain at the domestic altar ... with sweet simplicity and reverence ...'¹⁴¹ The preachers' wives, therefore, were very willing and able to carry out these religious duties. Their unique position arguably allowed them to assume more responsibility and authority in this respect than many other married women.

The management of servants

Part of the wives' responsibilities both in the latter respect, and in the general running of their households, was to care for and manage any servants. Conference agreed an allowance for a servant from the 1780s, in recognition of the difficulties that preachers' wives faced due to the long absences of their husbands.¹⁴² This is significant in view of the fact that the possession of at least one servant has been viewed as a defining mark of the middle-class household.¹⁴³ In reality, however, many circuits were unwilling or unable to fund the allowance,¹⁴⁴ and there is

¹³⁵ See, for example, Mary Entwisle [8] and Mary Sykes [74].

¹³⁶ *Works* 8: 261.

¹³⁷ Eliza Lessey (1793-1813 *m* 1812) [17].

¹³⁸ [21: 373].

¹³⁹ [5: 146].

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth McAllum (1755-1812 *m* 1784) [18: 209].

¹⁴¹ [46: 901].

¹⁴² Lloyd, *Payment*, 26-7.

¹⁴³ Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 8.

¹⁴⁴ Lloyd, *Payment*, 26-7.

evidence within the texts that at least one wife tried to cope manage without extra help.¹⁴⁵ For other wives among the cohort the management of servants constituted a further important duty.

Though some accounts simply suggest that the subjects were exemplary in their handling of servants,¹⁴⁶ others offer practical advice. The memoir of Ann Hardcastle, for example, explains that its subject:

... had an excellent method of managing untoward servants. She never railed at them; but when they acted contrary to her mind, she frequently called them to her, and expostulated with them in a mild, but firm tone of voice, which seldom failed to convince them of her regard for them, and, at the same time, of the impropriety of their conduct.¹⁴⁷

This is a very clear exposition of how to convey appropriate behaviour in a positive but firm manner. A similar approach is signalled in the account of Bridget Daniell, whose servants are said to have been ‘objects of her special attention, and kind consideration.’¹⁴⁸ Jane Wilson treated her servants ‘rather as a mother than as a mistress,’ but she reportedly also took care ‘to maintain her proper place’ so that her charges ‘might not lose the respect for her which was due from them as servants.’¹⁴⁹ Significantly this 1838 text is the only one to hint at any social boundaries *within* the Methodist household. In fact the 1852 account of Kezia Geden suggests an entirely different dynamic. Here, Kezia is described as having had ‘a high regard for the rights and interests of those whom she employed in her service’ making it her study ‘to show *them* all due consideration and respect, both in word and deed.’¹⁵⁰ [My emphasis].

A number of accounts highlight a concern for the servants’ spiritual condition, and this seems to have been a key issue for the preachers’ wives. Margaret Worrall is said to have been conscious that the souls of her servants ‘were as precious in the sight of God as her own,’¹⁵¹ while Bridget Daniell ‘held herself in a manner responsible’ for her servants moral conduct, ‘carefully instructing them in their duty to God, and attempting to impress on their hearts the importance of religion.’¹⁵² Jane Wilson’s servants were given time for private devotions, were expected to be present at family worship, and allowed to attend chapel each Sunday.¹⁵³ Clearly Mrs Wilson was keen to inculcate her helpers soundly into the Methodist way of life: a task that would often need repeating due to the wives many moves. Lasting relationships were no doubt

¹⁴⁵ See [4] where Alexander Mather notes that his wife did not keep a servant until 1786, at which point her niece came to live with the family. At a later date, Sarah Stevens went without a servant in order to reduce expenses after her husband’s retirement. [28].

¹⁴⁶ The account of Eliza Byron (?- 1803 *m* 1793) suggests that care of her children and overseeing her servants were tasks ‘performed with wisdom and with love, as long as she was able.’ [7:46].

¹⁴⁷ [16: 779].

¹⁴⁸ [46:901].

¹⁴⁹ [43: 806].

¹⁵⁰ Kezia Geden (1796 - 1850 *m* 1821) [55: 901].

¹⁵¹ [29: 841-2].

¹⁵² [46: 901].

¹⁵³ [43: 806].

often stymied by the circuit system. Yet some references to loyal servants occur. Mrs Raston's coloured servant, for example, accompanied her ill mistress to England from West Africa.¹⁵⁴

Offering hospitality

As well as providing for the needs of their immediate families and servants a preacher's household regularly included other lodgers as single itinerants were often housed with married couples. Mrs Mather did sterling service in this respect, looking after such men for over twenty years.¹⁵⁵ Even her record was soundly beaten by Ann Taylor who is said to have extended her welcome for twice that period.¹⁵⁶ The effect upon the young ministers involved can also be seen from one of Mrs Hinson's lodgers, who wrote: '... had she been my mother, greater kindness could hardly have been manifested.'¹⁵⁷ Other visitors might include ministerial colleagues or others passing through the circuit, as well as relatives of the family.¹⁵⁸ Hospitality was therefore an essential virtue for a preacher's wife, and evidently provision for others was won through personal economies and self-restraint.¹⁵⁹ Such examples again reinforce the very public position of these women and the additional pressures bearing upon them on a regular basis.

The relationship between husband and wife

Turning to examine the relationship between husband and wife there is much evidence within the cohort of strong and loving marital partnerships. Mr Heath, for example, wrote that he and his wife: '... lived in the tenderest sympathy and love,'¹⁶⁰ whilst John Byron spoke of his 'dear and amiable wife', describing her also as a 'loving and invaluable friend.'¹⁶¹ Many accounts testify to the affection between husband and wife. Among these, Mrs Gartrell 'evinced the utmost warmth of affectionate regard to her husband, for which she was peculiarly remarkable, and which was equally displayed on his part in return.'¹⁶² The companionship shared by partners, and comfort derived from this aspect of married life also receives frequent

¹⁵⁴ [60]. The account of Mary Walker also refers to her 'faithful servant'. [51: 1154].

¹⁵⁵ [4: 367].

¹⁵⁶ [14]. Mrs Taylor's record was forty-two years.

¹⁵⁷ [21: 374]. Three preachers who resided with Elizabeth Rosser also mention her 'motherly kindness and attention.' [72: 580].

¹⁵⁸ *Works*, 8: 320. In the eighteenth century especially the preachers' houses were viewed by many ordinary members as legitimate places to seek lodgings or sustenance.

¹⁵⁹ Charlotte Rowland is described as 'hospitable and economical.' [33: 286]. Ann Leach is said to have practised strict economy but was never disconcerted by arrival of an unexpected guest. [65: 874].

¹⁶⁰ Mrs Heath (1756-1796) [6: 602].

¹⁶¹ [7: 88].

¹⁶² Mrs Gartrell (1767-1818) [26: 678]. In other examples Mary Walker confided to her diary: 'It is my pleasing duty to be an affectionate wife and mother,' [51: 1153] whilst the marriage of Elizabeth Robinson (1834-1864 *m* 1853) [69] is said to have been marked by 'strong mutual affection'. [69: 679].

comment. Elizabeth Robinson's husband, for example, described her as his 'best earthly friend': one to whom he could 'unfold [his] heart on any occasion.'¹⁶³ John Burdsall held his wife to be an 'intimate, faithful, and inestimable partner of [his] joys and sorrows,'¹⁶⁴ and the marriage of Agnes and Henry Hopwood is reported to have been 'a source of heart-felt comfort and satisfaction' to both partners.¹⁶⁵

The success of these partnerships is depicted as resulting from mutual spiritual goals and reliance on God's will. As shown earlier, much prayer and soul-searching took place before marriage and the validity of this approach is underlined in several accounts. Kate Thomas had 'earnestly prayed for divine guidance' prior to her wedding, and her husband described a subsequent union that 'proved to be one of deep affection, peace and comfort ...'¹⁶⁶ Theophilus Lessey suggested that he and his spouse, Eliza: '... were of one heart and soul' adding that 'God was with us, and seemed to crown our union with his blessing.'¹⁶⁷ Duncan McAllum married his wife, Elizabeth in the belief that she 'had chosen Jesus Christ for her soul's everlasting Husband' and would therefore 'do [him] good, and not evil, all the days of her life.'¹⁶⁸ He wrote that she had indeed proved 'a faithful, loving and obedient wife nearly 29 years.'¹⁶⁹ Most significantly, in view of John Wesley's own views and writings on gender relationships within marriage, the latter account is the *only* reference to wifely obedience in the full cohort.¹⁷⁰ The texts illustrate quite clearly that the Methodist preachers and their spouses, found personal satisfaction and fulfilment in their wedded lives. Moreover, the publication of these and similar statements in the *Magazine* served as a strong affirmation of the married state.

A wealth of comment within the accounts also points to the valuable help and encouragement that the preachers' wives provided to their husbands, regardless of any additional work undertaken beyond the home. Their ability to create a comfortable dwelling and run it efficiently was, as already seen, a vital component in this supportive role. Memoirs also note the subjects' unselfish concern for their husbands' needs. Ann Marsden, for example, strove 'in every possible way to promote her husband's health, happiness, and usefulness.'¹⁷¹ The women's attempts to alleviate worries and encourage their spouses receive particular

¹⁶³ Elizabeth Robinson (1782-1816 *m* 1814) [25: 137 and 141].

¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth Burdsall [35: 158].

¹⁶⁵ [31: 922].

¹⁶⁶ [54:1060].

¹⁶⁷ Eliza Lessey [17]

¹⁶⁸ [18: 209]. The phrase 'she would do me good, and not evil, all the days of her life' echoes Proverbs 31: 12. (KJV).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ See the discussion in chapter five above.

¹⁷¹ [41: 656]. Mrs Hinson's husband also commented that it was: 'the business of her life to make [him] happy.' [21: 374].

mention. Mrs Heath's concern for her husband's peace and happiness was such that 'in all her trials and exercises of mind she would by every possible means endeavour to hide them from [him].'¹⁷² Sarah Turton is described as 'ever attentive to the health and usefulness of her husband,' being 'always ready, in the most cheerful and affectionate manner, to help and encourage him.'¹⁷³ The wives' prayers with, and on behalf of their husbands are portrayed as another crucial form of support. 'Oh how faithful was she towards me, in reference to divine things!' wrote the husband of Ann Horne,¹⁷⁴ whilst Mr Rowland also recorded his wife's prayers on his behalf, arguing that his spouse, Charlotte 'was not a clog, but a spur' in his itinerant ministry.¹⁷⁵ Such testimonies act as a strong rebuttal to the idea that Methodist itinerant preachers should not marry, countering the views expressed by Methodism's leader.

The care and training of children

In addition to all the various aspects mentioned above, the need to raise and train their children was another significant task for the majority of preachers' wives.¹⁷⁶ As shown earlier, some individuals acted as surrogate mothers to their siblings even before their marriages.¹⁷⁷ Other cases show the seriousness with which the preachers' wives approached this duty. Judith Dredge, widowed with a young family, expressed her thoughts thus: 'I feel much for my children. I see that an important charge is committed to me; and I am daily led to the throne of grace to ask for wisdom to discharge the important duty of a Christian mother.'¹⁷⁸ In a letter to her husband, Mary Entwisle argued that the job of training and managing her children was part of her God-given calling.¹⁷⁹ Sarah Stevens, another member of the cohort, wrote: 'I long to be more useful in my day and generation: and particularly in training up my children; the task appears, as it really is, very important; my prayer to God is for direction.'¹⁸⁰ These women clearly felt the magnitude of their task.

Here, as in other areas of family life, there was official guidance from Wesley's numerous writings, but evidence within the memoirs suggests a less severe approach.¹⁸¹ Descriptions of the relationship between the preachers' wives and their offspring typically allude to the subjects' kindness, tenderness and affection. The biographer of Mrs Gartrell

¹⁷² [6: 602]. See also the account of Jane Wilson. [43].

¹⁷³ Sarah Turton (1775-1828 *m* 1804) [37: 450].

¹⁷⁴ [32: 18].

¹⁷⁵ [33: 283-4 and 286]. See also Mrs Lofthouse [45]; Mrs Shoar [58] and Mrs Leach [65].

¹⁷⁶ There is evidence of procreation in fifty-six of the accounts, which constitutes 76% of the full cohort.

¹⁷⁷ See, for example, the accounts of Frances Derry [12] and Ann Leach [65].

¹⁷⁸ [36: 657].

¹⁷⁹ [8: 372].

¹⁸⁰ [28: 128].

¹⁸¹ Wesley's strict views are discussed in chapter five above.

reflected ‘Perhaps there never was a more kind and affectionate mother,’¹⁸² while Mr Roadhouse described his wife, Harriet as ‘most tender-hearted,’ observing that her two sons: ‘had always been lovely in her eyes, and entwined around her heart.’¹⁸³ The wives’ unfailing attention to their offspring and concern for their welfare is also stressed. Sarah Benson insisted on feeding her children herself, despite personal health problems, refusing a wet nurse. ‘Perhaps she sometimes went to an extreme in this’, wrote Sarah’s husband, ‘but she would have considered herself as sinning against God, if she had not done her utmost to preserve the lives and health of [her] offspring...’¹⁸⁴ In a similar way, Ann Hardcastle is said to have made the health and comfort of her children ‘her constant care.’¹⁸⁵ That such sentiments were being expressed in the *Magazine* is highly significant, showing the way in which a model of the selfless home-oriented mother, who focused upon the needs of her offspring was being presented. As Ruth Perry has argued, this ideal of maternity emerged in wider society during the eighteenth century.¹⁸⁶ The texts quoted above were clearly assisting the promulgation of these wider societal ideals rather than promoting the regime advocated in Wesley’s writings.

With regard to other childrearing practices the preachers’ wives are portrayed as adopting firm, but gentle discipline. Jane Wilson is said to have ‘[strongly] inculcated and firmly required prompt and universal obedience to parental authority; yet with ... much sweetness and benignity’¹⁸⁷ The avoidance of indulgence and adoption of a consistent approach are other points mentioned.¹⁸⁸ The wives raised their offspring to be industrious, and ‘useful’, the latter term being strongly associated in Methodist and other evangelical circles with the furtherance or accomplishment of religious good.¹⁸⁹ As she lay dying, Jane Allen instructed her husband: ‘Whatever of a domestic character may be disregarded when I am gone, *never neglect to train the children for usefulness and heaven.*’ [Author’s emphasis]¹⁹⁰

Not surprisingly, for the preachers’ wives and their husbands, the spiritual development of their offspring was a prime concern. The desire for their children’s conversion is a clear

¹⁸² [26: 677].

¹⁸³ Harriet Roadhouse (1787-1819 *m* 1814) [30: 849].

¹⁸⁴ Sarah Benson (1758-1810 *m* 1780) [13: 455].

¹⁸⁵ [16: 779].

¹⁸⁶ See "Colonising the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth Century England," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 2 (1991): 204-234. In general, Perry argues, women were ‘reimagined’ as: ‘loving but without sexual needs, morally pure, disinterested, benevolent and self-sacrificing,’ (212-13) a change partly accomplished through valorisation of motherhood.

¹⁸⁷ [43: 806]. Mrs Dernaley was also known for her ‘[wise], firm, kind and gentle discipline.’ [70: 1063].

¹⁸⁸ See Ann Hardcastle [16] and Sarah Turton [37].

¹⁸⁹ Mrs Taylor taught her children to make things for others, and ‘let no opportunity slip ... to form their minds to what was useful.’ [14: 52]. Elizabeth Gill (1754-1823 *m* 1788) also reportedly brought up her children ‘in habits of industry.’ [34: 796].

¹⁹⁰ [63:786].

preoccupation, a change that Sarah Keeling is reported to have anticipated with ‘true motherly anxiety.’¹⁹¹ For Kezia Geden, the salvation of her children was ‘her paramount anxiety, whilst Mr and Mrs Dernaley were united in the hope that their children: ‘might be early led to a saving knowledge of the “truth as it is in Jesus”.’¹⁹² Children were constantly monitored for any promising signs. Ann Leach, for example, noted being ‘much in prayer for the salvation of [her] children’ in consequence of ‘observing signs of strong convictions’ on the mind of her eldest child.¹⁹³ In addition to regular family devotions, the women prayed with and for their offspring,¹⁹⁴ taking an active part in instructing and catechising their charges.¹⁹⁵ In a wonderful phrase, Mr Stevens described how his wife, Sarah used to ‘instruct each of her children apart in private and rivet the word of advice by earnest prayer.’¹⁹⁶ This evidence again supports the view, put forward by M. R. Watts, that women and especially mothers were important agents in the transmission of religious faith in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁹⁷ The publication of such examples, meanwhile, provided models for readers of the *Magazine*, augmenting debate in other sections of the periodical.¹⁹⁸

Whilst approaches to the spiritual development of children are frequently mentioned, few memoirs refer to the formal schooling of their offspring, although this was a subject that continued to be debated in the pages of the *Magazine*.¹⁹⁹ Education for the sons of Methodist preachers was provided at boarding schools at Kingswood, Bristol, and later at Woodhouse Grove in Yorkshire.²⁰⁰ As no holidays were allowed, the departure of sons must have been a real wrench for the preachers’ wives. At the time of Diana Claxton’s death she had not seen her eldest son for two years.²⁰¹ By the early nineteenth century some financial assistance was given towards the education of girls, but several accounts suggest that funding their offspring’s education was still a struggle. Lack of funds led Sarah Stevens to educate all her family

¹⁹¹ Sarah Keeling (1799- 1867 *m* 1838) [71: 391].

¹⁹² [55: 1057] and [70: 1063].

¹⁹³ [65: 869].

¹⁹⁴ Sarah Turton, for example, prayed with her children, spending time alone with each of them on the Sabbath ‘to plead with God on their behalf.’ [37: 450].

¹⁹⁵ Jane Wilson is said to have instilled ‘the all-important principles of Christianity’ on an almost daily basis. [43: 806]. Rebecca Gladwin’s children were regularly catechised and instructed. [61: 102].

¹⁹⁶ *MM* 32 (809) 338.

¹⁹⁷ *The Dissenters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 56.

¹⁹⁸ See “The importance of teaching children to pray”, *MM* 33 (1810): 519; “Letters on the religious instruction of the young,” *MM* 37 (1814).

¹⁹⁹ Examples include “On the education of children.” *MM* 17 (1794): 204; “Letters from a parent on the education of children.” *MM* 23 (1800); and “Hints for the education of children.” *MM* 40 (1817): 539-41.

²⁰⁰ Lloyd, *Payment*, 24-6; *DMBI*, 193 and 401.

²⁰¹ [27]. Mrs Gartrell’s sons [26] are also recorded as being educated at Kingswood.

herself.²⁰² However, a hint of rising prosperity among the Methodist preachers is also shown by the fact that one wife is known to have had a governess for her children.²⁰³

The foregoing discussion has highlighted the fact that, for the women who married Methodist itinerant preachers, the job of establishing and running a home was an exacting and challenging business, often to be managed in very difficult circumstances. The important role of wives, not only in caring for their husbands and children, but in managing servants and offering hospitality to other lodgers and visitors has also been demonstrated. These were responsibilities that were underpinned by the women's personal spiritual commitment and a framework of private religious exercises and family devotions. However, in addition to these home-based activities, the subjects of the study, like other members of the Society, participated in a number of *public* meetings and services. Such obligations took the preachers' wives out of their homes and among the local Methodist people.

The pressures of a public life

It is important to stress here, that even within their own four walls the wives were never totally divorced from the Methodist communities in which their husbands served. Being housed in, or close to the local chapel, they were situated physically at the heart of local Methodist affairs. Their homes were often the venue for meetings or services,²⁰⁴ and the women also had contact with lay post-holders or others calling on their husbands on many occasions.²⁰⁵ In such encounters the women in the study were subject to the close scrutiny of other members of the Society.²⁰⁶ As they went about their everyday business and joined in the collective activities that were part and parcel of Methodist life, the preachers' wives were also very much in the public eye, being objects of interest not only to the wider Methodist community but also to those outside the movement.

There is evidence that the women were well aware of the responsibilities of their situation, perceiving a need to personally exemplify Christian ideals. A diary entry by Elizabeth Robinson after her marriage and arrival at Lichfield, included her prayer: 'May the gospel of

²⁰² [28]. See also Elizabeth Burdsall [35] and Ann Leach [65].

²⁰³ Mary Ann Cooke [56].

²⁰⁴ The account of Elizabeth Murlin, for example, refers to preaching services taking place 'in the house.' as well as a meeting with 'the Leaders and Stewards' [2: 425 and 427]. Mary Walker described holding prayer meetings 'at our house.' [51: 1153].

²⁰⁵ John Murlin describes how his wife went to 'her own room' while he conducted a meeting with 'the Leaders and Stewards.' [2: 427].

²⁰⁶ See [62: 580] and the earlier example of the stewards' disapproval of Jane Vasey's improvements.

Jesus be recommended by my life and conversation in this dark city.’²⁰⁷ As this very significant comment suggests, Elizabeth wanted to embody and model the values of her faith. The self-regulation that this involved is also apparent in the account of Rebecca Gladwin, a later member of the cohort. She is said to have watched over herself ‘vigilantly’ to avoid any opportunity of being charged with ‘a spirit contrary to the Gospel of Christ.’²⁰⁸ Similarly, Mr Jennings wrote that his spouse was mindful of her position as ‘the wife of a Christian pastor,’ seeking always to ‘order her conversation that she might glorify God, and edify his church.’²⁰⁹ Such descriptions indicate not only the women’s appreciation of their unique situation, but their constant watchfulness.

Involvement in public devotions and the Methodist ‘means of grace’

In common with other members of the Methodist movement, the daily and weekly round of the preachers’ wives was marked by a range of communal devotional activities. Newly-arrived at Thirsk in 1806, Jane Fisher described weekly public obligations that other wives might typically expect, noting with satisfaction that there were: ‘three sermons one Lord’s-day and two the other: and prayer meetings, class meetings or preaching, almost every night in the week.’²¹⁰ As many Methodists also continued to attend their local parish church at this time, this was possibly another Sunday obligation. Involvement in such communal activities is often signalled in the texts with a general reference noting participation in ‘the means of grace’, or ‘public ordinances.’ Thirty-one per cent of the accounts employ these and similar terms. Faithful attendance is most commonly stressed. Mrs Hinson, for example, ‘constantly attended the outward means and publick [sic] ordinances,’ and Ann Marsden is described as: ‘a pattern of diligence in her attendance upon public ordinances.’²¹¹ In life, such conscientiousness was expected of the wives of preachers, and would be closely monitored by local congregations. These statements illustrate how the women’s dedication was held up as a model and inspiration to others even after their deaths.

An analysis of more specific references in the texts, summarised in Figure 15, sheds further light on the range of public devotional activities that were regularly undertaken by the members of the study after marriage.

²⁰⁷ [25: 137]. The undated diary entry was written between 24 August 1814 and 13 Nov. 1814.

²⁰⁸ [61: 99].

²⁰⁹ [49: 109].

²¹⁰ [10: 560].

²¹¹ [21: 373] and [41: 656].

Figure 15: References to public devotions after marriage among the cohort sample (in percentages)

Preaching/ Public worship	Sacrament	Covenant/ Watchnight Service	Class Meetings	Band Meetings	Prayer Meetings	Lovefeast	Means of Grace
44	15	5	39	5	17	9	31

Sources: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

Given the importance placed upon preaching within the Methodist tradition, and the nature of their husbands' work, it is not surprising to find that preaching, or public worship receives most mention in the accounts. As Jane Fisher's schedule above suggests, regular attendance framed the women's daily and weekly round. Elizabeth Murlin is one preacher's wife who truly satisfied the early Conference admonition to 'constantly ... attend the morning preaching,'²¹² rising at five each day for this purpose and being at public preaching, 'winter and summer, late and early, to the very last.'²¹³ Other cases demonstrate similar commitment, even in mitigating circumstances such as ill health.²¹⁴ Significantly, careful organisation on the domestic front is portrayed as essential. Ruth Revill 'made it a point so to order her household affairs that she might have an opportunity of attending the house of God.'²¹⁵ In a similar way, Mary Anne Sumner's management at home ensured that the 'sanctity and rest of the holy Sabbath' and 'the privilege of public worship, twice on the Lord's day, was secured to all ...'²¹⁶ Here again, the domestic, as well as the spiritual practices of the wives, are being articulated and held up for emulation.

The subjects' engagement with what they heard from the pulpit is suggested in a number of accounts. Mrs Ranson is described as an attentive listener, whilst Mr Taylor noted that his wife, Ann was 'a candid hearer,' who '... had read much divinity and understood it.'²¹⁷ Jane Vasey regularly assisted her husband in preparing and revising his sermons, being a forthright critic at the first trial of new texts.²¹⁸ The personal spiritual benefit received from sermons can also be seen. One discourse inspired Frances Derry, who wrote of 'such encouragement and comfort, as I cannot express,'²¹⁹ while preaching imbued Ann Hardcastle

²¹² Doughty, *Wesley's Conferences*, 60. This was urged at the 1753 Conference.

²¹³ [2: 425].

²¹⁴ Mrs McAllum for example is described as 'never absent' even when weak, or ill, or in poor weather. [18: 207] See also accounts of Hillaria Shrewsbury [42], Mrs Manly [53], and Elizabeth Robinson [69].

²¹⁵ [11: 354].

²¹⁶ [68:29]. See also Mrs Sykes [74].

²¹⁷ [44:10] and [14: 58].

²¹⁸ [62: 581].

²¹⁹ [12: 428]. Diary entry dated 30 Nov. [1807].

with a sense that her soul had been ‘quicken’d’, or ‘restored’.²²⁰ Covenant and Watchnight services were occasions for reflection and rededication. Though unable to attend a service when bound for Jamaica, Elizabeth Samuel renewed her covenant by singing the appropriate hymns.²²¹ References to participation in ‘special services,’ instigated to stir up revival or support for Methodist missions denote later developments.²²² A significant omission in the accounts is mention of any *female* preaching, although, as shown later some wives came within the orbit of women preachers, and one of the subjects was active in this way.²²³

Under the general rules of the Society all members were enjoined to receive the Lord’s Supper, but, as discussed earlier, its administration only gradually became a regular part of chapel services.²²⁴ This may partly account for the fact that specific references to this sacrament occur in only 15% of the memoirs. Frances Derry is one of the wives who felt the privilege of being able to receive the sacrament keenly,²²⁵ and for Harriet Garbutt, this ordinance was ‘highly-prized.’²²⁶ In another account Isabella Ranson is said to have reported experiencing ‘a powerful manifestation of divine love’ whilst at the communion table.²²⁷ However, most references to the sacrament appear in the context of descriptions of illness or final days. Eliza Byron and Harriet Butler are two of the subjects who wished to receive the Lord’s Supper in these circumstances.²²⁸ Such instances are a poignant reminder of the value placed upon this particular ordinance.

The Methodist class was an important institution, and 39% of the accounts refer to the subjects’ membership of these weekly meetings.²²⁹ Wherever they were stationed the preachers’ wives would join an existing class. The account of Elizabeth Burdsall highlights the dilemma facing each of the subjects on arrival in a new place, showing a cautious approach:

[Her] plan was, not hastily to fix on a Class-leader; nor yet to choose the one who was most popular, and followed; but after casting her discriminating eye around her, she

²²⁰ [16: 768 and 770]. Diary entries dated 4 August [1810] and 20 Nov. [1810]. See also the accounts of Jane Stanley [9], Elizabeth Gill [34], Annie Shoar [58] and Ann Leach [65].

²²¹ [66: 8]. Diary entry dated 1 Jan. 1832. See also the accounts of Frances Derry [12], Betsy Lofthouse [45], Ann Leach [65].

²²² On the former see the accounts of Mrs Garbutt [52] and Louisa Edman [67]. Elizabeth Gill records being ‘remarkably blessed’ during an anniversary service for the Thirsk missionary society. [34: 797].

²²³ See the later discussion in this chapter, and the case study of Mary Entwisle.

²²⁴ *Works* 8: 261. A recent study on this subject is Edward Royle, “When Did Methodists Stop Attending Their Parish Churches?” *PWHS* 56, no. 6 (October 2008): 275-96.

²²⁵ [12: 428]. Diary entry dated 7 Dec. 1806.

²²⁶ [52:594].

²²⁷ [44:10].

²²⁸ See [7] and [23].

²²⁹ I consider the wives’ activity as class-*leaders* below.

invariably selected that person whom she considered to be most sensible, most judicious, most consistent, most holy, and most faithful.²³⁰

In contrast, Harriet Roadhouse is reported to have been contented with her given leader and class-mates wherever she was enrolled.²³¹ Again, the wives' faithful attendance and punctuality at meetings receives much comment.²³² However, evidence also shows that it was not only duty that drew the women there. Writing in 1804, Diana Claxton suggested that she felt: 'more revived and blessed in class-meetings, than any other means of grace,'²³³ whilst four years later Frances Derry described one meeting as 'a season of refreshing from the divine presence.'²³⁴ When going through a difficult period spiritually, Susanna De Queteville also found that her 'darkness' lifted at her class,²³⁵ and for Isabella Ranson such meetings generally are said to have been 'times of edification and comfort.'²³⁶ These comments point to the continuing spiritual value of classes, at a time when membership numbers generally were falling.²³⁷ The individuals above clearly perceived some religious benefit accruing from their regular attendance.

On a purely practical level class-meetings allowed the preachers' wives to get to know the local people. This aspect was much appreciated by Mrs Garbutt, who is said to have especially valued the groups as a means of 'regular and periodical opportunities of enjoying communion with the people of God.'²³⁸ Despite the constant moves demanded by the itinerancy, it appears that close bonds did develop. When going through a worrying time, Elizabeth McKitrick sought out 'an old confidential friend' who met in her class.²³⁹ In another case, though very ill, Diana Claxton expressed 'a strong desire to meet her dear leader and class-mates once more'²⁴⁰ Testimonies from class leaders also appear in the memoirs, showing that meaningful relationships did evolve: close ties that are evidenced too in the prayerful support offered by these lay officials as the subjects' lives drew to a close.²⁴¹

Class meetings were spaces where individuals described their current spiritual condition, and some wives are shown to have articulated their position to the benefit of others.

²³⁰ [35: 156].

²³¹ [30: 849].

²³² Elizabeth Samuel's class-leaders 'had never to mark her as an absentee, or wait for her as a late-comer.' [66: 9]. Elizabeth McAllum attended 'conscientiously' for thirty-six years. [18: 207].

²³³ [27: 920]. Diary entry dated 19 Nov. [1804].

²³⁴ [12: 429]. Diary entry dated 26 May 1808.

²³⁵ [57: 8].

²³⁶ [44: 10].

²³⁷ On this aspect see Henry Rack, "The Decline of the Class-Meeting and the Problem of Church Membership in Nineteenth Century Wesleyanism," *PWHS* 39 (1973 - 4): 12 - 21 and William Dean, "The Methodist Class-Meeting. The Significance of Its Decline," *PWHS* 43 (1981): 41 - 48.

²³⁸ [52: 594].

²³⁹ [22: 688].

²⁴⁰ [27: 923].

²⁴¹ See accounts of Mrs Jennings [49], Isabella Ranson [44], Mary Entwisle [8] and Kate Thomas [54].

Helena Waugh, for example, ‘spoke clearly and strongly of the peace and joy she felt ...’²⁴² whilst Mrs Ranson’s leader recounted, that when Isabella related her experience, ‘she was often made a blessing.’²⁴³ Not every member of the cohort, however, found these gatherings easy. One of Elizabeth Burdsall’s leaders recalled her first attendance in class, writing: ‘I was much struck ... with the diffidence *and fear* observable in her.’ [My emphasis]²⁴⁴ She continued:

I expected to find in her, as the wife of a Methodist Preacher, great fluency of speech on religious topics; and a great display of the knowledge and love expected in matured Christians. Judge, then, what was my surprise, to find so much diffidence of communication, combined with so much Christian attainment.²⁴⁵

If Elizabeth’s care in choosing a class leader is here explained, the comment also demonstrates the weight of public expectation bearing down on the preachers’ wives.

Whilst mention of the wives’ participation in bands, groups for the more spiritually advanced, is made in only 5% of the memoirs, this evidence reinforces the view that these same-sex meetings allowed women in particular to develop confidence. Despite a timid disposition, Elizabeth McAllum found courage to pray within her band.²⁴⁶ When speaking of her experience among her fellow band-mates, meanwhile, Diana Claxton, felt that ‘every cloud was dispersed, and [her] soul entered a state of more glorious liberty.’²⁴⁷ Strong relationships and networks for mutual support were evidently fostered in these meetings. Stationed at Whitby in 1805, Ann Hardcastle became close to a band-mate, who ‘under God, was rendered a great blessing to her.’²⁴⁸ The friends ‘met frequently, spoke freely, and prayed fervently, to the mutual comfort and edification of each other.’²⁴⁹ Sarah Stevens is also said to have taken ‘much sweet counsel’ with Mrs Green, one of her band-mates ‘whom she consulted on all difficult matters.’²⁵⁰

Both class and band meetings were places where the wives could express themselves in prayer. Hillaria Shrewsbury is said to have exercised her ‘useful gift in prayer’ in her class,’ whilst at her last band-meeting Ann Hardcastle prayed ‘with uncommon fervour’ on behalf of her band-mates, the classes, and the circuit as a whole.²⁵¹ The subjects’ participation in separate meetings for prayer is also mentioned in 17% of the accounts. Less formal than the classes or bands, the latter gatherings were led by lay members, often attracting newcomers to the

²⁴² [48: 637].

²⁴³ [44: 10].

²⁴⁴ [35: 155].

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 155-6.

²⁴⁶ [18: 209].

²⁴⁷ [27: 920] Diary entry dated 3 Sept. 1803.

²⁴⁸ [16: 766].

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ [28: 52].

²⁵¹ [42: 494] and [16: 775].

movement and individuals from the poorer classes.²⁵² Jane Stanley recorded her presence at a women's prayer meeting at Newbury in 1803, whilst after her marriage, Annie Shoar is said to have become 'zealous and active' in attending meetings.²⁵³ Various venues for these gatherings are noted, such as local cottages, chapels, and the minister's house.²⁵⁴ Going to her first prayer meeting in the chapel at Thirsk in 1806, Jane Fisher discovered to her satisfaction that the congregation included: 'Such wrestling Jacobs as ... I never saw before'.²⁵⁵ Attending cottage meetings during a revival at Witney, Mary Ann Cooke took a leading role and exhorted those gathered 'to flee from the wrath to come'.²⁵⁶ Such evidence shows the active engagement of the wives in communal devotions among their fellow Methodists.

Involvement in the Methodist institution known as the lovefeast is mentioned in only 9% of the accounts, but it is clear that these assemblies, modelled on the Moravian 'agape' meal, inspired some members of the cohort. After one lovefeast at Belper, Diana Caxton wrote that 'The Lord was graciously with us,²⁵⁷ and on another occasion Mary Walker felt that 'a peculiar unction' rested upon the congregation.²⁵⁸ A keen sense of drawing near to God is expressed by Frances Derry who recounted that: 'The Lord manifested himself in much love to my soul. I can not express what I felt'²⁵⁹ Whilst hearing the testimony of others was valued,²⁶⁰ this was a setting where a number of the wives also felt able to witness to their faith. The 'naturally diffident and retiring' Harriet Garbutt overcame her scruples to speak openly 'of the hope that was in her.'²⁶¹ In another example, Mrs Derry, wrote that it was 'an unspeakable favour ... [to be] enabled to testify to [God's] goodness, and declare myself a monument of his saving grace.'²⁶² Again, these examples point to the empowering power of these Methodist services and their importance to the experience of the preachers' wives.

For all the women in the study, therefore, attendance at church meetings and services was an integral part of everyday life, taking the wives out of their homes and providing regular contact with the local Methodist society. As the above evidence has revealed, whether in the more intimate class or band meetings or in larger gatherings such as prayer meetings and

²⁵² Dean, "Methodist Class-Meeting," argues that during the early nineteenth century the prayer meetings superseded the class as the main vehicle for evangelism, and that existing members found a spiritual dynamism that was often lacking in other services.

²⁵³ [9: 229] and [58: 290].

²⁵⁴ See accounts of Mary Ann Cooke [56]; Jane Fisher [10]; Louisa Edman [67] and Mary Walker [51].

²⁵⁵ [10: 560].

²⁵⁶ [56: 1152].

²⁵⁷ [27: 922]. Diary entry dated 23 Dec. [1814].

²⁵⁸ [51: 1153].

²⁵⁹ [12: 428]. Diary entry dated 2 Jan 1807.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Mrs Derry described hearing 'many evidences of the love and faithfulness of God.'

²⁶¹ [52: 598]. See also the account of Ruth Revill [11].

²⁶² *Ibid.*

lovefeasts, the preachers' wives were able to testify to their beliefs, often encouraging or exhorting others. For a majority of the subjects, however, this was only one aspect of their active involvement with the neighbouring people. Earlier discussion highlighted that many of the women embarked upon marriage with the firm conviction that as preachers' wives they would have additional opportunities to serve God. The following analysis shows that they were not mistaken, and that a high proportion of the subjects took up new challenges in various fields of public work.

The variety of public service within the cohort

Examination of the full cohort reveals that fifty-four texts refer to the subjects' active engagement in some kind of public service after their marriage.²⁶³ With further analysis it can be seen that these efforts were directed not only at the wives' local Methodist congregations, but also encompassed the wider communities in which they lived. Many women engaged in more than one type of work, and a summary of participation in different areas is given below.

Figure 16: Public service undertaken after marriage among the cohort sample: evidence from fifty-four cases

Visiting sick	Relief of poor	Sunday school/ general teaching	Prayer leader	Class leader	Band leader	Distrib. tracts/ bibles	Fund raiser missions/ chapels	Other/ Evangelism
26	34	16	1	26	2	4	2	3

Source: Sample count of memoirs in the *Arminian/Methodist/Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for the years 1780-1880. Leeds City Reference Library, and John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

From this analysis it is clear that a large proportion of the wives engaged in work to relieve poverty and sickness, with thirty-four individuals providing some kind of support for the poor,²⁶⁴ and twenty-six women noted as visiting the sick.²⁶⁵ Interestingly, although some of the women had been involved in similar efforts when single,²⁶⁶ substantially more individuals tried to alleviate such distress *after* their marriage. Perhaps this rise might be expected given that such work was a natural extension of the kind of hospitality that has been shown to be normally practiced by the women in the study.²⁶⁷ Certainly this area was considered an acceptable field

²⁶³ This comprises 73% of the total cohort.

²⁶⁴ This figure constitutes or 62% of this sample or 46% of the total cohort.

²⁶⁵ This figure comprises 48% of the group or 35% of the total cohort.

²⁶⁶ See Figure 9 in chapter seven above. Nine individuals are recorded as visiting the sick prior to marriage and eight noted as supporting the poor.

²⁶⁷ On this point see Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal*, 193. Discussion of visiting generally and associated charities is found in H. D. Rack, "Domestic Visitation: A Chapter in Early Nineteenth Century Evangelism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 24, no. 4 (1973): 357-76 and F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), chapter four.

of service for ministers' wives in other denominations.²⁶⁸ What is clear is that these Methodist preachers' wives felt a strong obligation to those less fortunate than themselves. Ann Taylor is said to have had 'a feeling heart for the poor,'²⁶⁹ whilst Diana Claxton is described as showing 'pity and compassion' for their wants.²⁷⁰ Moreover, the women can be seen to have adopted a wide variety of strategies to provide for others' needs.

Personal visits appear to have been routinely made by many women. Described as 'an affable, sympathizing friend and benefactress to the poor', Charlotte Rowland is said to have 'felt it her delight, as well as duty, to visit the needy and afflicted ...'²⁷¹ Helena Waugh, meanwhile, reportedly 'sought out every form of distress.'²⁷² Financial support was one response to the need encountered, and in the trying pecuniary circumstances faced by the wives themselves, it is evident that real sacrifices were made. Ann Hardcastle's 'ability to supply the wants of others was not great', wrote her husband, yet through her 'prudent and justifiable economy' some means were found.²⁷³ Mary Ann Cusworth and her family went without 'animal food' for one day a week in order to relieve two destitute families.²⁷⁴ Other women were determined fund-raisers on behalf of those less fortunate than themselves. Elizabeth Gill, for example, regularly begged for old clothes or money to supply those in distress.²⁷⁵

The wives can be seen to have offered very practical responses to the real hardship surrounding them. Ann Marsden spent one day a week distributing food she had cooked at home, and Susanna de Queteville, who studied medical books to help the poor and sick, gained a widespread reputation as a healer.²⁷⁶ In common with Prochaska's findings, some of the women's efforts were specifically targeted towards members of their own sex.²⁷⁷ Hearing of poor women in labour, Ann Taylor and her children sewed items for the new-born babies.²⁷⁸ Harriet Butler was particularly drawn to help 'females in affliction,'²⁷⁹ and Mrs Marsden, one wife who seems to have been wealthier than most, provided funds to establish businesses for

²⁶⁸ See Jeremy Gregory's discussion of the 1832 manual: *Hints to a Clergyman's Wife*, "Gender and the Clerical Profession," in *Gender and Christian Religion*, ed. R. N. Swan (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 263-4. For some Congregational examples see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780 - 1850*, (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 130.

²⁶⁹ [14: 52].

²⁷⁰ [27:924].

²⁷¹ [33: 286]. See also Martha Lessey [24].

²⁷² [48: 637].

²⁷³ [16: 778].

²⁷⁴ Mary Ann Cusworth (1792- 1833 m 1813) [40: 419]. This would appear to mean meat or dairy produce.

²⁷⁵ [34].

²⁷⁶ See [41] and Susanna De Queteville (1768-1843 m 1788) [57].

²⁷⁷ *Women and Philanthropy*, 30. Prochaska's study of subscription lists noted that many women preferred to support charities dealing with members of their own sex.

²⁷⁸ [14].

²⁷⁹ [23:771].

‘respectable’ women who had fallen on hard times.²⁸⁰ Many individuals participated in communal enterprises like Dorcas societies or benevolent funds, a trend more noticeable in accounts published after 1830.²⁸¹ While most of the wives acted as visitors or almoners in existing organisations, two women especially deserve mention for the impressive initiatives they took. In 1789 Sarah Stevens formed a society for the relief of the sick and poor on Jersey, going out to hospitals, prisons, and even the soldiers’ barracks.²⁸² Ann Marsden is a later member of the cohort, who established clothing charities in many places, starting similar schemes to help women who were lying-in.²⁸³

Some of these endeavours were geared specifically towards Methodist members,²⁸⁴ but many took the wives into wider society. More than one woman was adversely affected by the distress they encountered. Dorothy Wright, a sensitive visitor of the sick, had to give up the work, being frequently ill herself on her return.²⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the labour involved in distributing funds during one ‘season of great severity and distress’ at Wakefield during the 1830s left Isabella Clarkson ‘prostrated.’²⁸⁶ There were also undoubted challenges and dangers when going out into unfamiliar territory. Jane Wilson, one visitor for the Benevolent Society, is said to have frequently experienced ‘difficulties and discouragement.’²⁸⁷ Thus, though the commitment of the wives is evident, their efforts in these fields were also accompanied by many stresses and strains.

Work in Sunday schools, or wider educational projects also took the preachers’ wives into the public realm, often bringing them into contact with those outside the movement. Sixteen of the subjects operated in these areas, a slight increase on the numbers participating before their marriage.²⁸⁸ Harriet Butler is said to have made the religious instruction of the young one of her particular concerns,²⁸⁹ and among other individuals, Mary Sykes had a ‘select class of young women’ in the Sunday school,²⁹⁰ whilst Sally Crofts catechised the children at

²⁸⁰ [41].

²⁸¹ See the accounts of Jane Wilson [43]; Isabella Clarkson [59]; Mary Anne Sumner [68]; and Elizabeth Mrs Rosser [72].

²⁸² [28]. Sarah’s enterprise was all the more remarkable as she had recently lost her first child.

²⁸³ [41].

²⁸⁴ Isabella Clarkson (1800-1851 *m* 1824) for example, ‘revived’ a clothing charity ‘for the assistance of needy Wesleyans’ at Sunderland in 1833. [59: 774]. See also the account of Harriet Garbutt [52].

²⁸⁵ [3].

²⁸⁶ [59: 774].

²⁸⁷ [43: 807]

²⁸⁸ This figure constitutes 30% of the sample, or 22% of the full cohort. Figure nine above shows that thirteen women worked in Sunday schools or other forms of education as single women.

²⁸⁹ [23].

²⁹⁰ [74].

Spanish Town in Jamaica.²⁹¹ Sarah Keeling began to teach other children as well as her own, subsequent to her husband's death,²⁹² and Mary Swallow, who travelled with her husband to the Gambia, is reported to have been 'diligent' and 'always ready to instruct the poor black females.'²⁹³ Interestingly, none of the above had been involved in such work as single women.

The preachers' wives also took leading roles in founding schools or other educational schemes, both in Britain and in overseas missions. Judith Valton provided financial support for a day school for girls, being not only the principal benefactor, but also its main instructor.²⁹⁴ Ann Marsden's many charitable efforts included the establishment of a number of day schools.²⁹⁵ Louisa Edman started a Sunday school at Grateful-Hill in Jamaica through which many became Christians, and also Methodist members.²⁹⁶ Other missionary's wives are revealed as responding to their local situation in a creative way. When Jane Allen's skills were not needed in the local day school in West Africa, for example, she began a class for older women, teaching them to read, write and sew.²⁹⁷ Aiming to draw younger local women away from heathen customs, Rebecca Gladwin also formed a large sewing class in which she 'encouraged free conversation and the asking of questions.'²⁹⁸ Again this enterprise bore fruit with many of Rebecca's charges being baptized. Significantly, both the latter accounts record with some satisfaction the wives' success in inducing the local women to 'abandon the heathen costume, and adopt the European.'²⁹⁹ From this it is evident that the preachers' wives were not only teaching literacy and practical skills, but were agents of colonialism, assisting in the domestication of the indigenous people.

The women can be seen to have been active as *spiritual* counsellors in both unofficial and more formal capacities. Ann Hardcastle appears to have held no formal office, yet Mr Bustard wrote of her attempts 'as opportunity served' to 'convince the careless sinner' and encourage of others 'who with all their heart were seeking the pardoning or sanctifying grace of God.'³⁰⁰ Interestingly, the women's position appears to have opened up their opportunities to minister in this way. As the wife of Joseph Taylor, Mary Hunt reportedly: 'afforded religious counsel to inquirers [sic] who could more readily speak to a minister's wife than to a minister

²⁹¹ [39]. Sally travelled to Jamaica in 1824.

²⁹² [71]. It is not clear whether this was an economic necessity.

²⁹³ [50: 320]. Mary left England for the Gambia in 1837.

²⁹⁴ [5].

²⁹⁵ [41].

²⁹⁶ [67]. This work was started shortly after Louisa's arrival in 1855.

²⁹⁷ [63]. Jane set out for West Africa in 1845.

²⁹⁸ [61: 99]. Rebecca went out to South Africa in 1840.

²⁹⁹ This quote is from Jane Allen's account, [63: 783], but see also [61: 99].

³⁰⁰ [16: 778]. In a similar way, Harriet Butler is said to have given much attention 'to young females, whom she saw not far from the kingdom of God; and such as were babes in Christ' [23: 771].

himself,' caring especially for young women, some of whom were 'led to Jesus' through this help.³⁰¹ The wives' focus on members of their own sex is again noticeable, and it is not possible to tell whether this was a natural predilection or in any way imposed. However, these individuals were clearly directing and supporting others, despite holding no specific connexional post. When dealing with the young or shy enquirers, this unofficial status may even have contributed to their success.

Skills of instruction and pastoral guidance were also demanded of class and band leaders, but their work was much more regulated and involved a weekly commitment. The accounts suggest that twenty-eight of the subjects were active in these positions after marriage: more than twice the number than had formerly held such posts.³⁰² These findings contrast greatly with Linda Wilson's research on female obituaries during the 1825-75 period, which though discovering Wesleyan women who were class leaders, found no Wesleyan minister's wife undertaking this role.³⁰³ This lack led Wilson to suggest that there might be 'different expectations' in the mainstream movement, implying, perhaps, that it was not considered appropriate for preachers' wives to do this job.³⁰⁴ The women uncovered by this study, however, seem to have had ample opportunities to act as class leaders, and, as shown below, there may even have been some pressure for them to assume this office.

Even as married women some of the subjects evidently had misgivings about taking up the post of class leader. Agnes Hopwood, for example, is said to have been 'prevailed upon, although not without considerable reluctance on her part.'³⁰⁵ Yet there is much to show that individuals brought a wide range of qualities and skills to the role. Mrs Mather, for example, won admiration and envy from both leaders and preachers for the way in which she elucidated the need for salvation, assisted individuals to be converted, and go on to experience perfect love.³⁰⁶ Elizabeth McKittrick is also said to have been 'a proper person' for the office of leader, having 'correct views of the plan of salvation' and being 'deeply versed in the things of God.'³⁰⁷ Bridget Daniell's noted qualities included sincerity, gentleness, and 'deep knowledge of the human heart,'³⁰⁸ whilst the education, piety, experience and 'aptness to teach' of Mary Sykes

³⁰¹ Mary Hunt (1795-1861 *m* 1825) [64: 307].

³⁰² The figure represents 52% of this sample or 38% of the total cohort. As shown in figure nine above eleven women previously held office as a class or band leader.

³⁰³ Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal*, 202-4. Thirteen percent of the Wesleyan women in Wilson's sample were class leaders as opposed to 8% of the female Primitive Methodists.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ [31: 924].

³⁰⁶ [4: 368-9].

³⁰⁷ [22: 686-7].

³⁰⁸ [46: 897].

equipped her to do a leader's job.³⁰⁹ Such instances reveal not only the wealth of talents that the wives employed in this field of service, but also the spiritual maturity of these women.

While some of the wives took over established classes, many were instrumental in the formation of new groups.³¹⁰ Mary Ann Cooke began a class at Barton-on-Humber, later founding two or three in the Witney circuit.³¹¹ Sarah Stevens was responsible for the creation and building up of many classes, and in every one of her husband's circuits she also established bands.³¹² As these examples suggest, this was not only a process that was often repeated, but for many individuals became a lasting vocation. Mrs Thompson, for example, is said to have: 'raised up and consolidated' classes throughout the twenty-five years of her married life.³¹³ In establishing classes the women worked hard to nurture their charges. Mrs Mather, who inaugurated both classes and bands, is said to have 'travailed in birth for those under her care.'³¹⁴ The metaphor is an apt one, not only for this particular preacher's wife, but for the other subjects in the study, who as leaders became spiritual midwives for new members of the Society.

A letter written by Sarah Stevens in June 1794 allows a striking insight into the working of these groups. On this occasion several individuals who were not members of the local society had been permitted to be present. Sarah wrote of finding 'great enlargement of heart when speaking to the people', and 'was led in a particular manner to exhort them to look for a present blessing, and to venture on Christ by faith.' She described how, after members had finished describing their own experience, and after engaging in prayer, 'the Lord did indeed open the windows of heaven, and pour down blessings in a very liberal manner.'³¹⁵ In the extraordinary scenes that followed, many of the newcomers, and even some of the neighbours who had come in after hearing the proceedings, were convinced of their sinfulness or experienced conversion. This episode not only reveals Sarah's leadership, but is a vivid reminder of the evangelism that could be engendered by classes. In the later period of the study classes became less popular and there were difficulties attracting leaders.³¹⁶ A remark by the biographer of Ann Leach reflects this development, noting that becoming a class leader Ann

³⁰⁹ [74: 1058].

³¹⁰ In the former category, Diana Claxton noted: 'The Leaders have committed a class to my care, which the Lord appears to own and bless.' Diary entry dated 19 Nov. 1804. [27: 920].

³¹¹ [56]. *Hall*, shows that Mary Ann was in Barton-on-Humber from 1817 and in Witney from 1825.

³¹² [28]. A period from Sarah's marriage in 1789 until her husband's retirement in 1801.

³¹³ [47: 993]. Mrs Thompson married in 1806 and died in 1837. See also [65] and [68].

³¹⁴ [4:369].

³¹⁵ [28: 54-5.] Letter dated 26 June 1794.

³¹⁶ Dean, "Methodist Class-Meeting", 41- 48.

‘performed a duty imposed by the church.’³¹⁷ [My emphasis]. These accounts, therefore, provide evidence of the changing nature of class meetings, and of the movement generally.

Only four of the subjects distributed tracts after marriage, a slightly smaller number than had been involved in this field as single women.³¹⁸ Ann Leach took up this work when most of her children had been raised, alongside various other ventures.³¹⁹ In contrast, this seems to have been the only public activity undertaken by Isabella Ranson, stemming from her ‘fervent and active zeal for the spread of Christianity.’³²⁰ Penelope Coke’s delicate constitution prevented more active visiting, but she distributed a wide range of tracts, losing no opportunity ‘of giving them an extensive circulation.’³²¹ Mary Ann Cooke passed such literature to local railway workers from her garden when she was unable to attend chapel.³²² Towards the end of the study period this kind of proselytising was satirised to good comic effect.³²³ But the latter wives’ endeavours were a practical form of outreach despite quite limiting circumstances. Even in poor health Mrs Cooke reasoned that ‘it was much more agreeable to be able to work for God, and to serve him in active duties.’³²⁴ Giving out tracts enabled her to fulfil this wish.

The number of women raising money for missions or chapels after marriage is also low, with only five accounts mentioning the subjects’ participation in such efforts. As more individuals were active in this area when single, it is possible that this field was less of a priority for the preachers’ wives.³²⁵ Harriet Garbutt is one example who was a fundraiser for chapels, while Mrs Sumner and Mary Sykes were associated with other ‘Circuit efforts’ to alleviate financial difficulties.³²⁶ Helena Waugh and Jane Wilson were more concerned with the spread of Christianity, collecting for the Bible and Missionary Society.³²⁷ Even in this work some challenging situations could arise. Describing Jane’s experience, her biographer noted:

In one or two instances, persons of infidel principles assailed their Visiter [sic] with considerable warmth; but on such occasions the moral courage Mrs. Wilson evinced, and

³¹⁷ [65: 871-2].

³¹⁸ This figure constitutes 7% of this sample, but 5% of the full cohort. See Figure 9 in the previous chapter. Seven individuals distributed tracts before their marriages.

³¹⁹ [65].

³²⁰ [44: 9].

³²¹ [15: 215].

³²² [56: 1154]. This was during the couple’s time at Macclesfield, between 1847 and 1849.

³²³ A notable example is Miss Clack, a busy-body and insensitive tract distributor, who is a central character in Wilkie Collins’ 1868 novel, *The Moonstone*.

³²⁴ [56: 1153].

³²⁵ This figure represents 9% of this sample, but 7% of the full cohort. See Figure 9 in the previous chapter. Eight of the subjects worked in this way prior to marriage.

³²⁶ See [52], [73] and [74]. The need for their activities points to the lasting pecuniary difficulties experienced in some areas.

³²⁷ See Helena Waugh, (1774-1841 *m* 1814), [48] and [43].

the patient kindness she displayed, disarmed her antagonists, and induced them willingly to listen to what she had to say.³²⁸

The account of Jane's life was published in 1838, fifteen years before Dickens' acerbic caricature of Mrs Jellaby, an over-zealous supporter of missions.³²⁹ Jane's memoir suggests that as well as personal conviction or 'moral courage', resilience and empathy were also needed: virtues that are presented as a model to others who might take up this work.

Earlier discussion has illustrated that a number of the wives exercised a ministry of prayer informally. However, only one member of the cohort, Sarah Stevens, has been identified from the accounts as a prayer *leader*.³³⁰ Evidence shows that she ventured into the public realm in a very visible way. Following a depressing start in the Oxford circuit during 1791,³³¹ Sarah established prayer meetings at five o'clock every morning, 'to wrestle with God for Zion's prosperity.'³³² Two months later she ventured with her group into 'the most abandoned parts of the city'.³³³ 'The praying few being headed by a woman', Sarah's husband wrote, 'excites the attention and curiosity of the people'³³⁴ As a result new prayer groups were established in several areas in Oxford and a revival ensued, bringing new members to the 'long barren society.'³³⁵ Sarah's intrepid actions as a prayer leader, therefore, brought about real spiritual growth. This is a striking instance of 'the impact of *women on religion* rather than just the other way round.'³³⁶

Not surprisingly, no reference is made in any of the accounts to the subjects engaging in preaching after marriage.³³⁷ However, instances are recorded where wives took the initiative in public, exhorting, or promoting the gospel openly. The account of Mary Ann Cooke describes her intervention at a preaching service near Witney, when disruption outside the chapel began to affect those inside. As the elderly local preacher nominally in charge lost control of the situation, Mrs Cooke stood up, settling the crowd by giving out a 'solemn hymn' and praying 'with extraordinary power.'³³⁸ The preacher's second attempt to deliver his sermon again failed and Mrs Cooke stepped in again. She reproved those assembled, urging them to repent, and 'fly

³²⁸ [43: 807]. The choice of the word 'infidel' is interesting in view of the fact that Jane was collecting for work amongst 'the heathen.'

³²⁹ In *Bleak House* (1853) Mrs Jellaby's unswerving support of foreign missions overrode the pressing needs of her family.

³³⁰ As I show later, a separate source proves that another preacher's wife was also a prayer leader.

³³¹ See the discussion above in section 2.

³³² [28: 50].

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *Ibid.* Letter dated 12 Dec. 1791.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ Gregory, "Gender and Clerical Profession," 260.

³³⁷ Though, as I show later, other sources indicate that this work was done by one of the women.

³³⁸ [56: 1152-3]. According to *Hall*, Mrs Cooke was in Witney between 1825 and 1827.

for mercy to Christ Jesus', before praying and concluding the service.³³⁹ This undoubtedly demanded strength of character and a great deal of courage. Though the mob outside allowed Mrs Cooke and her party to pass through their midst, they later wrecked the chapel.³⁴⁰

Two other women are reported to have spread the Christian message among their communities in a more systematic fashion. At some stage after Susanna de Queteville's marriage in 1788, she experienced a renewed sense of 'the greatness of ... salvation,' which led to a desire in her: 'to proclaim it everywhere ...'³⁴¹ Though used to acting as a class leader, she began a wider and more public ministry to her neighbours, recording a wish to spend her whole time 'in instructing, exhorting, and encouraging souls from house-to-house.'³⁴² At a much later date, Rebecca Gladwin, a missionary's wife employed the same approach when arriving at Clarkebury in South Africa in 1840.³⁴³ Concerned to improve the spiritual condition of her own sex, Mrs Gladwin also visited homes, seeking to win converts.³⁴⁴ As a result a large class was formed in which Rebecca again took a leading role: 'communicating, by an interpreter, plain, appropriate, and faithful instructions.'³⁴⁵ The keen sense of mission felt by both these preachers' wives is evident, and though not evangelising in the literal sense of 'taking a text', they certainly became ambassadors for the gospel among their local communities. This personal approach in homes, or 'gossiping the gospel,' has been more usually associated with female evangelism in different Methodist sects.³⁴⁶ Significantly, these instances suggest that at different stages there were women in the mainstream movement engaging in similar strategies.

Additional sources reveal that the public ministry of several preachers' wives was wider than their accounts in the *Magazine* suggest. Mrs Mather, is shown to have worked as a prayer leader as early as 1760,³⁴⁷ whilst other evidence suggests that both Mary Entwisle³⁴⁸ and Mary Hunt³⁴⁹ visited the sick and had experience as class leaders at an early point in their married lives. Meanwhile, Zechariah Taft provides important evidence of the range of Sarah's Steven's public ministry. Taft describes Sarah as 'a peculiar helpmate' to her husband,' writing that she: '... laboured with him in the gospel, and sometimes laboured for him, when infirmities rendered

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ [57: 8]. Undated diary extract. Susanna married in 1788.

³⁴² *Ibid.* Susanna started work as a class leader prior to her marriage. See chapter seven above.

³⁴³ [61].

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 98. Her biographer wrote that it was her custom 'to dwell especially on the happy influence of Christianity on the female character.'

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁶ See especially Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

³⁴⁷ *EMP* 2: 180-181. The couple were stationed in Staffordshire at the time.

³⁴⁸ See "Diary of Mrs Entwisle 1793-1798." File MAM L. 613, Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester. Entry dated 21 Sept. [1795].

³⁴⁹ See "Memoir of the Rev. William Entwisle," *WMM* 55 (1832): 701.

him incapable of exercising in the public functions of his ministry.³⁵⁰ [Author's emphasis] Noting that Sarah often accompanied her husband, and would often follow the latter's sermon with her own exhortation,³⁵¹ Taft also provides important evidence of her role as a preacher. He recalls that Mr. Lomas, an itinerant preacher who described himself at the 1824 Conference as '... *the fruit of female preaching,*' had stated that: '*Mrs. Stevens was the instrument of my conversion to God.*' [Author's emphasis]³⁵² As William Stevens left the itinerancy in 1801,³⁵³ it is most probable that Sarah was active as a preacher prior to this period.

It can be seen therefore, that many preachers' wives were very busy, contriving to manage a range of public offices alongside their domestic responsibilities. As noted earlier, others in the cohort refrained from such public efforts, and it would be wrong to imply that these women were in any way inferior. Factors such as personal conviction,³⁵⁴ or traits of personality,³⁵⁵ helped to determine some individuals' decisions about their roles. Increasing household or family responsibilities also undoubtedly limited the possibilities for some women. As a young wife, Mary Walker complained:

I have been much taken up with domestic concerns. I frequently feel much at doing so little for the good of others; but I am almost fully occupied with my two young children, and am not to choose my own work, but to do what is set before me.³⁵⁶

Though Mary later took up various official responsibilities, frequent childbearing appears to have stymied some women's efforts completely. For Harriet Roadhouse, having her children 'so near together' prevented her 'from going amongst [the] people as often as she desired to do.'³⁵⁷ Poor health was another major factor influencing the wives' activities. Betsy Lofthouse suffered much due to the climate in Jamaica, a fact that is said to have 'greatly interfered with her plans for usefulness.'³⁵⁸ Moreover, several individuals in the cohort died shortly after their marriages, having little or no chance to explore the potential of their position as preachers' wives.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁰ Zechariah Taft, Ed., *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women* ... (Leeds: J. Stephens, 1825), 159.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 168.

³⁵³ [28: 129].

³⁵⁴ See earlier discussion of Elizabeth Burdsall [35] and Mrs Jennings [49: 109].

³⁵⁵ Elizabeth McAllum, for example, 'never ventured to act in any public capacity' because of her timid disposition and 'weak voice,' [18: 209]. Margaret Worrall's 'invincible and constitutional timidity' hindered her from taking up public work. [29: 840-41]. See also Mary Entwisle [8] and Ann Taylor [14].

³⁵⁶ [51: 1152]. This undated diary entry appears to have been written shortly after arriving in the Sandhurst circuit in 1818.

³⁵⁷ [30: 845]. This was at Sleaford, in Lincolnshire. Other members of the cohort had large families.

Sarah Turton, for example, had nine surviving children. [37].

³⁵⁸ [45: 382].

³⁵⁹ Mary Ault [20] died only ten weeks after her marriage and the marriage of Jane Fisher [10] lasted only six months.

Certainly, there seems to have been a general expectation that these women would embrace a public role. Mrs Sumner's husband wrote that she was: '... perfectly aware that, as the wife of a Wesleyan Methodist minister, it was expedient and right for her to take part in the various activities of the Church to which she belonged ...'³⁶⁰ Mrs Dernaley suggested that there were 'people everywhere who make the most unreasonable demands upon a minister's wife'.³⁶¹ Mary Entwisle's account reveals that she experienced forthright criticism when a person 'bluntly [blamed] her in a Class meeting for not acting in a public way.'³⁶² Some strength of character was therefore required to stand up to such pressures. After reappraising her situation, Mary Entwisle decided that her energies should remain focused on her home.³⁶³ Interestingly, Ann Taylor, who had 'a natural diffidence to appear in public,' seems to have resisted her husband's efforts to engage her in official work.³⁶⁴ Mr Taylor commented rather tersely in her account: 'I was pretty certain she might have been very useful in meeting a class, but she did not think so...'³⁶⁵ These examples show that the women were eminently capable of exercising their own choice.

Expectations about the appropriate *boundaries* of female service also had an impact upon those who were fully committed to more public activities. Mrs Mather's position as a prayer leader at Darlastan in the 1760s, for example, provoked antagonism from some quarters. Her husband noted that: 'Longing for peace, and preferring the judgment of other men to my own, I agreed that my wife should not hold any more prayer-meetings. Immediately the work began to decay'³⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Susanna de Queteville's house-to-house mission also won some unwelcome criticism, and she experienced 'many trials, oppositions and contradictions from without.'³⁶⁷ Susanna wrote:

The enemy made use of the very persons who should have seconded my efforts, in order to try and mortify me; which led me at times to reason, and to conclude that it was not right for me to put myself forward, or to speak of these things.³⁶⁸

This opposition obviously weakened her resolve, but in the end a combination of domestic cares and ill health were apparently what caused her to give up this work.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁰ [68:291]. Speaking of the clergy wives in the Established Church Jeremy Gregory has pointed out that 'ideas about ... wifely behaviour came not only from the Church but also from the laity's expectations.' See "Gender and Clerical Profession," 260.

³⁶¹ [70: 1063].

³⁶² [8: 372].

³⁶³ *Ibid.* See the later discussion in chapter nine below.

³⁶⁴ [14: 55].

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ *EMP* 2: 180-181. Whether Mrs Mather was able to take up this role at a later date cannot be established.

³⁶⁷ [57: 8].

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Interestingly, in the texts surveyed comments about the ‘proper’ scope of female service start to appear in 1804,³⁷⁰ a year after the Conference prohibition of female preaching.³⁷¹ Meanwhile, although, the accounts as a whole celebrate the diversity of female talents and the resourcefulness of the preachers’ wives in a multitude of formal and informal roles, it is true to say, that with a few exceptions, all these women are shown to be working within acceptable parameters. Moreover, accounts that openly draw the readers’ attention to evangelism as a primary role for women often recall Methodism of former times with a nostalgic glow. In 1860, for example, Mrs Vasey’s son poked fun at ‘the delicate ladies of this day’ and ‘our refined tastes and manners,’ drawing attention to the changed culture of the movement.³⁷² By this period it was safe to recount the activities of Jane and her ‘band of Methodist heroines’ as such behaviour was considered not only inappropriate, but quaint.³⁷³ In real life, as the earlier description of Mrs Gladwin’s house-to-house efforts suggests, it was women’s evangelism in missionary outposts that superseded such efforts on the home front.³⁷⁴ By the following decade one preachers’ wife was advising her daughter, who was also married to a minister, thus:

“Your first duty, as a wife, is to study your husband’s comfort in all things; and, depend upon it, in the long run, you will best serve the church by fulfilling what is every wife’s first duty. I know that there are people everywhere who make the most unreasonable demands upon a minister’s wife. There is a constant cry for ‘visiting’; do not let it distress you, because you cannot satisfy them in this. Make yourself as useful as you can, in any way, public or private; but never to the neglect of home duties.”³⁷⁵

In the eyes of some of the preachers’ wives, therefore, there needed to be a greater retreat into domesticity.

The above overview of the textual evidence pertaining to the women in the cohort has revealed the full complexity of their lives. Though there are many who felt their calling to be active in the public domain, others believed that their efforts should be channelled towards their homes and families. Most women were taking informed and often difficult decisions about the scope of their public service, based on their convictions and understanding of their personal vocation. Their choices, as shown above, were complicated by a variety of factors, and circumstances that could rapidly change. The following two case studies of Mrs Mary Entwisle and Mrs Ann Leach explore the experience and roles of two of the cohort in more detail, throwing further light on the itinerant lifestyle and the choices open to these women.

³⁷⁰ One of the reasons why Eliza Byron did not assume public office after her marriage is said to have been ‘the views she had formed of the proper province of her sex’. [7: 46].

³⁷¹ See chapters three and five above.

³⁷² [62: 579].

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁴ On this aspect see Jocelyn Murray, ‘Gender Attitudes and the Contribution of Women to Evangelism and Ministry in the Nineteenth Century’ in John Wolffe ed., *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780 – 1980* (London: SPCK, 1995), 97 – 116.

³⁷⁵ [70: 1063].

Chapter Nine: Case Study 1: Mrs Mary Entwisle (1770-1804)

Introduction

The memoir of Mrs Mary Entwisle was written by her husband, Joseph and appeared in the August edition of the *Methodist Magazine* of 1804, one of two biographical accounts in this issue. At this time, under the recent editorship of Joseph Benson, the format of the denominational periodical had been reorganised into distinct departments. Spiritual narrative was found in both the prestigious ‘Biography’ section, which began each issue, and the ‘Grace of God’ department, which came later in each edition. The account of Mary’s life was placed in the latter slot. Consisting of eight pages, its title was: ‘The Grace of God Manifested: in a Brief Account of the Life and Death of Mrs. Entwisle who died in Macclesfield, March 12, 1804’.¹

The account of Mary’s life came into print as the Methodist leadership were increasingly anxious to preserve their own authority, and stamp out any unorthodox activities within the movement. This was a period when the scope of female service in the movement, and particularly the work of women preachers had become an important issue. Meanwhile, the role of ministers’ wives was also firmly under the spotlight. The Conference rule of 1802 regarding propriety of dress, with the accompanying admonition that the itinerants set the best example ‘in everything’ was indicative of an expectation that both the preachers and their wives should not only embody piety, but also conform to and mirror the models of propriety that the leadership so desired.² The following analysis will examine the extent to which Mary’s published account presents the appropriate ideals.

Furthermore, the current chapter takes up the second major strand of the research. Using the published account as a starting point a wide range of other primary and secondary sources are employed to go *beyond* the representation of Mary’s life provided by the printed text. With the aid of Mary’s manuscript journal and other life-writings, her father’s will, parish records and other local records, the chapter pieces together a much fuller picture of Mary’s childhood and education, her courtship and family life before and after marriage, and her evolving spirituality. The practicalities of the itinerant life and added complexities for women of childbearing age are further illuminated. Most importantly it is possible to gain significant insights into Mary’s own perspective on her life experiences and spirituality, her vocation and her role as a preacher’s wife.

¹ *MM* 27 (1804): 368-376. I discuss Benson’s editorship in chapter one above.

² J. A. Vickers, “Documents and Source Material,” in *HMCCGB*, 4: 303. See earlier discussion in chapter three.

Mary's family background and kinship

Mary Entwisle was born on 21 December 1770.³ She was the second child of Marmaduke and Elizabeth Pawson, and spent her formative years in the small rural township of Thorner near Leeds, where her father was in business as a farmer and maltster.⁴ Mary seems to have had a happy and settled childhood in the family home. The Pawsons were well established in the local community, and Mary was fortunate to have affectionate parents and a close knit group of siblings, as well as other relatives near by. The daughter of committed Methodists, Mary was also brought up firmly within this way of life. Her family was very active in the local Methodist Society and beyond, for Mary's father held office as a local preacher, and her uncle, John Pawson was one of Wesley's earliest itinerants.⁵ Furthermore, as travelling preachers in the Leeds circuit found a warm welcome in Marmaduke Pawson's home many other Methodist ministers were regular visitors to Mary's household.⁶

Details of Mary's family are provided in Figure 17 below.⁷ At the time of Mary's birth Marmaduke Pawson is recorded as a 'yeoman' in the records of Thorner parish church,⁸ and his economic and social standing can be discerned from other sources describing a 'prosperous'⁹ and 'respectable' individual.¹⁰ He is reported to have been 'a man of few words', but to have been 'generally chearful' [sic].¹¹ Prudent and circumspect with business acquaintances, he was 'a faithful and most affectionate husband' and very tender-hearted towards his kin.¹² Little is known of Mary's mother, Elizabeth, but it seems clear that Mary, known affectionately as 'Polly', grew up in a loving and stable home.¹³ She was one of seven siblings.¹⁴ At the time of her tenth birthday Mary had an older sister Gracy aged twelve; two younger sisters, Elizabeth

³ "The Grace of God Manifested: in a Brief Account of the Life and Death of Mrs. Entwisle who died in Macclesfield, March 12, 1804", *MM* 27 (1804): 368-376, specifically 368. Hereafter this source will be referred to as *MEMM*. This provides Mary's date of birth, but no reference to this or her baptism has been found in the parish registers for Thorner.

⁴ Marmaduke Pawson's *MS* will, dated 3 July 1797 gives his occupation as 'maltster', and shows that he also owned land and property in Thorner. Copy supplied by the Borthwick Institute at the University of York, from the register of wills of the York diocese: v. 142 f. 105.

⁵ On Marmaduke Pawson's conversion and commencement as a local preacher see "A Short Account of the Dealings of God with Mr. Marmaduke Pawson, Written by Himself", *AM* 16 (1793): 511-516 and 556-560. On the conversion and ministry of Mary's uncle, John Pawson, see *EMP*, 4: 1-108.

⁶ *MEMM*, 368.

⁷ Figure 17: 'Marmaduke Pawson's family' is in Appendix 1 following this chapter.

⁸ *Thorner Parish Register, 1623-1841* (typewritten copy made by Thorner and District Historical Society, 1980) Leeds City Reference Library, entry dated 12 June 1781.

⁹ J. Entwisle, ed., *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwisle Fifty Four Years a Wesleyan Minister* 1848, Seventh Edition (London: James Nichols, 1861), 82. Hereafter *JEM*.

¹⁰ *MEMM*, 368.

¹¹ "An Account of the Death of Mr. M. Pawson", *MM* 21 (1798): 471; *PL* 1: 95.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1: 113.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Details of Mary's siblings are given in Figure 17 in Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.

and Sarah, aged seven and five respectively; and a baby brother, John, who was almost two years old. Marmaduke and Elizabeth's brood was not complete, however, until 1784 by which time there were two further girls, Hannah and Martha. As the second eldest daughter within the family, Mary may have found early female role models in her mother, and elder sister, Gracy.¹⁵ She is likely to have had responsibility for the care of the younger children, and would, no doubt, have been expected to have set a good example to these siblings herself.

Mary's education and spiritual development

Available evidence suggests that Mary's home environment was one where literature was much in evidence. Marmaduke Pawson referred to spiritual classics in his autobiography, and as a local preacher would have been expected to be familiar with Wesley's writings.¹⁶ An indication of possessing a range of works is apparent from arrangements in his will for the dispersal of books in his library.¹⁷ No wonder therefore, that Mary is said to have been 'accustomed to reading much from an early age'.¹⁸ As a number of Mary's relatives also produced religious narratives, it would appear that in her household both reading and writing were seen as valuable and aids to personal spiritual development.¹⁹ Moreover, when instructing his executors, Marmaduke Pawson insisted that his daughters should have any of his books that they might desire.²⁰ Thus the education of both sexes was important in Mary's family.

Judging by what can be gathered about the general level of education in Thorner at the time, Mary was fortunate to have this early kind of background. Though a school had been established from the 1760s in Thorner, it appears that the general standard of literacy within the parish was slow to increase. Between 1784 and 1793, for example, 39% of individuals marrying at the local parish church of St. Peter's were unable to sign their names.²¹ For women the rate was even higher, and among Mary's contemporaries half of all brides registered their consent to marriage by making a mark.²² Mary, however, belonged to the other 50% of women married in the parish: the literate brides.²³ In a manuscript diary that she started shortly after her

¹⁵ Gracy, is said to have 'enjoyed a sense of the Love of Christ for many years'. See Marmaduke Pawson, "Dealings of God", 560, and *PL* 1: 95.

¹⁶ Marmaduke Pawson, "Dealings of God", 512 – 13. Here Mary's father noted that his spiritual development was influenced by reading Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and *An Alarm to the Unconverted* by Joseph Alleine.

¹⁷ *MS* will of Marmaduke Pawson.

¹⁸ *MEMM*, 370.

¹⁹ See note six above, regarding the religious narratives by Mary's uncle and her father.

²⁰ *MS* will of Marmaduke Pawson.

²¹ Terence Brown, *Thorner: The Making of a Yorkshire Village* (Leeds: Thorner and District History Society, 1991), 96 -99.

²² *Ibid.*, 99.

²³ Entry no. 182 in 'A Marriage Register Book for Thorner', *Thorner Parish Register, 1623–1841*.

marriage in 1792 a well formed and neatly spaced hand is revealed. Mary's narrative flows fluently, and although punctuation is sparse, the document as a whole is marred by few errors of spelling, deletions or alterations.²⁴

The form and narrative style of Mary's diary therefore indicate that she benefited from a good standard of education. Meanwhile this journal provides the only clue as to where Mary's formal schooling took place. Writing in June 1796, Mary recalled one occasion when, as a child, she went paddling in the local beck with a friend during the school lunch break. She wrote: 'when we returned to school, our Master who was the Minister of the parish expressed his surprize [sic] that I and another girl who was serious should be found in such an exercise'.²⁵ Thus it seems clear that Mary attended the township school in Thorner, although there is no other clue to indicate for how long, or when this period of education took place. Significantly, Mary's comment also shows she was identified as a 'serious' child, even when at school. The minister's censure of her spontaneous play underlines the kind of inspection that Methodists of the period received. This episode foreshadows her later experience as the wife of a preacher, when Mary's conduct was also scrutinized and similar judgements made about her behaviour.

As a second-generation Methodist, Mary's early religious experience was bound to be shaped by her family's involvement in the movement. Indeed, it could be argued that she had the opportunity to imbibe Methodist ideals almost from birth. According to the *Magazine* account of her life, Mary's spiritual awareness was indeed awakened from an early age, as she joined the Methodist Society and was converted when only ten years old.²⁶ The part played by Mary's father this period of religious development seems to have been especially significant. The account suggests that Marmaduke's instructions and 'prayers in private' made a deep impression on her 'when very young'.²⁷ At a later stage, her father's funeral sermon for 'an old disciple,' infused a desire in Mary to fill the place of the one who had died.²⁸ Such instances indicate that Marmaduke's private role as a parent and his public office as a Methodist local preacher were both instrumental in furthering Mary's spiritual growth.

Mary's memoir suggests that the family's hospitality towards other Methodist itinerants was also conducive to the development of the young girl's religious life. The period

²⁴ Mary Entwisle, File: MAM L. 613, Diary of Mrs Entwisle 1793 - 1798, Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester. Hereafter *MD*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22-23. Brown, *Yorkshire Village*, 80. Dates here suggest the minister was possibly Edward Carne MA, incumbent at St. Peter's church from October 1777.

²⁶ *MEMM*, 369. This makes her one of the youngest converts among the preachers' wives identified by the present study.

²⁷ *MEMM*, 369.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

from 1770 to 1790 was one when Methodism in the Leeds circuit 'was experiencing substantial growth' and many leading ministers were stationed in the town.²⁹ As those 'planned' to preach in Thorner found overnight lodgings with Mary's family she had regular contact with some of the most important travelling preachers of the period. She later acknowledged the personal value gained from the conversation, advice and prayers of such men.³⁰

Mary is said to have been first convinced of her personal need for conversion during a sermon preached by Joseph Benson at the latter end of 1780, and she joined the society shortly afterwards.³¹ At the time, as indicated above, she was merely ten years old. On the eighth of February 1781 Mary was also present when Mr Benson took a text from Malachi: 'The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple.'³² At a Watchnight service that followed the sermon the congregation continued 'in prayer, praise and exhortation'.³³ It was during this time that Mary is reported to have 'obtained a sense of divine mercy.'³⁴ It seems very significant that Mary's father was again a major instrument in this spiritual breakthrough, which occurred while he 'was engaged in fervent supplication to God.'³⁵ As shown earlier, the length of time between conviction of sin and conversion differed for each individual. In Mary's case there was a speedy transition: a period of about two months.³⁶

Unlike many testimonies relating the process of conversion, the published account of Mary's life makes no mention of any changes in her personal qualities or behaviour following this important spiritual turning point: an omission which perhaps stems from Mary's young age at the time. She appears to have suffered some setbacks, however, and is said to have 'lost a degree of the grace she had received' during her time at school.³⁷ Mary's regular contact with others outside the Methodist fold may well have weakened her spiritual resolve at this stage, or this comment may reflect the common distrust of educational establishments expressed in many Methodist narratives.³⁸ At a later date Mary gave thanks for her early conversion, and for God's provision of a loving husband, who had also been called into God's service from a young age.³⁹

²⁹ D. Colin Dews, "Methodism in Leeds from 1791 - 1861: An Analysis of the Development and Involvement of the Various Denominations and Sects within the Methodist Movement in a Changing Urban Community," (M. Phil, Bradford, 1984), 26.

³⁰ *MEMM*, 369.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Malachi 3:1.

³³ *MEMM*, 369.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *MEMM*, 370.

³⁸ See the discussion in chapter five and other examples in chapter seven.

³⁹ *MD*, 1. Entry dated 27 Jan. 1793. Mary wrote: '[God] called us both when young to seek his face, and soon manifested his pardoning love to our souls ...'

Mary's courtship and marriage

The end of the 1780s marked a very difficult time for Mary's family. At Easter 1789 Mary's aunt, Sarah Tarboton was thrown from a horse, and died from her injuries shortly afterwards.⁴⁰ In July of the same year, there was the first breach in Mary's birth family as one of her siblings, her younger sister Sarah, became ill and died aged only fourteen years.⁴¹ Unfortunately this was not the end of family misfortunes. In December 1790 Mary's elder sister, Gracy, who had been married to William Maltby since 1788, also fell ill and then died at the age of twenty-two.⁴² For Mary, however, happier times were ahead. In October 1791 Joseph Entwisle, a young Methodist itinerant preacher visited Thorner with Mary's uncle, John Pawson. Shortly afterwards, after gaining permission from Marmaduke Pawson, Joseph became Mary's suitor.

Joseph Entwisle was born on 15 April 1767 in Manchester. Brought up by Presbyterian parents, he came into contact with Methodist members when serving his apprenticeship, and subsequently started to attend Methodist preaching regularly. He later joined the Society, being converted shortly afterwards at the relatively young age of fourteen. After helping at prayer meetings, Joseph became convinced of a call to preach and with encouragement from John Allen, the superintendent of the Manchester circuit, started as a local preacher in 1783.⁴³ During the following year John Wesley read Joseph's account of his conversion and call to preaching, and urged the young man to become a travelling preacher. However the latter decided to remain as a local preacher, deferring entry into the itinerancy until 1787. After being put 'on trial' Joseph's initial appointments as a travelling preacher were to Oxfordshire, Birstall, and Halifax. In August 1791 Joseph was admitted to 'full connexion', and reappointed to Halifax where his superintendent was John Pawson.⁴⁴ From this point onwards Joseph Entwisle's connection with the Pawson family became much more intimate.

The appointment at Halifax gave John Pawson and Joseph a chance to renew a relationship of friendship and mutual respect. They had met initially at Manchester in 1784, where Mary's uncle had supported Joseph, then a local preacher.⁴⁵ Later, Joseph and another young preacher, James Ridall, were appointed to Birstall near Leeds where John Pawson was the superintendant minister, and the two junior preachers lived with the older itinerant and his

⁴⁰ "Sarah Tarboton of Thorner", *AM* 19 (1796): 296. Sarah was Marmaduke Pawson's sister.

⁴¹ Marmaduke Pawson, "Dealings of God", 560.

⁴² *Ibid.*; *PL* 1: 95.

⁴³ *JEM*, 1-14. Joseph must have shown unusual promise, as at this time he was only fifteen years of age.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-65.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

wife. The ‘mild and humble’ nature of his younger colleagues pleased Mr Pawson. He considered them ‘useful’ preachers, who had won love and esteem in the circuit.⁴⁶ Meanwhile Joseph was also pleased with the choice of his superintendent at Halifax in 1791, and is said to have ‘entertained great respect and affection’ for John Pawson.⁴⁷

By this time Joseph was twenty-four years old, and having been admitted to ‘full connexion’ at the previous Conference, was free to seek a wife if he so wished. His biographer reveals that he had already devoted serious thought and prayer to the general issue of whether Methodist preachers ought to wed, arriving at: ‘a full conviction that a Christian minister’s usefulness is greatly promoted by marriage, - at a proper time, and to a suitable person.’⁴⁸ He now sought Divine direction through ‘frequent and fervent prayer’ to guide him in making this ‘connexion for life.’⁴⁹ During these deliberations Joseph’s mind turned to Mary Pawson, whom he must have met at an earlier stage in his acquaintanceship with her uncle.⁵⁰

Joseph’s thoughts crystallised during a journey to York with his superintendent in October 1791. En route the two men dined at Thorney, where Joseph had the opportunity to observe Mary more closely, recording that he was: ‘much pleased with the modesty and simplicity of [Mr Pawson’s] niece’.⁵¹ Joseph felt strongly that meeting Mary at this point was providential: an idea that was reinforced the next day when Mr Hodgson one of the York preachers, unaware of Joseph’s interest, recommended Miss Pawson to him: ‘as a very proper person for a companion.’⁵² As Mr Hodgson had lodged with Marmaduke Pawson frequently, Joseph made more particular enquiries about Mary, concluding ‘I think she will be an agreeable and spiritual companion’.⁵³ He clearly recognised the need to find a partner who was not only suitable on a personal and social level, but also of an appropriate *spiritual* disposition.

On the return journey to Halifax, Joseph made his thoughts known to John Pawson who, he wrote: ‘quite approved of my design.’⁵⁴ This was a necessary endorsement both on a personal and professional level.⁵⁵ At Joseph’s request the older man acted as an intermediary, writing to Marmaduke Pawson and ‘proposing a correspondence with a view to marriage

⁴⁶ *JEM*, 45. John Pawson later described Joseph as ‘a truly amiable young man,’ and ‘a lovely young man’. *PL* 1: 108 and 110. Letters to Charles Atmore dated 7 and 19 Oct. 1791 respectively.

⁴⁷ *JEM*, 65.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 66–67.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 67. Extract from Joseph’s journal dated 17 Oct. 1791.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ See earlier discussion of the ‘The Rules of a Helper’ (1753), in chapters three and four above.

between [Joseph] and his daughter'.⁵⁶ Joseph confided in his journal that: 'I hope the Lord will incline the hearts of the parents that way, and likewise give the object of my choice an affection for me'.⁵⁷ A positive reply came on 4 November. Marmaduke permitted Joseph to visit and converse with Mary, writing that if the couple found 'a suitable affection upon further knowledge of each other' he would have no objection to their marriage.⁵⁸

Mary's first private meeting with her suitor appears to have taken place a fortnight later when the couple spent about two hours together at Thorner, a time which they began with prayer. In his journal Joseph again described his satisfaction with Mary's personal and religious qualities. If she had a suitable affection for him, he wrote, Mary would be: 'a most amiable, agreeable, and truly spiritual companion'.⁵⁹ The couple corresponded with each other during their courtship, deciding that they would each dedicate the hour from six o'clock each evening for mutual prayer.⁶⁰ Their commitment to each other and desire for a prayerful union from this early stage is thus apparent.

Mary's diary is silent on this period of courtship, but a comment from John Pawson indicates that Joseph had made a firm proposal of marriage by early December 1791.⁶¹ However, as later extracts from the latter's journal reveal, the future bridegroom still underwent a good deal of soul-searching concerning the purity of his motives and actions. During one six o'clock 'appointment' in mutual prayer, for example, Joseph was led to review the fundamental principles underlying his conduct. Asking himself: 'What end have I got in view?' he eventually concluded that his aim and design was good.⁶² As the time for his marriage drew nearer, Joseph also examined the grounds for believing that he was truly following providence.⁶³ His ruminations suggest the continuing baleful influence of Wesley's teaching on marriage and the single life. At one point, for example, Joseph was led to question whether his growing love for Mary constituted 'inordinate creature attachment'.⁶⁴

The foregoing discussion illustrates the reflective frame of mind in which Joseph Entwisle approached his marriage to Mary Pawson during the spring of 1792. Writing to his

⁵⁶ *JEM*, 68.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶¹ *PL* 1: 113. Letter to Charles Atmore dated 9 December 1791.

⁶² *JEM*, 72. Journal entry dated 12 Jan. 1792. See also chapter four above, where the specific details of Joseph's argument are discussed in more detail.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 77, entry dated 6 March [1792].

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 80, entry dated 28 April [1792]. This phrase was one that Wesley used in his article: "A Thought on Marriage", *AM* 8 (1785): 533 – 535.

‘dearest Mary’, shortly before their wedding Joseph suggested that they now needed to enter upon marriage with ‘the utmost devotion’ and ‘solemnly dedicate [their] all to God.’⁶⁵ He informed Mary of a future journey together that was bound to contain trials as well as pleasure, but assured her that if they were careful to look to God for all their needs ‘every providential affliction’ would be sanctified.⁶⁶ It was Joseph’s wish that they would never add to life’s misfortunes by wounding or grieving each other, but would bear one another’s burdens and trust God in every eventuality.⁶⁷

In daily life, Joseph suggested, he and Mary should aim daily to ‘promote each other’s temporal and spiritual prosperity’ and from now on pursued a single interest and end.⁶⁸ They should have no secrets, but should place their entire confidence in each other. Discussing the state of their minds frequently, and praying together about their ‘present states and necessities’, he argued, would help to advance their life together as ‘fellow-heirs of the grace of life’.⁶⁹ Joseph proposed time together in mutual prayer twice-daily in addition to any general family prayers, winding up his letter with a heartfelt appeal: ‘May the God of all grace make us both patterns of piety and serious godliness!’⁷⁰ This is a very significant statement, articulating the desire for personal spiritual standards that would be worthy of imitation. Joseph’s private plea, also points to the very *public* nature of the couple’s conduct and life together after marriage.

Eventually the time for deliberation and plans was over and on 2 May 1792 Mary Pawson and Joseph Entwisle were married at St. Peter’s Church, Thorner. Joseph was twenty-five years old at the time and his bride was twenty-one. The wedding day started with family prayer at Marmaduke Pawson’s house. Then all the family except Mary’s mother repaired to the parish church, where the marriage service was conducted by the curate.⁷¹ Returning home, John Pawson ‘gave out a hymn and prayed’, and Joseph recorded a palpable sense of blessing during these proceedings.⁷² When retiring together Mary and Joseph marked the beginning of their married life with prayer, also reading over, and signing ‘a covenant with God’, that Joseph

⁶⁵ *JEM*, 79. Letter dated 20 April 1792.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ See entry no. 182 in ‘A Marriage Register Book for Thorner’ contained in *Thorner Parish Register, 1623–1841*. The marriage register describes Joseph as a ‘gentleman’ of Entwistle, Halifax. Witnesses to the wedding were Marmaduke Pawson and John Pawson. See also *JEM*, 80. Joseph wrote that the curate: ‘read over that solemn form of words in a manner truly shocking. He read as fast as he could, and with the utmost indifference imaginable.’ Whether this was an intentional slight, denoting prejudice against Methodists in general, or whether the cleric was simply unnerved by this particular phalanx of the Society’s members is unclear.

⁷² *Ibid.*

had prepared.⁷³ A few days later Joseph returned to Halifax with his new bride. Mary had left behind her parents, three sisters and a brother, as well as other close relatives. She now embarked on a much more uncertain existence as Mrs Entwisle, the wife of an itinerant preacher.

Before moving on to discuss Mary's married life there is one other area that needs to be mentioned. From the above details it is very clear that Joseph had been careful to observe all the existing rules applying to his position as a Methodist itinerant preacher who wanted to wed. He had completed his probationary period, had consulted with other senior preachers on the advisability of marriage, and on his choice of bride. The object of his affections was a member of the Methodist Society, and Joseph had obtained the permission of her parents before proceeding with any personal approaches. His actions were not hasty, but the result of a lengthy period of prayer. Finally, he believed that his union with Mary was fully in accordance with God's will for them both. Despite fulfilling all these requirements, however, John Pawson reported a growing coldness from William Thompson, who was President of the Conference that year, and noted that the latter was: 'offended with Joseph Entwisle because of his marriage'.⁷⁴ It seems that for the Methodist itinerant preachers, even after Wesley's death, a change in marital status was not always welcome.

The itinerant life

For any woman marriage is a significant turning point: a crucial life stage that inaugurates a completely different pattern of living. For those marrying Methodist preachers, as previously noted, the sense of dislocation with familiar prenuptial ways was especially keen. There is no record of Mary's feelings on the day that she left her home village of Thorner. However, the significance of her altered situation and the responsibility this entailed was not lost on Joseph, who wrote:

I have taken away my dear wife from her father's house, a situation in many respects very agreeable. She has forsaken father and mother, brother and sisters, and has set out with me, who a little while ago was a stranger, on an itinerant life. How shall I be able to make her suitable returns?⁷⁵

Although Mary's departure from her affectionate family and the Methodist society at Thorner must have been a wrench, her strong roots in the tradition and frequent contact with those engaging in the Methodist ministry arguably meant that she was better prepared than many

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 81. Joseph noted: 'We signed and sealed it in the presence of the Lord, considering ourselves as his property, and resolved to devote ourselves afresh to his service in our new relation.'

⁷⁴ *PL* 1: 119.

⁷⁵ *JEM*, 83.

women embarking on an itinerant life. In the published memoir of Mary's life Joseph wrote of his wife as possessing tenderness and sensibility: characteristics that would allow empathy with others.⁷⁶ Mary is described as being modest about her own achievements in the religious life,⁷⁷ impeccably honest,⁷⁸ yet judicious and restrained in that: 'if she could not speak well of a person, she was silent'.⁷⁹ However, from other remarks it appears that Mary had a rather shy and retiring nature. For example, Joseph alluded to her 'natural timidity', also describing his wife as 'naturally cautious and diffident'.⁸⁰ Thus Mary may have found the move into the public arena that her marriage occasioned especially challenging.

Some insight into the young woman's feelings can be gained from an entry in her personal diary. Nine months after her wedding Mary wrote: 'I feel an earnest desire that my dear husband and I may be helps one to another, and a blessing to the people amongst whom he is called to labour, may we be as lights to all around us ...'.⁸¹ She continued: 'God forbid that I should be a hinderance [sic] to him in the great work thou hast called him to ...'.⁸² The comment is worthy of note, revealing Mary's unqualified support for her husband's ministry, and also clearly demonstrating some nervousness regarding her own role as a preacher's wife.

Other evidence suggests a deepening of her relationship with her husband and the adoption in daily life of the principles set out in Joseph's prenuptial letter. In January 1793, for example, Mary expressed thankfulness for the providential way that she and Joseph had been brought together, writing that God had made them one: 'in every sense of the word,' also blessing God for their 'happy union' and the fact that their 'regard for each other [had] hitherto been increasing'.⁸³ 'Nothing has ever happened to cause any shyness' she recorded, describing herself and her husband as being of 'one heart and one way'.⁸⁴ Mary continued: '[We] take pleasure in unbosoming our souls to each other, in bearing one anothers [sic] burdens, and so fulfilling the law of love ...'.⁸⁵ At a later stage, Mary enumerated the special qualities of her husband and acknowledged the ways in which he sought to assist her in the spiritual life. 'The Lord has blessed me with a kind, tender hearted and affectionat [sic] partner', she wrote, 'who endeavours to promote my welfare by his example, prayers and spiritual conversation'.⁸⁶ Other

⁷⁶ *MEMM*, 375.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 373.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 373.

⁸¹ *MD*, 5. Entry dated 17 February [1793].

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *MD*, 1-2. Entry dated 27 Jan. 1793.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 23. Entry dated June [1796].

extracts from Mary's manuscript diary refer to her 'dear husband', and 'precious companion.'⁸⁷ Joseph, she suggested, was the 'true partner of [her] weal or woe'.⁸⁸ Such comments show that a strong bond of love and fellowship continued to underpin the couple's union.

Joseph's journal entries also express a growing closeness to his spouse and satisfaction with wedded life. At an early stage in their marriage he referred to 'many refreshing seasons in social prayer' with Mary since their wedding, reporting 'unusual nearness to God at many times', and a positive impact on his ministry.⁸⁹ Significantly, he alluded to Charles Wesley, who, unlike his older brother, John, was happily married: 'From what I have experienced since I was married,' Joseph wrote, 'I am confirmed in the opinion of the late Rev. Charles Wesley, that when any that fear God marry and acknowledge him in their marriage, they receive a larger degree of grace.'⁹⁰ A little later he wrote: 'I think I am the happiest of men: God has given me a help-meet who is a continual blessing to me... Blessed be God for all his mercies!'⁹¹

In practice Mary's introduction to the itinerant life in May 1792 was eased by the fact that Joseph was currently stationed at Halifax, where John Pawson, Mary's uncle, was the Assistant. In fact the Entwistles lived with the older preacher and his wife, Frances. John Pawson described his lodgers as a 'bonny couple,' and said that his household was 'one of the happiest families in the whole world'.⁹² Mary's time under the same roof of her uncle was relatively short, however, for Joseph had almost completed two years at Halifax, which meant that the 1792 Conference was certain to appoint him to a different circuit.⁹³

Joseph's ministry and appointments

A survey of all Joseph's appointments, shown in Figure 18, reveals that Mary underwent a total of seven major changes of residence as a result of her husband's work.⁹⁴ From Halifax the couple went to Leeds until 1794, and from there to Colne, where Joseph served another biennial term. In 1796 he was appointed to the Wakefield circuit where the couple stayed until 1798.⁹⁵ A move to York followed, seemingly allowed to facilitate contact

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 and 25, entries for 26 July 1795 and 17 July [1796].

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1795.

⁸⁹ *JEM*, 83-4. Entry dated 19 May 1992.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁹² *PL* 1: 118. Letter to Charles Atmore dated 22 May 1792.

⁹³ As reported earlier, Wesley's 1784 *Deed of Declaration* allowed a term of up to three years, but the usual period of office during the 1790s was two years.

⁹⁴ See 'Timeline of Mary's married life,' in Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter. This total includes her initial move to Halifax.

⁹⁵ *JEM*, 133; 142 and 156.

with the Pawson family at Thorner, following the death of Mary's father.⁹⁶ After this biennial appointment Conference sent Joseph to the Hull circuit in August 1800, where the couple stayed until 1802, before moving on to Macclesfield in Cheshire.⁹⁷ This latter trip was the last major removal that Mary undertook with her husband. Joseph was reappointed to the Macclesfield circuit in 1803, and it was here that Mary died in April 1804.⁹⁸

As reported earlier, though the itinerants usually learned of their forthcoming appointments at the time of the July Conference, in practice last minute changes could occur. Such complications affected the Entwistles on two occasions. In August 1792, after hearing news that he was to be posted to the Bradford circuit, Joseph was sent instead to Leeds.⁹⁹ The younger itinerant saw this as a providential change at the time. He was keen to work in the Leeds circuit, among people who were known for their 'deep and genuine piety,' and happy to remain so close to Thorner.¹⁰⁰ A second reversal of plans occurred in 1794. Having had a very full workload in Leeds, Joseph was relieved to hear of a posting to nearby Otley, a less arduous circuit.¹⁰¹ Five days later, however, he heard that another itinerant had petitioned for the Otley circuit because his wife was seriously ill.¹⁰² Consequently the Entwistles went to Colne in Lancashire, and as described later, the move was much less felicitous for the couple.¹⁰³

This summary suggests that, apart from the two last-minute changes imposed by Conference, the couple were relatively well served by the stationing procedure. In terms of geographical location, for example, the itinerants could be sent to any circuit in the Methodist connexion, and as earlier examples have shown, some individuals were obliged to travel huge distances between their various posts. Joseph's record, however, shows that out of seven appointments during Mary's lifetime, five were in Yorkshire and within reasonable distance of Mary's family. In fact the couple's furthest destination to the west of the country was Colne in Lancashire, whilst the posting to Macclesfield in Cheshire was their farthest journey south.

This record also indicates that Mary was fortunate in having a husband who was well regarded by leading itinerants, and popular amongst the Methodist members that he served. Holding appointments within major circuits, and among prosperous strongholds of the

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 165 and 167. See also *PL* 2: 137-8. Some oversight of the family's affairs was necessary after Marmaduke's death in April 1798, as Mary's brother, John, was only nineteen at the time.

⁹⁷ *JEM*, 175; 181 and 192.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 196. On Mary's last illness and death see *ibid.*, 197-200 and *MEMM*, 373-76.

⁹⁹ *JEM*, 86 and 88. No reason for this last-minute substitution is apparent.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 117. Joseph received this news on 4 August 1794.

¹⁰² The 'healthiness of the situation' at Otley is remarked upon in: the account of Elizabeth Robinson [25].

¹⁰³ *JEM*, 119- 122; *MD*, 15-16. This episode is considered in more detail later in the chapter.

movement, Joseph was soon assigned the post of superintendent.¹⁰⁴ In addition Joseph's steady run of biennial appointments also suggests that he found acceptance in each circuit, possibly deriving from his ability in the pulpit. In fact, Joseph was petitioned to stay on for a third year when he was stationed at Hull, but chose to move instead, hoping to benefit Mary's health.¹⁰⁵

Although the end of each July Conference brought confirmation of the location and status of each of the itinerant preachers other important matters remained uncertain. Previous discussion has illustrated that the standard of accommodation and financial support for the preacher and his family varied from circuit to circuit, as did the amount of travelling and official workload demanded by each post. By the 1790s the Methodist people were no longer surprised by the idea of a preacher's wife accompanying her husband into the circuit. However, as noted above, the extra allowances for wives and families were often felt to be an unfair imposition.¹⁰⁶ During the period of Mary's married life the ongoing economic recession exacerbated this situation. Generally unemployment rose,¹⁰⁷ and the cost of provisions soared.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the north of England, the scene of Joseph's ministry, was hit particularly badly.¹⁰⁹ Earlier evidence has shown that many of the itinerants and their families suffered particular hardship in this period.¹¹⁰ While Mary and her husband were fortunate to avoid such abject distress, they appear to have undergone sharp variations of income, revealing the insecurity of the Methodist system.

Financial support for the Entwisle family and their accommodation

As noted above, Joseph welcomed the posting to Leeds and after lodging with Mary's uncle and aunt at Halifax, this appointment seems to have been the couple's first experience of setting up an independent home.¹¹¹ At the time the Leeds circuit was well established. There were thirty-three societies with approximately 2,100 members. It also benefited from large congregations and prosperous societies, enabling the circuit to give generous allowances to

¹⁰⁴ Circuits such as Leeds, Wakefield, York and Hull were key Methodist circuits. Joseph was appointed as Superintendant in Colne, later holding this office in Wakefield, York, and Macclesfield.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁰⁶ See the fuller discussion of these aspects in chapters three and examples in chapter eight above.

¹⁰⁷ John Baxter, "The Great Yorkshire Revival, 1792-6: A Study of Mass Revival Among the Methodists," in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* ed. Michael Hill (London: SCM Press, 1974), 61. Baxter notes that the poor law expenditure in Morley, a township close to Leeds, rose from £247 in 1790-1, to £601 in 1795-6.

¹⁰⁸ Figures cited by Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1982), 392 show that between the years of 1790 and 1804 the price of bread in London almost doubled. Meanwhile M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 73 shows that the real wage index dipped to its lowest point in 1800-1801.

¹⁰⁹ Baxter, "Great Yorkshire Revival", 66. described 1795 as a 'a year of near famine ... in the North.'

¹¹⁰ See the earlier discussion in chapter three regarding recipients of the Preachers' Friend Society.

¹¹¹ *MD*, 11.

support the itinerant preachers and their families.¹¹² Though there is no record of where Mary and Joseph were housed at Leeds, it appears that the couple enjoyed a good standard of living here as Joseph described their conditions as: ‘the most agreeable’ and suggested that they had been provided with ‘every outward comfort’.¹¹³

The move to Colne in 1794, however, was a sharp contrast, and perhaps the disappointment of not going to Otley worked to emphasise the change that the couple faced. After the busy Methodist stronghold of Leeds, the environs of Colne seemed geographically isolated: a difference underlined by Mary, who likened their removal to travelling from ‘Goshen to the wilderness’.¹¹⁴ Although the circuit as a whole had a membership of around 11,000, congregations were small at Colne and other places, and religion is described as ‘at a low ebb’.¹¹⁵ This evidently affected the support available for the preachers as it is suggested that the couple ‘were called to the sacrifice of many temporal comforts’.¹¹⁶ Mary and her husband lived in the preacher’s house: a building adjoining the chapel erected almost twenty years earlier.¹¹⁷ During the second year at Colne Joseph arranged further accommodation for another married preacher, Mr Edmondson, as the second preacher’s house was ‘a very unsuitable one’.¹¹⁸ Supplying the necessary fixtures and fittings was difficult, for Joseph had to raise funds himself begging for ‘as much money as enabled him to furnish it ...’¹¹⁹ The latter incident provides another indication of the poor state of funding in the circuit.

The couple’s later moves to Wakefield (1796) and York (1798) again highlight the differences in financial support for the preachers. Arriving in Wakefield, Mary gave thanks for a place: ‘where we are comfortably situated amongst a kind and affectionate people ... and where we have every outward comfort which we can desire.’¹²⁰ This was evidently a great improvement on the situation at Colne. Yet two years later in York, the couple’s financial stability was challenged once again. Though a long established circuit, the allowances provided for the preachers at York were ‘scanty’, and by now the Entwistles had three children to support.¹²¹ In September 1798, Joseph wrote: ‘My whole income, at present, appears to be less than will supply my growing family with food and pay the servant’s wages; so that there is

¹¹² Dews, “Methodism in Leeds”, 26-7 and 336.

¹¹³ *JEM*, 122.

¹¹⁴ *MD*, 15. Entry dated 26 July 1795. Goshen was the Israelites ‘land of plenty’.

¹¹⁵ *JEM*, 120.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *EMP*, 2: 186. Alexander Mather noted that the house was built in 1777.

¹¹⁸ *JEM*, 133.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *MD*, 26. Entry dated 29 Aug. [1796]. Like Leeds, Wakefield also had a record of paying rather more than was required. See F. H. Mills, “Circuit Finance in Early Methodism,” *PWHS* 23: 61.

¹²¹ *JEM*, 169. As shown on Figure 18 the couple had three children at this point: John, Mary and Joseph. I discuss Mary’s childbearing history below.

nothing for clothing etc. [sic].¹²² Moreover, some extra provisions that Mary's father had been supplying had ceased since Marmaduke's death.¹²³ Faced with this worrying drop in finances, and having now the prospect of a further birth in the family, Joseph confided in a close friend in the society, and through the latter's intervention an increase was arranged.¹²⁴

Little evidence is available regarding the couple's financial situation in the last two circuits of Hull and Macclesfield. However, Joseph's name and a donation of one guinea are recorded in the list of benefactors to the Preachers' Friend Society of 1802, which suggests that whilst at Hull he may have had some money to spare.¹²⁵ In addition, the contents of Marmaduke Pawson's will show that Mary's father bequeathed some property in Thorner to his daughter, including a house and 'a blue cotton factory'.¹²⁶ By this time Mary possibly had some income from rent on the latter properties. If this were so, the couple would not have been entirely dependent upon the movement's allowances at Macclesfield either. Finances in the latter circuit appear to have been poor. One of Joseph's co-preachers here, Jabez Bunting, a probationer at the time, used local statistics to argue for a rise in the itinerants pay.¹²⁷ This overview has provided the context of Mary's married years. Discussion now turns to consider her own perspective in more detail, examining Mary's personal history and family life, and her approach to her role as a Methodist preacher's wife.

Mary's family history

Joseph's appointments at Halifax (1792) and Leeds (1792-4) meant that for the first two years of her marriage Mary remained well within the orbit of her birth family. At Halifax the couple shared accommodation with John Pawson and his wife, Frances. Mary's first months in her new role were likely to have been eased by this close contact with her uncle and aunt. The companionship of the latter must have been especially welcome when Joseph returned to his regular duties in the circuit. Frances Pawson was a godly woman and an experienced preacher's wife and was no doubt an excellent mentor for Mary as the young bride embarked upon the same uncertain way of life.¹²⁸

¹²² *JEM* 169.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 176-7. Joseph recorded that his band-mate, Mr Robert Spence burst into tears on hearing the amount of Joseph's income, and said that he knew that his wife 'could not keep house with such a sum.' See Figures 17 and 18. As recorded here, Mary gave birth to twins in October 1799.

¹²⁵ *MM* 25 (1802): 341.

¹²⁶ Marmaduke Pawson's *MS* will, dated 3 July 1797.

¹²⁷ A. Kingsley Lloyd, *The Labourer's Hire: The Payment and Deployment of the Early Methodist Preachers, 1744 - 1813* (Bunbury, Cheshire: Wesley Historical Society, 1987), 15.

¹²⁸ On Frances Pawson see Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Her Own Story: Autobiographical Portraits of Early Methodist Women* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 85 - 101.

Joseph's subsequent posting to Leeds again offered many advantages. Here knowledge of Mary's local roots and her family's active role in the Methodist movement may have smoothed her acceptance into the circuit. Unlike more far-flung circuits, Leeds was familiar territory for Mary and according to Joseph the couple were 'surrounded by friends and relations'.¹²⁹ As noted earlier, this appointment appears to have offered the first chance for the couple to set up their own household, and the living standard offered by the circuit was good.¹³⁰ It is probable that Mary and her husband lived close to, or even on the site of the only chapel in Leeds, the Boggard Chapel, where housing for two itinerant preachers existed.¹³¹

Mary had little time to get used to her position as a preacher's wife before being faced with other important responsibilities. By the time the couple moved to Leeds in the summer of 1792, she was already pregnant. On 8 March 1793, she gave birth to her first child, a boy who was called John Pawson Entwisle after Mary's uncle.¹³² It can be seen from this that motherhood came early to Mary, as baby John arrived only ten months after her marriage. Evidence of subsequent births in the family, shown in figure 19 reveals a continuing high level of fertility. During just short of twelve years of marriage, Mary underwent seven successful pregnancies, which produced eight live births. The frequency of these events meant that only four of Mary's married years went by *without* the arrival of a new baby. Moreover, due to the *timing* of the births, and Joseph's regular changes of circuit, one or even two new members of the Entwisle family arrived in each of the posts where Joseph was called to serve.¹³³

Where Mary's own upbringing had taken place amongst mainly female siblings, the family that she and Joseph produced was predominantly male. The couple's second son was born at Colne in October 1794, shortly after their move there. He was christened Marmaduke in honour of Mary's father: the baby's 'pious grandfather'.¹³⁴ Almost two years later, when at Wakefield, the Entwisles welcomed the only girl of the family, Mary,¹³⁵ while a further son, Joseph junior, was also born in the Wakefield circuit in March of 1798.¹³⁶ The couple's time at York was marked by the addition of twin boys named William and Thomas in the autumn of 1799,¹³⁷ and when at Hull, the couple's seventh child, James arrived in May 1802.¹³⁸ Mary's

¹²⁹ *JEM*, 122.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, MD, 11.

¹³¹ J. E. Hellier, "The Mother Chapel of Leeds," *Methodist Recorder* 35 (Winter 1894): 66.

¹³² *MD*, 8. Entry dated 20 Dec. [1793]; *JEM*, 94.

¹³³ Further details of Joseph and Mary's family see Figure 19: 'The Entwisle family' in Appendix 1 after the chapter. Mary gave birth to a child in every year except 1795, 1797, 1800 and 1801. Figure 18 illustrates more clearly the timing of each birth in relation to Joseph's ministerial appointments.

¹³⁴ *MD*, 16. Entry dated 26 July 1795; *JEM*, 123. Marmaduke was born on 4 Oct. 1794.

¹³⁵ *JEM*, 143 and 148 suggest Mary arrived in early September 1796. *IGI* records give 5 Sept. 1796.

¹³⁶ *JEM*, 165. Joseph, nicknamed Jo, was born on 14 Mar. 1798.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 177-8. The twins were born on 4 Oct. 1799.

final confinement took place when Joseph was stationed in the Macclesfield circuit. On this occasion she gave birth to another boy on 19 November 1803: a child whom the couple called Samuel.¹³⁹ Unfortunately, not all of the children survived infancy. This meant that Mary's family history was laced with sorrow as well as joy.

The period of Mary's married life, and her childbearing years was one when the process of pregnancy and childbirth was still fraught with danger for both mother and child. Labour itself could be 'a brutalizing experience with horrendous potential side effects',¹⁴⁰ and although the rate of maternal and infant mortality was falling by the second half of the century, the chance of a woman dying from childbirth or its consequences remained high.¹⁴¹ Thus Mary was fortunate to survive seven pregnancies. Though childhood mortality had been at its highest earlier in the century, even by 1800 seventy-five out of a thousand newborns did not survive the first month of life.¹⁴² With the added threat from ordinary childhood diseases and epidemics, it is not surprising that the Entwisle family suffered the pain of two infant deaths.

The first breach in the family came when the couple's second son, Marmaduke, contracted smallpox at Wakefield in the spring of 1797. This 'sweet, affectionate child' died on 20 April at the age of two and a half years.¹⁴³ The second early loss to the family was Thomas, who was one of the twins born at York. This baby began to sicken ten days after his birth. On 19 October 1799, Joseph wrote: 'After suffering more than one would think such a little creature could endure, he breathed his last about eleven this morning.' He was buried at St Saviour's Church, where he had been baptized only five days earlier.¹⁴⁴ The pain of such losses was arguably harder for the itinerants and their wives who, because of the circuit system, were often constrained to leave a child's final resting place behind and travel on.

The details of Mary's pregnancies bear closer examination and highlight the emotional and physical demands that were placed upon her by this prodigious rate of family growth. Emotionally, for example, however welcome a pregnancy was to a woman of this period, there was bound to be anxiety about the outcome. Available sources show that both Joseph and Mary were also keenly aware of the dangers that childbirth posed. Each unborn child was the subject

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 189. James was born on 24 May 1802.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁴⁰ Phyllis Mack, "Does Gender Matter? Suffering and Salvation in Eighteenth Century Methodism," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library Manchester* 85, no. 2 & 3 (2003): 170.

¹⁴¹ E. Wrigley, "British Population during the Long Eighteenth Century, 1680 - 1840," in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, ed. R. Floud & P. Mc Closky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 83.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 81. Figures here indicate that infant mortality peaked in the period 1725-49.

¹⁴³ *MD*, 27. Entry dated 7 May [1797].

¹⁴⁴ *JEM*, 177.

of much prayer, and prior to Mary's various confinements the couple set apart a day of fasting and prayer on account of the 'forthcoming trial'.¹⁴⁵

Mary's journal throws light upon her personal perception of her situation. It includes several petitions to God for help in 'the hour of nature's sorrow'.¹⁴⁶ Her appreciation of the risk to herself is apparent from words written in August 1796, when approaching the end of her third pregnancy. Here, Mary wrote: 'Lord be thou with me in the hour of nature's sorrow, which is fast approaching be pleased to bring me safely thro' and spare me to my friends and family if it be thy blessed will'.¹⁴⁷ Following the safe arrival of her baby, shortly afterwards Mary's remarks are reminiscent of scriptural thanksgivings: 'I trust the Lord at all times, he [sic] made me the living mother of a living child ...'.¹⁴⁸ But her words are also a stark reminder of the danger that women and their babies often faced.

When considering the frequency of births within the family the physical cost to Mary also becomes clearer. In the course of her married life Mary had seven pregnancies in the space of eleven years and ten months. The longest birth interval is that following the arrival of the twins in October 1799 and before James was born in May 1802: a period of thirty-one months.¹⁴⁹ In other cases the gap is much smaller with twenty-three months separating the births of Marmaduke and Mary, and a space of seventeen or eighteen months in other cases.¹⁵⁰ Considering that the interval between each birth would include a period of perhaps six months of breastfeeding the latest infant, plus nine months gestation leading to the following birth, it becomes apparent just how much of Mary's life was dominated by procreation. Moreover it is possible that she suffered additional miscarriages that have gone unrecorded.

The amount of childbearing indicated above would have taken a toll on any woman, even in the best and most settled conditions, but Mary also had to cope with the particular conditions imposed by the itinerant life. Her history is a poignant illustration of the extra physical and emotional strain that the Methodist system placed upon the wives of its travelling preachers, especially those of prime childbearing years. The frequent removals that were integral to the itinerant system posed one particular hazard whilst the need for the preachers to

¹⁴⁵ *JEM*, 96, and 123.

¹⁴⁶ For Mary's prayers before the birth of John see *MD*, 6, 7, 8 and 9. Those prior to Mary's arrival are found in *MD*, 26. *MD*, 30-31 includes Mary's prayers before Joseph was born.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 26. Entry dated 29 August.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 27.

¹⁴⁹ See Figures 18 and 19 in Appendix 1 at the end of the chapter. The twins were born on 4 Oct. 1799 and James on 24 May 1802.

¹⁵⁰ See Figures 18 and 19. Seventeen months separate the births of James and Samuel, Mary's last child. Eighteen months separate John and Marmaduke, Mary and Joseph, and Joseph and the twins.

travel round their appointed circuit also meant that husbands and wives spent the majority of their time apart. As the following details show, whether facing or recovering from childbirth, or when illness struck the family, Mary was often at some remove from her husband, and on many occasions had to cope with the difficulties of the situation alone.

The circumstances surrounding the couple's move to Colne really underline the clash of personal and institutional needs and resulting impact on family life. It will be remembered that Joseph's term at Leeds ended in 1794, and news first came of a posting to the Otley circuit.¹⁵¹ However, on 9 August he heard that Lancelot Harrison was going to Otley due to the serious illness of his wife, which meant that Joseph was to go to Colne. Though recording that 'the Will of the Lord be done,' Joseph was most concerned that Mary, who was then in her seventh month of pregnancy, would find the move 'exceedingly trying'. He wrote: 'She is near her confinement; and the roads are bad and mountainous, so that I fear there will be difficulty in getting her to Colne without injury'.¹⁵²

The journey, however, was not the only problem. The couple set out from Leeds by chaise on August 15th, but on reaching Keighley were informed that smallpox was very prevalent in Colne. To add to their woes they heard that Mr Harrison, the departing itinerant, had left a child in the preacher's house that was 'dangerously ill in that disorder'.¹⁵³ Such behaviour seems almost incredible, and the news left Mary and Joseph deeply alarmed. Their little son, John was only seventeen months old at the time, and was, as Joseph put it: 'in a habit of body very unfit for the small-pox'.¹⁵⁴ Despite being inoculated, John became infected with smallpox and so seriously ill that 'his life was despaired of'.¹⁵⁵ As well as being a newcomer to the circuit, and heavily pregnant, Mary was now 'greatly fatigued' caring for her son.¹⁵⁶

Here, the clash between the family's needs and Joseph's ministerial responsibilities is very much in evidence. As newly-appointed superintendent, Joseph felt constrained to continue with his circuit work despite his family's plight, writing that he 'felt much' in leaving his 'little afflicted family'.¹⁵⁷ Though he travelled long distances to return home whenever possible, at the height of John's illness Mary was left alone. She later described the unfolding events:

... my dear John had not had the Small-pox and was obliged to be prepared and enoculated [sic] immediately. He was severely handled, his life endangered, I in a

¹⁵¹ *JEM*, 117.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

strange place, my dear husband, true partner of my weal or woe, at a great distance, when the child was at the worst, my trials were great¹⁵⁸

Thankfully John subsequently recovered fully, and Mary later praised God, writing: 'I believed the Lord would spare my child, he did and raised him up again ...'¹⁵⁹ A mere three weeks afterwards Mary gave birth to Marmaduke, the couple's second son. Thus the initial period in the Colne circuit could hardly have been more trying.

Significantly, this traumatic move appears to have coloured Mary's later experience. When another change of circuit approached in 1796 she was again in the third trimester of pregnancy, and facing removal this time even closer to the impending birth. The prospects of the move seem to have oppressed Mary as early as June, for she wrote of her mind being 'taken up' with 'the thoughts of our removal from this place, [and] of what I have to go thro' before, ...'¹⁶⁰ The latter words concerned the approaching Conference and Joseph's attendance there. Leaving for London in July, this was another burden for Mary to bear. She wrote that it was 'painful to part with [her] precious companion' for a period of a month.¹⁶¹ In the event, the move to Wakefield seems to have been without incident, and the couple were blessed with the arrival of a daughter on 5 September, who took her mother's name. Following this, however, came a prolonged period when the family's life was dominated by ill-health.

Mary was the first person to suffer, as after the birth of her baby daughter, she was taken ill and 'brought very low'.¹⁶² At the same point the older boys, John and Marmaduke also caught measles, causing extra strain. To complicate matters further Mary's sister, who had come over to Wakefield from Thorner to help the family, then became 'very unwell'.¹⁶³ With the entire household indisposed, Joseph travelled home each evening regardless of the distance to help his stricken family cope.¹⁶⁴ Mary's health was poor again during the following spring of 1797, and on this occasion she was laid up for eleven weeks. Described as having a 'nervous fever', Mary's condition was arguably caused by the unrelenting strain of previous months.¹⁶⁵ Worse was to come however. Having travelled from Wakefield to Thorner for the benefit of the country air, she was called back urgently as Marmaduke fell ill with smallpox.¹⁶⁶ Mary later wrote of her anguish during this period: 'O the distress of mind I felt on account of his great

¹⁵⁸ *MD*, 15. Entry dated 26 July 1795.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

¹⁶⁰ *MD*, 23.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25. Entry dated 17 July [1796]. An additional uncertainty was that at this stage, prior to Conference, the couple did not know where they would be going in September.

¹⁶² *JEM*, 144.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 154; *MD*, 27. Entry dated 7 May [1797].

sufferings, and the daily prospect of losing my precious boy'¹⁶⁷ Such words demonstrate her heartfelt love and concern for her child. But, as noted earlier, Marmaduke did not recover. He died on 20 April 1797, being buried at Wakefield two days later.¹⁶⁸ Even after this there was further anxiety, as baby Mary also caught the disease. In this case, however, there was a happy outcome, and Mary later thanked God for 'dealing so tenderly' with her infant, indicating, once more, her attachment to her offspring.¹⁶⁹

Given the fact of Mary's almost constant childbearing it is not surprising to read that she often suffered from 'a feeble enervated frame'.¹⁷⁰ But a more marked deterioration in her health seems to have occurred while she and Joseph were at Hull during the period 1800-1802. This was one of the reasons that Joseph decided not to stay on in the circuit for a third year. As he was appointed to Macclesfield in Cheshire at Conference of 1802, however, there was a journey of 130 miles to face when the family moved.¹⁷¹ By this time, Mary and Joseph also had five children to consider. John was nine years old and Mary five, whilst Joseph had reached his fourth birthday, and William was two years old. The couple's youngest child, James had been born only two months previously.¹⁷²

Again, the latter change of circuit came at a difficult time for Mary. Perhaps because of the recent birth of James, she was 'much enfeebled' even when the family set out from Hull. The long journey meanwhile induced complete exhaustion.¹⁷³ It appears that the situation at Macclesfield was of some benefit to Mary's health initially, but after bearing Samuel in November 1803, her condition steadily declined. On 12 March 1804 she died of tuberculosis at the relatively young age of thirty-three. Joseph was left a widower, with six surviving children. The eldest of these, John had just celebrated his eleventh birthday. The youngest child was baby Samuel, not quite four months old.¹⁷⁴

The practicalities of Mary's life

Turning to consider the practical aspects of Mary's life within each circuit, it is necessary to note first of all how different her everyday experience would have been from that of her husband. By necessity, Joseph's life was determined by the timetable set out in the

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *JEM*, 154.

¹⁶⁹ *MD*, 28. Entry dated 10 Sept. [1797].

¹⁷⁰ *MEMM*, 370.

¹⁷¹ *JEM*, 192-3.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 189. James was born on 24 May 1802.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 197-200; *MEMM*, 373-6.

circuit preaching plan: a schedule of engagements ensuring that regular preaching and oversight of members took place in all existing societies. As Joseph was travelling into a variety of urban and rural environs, Mary lived a much more settled existence, formally at least. Her life was focused on her home and children, based in lodgings provided by the circuit stewards, amongst the Methodist community in the chief circuit town.

Evidence relating to different circuits illustrates just how infrequently Joseph was at home. At Leeds (1792-4), for example, the circuit covered a much wider area than the township itself, and included growing industrial suburbs as well as rural villages at some distance from the town.¹⁷⁵ Membership levels within the different societies varied,¹⁷⁶ and though some societies had already built chapels, members in other places still gathered in cottages and barns.¹⁷⁷ In this posting Joseph preached from nine to fourteen times per week, often holding love-feasts and prayer-meetings in addition. On both Sundays and weekday nights he met the different societies, and on Saturday afternoons taught the members' children. Special addresses and pastoral visits were further responsibilities,¹⁷⁸ as was socialising with affluent Methodist members in this prosperous circuit. Such 'ceremonial visiting' seemed especially inappropriate to Joseph, who commented that he 'did not think it right to spend so much time in company with the rich.'¹⁷⁹

Details of Joseph's later circuits also suggest few opportunities to be at home. At Colne (1794-6) the circuit was roughly fifty miles in length embracing towns such as Burnley, Todmorden, and Clitheroe, and also covering many settlements in the Yorkshire dales to the east.¹⁸⁰ Unless in the circuit town, the itinerants preached three times every Sunday, and every night of the week,¹⁸¹ their labours made more arduous by the difficult terrain in many areas, and the poor standard of overnight lodgings.¹⁸² In contrast Wakefield (1796-8) was a more compact round where Joseph wrote of: 'a situation where I can be much with my family'.¹⁸³ The following York circuit however, (1798-1800) entailed working in the country districts for

¹⁷⁵ Dews, "Methodism in Leeds", 26-7 and 336.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Societies at places such as Clifford, Collingham, East Keswick, and Kirkstall Forge had less than twenty members, whilst the main Leeds society had a membership of 714.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27. By this time there were chapels at Thorner, Armley and Bramley.

¹⁷⁸ *JEM*, 118.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 126-7. The circuit included places such as like Clapham, Largill, [Lowgill] and Settle.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 121. Joseph wrote that in many places on the preaching plan the accommodation was 'very inferior'. J. W. Laycock, *Methodist Heroes in the Great Haworth Round 1734 - 1784* (Keighley: Wadsworth and Co., the Rydal Press, 1909), 323 gives a preaching plan for 1786, eight years before Joseph's posting showing that over a six week period sixty one sermons were preached and approximately 231 miles were covered.

¹⁸³ *JEM*, 143.

sixteen days at a stretch. During Joseph's first six weeks in the circuit, only three periods of three days were spent in York itself: not much time to assist his wife and three young children to settle into the circuit.¹⁸⁴

In contrast to her husband's constant journeying, Mary's daily round was centred on her home and growing family. One of the most daunting aspects of her circumstances, especially remembering Mary's own rather timid nature, may have been to find the family's living space situated so close to the hub of chapel affairs. At Halifax, for example, the circuit where Mary spent the first months of her married life in 1792, the preachers' quarters were situated *under* the chapel.¹⁸⁵ A similar proximity occurred in other places. At Leeds, as seen earlier, lodgings for the preachers were on the same site as the Boggard House, whilst at Colne, York and Macclesfield accommodation had been built on to existing chapels.¹⁸⁶ The trustees at Wakefield had added a manse adjacent to the Thornhill chapel in anticipation of becoming the head of a circuit, and by the time of Joseph's appointment a second house had been built.¹⁸⁷ Such living arrangements indicate how difficult it must have been for Mary to ensure her own personal space, and preserve a separate home life with her family. As the couple also had single travelling preachers living with them, privacy must have been in very short supply.¹⁸⁸

Part of Mary's challenge as the wife of a travelling preacher, like that of other women in her situation, was to make each residence homely, regardless of the fixtures and fittings provided. Whilst evidence is fairly sparse it seems that the couple were generally well provided for, though, as noted above, the standard of accommodation at Colne was more austere than that at Leeds.¹⁸⁹ In addition the position of the couple's lodging here may well have been somewhat exposed, as the preacher's house had been added to the chapel to strengthen it after a gable end was demolished in a gale.¹⁹⁰ On arrival in the Wakefield circuit however, Mary noted that: '...

¹⁸⁴ John Lyth, *Glimpses of Early Methodism in York and the Surrounding District* (York: William Sessions, 1885), 305. This reprints the preaching plan for September and October 1798.

¹⁸⁵ Chilcote, *Own Story*, 98.

¹⁸⁶ For Colne see Laycock, *Methodist Heroes*, 324. Lyth, *Glimpses*, 134 notes that at York a preacher's house had been added onto the chapel at Peaseholm Green in 1780, fronting St Saviour's Place. It is still standing. On the couple's housing in Macclesfield see Gail Malmgreen, *Silk Town: Industry and Culture in Macclesfield, 1750 - 1835* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1985), 146 and *JEM* 198. Mary and Joseph's residence adjoined Wesley Chapel on Sunderland Street.

¹⁸⁷ On Wakefield see F. H. Mills, "Circuit Finance in Early Methodism," *PWHS* 23: 61 and Paul Dawson, "The History of West Parade Methodist Chapel," in *Aspects of Wakefield 2: Discovering Local History*, ed. Kate Taylor (Barnsley: Wharnccliffe Publishing, 1999), 120. No evidence is available about the couple's lodgings at Hull, but Hull's George Yard chapel had been built at a cost of £4,500 in 1785, and accommodation would most probably have been incorporated. See David Neave, *Lost Churches and Chapels of Hull* (Beverley: Hull City Museums and Art Galleries & Hutton Press, 1991), 14 - 15.

¹⁸⁸ *MD*, 18; *JEM*, 137, 196 and 203. Three single preachers are known to have shared the couple's home. Mr Gloyne, at Colne. Jabez Bunting and Mr Needham at Macclesfield.

¹⁸⁹ Joseph's difficulties fitting out a second house in this poor circuit have already been mentioned.

¹⁹⁰ Laycock, *Methodist Heroes*, 324.

we have every outward comfort which we can desire,¹⁹¹ and a previous inventory shows some generosity in equipping the manse.¹⁹² The preacher's residence at York, meanwhile, had been described as 'a neat genteel house' by its first occupant,¹⁹³ who noted that the stewards had 'made everything convenient'.¹⁹⁴ A sign of improving standards is apparent in the fact that where once the preachers trod on matting in this lodging, some carpet was now underfoot.¹⁹⁵

Turning to the regular pattern of Mary's daily existence the evidence points to her full involvement in the range of religious activities constituting the Methodist way of life. At home she is known to have made time for personal devotions such as private prayer, Bible study and meditation, reading also from other religious works.¹⁹⁶ She seems to have valued spiritual narratives in particular and began to record her own thoughts in a personal journal shortly after her marriage.¹⁹⁷ Whenever Joseph was at home, the couple spent time in joint devotions, praying and studying the Bible together.¹⁹⁸ Other religious duties involved the wider household, which gathered together for family prayer,¹⁹⁹ and with Joseph's frequent absences from home it would often fall to Mary to organise and lead these family devotions.²⁰⁰ Religious commitments outside the home included attendance at regular preaching services²⁰¹ and going to weekly class and band meetings.²⁰² Mary's journal also refers to the January Covenant Service.²⁰³

An examination of Mary and Joseph's time in the Leeds circuit during 1792-4 gives a clearer indication of how such private and public commitments would shape Mary's time. At this period the Boggard House was still the only Methodist chapel in Leeds, and here Mary joined a society of over seven hundred members.²⁰⁴ Preaching services were held at five o'clock each weekday morning, so Mary's day would begin early.²⁰⁵ She attended a class meeting mid-week,²⁰⁶ and on Sundays with other members would go to a preaching service in the chapel at seven-thirty in the morning, and then to the nearby parish church.²⁰⁷ Sabbath

¹⁹¹ *MD*, 26. Entry dated 29 Aug. [1796].

¹⁹² Mills, "Circuit Finance," 61. The circuit records indicate that three beds and all accoutrements were bought, plus furniture for the sitting room and items such as fire irons, candlesticks and a kettle.

¹⁹³ Lyth, *Glimpses*, 134.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁹⁶ See, for example, *MD*, 6-7; *MEMM*, 365 and 371.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 365 and 370; *JEM*, 84. Mary began her journal on 27 Jan. 1793.

¹⁹⁸ *MD*, 6. Entry dated 1 Mar. [1793].

¹⁹⁹ *JEM*, 96, and 100.

²⁰⁰ *MD*, 5, 11 and 17.

²⁰¹ *MD*, 10 and 11.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 2 and 17.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 1 and 11.

²⁰⁴ Dews, "Methodism in Leeds," 73 and 336.

²⁰⁵ B. Greaves, "Methodism in Yorkshire, 1740-1851," (unpublished Ph. D., Liverpool, 1968), 85.

²⁰⁶ *MD*, 2. Entry dated 3 Feb. [1793]. Mary wrote: 'I had a profitable time at my Class on Wednesday...'

²⁰⁷ Dews, "Methodism in Leeds," 92. The parish church was St. Peter's, Leeds.

observances continued with a further preaching session in the chapel at five in the evening, after which ‘latter meetings’ followed for the Society members, designed to instruct the people ‘in the practical duties of Christianity especially as they affected family life’.²⁰⁸ If Joseph was in Leeds the family then spent a further hour at home in ‘in spiritual conversation, singing and prayer’.²⁰⁹ After one such end to Sunday Joseph described his home as ‘a little heaven’.²¹⁰

During Joseph’s travels he maintained a frequent correspondence with his wife,²¹¹ and the couple allocated set times for prayer so that they could meet in spirit: ‘at the throne of grace’.²¹² In her husband’s absence Mary’s immediate contacts would be the wives of other preachers stationed in the circuit. She seems to have found real friendship in this way.²¹³ Other fellowship for Mary came from the local Methodist community, and at Leeds she mentions an individual called Miss Rhodes.²¹⁴ Even at Leeds, a visit to closer kin at Thorner was not always possible once Mary had a baby to consider. Despite: ‘a pressing desire’ to see her father and mother in January 1794, for example, Mary was: ‘afraid of leaving y [sic] dear little boy with the servant,’ and therefore stayed at home.²¹⁵

Developments at Leeds during Joseph’s posting illustrate the complex dynamics of Methodist life at local level, and the extra pressures bearing upon the itinerants and their wives. Tensions arose in the Leeds circuit following the 1793 Conference decision to allow the administration of the sacrament in societies where both trustees and members were in favour. While several places in the circuit took up this option, at the Boggard Chapel, still the only chapel in the city, conservative trustees blocked the move.²¹⁶ In this impasse more liberally-minded members began to meet separately: a move that split the main Leeds society. The circuit ministers were also divided on whether to supply preachers for the new venue. As Joseph supported the breakaway group, both he and Mary may have faced some hostility from the preachers and people of a different and more conservative persuasion.²¹⁷

²⁰⁸ Greaves, “Methodism in Yorkshire”, 85. It will be remembered that Methodist preaching was open to other ‘hearers’ who might not be actual members of the Society.

²⁰⁹ *JEM*, 100.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *MD*, 3; *JEM*, 138-140. In July 1796 after leaving Colne for Conference, Joseph began his first letter to his wife on the afternoon of his departure.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 91.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 205. After Mary’s death, Jonathan Edmondson, who had been a co-preacher with Joseph at Colne, wrote: ‘My wife is deeply distressed. She never loved a friend as Mrs. Entwisle.’

²¹⁴ *MD*, 10.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Dews, “Methodism in Leeds”, 73-6. Interestingly, Thorner was one of the first places to administer the sacrament.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Difficulties of a different nature emerged with an outbreak of revival at the start of 1794. Beginning at Woodhouse in the city, this was the first wave in Leeds of a wider movement of spiritual renewal in the north, later called the 'Great Yorkshire Revival'.²¹⁸ Joseph observed that the Lord was: 'pouring out his Spirit in a very extraordinary manner', but this sense of awe was tempered with awareness that there was not always 'that degree of reverence in our meetings which is desirable.'²¹⁹ His concern hardened into 'amazement and consternation' at one particular service, where he described the congregation as having 'got beyond all bounds of decency.'²²⁰ 'Such screaming and bawling I never heard', Joseph wrote, '... all was confusion and uproar.'²²¹

Meetings of this nature undoubtedly challenged Joseph's pastoral and leadership skills. Moreover, their often protracted length reduced his time with Mary and his family eventually inducing 'complete exhaustion'.²²² Mary shared her husband's anxieties about the unfolding events, noting in her diary that her mind was 'hurt with the wildness and extravagance of some people'.²²³ Despite the couple's misgivings, however, there were solid gains for the Methodist movement by the end of Joseph's time at Leeds.²²⁴ Thus Mary's first years as a preacher's wife corresponded with a lively period of spiritual revival, when many newcomers swelled the ranks of the local societies in and around Leeds. The focus now shifts to discover more about the other key factors shaping her personal life.

Mary's developing spirituality

It is clear that Mary was already a devout young woman at the time of her marriage, and evidence relating to the couple's early married life suggests that their union inspired new spiritual impetus in both partners. A month after their wedding, Joseph recorded 'a profitable hour in secret', describing how he and Mary had '... conversed upon spiritual things and the state of our minds'.²²⁵ During this time of bible study and prayer the couple re-read the covenant with God that they had signed on their wedding day. Joseph concluded: '... truly God did bless us.'²²⁶ These joint devotions clearly sparked a wish for greater holiness. On reading an account of 'the eminent piety of the late Rev. Mr. Fletcher' together, Joseph noted that he

²¹⁸ These developments are discussed fully in Baxter, "Great Yorkshire Revival": 46-76.

²¹⁹ *JEM*, 110-11. Entries dated 9 and 13 Feb. [1794].

²²⁰ *Ibid.* Entry dated 14 Feb. [1794].

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*, 118.

²²³ *MD*, 13. Entry dated 2 Mar. [1794].

²²⁴ *JEM*, 118. Between 1793 and 1794 membership in the Leeds circuit rose from 2,120 to 3,400.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 84. Entry dated 2 June [1792].

²²⁶ *JEM*, 84.

and Mary had ‘found a flame of holy desire enkindled in our hearts after that degree of piety which he attained and practised’.²²⁷ Later in the year Joseph wrote to Mary’s aunt informing her that his ‘dear Polly ... felt earnest longings to be wholly the Lord’s.’²²⁸ Such examples show that a greater degree of personal piety was a high priority for Joseph and Mary alike.

Mary’s manuscript journal, covering a period from January 1793 until December 1798 provided important evidence of Mary’s personal perspective on her developing religious life. By starting this spiritual diary Mary followed the example of several of her relatives, including her husband.²²⁹ Several reasons appear to have prompted her to begin this new enterprise at the end of January 1793. The annual Covenant Service, a time of personal rededication to God had recently taken place,²³⁰ and the anniversary of Mary’s conversion was also approaching.²³¹ Most significantly, Mary was also seven months pregnant and facing childbirth for the first time. All these factors evidently prompted her to review and record her spiritual life. However, though her awareness of the need for regular reflection and self-analysis as a spur to further spiritual development is clear, in the journal as a whole the entries are intermittent with several large gaps punctuating the narrative. After writing on 6 March 1793 on the brink of her confinement with baby John, for example, Mary does not resume writing until 20 December of that year.²³² Such silences still speak to the reader, illustrating the difficulties of maintaining the discipline of regular journal-writing when suffering almost constant childbearing and the strains and stresses of the travelling life.

The first entry of Mary’s journal declared an ‘ardent desire for a greater conformity to the blessed Jesus’, revealing that her impulse towards a further degree of holiness was as strong as ever.²³³ Separate comments suggest that Mary valued time spent in private prayer, and also used Bible study and meditation as an aid to this process.²³⁴ She noted being ‘very much refreshed’ by Methodist preaching,²³⁵ and of finding her class meeting ‘profitable.’²³⁶ On another occasion Mary recorded her sense that: ‘the Lord was powerfully present’ at one band

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 85. Entry dated 21 June [1792].

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 91. Letter dated 28 Nov. 1792.

²²⁹ See earlier references to narratives by Marmaduke and John Pawson. The latter suggests that Mary’s elder sister, Gracy also left a written testimony. Though submitted to Wesley and read by him, it was never published in the *Arminian Magazine* possibly due to Wesley’s death shortly afterwards, see *PL* 1: 95. Chilcote, *Own Story*, 85-101 gives extracts from the journal of Mary’s aunt, Frances Pawson.

²³⁰ *MD*, 1. Entry dated 27 Jan. 1793. Mary wrote that: ‘my dear husband and I had a very solemn season, while renewing our covenant with God and binding ourselves afresh to be his.’

²³¹ As noted above, Mary was converted on 8 Feb. 1781.

²³² *MD*, 8. Other gaps include the period from March 1794 until July 1795; August 1796 until March 1797; and September 1797 until February 1798. The last entry is dated 23 Dec. [1798].

²³³ *Ibid.*, 1. Entry dated 27 Jan. 1793.

²³⁴ See, for example, *Ibid.*, 6-7; *MEMM*, 365 and 371.

²³⁵ *MD*, 10. Entry dated 23 Dec. [1793].

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2. Entry dated 3 Feb. [1793].

meeting.²³⁷ These entries underline Mary's committed approach to her own religious development, showing how she was supported by the Methodist way of life.

In his account of Mary's life, Joseph suggested that his wife 'experienced variations as to *degrees* of religious affections and comforts.' [Author's emphasis]²³⁸ Mary's diary record confirms this assessment, showing peaks and troughs in her daily spiritual experience. Extracts record an increased sense of 'the divine presence',²³⁹ or period of private prayer when her soul was 'like a watered garden.'²⁴⁰ But others reveal her struggling to maintain some spiritual equilibrium in the light of perceived failings.²⁴¹ Mary was aware of these inconsistencies, writing of herself as 'a poor unstable creature',²⁴² and identifying her major fault as 'Discouragement'.²⁴³ She wrote movingly of Joseph's support, describing him as: a 'kind, tender hearted and affectionat [sic] partner', who promoted her welfare: 'by his example, prayers and spiritual conversation'.²⁴⁴ Moreover, she clearly perceived advantages in her situation as a preacher's wife, noting that she had 'more helps and fewer hinderances [sic] to a life of devotion', and great opportunities 'for improvement in knowledge and holiness'.²⁴⁵ However, despite these benefits, Mary felt that her religious condition was singularly 'misimproved.' [sic]²⁴⁶ From this it appears that Mary's position as a preacher's wife generated *self-expectations* of spiritual progress that were arguably difficult to achieve.

Part of Mary's frustration undoubtedly stemmed from her own capabilities and perceptiveness. She had evidently read widely from a young age, producing a mind: 'well furnished with divine knowledge', and 'clear judgment in the things of God'²⁴⁷ Mary's journal and a published letter to Joseph further indicate her intellectual capacity, and ability to engage with spiritual issues.²⁴⁸ Though deriving support from Methodist instruction and fellowship she was astute in identifying areas of inconsistency between the movement's precepts and its practice. At Leeds, for example, the subject of holiness appears to have been widely discussed, with some individuals claiming to have reached this pinnacle showing little signs of the appropriate level of godliness. Mary was troubled by such events, and recorded a

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 18. Entry dated 21 Sept. [1795].

²³⁸ *MEMM*, 369 - 70.

²³⁹ *MD*, 1. Entry dated 27 Jan. 1793.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7. Entry dated 1 Mar. [1793].

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5. Entry dated 17 Feb. [1793]. Mary wrote, for example: 'I have been tempted to be impatient with the servant today, and fear I have been overcome, I feel it is my burden, my grief and pain...'

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23. Entry dated 21 June [1796].

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *MEMM*, 370.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 372. I discuss Mary's letter, written from Hull in 1802 below.

sense of personal spiritual loss through both ‘looking at others who make a great profession of perfection, and I fear act not as persons who possess such a high degree of grace’, and ‘reasoning about perfection after hearing people converse differently about it.’²⁴⁹ Mary’s words underline the confusion surrounding Wesley’s teaching, as well as illustrating her clear-sightedness and active attempt to make sense of this Methodist doctrine.²⁵⁰

According to Joseph, Mary tended to blame herself and ‘lament her unfaithfulness’ in times of spiritual dryness. He wrote that Mary’s ‘feeble enervated frame’ was more often the cause’.²⁵¹ A reading of Mary’s journal strongly reinforces the view that both physical and emotional factors affected the dynamics of her religious life. Mary’s diary entries speak of her frustration with the physical restrictions of pregnancy²⁵² and disclose real anxiety regarding childbirth.²⁵³ Describing the period prior to John’s birth, for example, Mary spoke of ‘a very hard time’ during her pregnancy admitting that she had ‘never found liberty to pray for an easy delivery’, and could not join in with Joseph’s many petitions on this matter.²⁵⁴ She admitted her need of patience, when suspecting a second pregnancy in March 1794, abandoning her journal for some months shortly afterwards.²⁵⁵ In January 1796, meanwhile, Mary’s realisation that she was bearing another child triggered a further barren period in her religious life. Describing ‘little life or fervour in either the public or private means of grace,’ she made clear that this arose: ‘chiefly from my being in a state of pregnancy.’ Mary continued: ‘sometimes the thought of suffering depress [sic] my spirits. I think for near a month I have been in the wilderness.’²⁵⁶

Worries about her growing family, and difficulties arising from the itinerant life also influenced Mary’s religious state. As the time for a change of circuit drew near in June 1796, for example, Mary was also six months pregnant. She bemoaned her lack of spiritual progress, admitting that: ‘... lately my mind has been too much taken up with the concerns of my little family, the thoughts of our removal from this place, of what I have to go thro’ before, and what is before me of my present situation ...’²⁵⁷ From other entries in her journal, however, it is also

²⁴⁹ *MD*, 13. Entry dated 2 Mar. [1794].

²⁵⁰ See also *MEMM*, 373. Here Joseph wrote of his wife: ‘In her situation many things came under her observation which were painful; and she could not but see inconsistencies even in *some* professors of religion. [Author’s emphasis].’

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 370.

²⁵² *MD*, 1. Entry dated 27 January 1793. Mary confided to her journal that she felt ‘... much oppressed with inactivity’ and had no ‘power to do anything as I wish’

²⁵³ Entries relating to the forthcoming ‘trial’ prior to John’s birth in March 1793 include *MD*, 6, 7 and 8 dated 17 Feb., 1 Mar., and 6 Mar. respectively. For Mary’s thoughts prior to baby Mary’s birth see *MD* 26, entry dated 29 Aug. [1796], and before Joseph junior’s birth see *MD*, 30-31, dated 20 Feb. [1798].

²⁵⁴ *MD*, 8 - 9.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14 -15. One further entry in May 1794 follows, and then the next entry is dated 26 July 1795.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20. Entry dated 24 Jan. [1796].

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 23. Entry dated June [1796].

evident that freedom from anxiety often prompted a return of religious comforts. After baby Mary's recovery from smallpox in spring 1797, for example, her mother recorded her thankfulness for many spiritual mercies.²⁵⁸ Such instances further indicate the connection between Mary's physical and emotional condition, and her spiritual well-being.

The previous paragraphs illustrate Mary's sincerity, her longing for more holiness and acute consciousness of her shortcomings in the religious life. Despite the fluctuations in her experience, there is evidence that her faith did sustain her, enabling her to cope with the most difficult circumstances throughout her married life. Recounting the birth of her first child, for example, Mary described with gratitude how: 'many comfortable portions of God's word had been powerfully applied to [her] mind' in the weeks prior to her delivery.²⁵⁹ She continued:

... all of [these] I kept fast hold of till the hour of trial, when the Lord in great mercy to my soul applied them with fresh power. Glory be to God for ever for the consolations I felt. My strength was proportioned to my sufferings. I have often thought if it had not been for that divine support which I felt from the Lord raising me above the fear of death, or anything else, I should not have got through ...²⁶⁰

At a later stage in her marriage Mary felt that through God's help she had overcome the problems resulting from the move to Colne, recording that her 'trials were great, yet ... strength was proportioned to my day.'²⁶¹ In the severest test of faith, the loss of a child, Mary again found resources to deal with the situation. Her moving description of Marmaduke's death revealed: 'He died without a struggle and angels no doubt bore his happy spirit away to the realms of light.'²⁶² Mary wrote: 'O Lord thou hast tried us as silver is tried,'²⁶³ continuing:

Lord help me constantly to say thy will be done, knowing thou cans't [sic] not err, thou doest all things well, however contrary to our feelings. My dear Marmaduke was a sweet, affectionate child nearly 2 years and seven months old. I trust I shall go to him but he shall not return to me.²⁶⁴

She clearly desired to see God's purpose even in this dire situation.

Through Mary's diary and the published account of her life it is possible to discern signs of real spiritual growth. Her journal reveals an increasing awareness of the need to rely on God to combat present difficulties, as in December 1793, when Mary recalled her fretfulness and discouragement due to breast pain following the birth of John. She noted the need to be 'looking for fresh supplies of grace continually.'²⁶⁵ 'Sometimes,' she added, 'when we overcome

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 28. Entry dated 10 Sept. [1797].

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8. Entry dated 20 Dec. [1793].

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 15. Entry dated 26 July 1795.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 27. Entry dated 7 May [1797].

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 8. Entry dated 20 Dec. [1793].

great trials we are overcome by small things not duly considering our helplessness and that the grace we have for the present will not suffice for the next trial.²⁶⁶ Her later observations suggest an increasing recognition that she was focusing too much on her own shortcomings, rather than depending upon God. When worried about moving from Colne oppressed her in 1796, Mary's comment was: 'I have not cast my care upon the Lord, and sought for grace to bear present burdens, when I reflect upon these things'²⁶⁷ By 1798 she was writing of the need for a continual sense of God's presence, suggesting that: 'nothing short of constant communion with him can satisfy.'²⁶⁸

A later letter to Joseph, included in the published account of her life, provides a more detailed consideration of her spiritual position in the light of her reading and meditation. Writing in 1802 at Hull, Mary spoke of a new conviction that she should 'cast away all dependence' upon herself and 'rest upon the merits of Christ alone for present acceptance and eternal salvation.'²⁶⁹ Regarding holiness, she wrote of a belief that following justification, which she described as 'an instantaneous act of God', there also came 'a point in time when the soul is *fully* renewed and restored to the likeness of God.' [Author's emphasis]²⁷⁰ She further observed that views of her own shortcomings should not be seen as discouragements, but rather a spur to seek more faith to believe that: 'he who has begun will carry on the good work in my heart, if I depend on him, and ... I shall at last come off "more than conqueror thro'[sic] him that hath loved me."²⁷¹ By now, therefore, Mary seems to have accepted the progressive nature of holiness, and been willing to leave the *timing* of her sanctification entirely in God's hands. Thus, she appears to have reconciled her own experience with Methodist doctrine.

The range of Mary's service

Mary's early journal entry desiring that she and Joseph would be 'a blessing to the people' underlines her acceptance of a life spent in service to those around her.²⁷² Evidence suggests that this hope was fulfilled in a number of ways. Firstly, Mary can be seen to have exercised a ministry of prayer, offering petitions for her husband and his work,²⁷³ for her growing children,²⁷⁴ and on behalf of other members of the household.²⁷⁵ Similarly, she prayed

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 21. Entry dated June [1796].

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 29. Entry dated 20 Feb. [1798].

²⁶⁹ *MEMM*, 372.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 371

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *MD*, 5. Entry dated 17 Feb. [1793]

²⁷³ *MD*, 6 and 14.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

for the salvation of her Thorner relatives, seeking to aid her mother's spiritual development,²⁷⁶ later praying 'fervently' for her sister, Hannah's conversion.²⁷⁷ During the 1795 Conference Mary asked God to ensure that 'a spirit of wisdom' prevailed among the assembled ministers.²⁷⁸ Thus her intercessions also embraced much wider connexional affairs.

Mary's hope that she and her husband would become: 'lights to all around us' suggests her understanding of the special position in which she was placed and recognition of her potential as a role model.²⁷⁹ However, as shown earlier, she was also fearful of falling short as a preacher's wife and hampering Joseph's ministry.²⁸⁰ Despite her rather reticent nature Mary rose to the challenge of her role, and at Leeds joining Joseph in social visiting²⁸¹ also accompanying him on pastoral visits to the sick.²⁸² At a later date, during the couple's posting at Colne, Mary started to teach a class of girls. Her sincerity and nervousness at taking up this role are evident from a journal entry. This recorded: 'I have begun instructing a few children in the way of salvation, Lord thou knowest my motives, O crown my feeble endeavours with success, and thou shalt have the praise.'²⁸³ As this comment illustrates, Mary thought carefully about the work, seeking to glorify God, rather than gain any personal credit. A later statement from Joseph suggests that her efforts were successful in this quite difficult circuit.²⁸⁴

As time went on, Mary's role within the wider Methodist community was constrained by the need to care for her young family, and her increasing physical frailty. Her efforts in later years were by necessity mainly concentrated on the running of her home, seeing to the upbringing of her children and offering hospitality to various single probationers. Interestingly, it was Mary who first raised the subject of the spiritual education of her offspring with Joseph, prompting discussion about an appropriate approach.²⁸⁵ Joseph later wrote of Mary's: 'peculiar talent for instructing her own children in divine things', suggesting that she 'took much pains [sic] with [them] on instruction and prayers'.²⁸⁶ Mary's own perspective on her role at a later stage in her marriage can be seen in her 1802 letter to Joseph, which set out her priorities and

²⁷⁵ *JEM*, 134. Entry dated 23 Sept. [1795]. Mary's prayers with the family's maid at Colne are said to have assisted the latter's conversion.

²⁷⁶ *MD*, 11. Entry dated 3 Jan. [1794].

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 17. Entry dated 21 Sept. [1795].

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 16. Entry dated 26 July 1795.

²⁷⁹ *MD*, 5. Entry dated 17 Feb. [1793].

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.* Mary wrote: 'God forbid that I should be a hinderance [sic] to him in the great work thou hast called him to ...'

²⁸¹ *JEM*, 92.

²⁸² *MD*, 7.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 18. Entry dated 21 Sept. [1795].

²⁸⁴ *JEM*, 135. Letter dated Dec. 1795.

²⁸⁵ *JEM*, 185. Letter dated 15 May 1801.

²⁸⁶ *MEMM*, 370.

the rationale behind her decision to focus on her home.²⁸⁷ Significantly, this exposition may have been partly stimulated by public criticism.

Introducing Mary's letter into the on-going narrative of her memoir, Joseph made the point that his wife 'rejoiced to see any of her own sex take an active part in the Church, especially in a private way; but she considered *her* call to be chiefly to do good in her own family...' [Author's emphasis]²⁸⁸ He described how he had recently discovered: 'a memorandum respecting a person bluntly blaming her, in a Class-meeting, for not acting in a public way.'²⁸⁹ This accusation, Joseph wrote, had caused Mary to 'to humble herself before God for her unprofitableness [sic],' and examine her role more carefully.²⁹⁰ The incident clearly indicates the demands upon preachers' wives. When this occurred is not known, but similar heart-searching is found in Mary's letter, written when the couple were at Hull.

Beginning her letter, Mary revealed that a reading of 'the life of Dr Cotton Mather' had caused her to 'be humbled and reprov'd on account of [her] sloth and inactivity in the divine life'.²⁹¹ 'My little family', she wrote, 'and the state of my health, in general, prevent my taking any active part in the Church, had I abilities for doing *what is proper* for my sex to do.'²⁹² [Author's emphasis] Nevertheless, Mary went on, she believed that God had appointed her to certain work. Her main priority was to make sure of her own 'eternal happiness', a task that required diligence in private devotions, subject to the demands of her family, faithfulness to the means of grace, and seeking 'an habitual spiritual frame' throughout the day. In addition, it was necessary to be mindful of the progressive nature of holiness. Finally, Mary declared her belief that: 'A very important part of the work which God hath allotted me, is, the training up and management of my children.' Thus she viewed her family responsibilities as a significant part of her vocation. In this way Mary articulated her feelings about her personal calling, defending the choices she had made.²⁹³

Joseph's observation that Mary valued the active involvement of women in the work of the Church, 'especially in a private way', and his wife's own emphasis on '*what is proper* for my sex to do' call for further comment.²⁹⁴ Both these statements suggest that Mary held conservative views about the scope of female ministry generally within the Methodist

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 372.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 370-372. All the following quotations from Mary's letter can be found in these pages.

²⁹² I discuss the implications of this remark further below.

²⁹³ *MEMM*, 370-372

²⁹⁴ *MEMM*, 370.

movement. It is possible that Mary's rather reticent personality predisposed her to be nervous of any unorthodox activities within the church, as witnessed, for example by her comments during the Leeds revival.²⁹⁵ Meanwhile, the work of local female preachers must have been familiar to her both before and after her marriage. Leeds was a major centre for the work of such women, and Sarah Crosby, one of the earliest and most significant women preachers, lived close to the Boggard Chapel when Joseph was stationed in the town.²⁹⁶ During the same period other women evangelists such as Ann Cutler and Mary Barritt were active in Yorkshire, being leading protagonists in the growing revival.²⁹⁷

Significantly, there was a mixed response to female preaching amongst Mary's kin. Her aunt, Frances, was one of Mrs Crosby's confidantes and a staunch admirer of her work, whilst her uncle, John Pawson had been initially an opponent, but later changed his mind.²⁹⁸ Mary's husband, however, took a very different line. Though Joseph Entwisle held liberal views on many aspects of connexional polity, he was strongly opposed to a preaching ministry being exercised by women. In a letter to Jonathon Edmondson, a fellow-preacher and close friend he expressed forceful views:

We have no *female preachers* in this part of the country. I think women might with propriety exercise their gifts in a private way, or amongst their own sex; but I never could see the propriety of their being public teachers. Under the patriarchal dispensation, the oldest male was the priest of the family. Under the law, all the priests were men. So were the twelve apostles. Nor do we ever read of a woman preaching, in the Acts of the Apostles. Hence I conclude, women are not designed for public teachers.²⁹⁹ [Author's emphasis]

Though some of Mary's relatives supported female preaching, therefore, it is likely that Joseph's strong disapproval was of most importance when considering Mary's personal stance.

Mary's final illness and death

As Mary's letter indicates, her health was already under some strain when the couple were at Hull in 1802. A move to the Macclesfield circuit in August of that year brought some benefits for a time, but after surviving the birth of Samuel in September 1803 Mary's physical condition deteriorated further and she died of tuberculosis on 12 March 1804.³⁰⁰ Turning to the narrative of her final illness and death it is worth noting that deathbed scenes were as much a

²⁹⁵ See above and *MD*, 13. Entry dated 2 March [1794].

²⁹⁶ D. Colin Dews, ed., 'From Mow Cop to Peake, 1807-1932. Essays to Commemorate the One Hundred and Seventy Fifth Anniversary of the Beginnings of Primitive Methodism,' *WHS (Yorks)* 4, May (1982), 17; Hellier, "Mother Chapel of Leeds," 66. Sarah Crosby lived in a house adjoining the Boggard chapel with a group of women who became called 'the Female Brethren.'

²⁹⁷ Dews, ed., "Mow Cop to Peake", 17; Baxter, "Great Yorkshire Revival", *passim*.

²⁹⁸ See Chilcote, *Own Story*, 101 and *PL* 3: 77.

²⁹⁹ *JEM*, 193. This was written from Macclesfield in 1802.

³⁰⁰ *MEMM*, 376.

convention within Methodist commemorative accounts as conversion narratives, being used to present certain virtues and confirm a ‘happy death’.³⁰¹ In many respects the description of Mary’s final days can be seen to conform to these conventions, underlining Mary’s continuing desire for spiritual perfection, her acceptance of God’s will, and the peaceful ending of her life.

Joseph’s account, for example, noted that during her final illness Mary’s ‘constant prayer was to be made holy’: a petition that seems to have been partly granted on Sunday 26 February, when Mary is said to have undergone ‘such an experience of God’s goodness that she was impelled to *shout* with praise.’³⁰² [Author’s emphasis] Whether this was the final stage of perfection that Mary desired is not clear, but Joseph’s description certainly indicates a special blessing, exhibited in his wife’s awareness of being ‘completely saved from fear and discouragement.’³⁰³ Mary is also reported to have come to a peaceful acceptance of God’s will even with regard to parting from her family, informing Mr Needham, Joseph’s fellow preacher: ‘Tho’ [sic] I feel as a wife and a mother, yet ... I am perfectly resigned to the will of my heavenly Father ...’,³⁰⁴ and suggesting to her husband that the newest member of the family, baby Samuel, ‘was under the special care of Providence.’³⁰⁵

Although it was long anticipated, Mary’s eventual death occurred in an unexpected fashion. She spoke to Joseph cheerfully at eleven o’clock in the evening of 12 March telling him: ‘I think I shall not go home tonight; I hope to see you in the morning.’³⁰⁶ Though wanting to remain with his wife, Mary urged her husband to retire, as he was unwell. Joseph recorded: ‘About 12 o’clock, I was hastily called, but before I got to her bedside, the happy spirit was fled’.³⁰⁷ Like her son, Marmaduke, Mary died ‘without a struggle or sigh’,³⁰⁸ and though Joseph was not present during her last moments Mary’s sister, Elizabeth was by her side.³⁰⁹ Mary can be seen to have remained a model wife to the very end, being cheerful, accepting and unselfish. The recognition of this pattern, meanwhile, by no means undermines the poignancy of Joseph’s account.

³⁰¹ See Henry J. Rack, “Evangelical Endings: Death-Beds in Evangelical Biography”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library Manchester* 74 (1992): 44, and 47-9.

³⁰² *MEMM*, 373.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 374.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 375. Mary’s baby was only four months old at the time.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 375.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 376.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*,

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* Elizabeth Pawson afterwards became Joseph’s housekeeper for a period.

What models are being put forward in the memoir of Mary Entwisle?

It is clear that Mary Entwisle embodied the kind of characteristics and attitudes to service that the leaders of Methodism valued at this time. Within the account of Mary's life her piety is exemplified in the description of her upbringing, continuing quest for holiness, and peaceful death. Mary's intelligence and clear judgement on religious matters is demonstrated in her letter of 1802, which provides astute analysis of her own spiritual condition and includes a timetable for daily devotions that could inspire and aid others. Among the personal attributes noted are Mary's retiring nature and modesty, whilst she is described as a 'faithful, affectionate wife' and 'the tender mother' of her children. Joseph wrote that the family circle was in fact where his wife's virtues could best be seen, and where she most excelled. He suggested: 'She never made a shew [sic] in public but *shone* in private and domestic life as a *wife*, a *mother*, and a *mistress* she was exemplary.'³¹⁰ [Author's emphasis] Most importantly, her obvious talents were directed to her home and family. Mary's conservative attitude towards female service within the Methodist movement is doubly emphasised. Joseph's words that his wife supported women's work 'in private', and Mary's personal allusion to what was '*proper* for [her] sex to do'³¹¹ work as a strong endorsement of the ministerial line which had developed during the 1800s. In piety, domesticity, and most of all propriety the memoir of Mary Entwisle set an approved pattern for others in the movement.

From the preceding exploration the many hardships and complexities of Mary Entwisle's existence as a preacher's wife have been revealed. Her decision to channel her energies into her family and home seems to have been prompted by a rather retiring personality and was a practical decision in view of personal health problems and her large family. That this stance attracted criticism from others in the movement, again emphasises the public nature of her situation. The foregoing evidence suggests that in life, as well as on the printed page, she was a woman of faith, integrity, and intelligence determined to fulfil her Christian vocation in her position as a preacher's wife. Her husband's memoir, meanwhile, was recognised as a faithful account. Mary's uncle, John Pawson, wrote to Joseph Benson, noting that it was 'very just and true,' and would be 'highly acceptable' to all who were acquainted with her.³¹² Moving on now to consider the second case study in chapter ten, the challenges facing another member of the cohort are explored, with discussion of the life, times, and published account of Mrs Ann Leach, the wife of an itinerant who married in 1806, two years after Mary Entwisle's death.

³¹⁰ MEMM, 372; see also JEM, 201-2, where these sentiments are repeated in a letter to Rev. Samuel Taylor after Mary's death.

³¹¹ MEMM, 372 and 370.

³¹² PL 3: 101. Letter dated 23 June 1804.

APPENDIX 1

Figure 17: Marmaduke Pawson's family (Mary's birth family) * TPC = Thorner Parish Church (St. Peter's); LPC = Leeds Parish Church (St. Peter's)

Name	Birth	Baptism	Place	Marriage	Spouse	Place	Death	Burial	Place	Age
Marmaduke Pawson	17/11/1740	17/11/1740	TPC*	19/10/1767	Elizabeth Farrer	LPC*	23/4/1798		TPC	58
Elizabeth Farrer				19/10/1767	Marmaduke Pawson	LPC	12/1/1806		TPC	64
Children										
Gracy		12/9/1768	TPC	12/5/1788	William Maltby	TPC		25/12/1790		22
Mary (Polly)	21/12/1770			2/5/1792	Joseph Entwisle	TPC	12/3/1804	16/3/1804	Macclesfield	33
Elizabeth		12/3/1772	TPC							
Sarah		11/9/1775	TPC				0/7/1789			14
John		26/1/1779	TPC		Sarah ?		17/1/1824		TPC	45
Hannah		12/6/1781	TPC	27/1/1798	Francis Beecroft	TPC				
Martha		13/12/1784	TPC	19/11/1804	John Atkinson	TPC				

Sources:

- 1) *Thorner Parish Register, 1623–1841* (typewritten copy made by Thorner and District Historical Society, 1980) at Leeds City Reference Library.
- 2) "A Short Account of the Dealings of God with Mr. Marmaduke Pawson, Written by Himself", *AM* 16 (1793):511-516 and 556-560.
- 3) "The Grace of God Manifested: in a Brief Account of the Life and Death of Mrs. Entwisle who died in Macclesfield, March 12, 1804", *MM* 27 (1804): 368-376.
- 4) J. Entwisle, ed., *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwisle Fifty Four Years a Wesleyan Minister* 1848, Seventh Edition (London: James Nichols, 1861).
- 5) *Pawson Letters*
- 6) D. Colin Dews, "The Pawson Family of Thorner," *Bulletin of the WHS (Yorkshire Branch)* 87 (Autumn 2005): 9-12.
- 7) *IGI*.

Figure 18: Timeline of Mary's Married Life

YEAR	EVENT	CIRCUIT
1792		
2 May	Joseph and Mary are married.	
8 May	They travel to Halifax.	Halifax
August	Joseph expects Bradford circuit but is posted to Leeds.	Leeds
1793		
27 January	Mary's diary starts.	
8 March	John Pawson Entwisle born, baptised at Thorner on 12 March	
September	Joseph is reappointed to Leeds	
1794		
August	Joseph expects Otley circuit, but is posted to Colne where smallpox is rife. After move, John (1yr 5mths) becomes ill with smallpox.	Colne
4 October	Marmaduke Entwisle born, baptised at Colne on 6 October.	
1795		
September	Joseph reappointed to Colne	
1796		
August	Joseph is appointed to Wakefield Move with John (3 yrs) and Marmaduke (1yr)	Wakefield
5 September	Mary Entwisle born, baptised at Thorner on 10 October	
November	Mary is ill, John and Marmaduke also ill with measles	
December	Family is ill again	
1797		
February	Mary to Thorner but returns as Marmaduke contracts smallpox.	
20 April	Death of Marmaduke aged 2 years 6 months, buried at Wakefield on 22 April.	
May	Baby Mary contracts smallpox, but recovers.	
September	Joseph is reappointed to Wakefield.	Continued Overleaf

YEAR	EVENT	CIRCUIT
1798		
14 March	Joseph (Jo) Entwisle born, baptised at Thorner on 14 April.	
23 April	Death of Mary's father, Marmaduke Pawson.	
September	Joseph appointed to York. Move with John (5), Mary, (nearly 2) and Jo (5 mths).	York
23 December	Mary's diary ends	
1799		
September	Joseph reappointed to York	
4 October	Twins Thomas and William born, baptised at St. Saviour's York on 14 October.	
19 October	Death of Thomas at 15 days, buried at St. Saviour's York on 21 October.	
1800		
September	Joseph is appointed to Hull. At move John now 7; Mary, almost 4; Jo 2; William 10 mths.	Hull
1801		
September	Joseph reappointed to Hull.	
1802		
24 May 1802	James Entwisle born, baptised at Thorner on 20 August.	
September	Joseph urged to stay at Hull but takes post at Macclesfield.	Macclesfield
	Mary finds journey difficult. John now 9; Mary almost 6; Jo 4; William 2; James 3mths.	
1803		
September	Joseph reappointed to Macclesfield. Mary's health deteriorating.	
19 November	Samuel Entwisle born, baptised at Macclesfield on 2 January 1804.	
1804		
12 March 1804	Mary dies aged 33 , buried at Christ Church Macclesfield on 16 March.	

Sources:

- 1) *MS* "Diary of Mrs. Entwisle", (1793-1798), File: MAM L. 613, Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester.
- 2) *MS* "Birthdays to 1804", J. Entwisle, File: MAM L. 638-647, Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester.
- 3) "The Grace of God Manifested: in a Brief Account of the Life and Death of Mrs. Entwisle who died in Macclesfield, March 12, 1804", *MM* 27 (1804): 368-376.
- 3) J. Entwisle, ed., *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwisle Fifty Four Years a Wesleyan Minister* 1848, Seventh Edition (London: James Nichols, 1861).
- 4) "Memoir of the Rev. William Entwisle by his Father, the Rev. Joseph Entwisle, Sen.," *WMM* 55 (1832): 693-710.
- 5) *IGI*.

Figure 19: The Entwisle family * TPC = Thorner Parish Church (St. Peter's); TMC = Thorner Methodist Chapel

Name	Birth	Place	Baptism	Place	Marriage	Spouse	Place	Death	Burial	Place	Age
Mary Pawson	21/12/1770				2/5/1792	Joseph Entwisle	TPC*	12/3/1804	16/3/04	Macclesfield	33
Joseph Entwisle	15/4/1767	Manchester			2/5/1792	Mary Pawson	TPC	6/11/1841	12/11/1841	Tadcaster	74
Children											
John Pawson	8/3/1793	Leeds	12/3/1793	TMC*	15/9/1822	Elizabeth ?	Baltimore	1/7/1824		Baltimore	31
Marmaduke	4/10/1794	Colne	6/10/1794	Wesley Chapel Colne				20/4/1797	22/4/1797	Wakefield	2yr 6m
Mary	5/9/1796	Wakefield	10/10/1796	TMC	16/2/1819	David Dalby					
Joseph (Jo)	14/3/1798	Wakefield	14/4/1798	TMC				1864			66
Thomas	4/10/1799	York	14/10/1799	St Saviour's York				19/10/1799	21/10/1799	St Saviour's York	15 days
William	4/10/1799	York	14/10/1799	St Saviour's York	2/8/1825	Mary Smith	Chawson	14/7/1831		Trowbridge	31
James	24/5/1802	Hull	20/8/1802	TMC				4/9/1819	6/9/1819	Birmingham	17
Samuel	19/11/1803	Macclesfield	2/1/1804	Christ Church Macclesfield				21/6/1830	26/6/1830	Bath	26

Sources:

- 1) *MS "Diary of Mrs. Entwisle"*, (1793-1798), File: MAM L. 613, Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester.
- 2) *MS "Birthdays to 1804"*, J. Entwisle, File: MAM L. 638-647, Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester.
- 3) "The Grace of God Manifested: in a Brief Account of the Life and Death of Mrs. Entwisle who died in Macclesfield, March 12, 1804", *MM* 27 (1804): 368-376.
- 3) J. Entwisle, ed., *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwisle Fifty Four Years a Wesleyan Minister* 1848, Seventh Edition (London: James Nichols, 1861).
- 4) "Memoir of the Rev. William Entwisle by his Father, the Rev. Joseph Entwisle, Sen.," *WMM* 55 (1832): 693-710.
- 5) *IGI*.

Chapter Ten: Case Study 2: Mrs Ann Leach (1783-1863)

Introduction

The memoir of Mrs Leach was published sixty years after that of Mary Entwisle, appearing in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* of 1866. By this period different editors had all made their mark on the *Magazine's* form and its contents now included book reviews and comments on world affairs.¹ Generally religious publications were facing stiff competition from the secular press in the 1860s, but the circulation of the Wesleyan denominational magazine had further improved.² Significantly, religious biography consisting of biographical sketches, memoirs and obituaries and memoirs remained a regular feature. The account of Mrs Leach was published as the first item in the October issue of 1866, taking up ten of its ninety-five pages. Entitled simply: 'Memoir of Mrs. Leach, late of Wakefield: by the Rev. Robert M. Willcox', the account was the only major biographical article in this edition.³

Within the mainstream movement, an ordained and trained ministry had long been the norm and the former 'preachers of the gospel' were now 'Reverend' ministers. The increasingly bourgeois composition of Wesleyan congregations, meanwhile, was reflected in the declining number of free pews in Wesleyan chapels.⁴ By this time the movement had survived the losses due to internal challenges, had begun to gain new members. In England the mainstream body was larger than any of its sectarian rivals.⁵ With regard to the role of women in the movement, there had been no slackening in the ban on female preaching, and women's service was becoming more philanthropic in nature. Open evangelism by women, as demonstrated earlier, was now more usually associated with the 'mission fields.'⁶

This was the context in which Mrs Leach's memoir was published, and the analysis that follows will highlight the ways in which the 'picture' being presented illustrates Methodist ideals and reflects the tenor of these times. Furthermore, like the preceding chapter, a much

¹ Frank H. Cumbers, *The Methodist Book Room* (London: Epworth Press, 1956), chapter 6.

² *Ibid.*, 98-9.

³ "Memoir of Mrs. Leach, late of Wakefield: by the Rev. Robert M. Willcox" *WMM* 89 (1866): 865 – 875. Subsequently *ALMM*.

⁴ See chapter three above and R. B. Walker, "The Growth of Wesleyan Methodism in Victorian England and Wales." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 24 (1973): 267-284.

⁵ *Ibid.*; David Carter, "The Context and Content of Mid-Victorian Wesleyan Ecclesiology", *PWHS* 52 (Oct 2000): 219 – 235; R. A. Currie, A. D. Gilbert, and L. Horsley, Eds, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles from 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 141 and 146.

⁶ See earlier discussion in chapter seven above, and Jocelyn Murray, 'Gender Attitudes and the Contribution of Women to Evangelism and Ministry in the Nineteenth Century' in John Wolfe ed., *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780 – 1980* (London: SPCK, 1995), 97 – 116.

wider range of sources are also employed to uncover more information about Ann's actual experience both before and after her marriage. Church records, local histories and trade directories, maps and census returns, as well as a photographic archive are utilised. With the aid of these sources a much wider perspective is available, illustrating the challenges Ann faced in real life, and the practicalities of her existence as the spouse of a Methodist minister. This evidence will allow an informed assessment of whether Ann's account truly represents her own ideals and experience.

Ann's family background and kinship

In contrast to Mary Entwisle, whose formative years were spent in a small township in a mainly rural area, Ann Leach grew up in the environs of the major cotton-producing city of Manchester, being born on 10 December 1783 into a family who lived on the outskirts of this large urban conurbation.⁷ Like the subject of the former case study, Ann was also a second generation Methodist. Both her parents were members of the Society in Manchester, and though running his own business, Ann's father, Mr Fildes devoted much of his time to the movement's educational and philanthropic work.⁸ Ann was the couple's third child, and in common with Mary Entwisle, her early years were spent among a close group of siblings. However, due to tragic circumstances, the pattern of Ann's family life took a very different turn, even before her marriage to the itinerant preacher, William Leach.⁹

The account of Mrs Leach's life discloses only limited information about her birth family and childhood, and no commemorative biographies of her parents have been found in the *Magazine*. A search of local church records, however, summarised in Figure 20 'Ann's Family Tree', has produced further evidence of the family. These sources indicate that Ann's father was Mr Thomas Fildes, of Manchester, who had married his wife, Ann Whitehead in 1778.¹⁰ These sources also show that by the time of Ann's birth in December 1783 the couple already had two other daughters, Mary, born in 1779, and Betty, whose birth took place in 1781.¹¹

⁷ *ALMM*, 865.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Figure 20: 'Ann's Family Tree' can be found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter. All church records cited in this chapter have been retrieved through *IGI*. Ann's date of birth is given in *ALMM*, 865, while her birth and christening are confirmed in records of Manchester Cathedral, formerly the Collegiate Church, Manchester, which also provide the Christian names of Ann's parents. A separate record shows that Thomas Fildes and Ann Whitehead were married at the Collegiate Church on 25 Oct. 1778.

¹¹ *ALMM*, 865, refers to Ann's 'elder sisters'. One *IGI* record shows the birth of Mary Fildes on 11 July 1779. Though this information is not extracted from parish records, the date is feasible, given that Ann's parents were married on 25 Oct. 1778. Moreover, the date of death of this Mary Fildes (March 1826) accords with the information in *ALMM*, 871, stating that one of Ann's sisters died on 9 March 1826.

Evidence of later family baptisms reveals that after this trio of girls, four more children were born to Mr and Mrs Fildes. Thomas, the couple's first son, was christened in the spring of 1786 whilst the baptism of another boy, James took place two years later.¹² Evidently the elder brother died in infancy, as a later son born to the couple was also named Thomas on 13 December 1789.¹³ The birth of another girl, Sarah, in the spring of 1792 appears to have completed the Fildes' family.¹⁴ Ann was thus the third eldest girl in a family of six. At the time of her tenth birthday, in December 1793, Ann's two older sisters, Mary and Betty were fifteen and thirteen respectively. Her brothers James and Thomas were aged five and four, and Sarah, the youngest sibling was approximately a year and nine months old.

The memoir of Mrs Leach is rather circumspect about the social status of Ann's father, stating merely that he 'occupied himself in business.'¹⁵ Local trade directories and histories, however, confirm that Mr Fildes was a grocer, having business premises at 37 Bank Top, a location lying in the south eastern part of Manchester on the main thoroughfare towards what was then the village of Ardwick.¹⁶ Whilst the shop was on the corner of Bank Top and Travis Street, the family's home was situated on the adjoining Worsley Street.¹⁷ It also appears that Thomas Fildes was something of an entrepreneur, for during the late 1780s he is known to have ventured into property development, erecting a row of cottages behind his family dwelling.¹⁸ Though there was a building boom generally in Manchester at this time, an 1801 street plan shows the area surrounding the Fildes family home was still relatively undeveloped. According to this map, reproduced as Figure 21 below, Ann grew up with the benefit of open fields to the east and south of her home.¹⁹

Thomas Fildes is reported as being associated with the first chapel established in Manchester, which was situated on Birchin Lane.²⁰ Like Mary Entwisle, therefore, Ann would

Records of Canon Street Independent chapel, Manchester indicate that Betty Fildes, daughter of Thomas and Ann Fildes, was born on 17 May 1781.

¹² *IGI* records of Manchester Cathedral. The couple's first son was baptized on 16 April 1786 and James was christened on 23 March 1788.

¹³ *Ibid*; J. T. Slugg, *Reminiscences of Manchester Fifty Years Ago*, 1st Edn 1881 (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University press, 1971), 96 confirms that Thomas Fildes senior had two sons named James and Thomas.

¹⁴ *IGI* records of Manchester Cathedral show Sarah was christened on 18 March 1792.

¹⁵ *ALMM*, 865.

¹⁶ Slugg, *Reminiscences*, 96; *Scholes's Manchester and Salford Directory* (Manchester: Sowler & Russell, 1794), 44.

¹⁷ Slugg, *Reminiscences*, 96.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ See Figure 21 in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter, an extract from G. Cole and J. Roper, *Street Plan of Manchester and Salford*, ca. 1801, accessed via: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com>. On the cotton industry in Manchester see Alan Kidd, *Manchester* (Keele, Staffordshire: Keele University Press, 1993), especially 15-25. Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1982), 352 suggests that the population of the city rose from 39,000 in 1780 to 75,000 in 1801.

²⁰ Slugg, *Reminiscences*, 96.

have been brought up according to Methodist principles, as her parents were already committed members of the movement at the time of her birth.²¹ In addition to running his business, Ann's father also took a keen interest in the movement's educational and charitable work. In 1785 he helped John Lancaster, 'a poor shoemaker' and newcomer to the town, who had started a Sunday school in his cellar.²² Lancaster, a fellow Methodist, lived close to the Fildes family and Ann's father assisted in making the cellar habitable, fitting out another cellar shortly afterwards. With the erection of Mr Fildes' cottages behind Worsley Street two years later, the scholars were transferred to a large room above these dwellings. This is believed to be the first Sunday school in Manchester, and Ann's father was not only instrumental in its founding, but took part in its operation.²³

Thomas Fildes was also involved in another Methodist enterprise: the Strangers' Friend Society. This was a scheme, originating in London in 1785, by which monies were collected from Methodist members and then distributed to those *outside* the Society who were in need. Potential recipients needed no other qualification than that they were 'poor, sick, friendless strangers'.²⁴ Writing of this charity in Manchester, Joseph Aston described how: 'Poor strangers sinking under the pressure of poverty and disease, are sought out, and supplied with food and raiment, and with medical assistance for the cure of their diseases.'²⁵ Ann's father is said to have been among the most 'diligent and devoted agents' of this work,²⁶ which, due to poor housing and sanitation in many areas of Manchester was particularly hazardous at this time.²⁷ On one occasion, after visiting a sick family, Mr Fildes fell ill with the same 'malignant fever'.²⁸ Ann's biographer opined: 'It is probable that he did not use proper precautions, in consequence of being in great haste to attend the meeting of a Committee.'²⁹ Whether this was the case or not, Ann's father subsequently died. Unhappily, Mrs Fildes did not survive her husband much longer, and only fourteen months later a family of six orphans was left.³⁰

The exact timing of these events is not clear, but there is evidence that the shop at Bank Top was being run by Ann's sisters, Mary and Betty Fildes in 1797, which suggests that Ann's

²¹ *ALMM*, 865. Interestingly, Ann's parents are described as *Wesleyan* Methodists, a distinction that was not necessary at the time of Ann's birth when there were no breakaway sects.

²² Slugg, *Reminiscences*, 96.

²³ *Ibid.*; *ALMM*, 865.

²⁴ "Strangers' Friend Society", in *DMBI*, 339.

²⁵ Joseph Aston, *A Picture of Manchester*, 1st. Edn. 1816 (Manchester: E. J. Morton, 1969), 137- 8.

²⁶ *ALMM*, 865.

²⁷ Roy Porter, *English Society*, 355, quotes John Aiken's 1795 description of poor housing in Manchester, especially damp cellar dwellings and shattered windows promoting fevers, which, he wrote: 'prevail most in houses exposed to the effluvia of dunghills...'

²⁸ *ALMM*, 865.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

father had died by this date.³¹ This would place the death of Mrs Fildes as occurring around early 1798. Subsequently both Mary and Betty married,³² and at this stage Ann took over the management of the household. Ann is reported to have been ‘not yet eighteen,’ at the time, which suggests the autumn of 1801.³³ From this point Ann was responsible for the care of her younger siblings, James, Thomas and Sarah, who by this date were approximately thirteen, eleven and eight years of age. Ann’s memoir makes no reference to the financial situation of the family at this point: an omission that may simply be reticence on the part of the memoir’s subject or her biographer. The family possibly received an adequate income, perhaps from rent accruing from Thomas Fildes’ cottages as well as proceeds from the shop. Whether Ann assisted her sisters in the running of the grocery store during this period is also not known, but the business certainly remained in the family, being expanded at a later date under the management of Ann’s brothers, James and Thomas Fildes.³⁴

Ann’s early spiritual life and conversion

Although Ann was brought up as part of a Methodist household, there is no comment in her memoir to indicate how this foundation expressly influenced her early spiritual development. One indication of devotional reading in the family derives from Ann’s reflection that her earliest religious inclinations were prompted by James Janeway’s *A Token for Children*. Though this is reported to have produced ‘excellent impressions on her mind’, such feelings were intermittent at this stage.³⁵ At a later period the ‘gayer scenes of life’ were a particular temptation. After being ‘strongly pressed’ to go to a ball on one occasion Ann even smuggled her dress to her friend’s house to avoid being seen.³⁶ This caused ‘much conflict and pain of mind,’³⁷ however as Ann knew her sister did not wish her to go. Finding that her companion was not able to attend, Ann viewed this as a providential deliverance, resolving ‘never [again] to frequent places of amusement.’³⁸ Such diversions, as shown earlier, were often held to be a

³¹ *Scholes’s Manchester and Salford Directory* (Manchester: Sowler & Russell, 1797), 42.

³² *Ibid.*, 865; IGI records of Manchester Cathedral note that Mary Fildes married Thomas Bibby on 22 Aug. 1799. I have found no trace of Betty’s date of marriage, but *ALMM*, 866 indicates that her husband’s name was Mr Johnson.

³³ *ALMM*, 865.

³⁴ Slugg, *Reminiscences*, 96; E. Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer [sic] of the County Palatine of Lancaster* 1st Edn. 1827 (Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1968), 2: 196. According to the latter source, James and Thomas Fildes were ‘grocers, tea dealers, and importers of Irish butter,’ at 38 London Road, (Bank Top had been renamed London Road by 1827) and 69 Shudehill, Manchester.

³⁵ *ALMM*, 866. See also M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 78 which notes that the book inculcated anxieties in its young readers, especially about hell.

³⁶ *ALMM*, 866.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* Ann wrote: ‘the Lord made a way for me...’

particularly female failing.³⁹ The fact that Ann received an invitation to a ball, and had a suitable dress, meanwhile, shows that the family's social standing and prosperity were relatively good. Moreover it is evident that at this point Ann's had friends outside the Methodist Society, for whom dancing was an acceptable form of entertainment.

The interpretation of difficult circumstances as a providential preparation for later life is a common theme in Methodist biography, and conversion narratives generally. Ann's biographer, Reverend Willcox, emphasized the character-building aspect of her situation after her parents death, writing: 'How this early introduction to the duties and responsibilities of such a position would tend to strengthen her natural prudence and foresight, afterwards so valuable to her husband and family may easily be perceived.'⁴⁰ Significantly, Mr Willcox saw the qualities of 'prudence' and 'foresight' as being of value later to Ann's *husband* and *family* rather than of personal worth. However, from dates within the memoir, it seems possible that Ann's circumstances and particularly the loss of both of her parents were instrumental in prompting a more earnest evaluation of her spiritual life.

Though there is no indication of precisely when Ann first became aware of her own sinfulness, she underwent a long period prior to conversion, being said to have: 'sought the Lord sorrowing' for two years.⁴¹ During this time Mr Johnson, Ann's brother-in-law, a Methodist class leader and local preacher, invited her to attend a class-meeting and in December 1802 she joined the Society.⁴² Despite Ann's 'natural timidity,' which hindered her in class meetings, she persevered determining: 'not to rest without a full assurance that I was a child of God, accepted by Him through Jesus Christ.'⁴³ In terms reminiscent of many other conversion narratives, Ann described her struggles:

I have often gone to the house of prayer with a sorrowful heart, hoping to find Him whom my soul longed for. Returning in sorrow, I have retired in secret, there wept and prayed, and wrestled with the Lord, alternately hoping and fearing: sometimes afraid to go to sleep; sometimes terrified by dreaming that the end of the world was come, and my soul unprepared.⁴⁴

Eventually, at a class meeting one evening, she found herself 'unusually affected' during the first prayer, being able subsequently to rejoice and praise God.⁴⁵ Finally her fears were

³⁹ See earlier examples in chapter seven above and Watts, *Dissenters*, 58.

⁴⁰ *ALMM*, 865-6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.* This description of her rather conflicts with the picture of Ann smuggling her frock to a friend's house in order to go to the ball.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 867.

removed, and Ann ‘had joy and peace in believing’.⁴⁶ ‘Having long been in the darkness of sin and sorrow,’ wrote Mr Willcox, Ann ‘was brought into “marvellous light”’.⁴⁷ It seems likely that these events took place during the second half of 1804.

Courtship and Marriage

Having lost her parents and been the head of the household for some time, new developments of a more personal nature now took place in Ann Fildes’ life, as several suitors put themselves forward. Denied the counsel of parents in this important matter, Ann was nevertheless very conscious of the need to find a partner who would share her own spiritual outlook, determining to pray about her situation and leave the matter in God’s hands. Writing of this period, she explained:

I resolved not to marry any one who did not love God. I sought counsel at His hand; praying that He would direct my steps. The Lord heard my prayer and made my way plain; but not as I expected: giving me to see that His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts⁴⁸

The unexpected development was attention from a new suitor, William Leach, who was one of the Methodist itinerant preachers, currently stationed in the Manchester circuit.

Ann’s new admirer hailed originally from Allerton near Bradford, Yorkshire, being born on 20 August 1777, to parents who, at that time, ‘had not received converting grace’.⁴⁹ As a young man he is said to have shared the general low opinion of Methodism, but changed his views after attending a Methodist prayer meeting. Becoming a regular participant, William faced opposition from his father, who insisted that he relinquish his ties with the movement or leave home. William chose to live with an uncle, who attended Methodist services, later joining the Society and being converted on his eighteenth birthday.⁵⁰ He was soon convinced of a call to preach and became a local preacher, continuing in this work for three years. Being recommended as a suitable candidate for the itinerant ministry William entered service as a probationer in 1799,⁵¹ and four annual appointments followed in the circuits of Huddersfield, Todmorden, Worcester and Burton-on-Trent. He was admitted to ‘full connexion’ at the Conference of 1803, going to Leeds, where he spent two years.⁵² In 1805, however, he was posted to Manchester, little knowing that in his new appointment he would also find a wife.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Notably, although the date of Ann’s entry into the Society is given, that of her conversion is not. This suggests that by the 1860s Ann’s membership was felt to be the more important event.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Ann is quoting Isaiah 55: 8.

⁴⁹ *WLMM*, 361.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 362-3. William was converted in August 1795.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 364-5.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 366.

William's co-preachers in the Manchester circuit were James Wood, John Reynolds and Jabez Bunting, the latter having been admitted to the itinerancy at the same time as William.⁵³ In 1805 the circuit was as yet undivided, and William found that the workload was 'excessive', due not only to the amount of ground to be covered but also the dire conditions that prevailed. William's daughter described his feelings:

... at first he felt discouraged by the thought that it would be impossible for him to do his duty in so large a town, where the people were so scattered, and almost perpetual calls were made upon the Minister to visit the sick and dying some of whom they found in the most deplorable situation.⁵⁴

However, William was not without encouragement. He learnt a great deal from James Wood, with whom he had his lodgings during this period, describing him as: 'a serious upright man ... who had thought clearly on most subjects in divinity.'⁵⁵ More importantly, he also became acquainted with the subject of this case study, Miss Ann Fildes.⁵⁶

It is not known how Ann and William first became known to one another, but as the Fildes family attended the Oldham Street chapel, this was most probably the couple's first meeting place.⁵⁷ Though the circumstances surrounding William's proposal are also unrecorded, the latter's attentions were certainly unexpected by the object of his suit. Ann wrote that she was 'much surprised, not expecting to be called to so public a position,' recording also that 'a great struggle took place in [her] mind at the prospect of leaving [her] friends and native place'.⁵⁸ It is clear that she was most concerned about a life spent in the public arena and the travelling entailed by the itinerant system.⁵⁹ After prayer and 'due consideration' however, Ann consented to William's proposal, and they were married in the firm conviction that this was 'in accordance with the will of God'.⁶⁰ Their wedding took place on 16 October 1806 at the Collegiate Church, Manchester, when a number of the couple's friends were present.⁶¹ William was twenty-nine years old at the time and Ann was twenty-two.

William's memoir, though recording the fact that he met and married Ann, reveals nothing of their later life together, simply informing the reader that Ann was the 'first and only object of his choice,' and that theirs was 'indeed a union attended with as much felicity as falls

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Slugg, *Reminiscences*, 96 and 154. Ann's brother, James Fildes is recorded as a member of the congregation at Oldham Street in 1829 and a trustee of the chapel in 1834.

⁵⁸ *ALMM*, 867.

⁵⁹ See chapter seven above for similar qualms expressed by other prospective wives.

⁶⁰ *ALMM*, 867.

⁶¹ *Ibid*; *WLMM*, 367.

to the lot of man in this vale of tears.⁶² The account of Mrs Leach's life, however, includes Ann's journal reference to her 'dear husband'. On 17 October 1813, for example, she wrote:

It was seven years yesterday since I was married to my dear husband. I thank God for him. He was given to me, I believe from the Lord. I had yielded myself to God; and my prayer was that He would choose for me, and direct me aright, and that I might have one to help and not hinder me, in my heavenly course.⁶³

These words confirm Ann's strong sense of God's providence in action in the matter of her choice of her husband, and also reveal that she sought a true spiritual partnership with her marital partner. Seeing William as a gift from God, she went on to express the wish that their union would continue 'to be blessed by Him.'⁶⁴ At this stage in her life, therefore, Ann appears to have been very satisfied with her marriage, showing her trust in God for the future.

The itinerant life

As the foregoing discussion has shown, Ann's primary anxieties about being the wife of an itinerant preacher concerned the public nature of her future position and the need to leave her family and friends. The former of these worries may perhaps have stemmed from personal characteristics, for example, her reported 'natural timidity'.⁶⁵ In other respects she was well qualified for the position, coming from an established Methodist family, being already converted, and having the added experience of managing her own household for some time. As events turned out, Ann's withdrawal from her friends and family was fairly gradual, for from the time of her marriage in October 1806 until the following summer William was in post in the Manchester circuit.⁶⁶ It is not known where the couple lived during this period but by remaining in Manchester, Ann was sure to have seen her relatives regularly. Things were set to change, however, for at the Conference of 1807 William was posted to the Blackburn circuit.⁶⁷ From this point onward Ann was never again resident in her native town.

William's ministry and circuits

The removal from Manchester to Blackburn marked the start of Ann's extensive travels alongside her husband. This was the first change of circuit in a total of sixteen such events between 1806 and William's retirement in 1841, details of which are included in Figure 22

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *ALMM*, 868.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 866.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 867; *WLMM*, 367.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, *ALMM*, 867.

‘Major Events in Ann’s Married Life’.⁶⁸ William’s next postings entailed a gradual eastward drift, for after two years at Blackburn the couple went to Todmorden in 1809, moving on to Halifax in 1811 and from there to York in 1813. The Leach family made a brief return to Lancashire in 1815, as William became the superintendent at Burnley, his first appointment to this senior post.⁶⁹ Later stations, however, again moved the family further afield, with postings at Derby from 1817 and to Birmingham two years later.⁷⁰ While these previous appointments were all biennial ones, the following stay in Sheffield, from 1821, lasted a full three years. The family headed even further north in 1824 as William served first at Sunderland, and then in Darlington: two biennial posts which kept the family in this area of the country until August 1828.⁷¹

As the above summary shows, by 1828 Mr and Mrs Leach had already lived in circuit towns in Lancashire, Yorkshire, the Midlands and the North East. The Conference that year, however, brought a complete change, sending William to Bristol, a place where he had long wished to serve.⁷² A three year term at Bristol followed, after which William’s subsequent appointments led to a gradual return to the north. He accepted an invitation to Burslem in 1831, going to Wakefield in 1833 and from there to Bradford Eastbrook.⁷³

Though William enjoyed his time in the last circuit, which was a return to the environs of his youth, he was almost sixty-two by the end of his service here,⁷⁴ and experiencing some deterioration in his health. Appointed to Rotherham at the Conference of 1839, he chose to leave the circuit after a year, finding the workload too demanding. He went to Bramley, near Leeds, in 1840, hoping to find a more compact and more manageable circuit. This did not prove to be the case, however, and in 1841 William decided to quit the full-time ministry. From then on he and Ann made their home in Wakefield, where William was a local preacher, and active in other fields.⁷⁵ Going from Bramley to Wakefield proved to be Ann’s last removal. After William’s death in 1846 she stayed in Wakefield until her own demise in 1866.⁷⁶

This whistle-stop tour through William’s ministry really brings home the nomadic nature of Ann’s life, showing how regularly the family were uprooted for the sake of the circuit

⁶⁸ See Appendix 2 at the end of the chapter.

⁶⁹ *WLMM*, 367-8.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 369-70.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 370.

⁷³ *WLMM*, 370- 371. William was at Wakefield from 1833 until August 1836 and then went to Bradford Eastbrook.

⁷⁴ William served at Bradford Eastbrook until August 1839.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 371-2.

⁷⁶ *ALMM*, 872-4.

system. This was despite the fact that a three year term in office in a circuit had now become acceptable.⁷⁷ No wonder that Ann's biographer speaks of the 'pains of severance from attached friends,' as being 'among the inconveniences which mark the Methodist ministerial life.'⁷⁸ As the following discussion shows, Ann and William, like the Entwistles experienced extra stresses through the decisions of the Stationing Committee, and the levels of support and living conditions were similarly variable.

Standards of living and circuit difficulties

A brief examination of the first few years of Ann's married life reveals a speedy introduction to the variable nature of the itinerant life. The couple's move to the Blackburn circuit, for example, involved conditions that were a sharp contrast to those at Manchester. 'The change', wrote Ann's biographer, 'as to house and household comforts was great, and the young pair had privations to endure which sorely taxed their piety and patience.'⁷⁹ Among such inconveniences was the fact that '... there was scarcely a piece of carpet in the whole house.'⁸⁰ Carved out of the original Colne round,⁸¹ the Blackburn circuit was unlikely to have been able to match the allowances of William's former prestigious station, Manchester.⁸² In addition, health problems dogged both William and Ann during their stay in the circuit, and the birth of their first child left Mrs Leach dangerously ill for two months.⁸³ There was sympathy, but little material support from the Methodist community, for Ann's biographer noted: the local people were 'not wanting in kindness, but they were poor.'⁸⁴ This was one occasion when an early move would have been welcome, but Ann and William were required to stay for the usual two-year term.⁸⁵

In contrast, William's next appointment at Todmorden proved both 'pleasant' and 'healthful', which must have come as a relief.⁸⁶ As reported earlier, William had served in the circuit as a probationary preacher, and now after an absence of eight years he returned as a more experienced minister and a married man. He reports being received 'with much affection by the

⁷⁷ William's three-year posts were at Sheffield from 1821, Bristol from 1828, Wakefield from 1833 and Bradford from 1836.

⁷⁸ *ALMM*, 868.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 867.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Hall*, 57.

⁸² T. P. Bunting and G. S. Rowe, eds., *The Life of Jabez Bunting DD* (1887), 258. Bunting, one of William's co-preachers at Manchester, informed the taxman that in 1805-6 he received allowances of £83-00.

⁸³ *ALMM*, 867. I discuss these problems further in the following section.

⁸⁴ *ALMM*, 867.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 868.

society'.⁸⁷ The family's home was situated 'on the breezy hill-side at Heptonstall',⁸⁸ and the memoirs of both William and Ann refer to extra comforts in this circuit.⁸⁹ Remaining here for another biennial term of office, the only fly in the ointment appears to have been trials, recorded by William, because of a 'want of discipline in the society' especially at Todmorden.⁹⁰ This aspect of his duties came to dominate the couple's experience in their following circuit, Halifax.

Halifax was a major circuit, one of the financial pillars of the movement, and its South Parade Chapel was extended during Ann and William's stay there.⁹¹ Despite these advantages, William's posting in the circuit, from September 1811, was not a comfortable one. This was the period when Lord Sidmouth's bill to limit itinerant preaching was pending, leaving Methodist leaders even more anxious to avoid the taint of radicalism.⁹² Discipline at Halifax, meanwhile, is reported to have been 'in a low state' for some time, and proved difficult to enforce, especially in the country districts.⁹³ Moreover, the introduction of machinery into the 'various branches of cloth manufacture' was stimulating active opposition.⁹⁴ Recording the machine breaking, attacks upon the mills, and robbery and violence that followed, William described how he and his co-preachers had 'found it absolutely necessary to warn our hearers against having any connexion with such a spirit of anarchy and confusion.'⁹⁵ Adding to the general tensions caused by these events, both Mr Leach and his co-preachers, Jabez Bunting and Mark Dawes, 'received various hints of our own personal danger.'⁹⁶ In the face of such threats it is not surprising that William and his colleagues were 'disposed to move' at the end of the connexional year.⁹⁷ However, their wishes were overruled, and all three preachers were obliged to remain at Halifax until August 1813.⁹⁸

As these brief snapshots suggest, Ann's experience in the first four of William's appointments were a speedy education into the variable temporal comforts afforded by different circuits. Blackburn was at the bottom end of the spectrum, whilst Manchester and Halifax were at the top. During the period of William's active ministry, there were some improvements in

⁸⁷ *WLMM*, 367.

⁸⁸ *ALMM*, 867-8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*; *WLMM*, 367.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*.

⁹¹ *WLMM*, 368; J. A. Hargreaves, "Methodism and Luddism in Yorkshire, 1812 - 1813," *Northern History* 27 (1990): 182.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 181-2; David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750 - 1850*. (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 98-105.

⁹³ *WLMM*, 368.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*. On these developments see especially Hargreaves, "Methodism and Luddism", *passim*.

⁹⁵ *WLMM*, 368.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, *Hall*, 208; Hargreaves, "Methodism and Luddism, 182. Mark Dawes was a junior minister.

⁹⁷ *WLMM*, 368.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, *Hall*, 208.

conditions for the preachers and their families. Whereas a married itinerant with one child could have expected thirty-four pounds to maintain his household in 1800,⁹⁹ by 1815 one estimate suggested that a popular preacher with a wife and two children could expect about a hundred pounds a year, plus a house and a horse.¹⁰⁰ The crucial word in this assessment, however, is ‘popular’, for discrepancies between different circuits continued, and as noted earlier favoured preachers won the wealthier, more prestigious circuits.¹⁰¹ Generally, William appears to have had a successful career, although he waited for some time before taking office as a superintendent.¹⁰² His record of appointments shows service in a number of the connexion’s major circuits.¹⁰³ Moreover, the fact that he was invited to some circuits, was welcomed back in others, and remained in most circuits for the usual length of office, also suggests that he was a popular and well-respected minister.¹⁰⁴

Despite this there are indications that the couple’s income fluctuated from place to place, and it seems quite possible that they faced some hardships even late in William’s career. During the couple’s time at Bristol from 1828, for example, a division of the circuit was mooted. Writing to Jabez Bunting, now President of Conference William warned that the split would leave the predominantly rural area in a precarious financial position. His letter provides an interesting insight into the way that circuit division could exacerbate differences in support for itinerants working in the same geographical area:

The division of this circuit as it is proposed to be done will be natural and geographical; but *not equitable*. All the distant country places to which a horse is necessary will fall to our end with a mass of very poor people. The other will be the Metropolitan Circuit, suited to the state of some venerable father in the connection and his favoured helpers.¹⁰⁵
[Author’s emphasis]

The circuit was split, nevertheless, and William, who was appointed superintendent in the area covering the country districts wrote to Bunting confirming that the division was indeed ‘inequitable ... both as to property and labour.’¹⁰⁶ William’s subsequent circuit, Burslem, had also faced financial difficulties in earlier years, with a former itinerant writing of a debt of £300

⁹⁹ *MM* 25 (1802): 334. This excluded board and lodging payments and the cost of fuel. Allowances were twelve pounds for the preacher, ten pounds for his wife, four pounds for a child, and eight pounds for a servant.

¹⁰⁰ Watts, *Dissenters*, 242.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* Watts cites evidence of Leeds itinerants receiving annual allowances of £250 in 1837, while those in neighbouring Keighley had only £103 per year in 1840.

¹⁰² *WLMM*, 368. William was not appointed superintendent until 1815 at Burnley. He had been in the ministry for twelve years and was thirty-eight years old.

¹⁰³ William’s service included time at Manchester, Halifax, Sheffield, Birmingham and Bristol all of which were among the most important Methodist centres.

¹⁰⁴ William was invited to Sheffield in 1821 and Burslem in 1831. He was welcomed back at Todmorden (1809), and Bradford (1836).

¹⁰⁵ *EC*, 210. Letter dated 17 July 1829.

¹⁰⁶ *EVM*, 8. Letter dated 14 Feb. 1831.

in 1826.¹⁰⁷ Referring to receipt of members' class money, the way that the preachers' allowances were raised, he suggested that 'very few comply with the rules of 1d per week and 1/- per quarter.'¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, though Wakefield, where Mr Leach went in 1833 is reported to be a place where ministers were 'loved and well cared for,'¹⁰⁹ the poor allowances at Bramley, William's last circuit prior to his retirement, caused many itinerants who were stationed there to complain bitterly.¹¹⁰

As the couple's time at Halifax reveals, however, the best temporal situation could be overshadowed by other circumstances. William's ministry in the Derby circuit during 1817-1818, for example, also coincided with social unrest, this time involving local riots in protest at low pay and unemployment. Methodist preachers here, and in other manufacturing areas were pressed to make more effort against radicals.¹¹¹ William's own views regarding radicalism are clear in a later letter to Bunting. After complaining about several other issues, he added: 'Though I write thus don't think me a *Croaker* or a *Conference radical*. No, I hate radicalism in Church and State, as I hate the works of the devil.'¹¹² [Author's emphasis] This comment suggests that Ann's husband strongly supported the official conservative line.

In addition to the stresses caused by the social and political upheavals in society as a whole, the period of William's ministry was also marked by internal strife within the Methodist movement, and a number of secessions from the mainstream body.¹¹³ The impact of such divisions at grass-roots level can be discerned from William's correspondence during 1834. In the normally comfortable and peaceful Wakefield circuit, Samuel Warren's challenge to the Methodist leadership, William wrote, had 'tended to agitate the minds' of those around him.¹¹⁴ He continued: 'Some of our best friends do not know what to think about the frequent acts of misconduct, and rebellion among the preachers ... What will the end of Warren's business be?'¹¹⁵ Contributions for Methodist missions were withheld by some of the local membership.¹¹⁶ In the long term there were widespread losses for mainstream Methodism, with William's memoir referring to the year 1836 as 'a time of trial' for the whole movement.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁷ *EC*, 147. Letter from Jonathan Barker dated 15 Sept. 1826.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ F. H. Mills, "Circuit Finance in Early Methodism," *PWHS* 23: 60.

¹¹⁰ See for example *EVM*, 190 and 408-9. I discuss Bramley further below.

¹¹¹ Hempton, *Methodism*, 105.

¹¹² *EC*, 210. Letter dated 17 July 1829.

¹¹³ On the various secessions affecting the mainstream movement see chapter three above.

¹¹⁴ *EVM*, 102 -3. Letter dated 15 Nov. 1834. For Samuel Warren's challenge to Jabez Bunting and the leadership and later developments see chapter three above.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *EVM*, 103.

¹¹⁷ *WLMM*, 371.

Turning now to discuss Ann's perspective in more detail and her personal circumstances during William's ministry, it is clear that she had added trials to bear. Being only twenty-two when she married she was, like Mary Entwisle, in her prime childbearing years. Therefore, Ann also to cope with all the complexities devolving from her husband's position, as well as bringing up her family and determining what her individual role within the Methodist movement should be.

Ann's family history

The memoir of Mrs Leach is rather circumspect about the details of its subject's childbearing history. The reader is told that Ann's eldest child was born at Blackburn, and later references reveal that this was a girl, whose initials were 'M A'.¹¹⁸ Mention is made of two further female siblings, who are identified only as 'E',¹¹⁹ and 'A'.¹²⁰ In addition one of Ann's journal entries, recorded in the spring of 1818 and quoted in her account, refers to the loss of a baby son at just a few weeks old.¹²¹ A search of chapel records in each of William's circuits, however, has provided some further details about these four siblings, revealing also that a further son and daughter was born into the family. The evidence uncovered, detailed in Figures 20 and 22, indicates that between 1809 and 1820 Ann and William had six children in total.¹²² Like the subject of the previous case study, however, Ann knew the pain of losing a child in infancy, for out of these six siblings, only five children survived to adulthood.

The birth of the couple's first child, 'M A' is confirmed in records of Clayton Street Chapel in Blackburn, which show that a daughter was born to Ann and William Leach during their second year in the Blackburn circuit. Arriving on 25 April 1809, the new baby was christened Mary Ann, most probably after her aunt Mary, and in honour of her mother and deceased grandmother, who shared the second name.¹²³ Whilst Ann's memoir makes no reference to a child being born into the family when Mr and Mrs Leach were in the Todmorden circuit, baptism records from the chapel at Heptonstall reveal that Ann gave birth to her first son in February 1811: a baby that took his father's Christian name.¹²⁴ Then, only eighteen months later, Ann and William were blessed with a second daughter, Eliza, who was born in September

¹¹⁸ *ALMM*, 867, 869 and 871.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 871.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 872.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 870.

¹²² Both figures are in Appendix 2 in at the end of the chapter.

¹²³ *ALMM*, 867; *IGI* records of Clayton Street Wesleyan Church, Blackburn.

¹²⁴ *IGI* records of Heptonstall Wesleyan Methodist Church show that William Leach junior was born on 2 February 1811 and baptized on 10 March 1811.

1812. By this time the family were resident at Halifax and Eliza was christened at the South Parade chapel in the town.¹²⁵

After these three fairly rapid births in the Leach family there appears to have been some respite from childbearing for Ann, for a period of about four years separates the birth of Eliza and that of the couple's next child, Emma, who was born at Burnley in the summer of 1816.¹²⁶ Thereafter a second son, James Fildes Leach arrived when the couple were at Derby, sometime towards the close of 1818.¹²⁷ Unhappily, this baby, who was named after Ann's brother, appears to have died at a very young age in the spring of 1819.¹²⁸ It is clear that Ann was soon pregnant again, as she gave birth to another child on 21 January 1820, by which time William was stationed in the Birmingham circuit.¹²⁹ The newest member of the family was the couple's fourth daughter. She was named Amelia and christened at Cherry Street Wesleyan Chapel three weeks after her birth.¹³⁰ Existing evidence suggests that this was Ann's final confinement, taking place when she was thirty-six years old.

Ann's childbearing history provides another reminder of the dangers for both mother and baby during the early nineteenth century. Mention has already been made of Ann's serious illness after the birth of Mary Ann, and at this time 'a complication of disorders threatened her life'.¹³¹ The long period separating the births of Eliza in 1812 and Emma in 1816 may also be a sign of some unsuccessful pregnancies having occurred during this time. Meanwhile, baby James, who was christened on 31 December 1818, died at only 'a few weeks old'.¹³² As the previous case study has indicated, Ann was not alone in suffering such a loss. A diary entry of 1 March 1819, published in the memoir of Mrs Leach, shows her trying come to terms with this situation, asking: 'Why should I murmur to give him back to Him who lent him to me for a short time?'¹³³ The account of William's life also notes the pain caused by this 'severe stroke'.¹³⁴ Both parents, therefore, felt the baby's loss to be a bitter blow.

¹²⁵ *IGI* records of South Parade Wesleyan Methodist Church, Halifax show that Eliza was born on 13 September 1812 and was christened on 12 October 1812.

¹²⁶ *IGI* records of the chapels at York have no evidence of further births to the couple. Records at Burnley reveal that Emma Leach was christened on 13 August 1816.

¹²⁷ *IGI* records of St. Alkmund St. Wesleyan Methodist Church, Derby provide no date of birth for James, but show that he was christened on 31 December 1818.

¹²⁸ *WLMM*, 369; *ALMM*, 870.

¹²⁹ *IGI* records of Cherry Street Wesleyan Methodist Church, Birmingham.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* Amelia was thus the 'A_' referred to in the memoir of Mrs Leach, see *ALMM*, 872.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 867; *IGI* records of Clayton Street Wesleyan Church, Blackburn. Ann's debilitation accounts for the delay in the baptism of Mary Ann, who was born on 25 April 1809 but not christened until almost two months later on 23 June.

¹³² *ALMM*, 870.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *WLMM*, 368-9.

An examination of the timing of Ann's pregnancies in conjunction with the chronology of William's ministerial appointments, outlined in Figure 22, reinforces the view that the welfare of a preacher's wife and offspring was often jeopardised by the demands of the itinerant life.¹³⁵ The couple's poor living conditions at Blackburn from 1807 to 1809 have already been described, and during this period both Ann and William suffered bouts of ill health leaving both prostrated at some point.¹³⁶ These events occurred about the time of Ann's first pregnancy, and, as detailed above, the birth of Mary Ann had dangerous consequences for her mother's health. Despite the fact that Mrs Leach had only just recovered from this health scare at the end of June 1809 a change of circuit was due, and thus the family had to remove with all the extra upheaval this involved. Their destination in the Todmorden circuit was only a short distance away, yet Ann was still in a particularly vulnerable state to be undertaking the journey at this time with her baby merely four months old.¹³⁷

By the time of the couple's next move from Todmorden to Halifax in 1811, however, Ann had two children under three years old to care for as Mary Ann was two years four months, and baby William was six months old.¹³⁸ The period at Halifax, meanwhile brought the birth of another child, which occurred in very anxious times due to the Luddite activity in the area. These disturbances came very close to home for the Leach family in April 1812 when Jabez Bunting, the superintendent minister, allowed the burial of a Luddite son of a local Methodist, and a memorial service at the South Parade Chapel.¹³⁹ The commemorative service attracted the largest congregation ever seen in the chapel, a body which included many Painite republicans. Though present, Bunting left the sermon to a local preacher whose conservative message did not go down well. Ominous slogans later appeared on surrounding doors and walls.¹⁴⁰ As noted above, both William and his co-preachers received threats regarding their personal safety.¹⁴¹ Meanwhile there was further uncertainty when William sought a change of circuit.¹⁴² It was in these difficult circumstances that Ann's third pregnancy and confinement took place. William's request for a move was denied, and Eliza was born on 13 September 1812, just as he embarked on a second year in this troubled circuit.¹⁴³

¹³⁵ See Appendix 2 at the end of the chapter below.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 367; *ALMM*, 867. William is said to have succumbed to a 'severe and dangerous illness', which confined him to bed for some time. With the worry and strain of nursing her husband 'day and night' Ann was then prostrated.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* As shown in Figures 20 and 22, in Appendix 2 at the end of the chapter, Mary Ann was born on 25 April 1809 and William needed to be in his next circuit by September.

¹³⁸ No date for the family's removal is available, but William was six months old in August 1811.

¹³⁹ Hargreaves, "Methodism and Luddism", 180 -183.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 182. Bunting had arranged for Jonathan Saville, 'a popular revivalist and politically quietest' local preacher to preside.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 183; *WLMM*, 368.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *IGI* records of South Parade Wesleyan Methodist Church, Halifax.

Following the birth of Eliza, Ann appears to have been free of childbearing for approximately four years prior to the arrival of Emma in 1816, and the death of her next baby, John, meant that there was a similar gap in age between Emma and the youngest surviving child, Amelia.¹⁴⁴ At a later date in William's ministry the family unit was sundered. Moving from the Darlington circuit for Bristol in 1828 Ann and William left some of their older children in the North East.¹⁴⁵ William recorded that he: 'came to Bristol with mingled feelings'. He had long felt a wish to reside there, he wrote, 'but part of my family being in the north, it was painful to leave them so far behind.'¹⁴⁶ For Ann, whose early qualms about becoming a preacher's wife had stemmed from the need to leave her birth family and friends, this added separation from her own offspring must have been doubly difficult. She is said to have suffered 'yearning maternal grief'.¹⁴⁷ This was another result of the unrelenting travelling inherent in the Methodist itinerant life.

Little information is available to establish Ann's links in later life with her family at Manchester, although the death of one of her sisters in March 1826 is mentioned in her memoir.¹⁴⁸ Other sources, however, reveal that the repercussions of the Samuel Warren affair affected her immediate kin. Warren was superintendent in the Oldham Street circuit, Manchester, familiar territory for Ann, and now the place where her brother, James held office as a trustee at the Oldham Street Chapel. By October 1834 Warren's activities had led to his suspension from ministerial duties: a decision that he sought to overturn in the courts. In the ensuing Chancery suit James Fildes became one of the principal defendants.¹⁴⁹ Though Warren eventually lost his case, this must have been an anxious period for Ann and her other siblings. To add to these worries Amelia, Ann's youngest daughter, started to experience illness described as 'a great and sore affliction'.¹⁵⁰ Thus wider connexional affairs and other family troubles overshadowed the couple's time at Wakefield.

Details regarding Ann's own health record are also sparse, though she appears to have suffered sporadic episodes of illness. When at Sheffield in the autumn of 1821, she is said to have been troubled with 'delicate health'.¹⁵¹ A later period of illness reportedly occurred in

¹⁴⁴ See Figures 20 and 22 in Appendix 2 at the end of the chapter. By the time of Amelia's birth, for example, Mary Ann was ten years old, William was eight, Eliza was seven and Emma three.

¹⁴⁵ *ALMM*, 871; *WLMM*, 370. It is not possible to establish which of the Leach's older children remained at Darlington, but Mary Ann was nineteen by this time, William was seventeen and Eliza almost sixteen.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *ALMM*, 871.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Slugg, *Reminiscences*, 96. The Samuel Warren affair is discussed in chapter three above.

¹⁵⁰ *ALMM*, 872.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 870.

March 1826.¹⁵² Recovering from the latter, Ann's respite was short-lived for she succumbed to a bout of rheumatic fever, described as a 'season of debility and severe pain', which lasted until July of that year.¹⁵³ Significantly, both Ann and her husband suffered from the latter ailment, a tendency that was possibly exacerbated by poor housing conditions in some circuits.¹⁵⁴

Ann faced her severest trial in September 1846 when William was taken ill suddenly and died within forty-eight hours. Her husband was aged sixty-nine at the time and the couple had been married for just short of forty years.¹⁵⁵ Ann's sorrow was increased by the fact that she had been away from home when her husband passed away.¹⁵⁶ Afterwards Ann continued living at Wakefield with her youngest daughter, Amelia.¹⁵⁷ It appears that Mrs Leach's health remained fairly robust until the spring of 1860, when, at the age of seventy-six, she suffered a stroke. On this occasion its effects were not severe enough to confine her to the house, and she continued to attend the chapel. Two years later, in May 1862, however a second stroke occurred with more serious consequences. From this point on Ann's physical strength gradually declined. A severe cold, contracted in January 1863, enfeebled her further. Happily she retained all her mental abilities to the end, dying peacefully in bed on 21 January aged seventy-nine. At least two of Mrs Leach's daughters survived their mother, although one of these died before the publication of the account of Ann's life in October 1866.¹⁵⁸

The practicalities of Ann's life

Though Ann entered upon the itinerant life at a later date than Mary Entwisle, the tenor of her daily existence was determined by many of the same factors, most of them out of her control. The welcome and support offered from local people could alter from circuit to circuit, along with the standard of living and accommodation that was available for her family. The demands of William's job also varied, being affected by issues such as his ministerial status in a given appointment, the size and terrain of the circuit, and the requirements of the current preaching plan. Ann's challenge, like that of other preachers' wives, was to make the most of what was provided, seeking friendship and fellowship amongst those close at hand. However, when at home in the circuit lodgings, caring first for Mary Ann, and later seeing to the needs of

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 871.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *WLMM*, 369, and 372. William had long bouts of rheumatism at Sheffield, and Bramley.

¹⁵⁵ See Figures 20 and 22 in Appenix 2 at the end of the chapter. The couple married on 16 Oct. 1806, and William died on 4 Sept. 1846.

¹⁵⁶ *ALMM*, 872.

¹⁵⁷ 1851 Census returns for Wakefield, Yorkshire. Source: Leeds City Reference Library, film no. 3422/23, Enumeration District 7, *folio* 30.

¹⁵⁸ *ALMM*, 872- 4.

her other children the young wife must often have felt lonely, for William's ministerial commitments ensured that Ann and her husband spent much of their time apart.

The first few weeks in a circuit were particularly difficult for the wives of the itinerant preachers as they sought to familiarise themselves with the different aspects of their new location and a fresh Methodist community. The memoirs of both Ann and William shed light on this aspect of their experience. In the Todmorden circuit, for example, as suggested earlier, William was known to the local people, after a previous term of office,¹⁵⁹ and returning with Ann in 1809, he reported being 'received with much affection by the society'.¹⁶⁰ Ann's memoir notes that in the early stages of their residence in York, she felt blessed by the 'fervent piety and kindness of the friends'¹⁶¹, whilst at a later date at Birmingham, she also recorded being 'received with much kindness'.¹⁶² The entry into her new situation must have been considerably eased with this kind of support.

When considering Ann's skills as a homemaker within the circuit lodgings, her previous experience of looking after the household and her siblings at Manchester evidently proved a real advantage. The poor state of the preacher's accommodation at Blackburn from 1807 was an early test of her capabilities. Ann's biographer wrote that '... love and faith in God made the bare dwelling a home of happiness,' but this was 'not without some sighs at the outset on the part of the young wife.'¹⁶³ Standards of living in later circuits are scarcely mentioned, but there was obviously a need to budget carefully, for in the household generally it is said that 'strict economy' prevailed.¹⁶⁴ However, Ann's daughter noted being 'sensible of many comforts' as a child, and praised her mother's good management and self denial.¹⁶⁵ Such practices, she suggested, ensured that there was always sufficient for the family and any who might visit unexpectedly. As earlier discussion has demonstrated, the need to care for the circuit fixtures and fittings was another responsibility. Ann's children were 'early taught to show the same regard for the property of others, as [their] own'.¹⁶⁶ Meanwhile, at the end of each tenure, Ann is said to have wished to: 'leave [the] house in the state in which she hoped to find the one she was expecting to move into.'¹⁶⁷ Her vigilance in such matters and high standards of domesticity are thus made very clear.

¹⁵⁹ *WLMM*, 363. William served at Todmorden from 1800-1802 with Robert Lomas as a co-preacher.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 367.

¹⁶¹ *ALMM*, 868.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 870.

¹⁶³ *ALMM*, 867.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 874.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Evidence from William's memoir and correspondence suggests that Ann would have often been called to manage her family affairs alone. Writing in 1814, at the end of his first year in the York circuit, for example, William described a circuit that was: 'extensive and in many respects, laborious,' recording that he had preached 325 times during the past year.¹⁶⁸ Extra work arrived with seniority, and in the subsequent circuit, Burnley, where William became the superintendent minister for the first time he noted 'new cares and some additional labour' in his journal.¹⁶⁹ It is salutary to remember that during the same period, (1813-1817) Ann had four very young children. Mary Ann, William and Eliza were all less than five years old when the couple first went to York, and baby Emma was born at Burnley in 1816.¹⁷⁰ William's descriptions suggest that his workload left little time to support his wife and family.

The latter's letters to Jabez Bunting show that even after the division of larger metropolitan circuits, the amount of labour required by the itinerant preachers was not significantly reduced. In 1831, for example, having taken over the newly-divided Bristol South circuit, William informed Bunting that he needed 'a circuit without so much travelling as I have had lately' describing his current post as 'rather fagging'.¹⁷¹ Summarizing his previous day's workload he recorded riding twenty miles, preaching three times and having administered the sacrament.¹⁷² Adding to William's labour here was the poor health of his co-preacher. As he informed Bunting: 'Brother Stead is really a very delicate man, and cannot always attend his places ...'¹⁷³ Despite moving to Burslem, however, his position appears to have been no better. William found himself in another demanding circuit, where there were only two itinerants to cater for the spiritual needs of 1,700 people.¹⁷⁴ It is likely, therefore, that Ann saw just as little of her husband in the later years of his ministry.

In everyday life Ann shouldered the responsibility for her family stoically. Her daughter suggested that she kept 'many a sorrow in her own breast' to avoid distracting her husband from 'the great work to which he had been set apart by God'.¹⁷⁵ Whilst Ann's determination to shield William from her own problems and worries is laudable, this may well have resulted in more strain for her and an increased sense of isolation at times. Ann's adept

¹⁶⁸ *WLMM*, 368.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ See Figures 20 and 22 in Appendix 2 at the end of the chapter. At the start of William's ministry in York in September 1813 Mary Ann was aged four, William was two and Eliza was eleven months old.

¹⁷¹ *EVM*, 7- 8. Letter dated 14 February 1831.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 8; *WLMM*, 370. The latter source gives 1,500 members. See also *EC*, 147. A third preacher had been appointed at Burslem in 1823, but was dropped the following year due to the financial problems in the circuit.

¹⁷⁵ *ALMM*, 874.

domestic management, meanwhile, is said to have been beneficial in affording William time for study and pastoral visits.¹⁷⁶ In these ways Ann was an indispensable supporter and facilitator of her husband's ministerial work.

While the number of moves recorded in Ann's memoir indicates the nomadic nature of the itinerant life, the account also points to the emotional strain of these regular upheavals. At the time of the couple's departure from York for Burnley in 1815, for example, Ann is recorded as suffering: 'strong regrets ... at parting with the cordial people of York'.¹⁷⁷ The prospect of the move at the end of William's term of office at Derby in 1819 meanwhile is said to have been 'productive of many anxieties'.¹⁷⁸ Again, when leaving Sheffield after a posting some years later, Ann was deeply affected by 'this separation from Christian friendships'.¹⁷⁹ The fracturing of her immediate family unit occurred firstly when the couple's only son, William left to be educated at the Methodist boarding school at Woodhouse Grove, in Yorkshire.¹⁸⁰ Another rupture took place in 1828 as Ann and William went to Bristol leaving some of their older offspring living in the North East, and as noted above, Ann is said to have suffered 'yearning maternal pain'.¹⁸¹ The position of the Methodist travelling preachers has been compared to that of 'strangers and pilgrims' in the land.¹⁸² Ann's memoir undoubtedly indicates that their wives were obliged to endure the same unsettled state.

With the help of local studies and census records it has been possible to discover much more about Ann's surroundings and the challenges of her life during William's last year of active service at Bramley near Leeds. Coming here from Rotherham, William hoped that his new posting would prove 'a compact, easy Circuit, to the labours of which his diminished strength would be equal'.¹⁸³ As events turned out William's hopes were not realized, and a prolonged spell of rheumatism kept him from his work for some time.¹⁸⁴ Still not fully recovered at the time of the Conference of 1841, William retired from the itinerancy, moving to Wakefield where he became a supernumerary.¹⁸⁵ While poor health was undoubtedly the main

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 868.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ J. T. Slugg, *Woodhouse Grove School: Memorials and Reminiscences* (London: T. Woolmer, 1885), 227. William is noted as a scholar from 1819, staying probably until 1825.

¹⁸¹ *ALMM*, 871; *WLMM*, 370. This was in 1828.

¹⁸² Hebrews 11: 13-14 speaks of believers as 'strangers and pilgrims' in the present world, a theme considered in detail with regard to Methodist itinerants in Isabel Rivers: "'Strangers and Pilgrims': Sources and Patterns of Methodist Narrative," in J. R. Watson, ed., *Augustan Worlds* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), 189-203.

¹⁸³ *WLMM*, 372.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

cause for this decision, Bramley was also a difficult circuit with a disputatious history.¹⁸⁶ For these reasons the Leach's time in the circuit may have proved less than comfortable for both William and his family.

Carved out of the original Leeds circuit in 1811,¹⁸⁷ the Bramley circuit was situated to the north west of the city: an area covering Bramley itself, which was one of the outlying chapelries of the Leeds parish, plus several other townships falling both within the Leeds parish and the adjoining parish of Calverley.¹⁸⁸ By 1830, the circuit served ten societies of various sizes, and despite the challenge from the Primitive Methodists, it contained a total membership of 1,638.¹⁸⁹ Membership levels dropped after 1835, possibly because of the Warrenite disturbances, but then recovered with a steady climb in numbers. By William's appointment in 1840, the circuit contained eight societies and held 2,080 members.¹⁹⁰ Three itinerants were in place to oversee the spiritual needs of this flock. Apart from Mr Leach, appointed as superintendent, Samuel Sugden and Henry Smallwood were also stationed in the circuit.¹⁹¹

Using the census returns of 1841 it has been possible to establish that Ann and William's lodgings during this time were situated in the township of Bramley,¹⁹² a place described by a contemporary guide as a 'populous chapelry' that was 'pleasantly situated on high ground'.¹⁹³ The township was characterised by its many stone buildings, and neighbouring quarries were one source of employment in the area.¹⁹⁴ The 1831 census reveals that the majority of local people derived their living from some form of manufacturing, with handicrafts and retailing being other common forms of work.¹⁹⁵ In particular Bramley was noted for its

¹⁸⁶ I discuss these aspects of the circuit below.

¹⁸⁷ Joseph Hill, *Memorials of Methodism in Bramley* (Bramley: J. Dawson, 1859), 17.

¹⁸⁸ D. Colin Dews, "Methodism in Leeds from 1791 - 1861: An Analysis of the Development and Involvement of the Various Denominations and Sects within the Methodist Movement in a Changing Urban Community," M. Phil, Bradford, 1984), 789. Societies were based for example in the towns of Armley, Farnley, and Wortley which were in the Leeds parish, whilst Pudsey, the site of another society, was in the parish of Calverley.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 789 and 792. The 1830 list of societies shows the largest to be Wortley with 319 members, whilst the smallest, Rodley, had only twelve. At this time the Bramley society was quite a substantial with 268 members.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 875: Appendix II; B. Greaves, "Methodism in Yorkshire, 1740 - 1851," Ph. D., (Liverpool, 1968), Figure. 28.

¹⁹¹ *Hall*, 270; *WMM*, 78 (1855): 855-6. Samuel Sugden (1787-1855) entered ministry in 1809. I have been unable to trace Henry Smallwood's details.

¹⁹² 1841 Census returns for Bramley, Leeds. Source: Leeds City Reference Library, film no: 1342/10 Enumeration District 9, folios 5-10. Afterwards *1841 Bramley Census*.

¹⁹³ Pigot & Co., *Royal National Commercial Directory and Topography of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire* (London: 1841), 34; Greaves, "Methodism in Yorkshire," 114. The latter states that in 1841 the population of Bramley was 8,875.

¹⁹⁴ Pigot, *Commercial Directory*, 35.

¹⁹⁵ Greaves, "Methodism in Yorkshire," 124. The 1831 census recorded 825 individuals employed in manufacturing and 310 in handicrafts and retailing. In contrast only sixty individuals made their living in

‘flourishing and extensive woollen trade ...’ and fifty-four individuals are noted as woollen cloth manufacturers.¹⁹⁶ Though there were a number of mills in the area, Bramley had also proved a refuge for domestic clothiers, and even in 1840 a large number of handlooms were in use.¹⁹⁷ Among such a social mix, Ann’s previous experience in clothing districts such as Heptonstall and Halifax would certainly have stood her in good stead.

The relevant folio of the 1841 census return, reproduced in Figure 23, reveals that Ann and her husband had their lodgings on Town Street, Bramley’s major thoroughfare.¹⁹⁸ This was a road that ran through the village from Broad Lane to Town End taking a north west to southerly route. As the extract of the 1902 map of the township, included as Figure 24 shows, the Leach’s dwelling was situated on the eastern side of Town Street, just three houses to the north of the road’s junction with Waterloo Lane.¹⁹⁹ This placed the family in the very centre of Bramley. The census indicates that the Leach household at this time included not only William and Ann, but their youngest daughter, Amelia, who would have been twenty when the family arrived at Bramley. In addition there was a female servant living with the family called Jane Gilling, who was born in Yorkshire, and was approximately fifteen years old.²⁰⁰

Figure 25 reproduces photographs of this section of Town Street taken before its demolition in the 1960s.²⁰¹ These show that Mr and Mrs Leach’s living accommodation was a stone two-storey building: a small cottage in a row of seven similar properties.²⁰² It is a through terraced house, seemingly comprised of two rooms on both floors.²⁰³ Like other houses in the

agriculture and sixty three in the professions. Other unspecified occupations accounted for a further 371 individuals.

¹⁹⁶ Pigot, *Commercial Directory*, 34-5.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Greaves, "Methodism in Yorkshire," 125. Bramley had experienced in migration from the 1790s onwards, from poor clothiers forced out of Leeds by increased building and rising rents. In later decades other domestic clothiers, who were displaced by the rise of factory production, also made their homes in the area.

¹⁹⁸ *1841 Bramley Census*. Figure 23 ‘Extract from 1841 census showing the Leach family’ is included in Appendix 2 in at the end of the chapter.

¹⁹⁹ Figure 24: ‘1908 Map of Bramley, Leeds,’ is included in Appendix 2 at the end of the chapter.

²⁰⁰ *1841 Bramley Census*, Figure 23 in Appendix 2 at the end of the chapter. Amelia is registered in the census returns as 20 years old, but was 21 on the date of the census (6 June 1841). Ages over fifteen were rounded down to the nearest five, so Jane could have been up to nineteen years old.

²⁰¹ See Figure 25 ‘Photographs of Bramley Town Street’ in Appendix 2 at the end of the chapter. Source: *Leodis: A Photographic Archive of Leeds*, Leeds Library & Information Service <http://www.leodis.org/>.

²⁰² See Appendix 2 at the end of the chapter. Figure 25 a) shows the relevant buildings facing Town Street. The census situates the Leach family in the third cottage from the right along the row. By 1960, the time of the photograph, the first house in the row had become a bank, seen at the far right of the photograph. The second cottage along has two upstairs windows and spans the archway into the rear yard. Mr and Mrs Leach’s lodging by this date was occupied by the ‘Benefit’ shop. The entire terrace has since been demolished.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, and Figure 25 b). Unfortunately the original ground floor frontage on Town Street has been obscured by the later ‘Benefit’ shop, but there is only one window on the second floor. To the rear, as

terrace, the front of the Leach's home opened directly on to Town Street, whilst to the rear of the terrace, which could be reached through an archway in the adjoining house there was simply a shared cobbled yard.²⁰⁴ Space and privacy would have been at a premium here for the yard was bounded by properties on Waterloo Lane to one side,²⁰⁵ and had another short row of cottages opposite.²⁰⁶ Meanwhile, if the site of Ann's residence and lack of garden meant that she and Amelia had little chance to escape the scrutiny of their neighbours they were also certainly highly visible to fellow Methodists. Brunswick chapel, at that time the only Wesleyan chapel in Bramley, stood only a few doors away at the other end of the row.²⁰⁷

Further analysis of the census returns suggests that the Leach family home was surrounded by a mixture of private households and shops.²⁰⁸ The first property in the terrace, on the corner of Town Street and Waterloo Lane, for example was occupied by George Bolton, a linen draper and hatter, whilst the next house along the row was a grocer's shop, run by James Walker.²⁰⁹ Having the latter business next door must have been a poignant reminder for Ann of her earlier years at Manchester and of her father's grocery business. After the Leach's lodging came the household of Sarah Harrison, a widow and her family of four, whilst another widow, Sarah Pinder lived alone in the adjoining house. The final two cottages in the row were inhabited by William Turner, an earthenware dealer and his family, and a household headed by George Bickerdyke, an agricultural labourer. The latter property must have been fairly crowded, as there were five adults and two children under this roof at the time of the census.²¹⁰

Standing at the far end of the short row of houses, and in clear view from the rear of the Leach's dwelling, was Brunswick Chapel.²¹¹ In 1823 this had replaced Bramley's former Wesleyan chapel on the same site, being rebuilt and set back further from the road.²¹² Two separate entries record families living at 'Chapel House,' at the time of the census, but whether these dwellings formed part of the chapel building is not known. Samuel Perrigo, a man described as 'chapel keeper' and his family formed one of these households. Samuel Sugden, William's co-itinerant, plus his wife, three children and a maid also occupied a Chapel House.²¹³

shown in Figure 25 b) the Leach household is the second doorway on the left. A square window with small panes sits to the right of the doorway, with another arched window of the same glazing above.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ See Figure 25 c). Cottages on Waterloo Lane, bounding the yard are to the right.

²⁰⁶ See Figure 25 d).

²⁰⁷ The chapel with its arched upper windows is visible on the far left in Figures. 25 a) and 25 d). It stands on the far right of Figure 25 b).

²⁰⁸ *1841 Bramley Census*, folios 5- 10.

²⁰⁹ These businesses are confirmed in Pigot, *Commercial Directory*, 34.

²¹⁰ *1841 Bramley Census*, folios 5- 10.

²¹¹ Note 212 above.

²¹² Hill, *Methodism in Bramley*, 21.

²¹³ *1841 Bramley Census*, folio 9.

For Ann, the proximity of this family and a fellow itinerant's wife must have been especially welcome.

Evidence from the census illustrates the predominance of the clothing industry in the township, with several households in this section of Town Street, and nearby streets including workers in the textile trade.²¹⁴ The very design of streets such as Providence Street, the row of cottages running parallel to the side of Brunswick Chapel, is indicative of the handloom weaving in this locality. Here, a series of small houses culminated in one large house at the far end. At the time of the domestic clothiers, wrote a former resident 'each street form[ed] a separate community in the trade controlled by a person of higher rank and education who occupied the large house'.²¹⁵ However it is also true that in 1841 some of the clothiers who were the Leach's neighbours may also have found employment at Waterloo Mill, a fulling and scribbling mill, which, as Figure 24 reveals, was situated only a short distance away.²¹⁶

What kind of welcome Ann and her husband received in the Bramley circuit is not recorded, but the circuit was one where the lay members and itinerants had often been in dispute. The underlying problems appear to have stemmed from the nature of the circuit. Unlike the Leeds circuit, Bramley lacked any prestigious chapels, and had no socially elite trustees to wield power and attract the better preachers. Consequently it had suffered from poor ministers, and much of the power in the circuit had passed into the hands of ordinary laymen.²¹⁷ Before William's arrival there had been an attempt to establish voting by ballot at the Quarterly meetings,²¹⁸ and a number of protests and resolutions had been made censuring Conference decisions.²¹⁹ A former superintendent described the local preachers in particular as '... aim[ing] at a separate interest from that of the travelling preachers and the Conference.'²²⁰ When further critical resolutions regarding Conference were thwarted by the itinerants the laymen retaliated

²¹⁴ *1841 Bramley Census*, folios 9-10. Three doors away from the Leach family William Turner junior was a clothier whilst Mary Gregson of the same household was a burler. James Heptonstall in the adjoining house is recorded as a cordwainer. Further along the terrace Benjamin Rider and his wife and their neighbour, William Smith are described as clothiers. All the heads of households living in the nearby Chapel Row were clothiers.

²¹⁵ Kirk, Pauline, Ed., *The Village that Disappeared* (Leeds: Printed Resource Unit for Continuing Education, Leeds City Council, 1980), 16.

²¹⁶ Pigot, *Commercial Directory*, 35.

²¹⁷ Dews, "Methodism in Leeds", 790 - 91.

²¹⁸ *EVM*, 159.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 158- 60, and 173; Dews, "Methodism in Leeds", 801. Protests had been lodged over the Conference decision to disallow the teaching of writing in Methodist Sunday Schools and resolutions passed condemning Conference and the Manchester District Meeting over the suspension of Samuel Warren. In 1836 a written objection to the new Conference regulations of 1835 resulted in a meeting between a deputation of senior ministers from the Leeds circuit and the main objectors during which an uneasy peace was secured.

²²⁰ *EVM*, 173.

by reducing the preachers' salaries by five pounds per annum.²²¹ At this stage William had forty years of service under his belt, and Mr Sugden, his co-preacher had laboured for thirty years. Despite their experience, they may have had their work cut out in such a situation, and also found scanty remuneration for their pains.²²²

It is quite possible therefore, that Ann's domestic skills were still being challenged by smaller allowances than normal when the family were at Bramley from 1840. Other difficulties arose from the continued illness of Amelia, the couple's youngest daughter,²²³ and a breakdown in William's health. In the latter case, William's conscientious attention to his duties during a winter that 'proved to be unusually severe' caused the onset of a bout of rheumatism.²²⁴ This left him 'on the bed of affliction' and thus unable to continue with his ministerial work for a full three months.²²⁵ It is possible that William's incapacity may have reduced the family's income further, whilst the fairly cramped conditions of the family's lodgings, close proximity of other houses and lack of any garden to enjoy, may have added to the strain. Moving on now to examine Ann's developing spirituality and service, it is pertinent to ask whether she was sustained by her faith in difficult times such as these, and whether, along with her family responsibilities, she managed to establish her own distinct role within the Methodist Society.

Ann's spiritual life and service

The process by which Ann settled on William as her marriage partner provides strong evidence of her willingness to trust in God in one of the most important decisions of her life. From other information included in Ann's memoir, it appears that her faith continued to grow despite the many difficulties of her position as an itinerant's wife. The main clues to Ann's developing spiritual life after marriage, like those pertaining to its earlier phases come from her journal entries, which are printed in the published memoir. The editorial role of Ann's biographer, Mr Willcox in selecting and arranging such material, must be remembered here plus the possibility of alterations being made. However, from the thirty-one diary extracts of various lengths included in Ann's memoir a genuine voice emerges, speaking with consistency of tone and expression. As the majority of such excerpts relate to the period from 1809 until 1843,²²⁶

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 189-90; Dews, "Methodism in Leeds", 804.

²²² The situation appears not to have improved, as a letter from a later preacher in the circuit in 1851 complained of 'the radicalism of this distracted place' and reported being deprived of his allowances altogether. See *EVM*, 408 - 9.

²²³ *ALMM*, 872.

²²⁴ *WLMM*, 372.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *ALMM*, 866-872. Out of thirty-one entries, twenty-six refer to Ann's married life.

Ann's own reflections provide the most important evidence of the tenor and progress of her later spiritual life.

The move from Manchester to Blackburn in 1807, and the challenging domestic situation which the couple faced has already been described: an early trial in Ann's married life much exacerbated by the subsequent health problems that both she and her husband suffered.²²⁷ In the change from a very prosperous to a very poor circuit, Mr and Mrs Leach's situation is reminiscent of that facing the Entwisle's when arriving at Colne from Leeds. Like the latter pair, who viewed their move to the 'wilderness circuit' of Colne as promoting their spiritual good²²⁸ William and Ann also saw God's hand in the unfolding events. William wrote:

I have no doubt but the Lord saw this kind of discipline was necessary, and I believe it was sanctified. Under this affliction we learned those lessons which could not have been taught us so well in any other way.²²⁹

For Ann, the added burden of pregnancy and childbirth in the spring of 1809 and subsequent 'complication of disorders' after her baby's birth had threatened her life.²³⁰ In this physical distress, however, she appears to have found spiritual resources, recording a new sense of God's closeness and the comfort deriving from a particular Bible verse:

I have often felt thankful for that affliction, painful as it was: the Lord was my support and comfort, laying on me no more than He gave me strength to bear; applying to me when in great suffering, the words He gave to St. Paul, - "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness."²³¹

This difficult period, therefore, appears to have been viewed by each partner as of benefit to their personal spiritual lives.

Ann religious growth appears to have been further stimulated at York due to the 'fervent piety and kindness' of the local membership.²³² A journal entry from this period, dated 7 November 1813 is particularly significant. Here, Ann recorded: 'I believe the Lord has taken full possession of my heart.'²³³ This comment certainly suggests a conviction that she had attained 'perfect love' or 'entire sanctification', which, as previous discussion has indicated was an important goal in the Wesleyan scheme of salvation.²³⁴ However, as Ann's later observations reveal, her spiritual state was by no means uniform. In September 1814 Ann blessed God for 'the encouragement and comfort' which she found in his service, adding that: 'He has been my support and helper in the various exercises and afflictions which I have had in

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 867; *WLMM*, 367.

²²⁸ See chapter nine above.

²²⁹ *WLMM*, 367.

²³⁰ *ALMM*, 867.

²³¹ *Ibid.* The verse in question is 2 Corinthians 12: 9.

²³² *ALMM*, 868.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ See the discussion in chapter three above.

my little family.²³⁵ Through God's help, she wrote, she had remained very happy and had: 'felt not the least degree of a murmuring spirit', concluding: 'My mercies outweigh my troubles.'²³⁶ Only four days later, this confident tone altered slightly as Ann noted: 'I have been cast down through various temptations; but I feel determined, in the strength of God, to persevere; and I hope at last to come off 'more than conqueror'.²³⁷ Meanwhile, by October, the tenor of Ann's spiritual life had taken a further downward turn, for she confessed:

I have not felt so happy lately as I did some time ago. It has been caused, I fear, by listening to the enemy, instead of looking to the Lord in the time of temptation: Help me, O Lord, to look to Thee for strength in every time of need!²³⁸

As a journal is used as an analytical tool to reflect on and aid one's spiritual journey, such entries do not denote an over scrupulous conscience, but rather serve as a reminder of the kind of spiritual vigilance that was a requisite part of Methodist discipline. Moreover, following Wesley's teaching, even if the gift of a perfect heart was granted, such holiness could still be forfeited through later sin or lack of diligence. Ann's reflections illustrate her religious integrity, her recognition of particular failings, and desire to eradicate such faults. She felt that her most pernicious sin was a hasty temper, and her dismay at succumbing to this undesirable characteristic was enough to turn one birthday into 'a day of humiliation before the Lord'.²³⁹ On another occasion she observed:

The Lord is deepening His work in my soul. It is my study to *watch* as well as to *pray*. My greatest besetment is a hasty temper; but the more grace I get the better able I shall be to conquer. [Author's emphasis]²⁴⁰

A later reflection points to her dread of backsliding in some way: 'I have a fear of falling into a spirit of lukewarmness [sic] and indifference,' Ann wrote, 'lest after enjoying the favour of God for so many years, I should, after all, become a cast-away.'²⁴¹ Once again she saw the remedy in a closer relationship with God. Only by 'a continual coming to God by Jesus Christ and believing on His word, by taking up my cross and following Him', she noted, would she 'at last obtain the crown.'²⁴² Thus, Ann's singular experience of November 1813 certainly did not lead to complacency. Her worries about backsliding, however, suggest the emotional cost of such constant diligence, and the underlying anxiety that Wesley's teaching arguably produced.

In common with Mary Entwisle, Ann was concerned that preoccupation with her family problems hindered her spiritual development at times. Writing in March 1818, for example, she

²³⁵ *ALMM*, 868. Entry dated 14 September 1814.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *Ibid.* Entry dated 18 September [1814].

²³⁸ *Ibid.* Entry dated 9 October [1814].

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 869. Entry dated 10 December [1815].

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 870. Entry dated 20 January [1818].

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 870-71. Entry dated February 1825.

²⁴² *Ibid.* 871.

admitted: ‘Since my last entry I have not felt at all times the ardent zeal for God that I ought to have had. The cares of my family have sometimes engrossed my mind too much ...’²⁴³ Yet like her earlier counterpart Ann appears to have been supported by her faith and to have found the greatest closeness to God in some of the most difficult family trials. After the death of her baby son, James, for example, Ann’s words reveal a sincere attempt to come to terms with this event, finding a parallel from the book of Job:

Why should I murmur to give him back to Him who lent him to me for a short time? May I say with Job, ‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!’ I have a fresh attraction to heaven.²⁴⁴

In other testing circumstances she was also determined to see the potential for spiritual gain. Learning about the death of her sister in 1826, for example, after suffering illness herself, Ann wrote: ‘The Lord has lately brought me through a severe affliction: but He has spared me, and taken another. By the help of God I hope to profit by this.’²⁴⁵ Meanwhile, when the lengthy illness of her youngest daughter, Amelia came to an end in 1841, Ann’s comment on this ‘great and sore affliction’ was: ‘I hope it has been sanctified *to me* and to her.’²⁴⁶ [My emphasis]

The prolonged spell of personal illness during the spring and summer of 1826 apparently marked a new phase in Ann’s spiritual life when, on one occasion she described being ‘saved from those doubts and fears which have often troubled me.’²⁴⁷ God’s love was so clearly manifested at this point, she explained, that she ‘thought it quite easy to pass out of time into eternity.’²⁴⁸ The hallmark of later diary entries recorded in Ann’s memoir is one of peace and thankfulness. ‘I thank God that it is so well with my soul this day; and I feel determined to spend the future to His glory’,²⁴⁹ she wrote in 1841, whilst on her sixtieth birthday, two years later, she again expressed her thanks, noting: ‘O what a mercy that the Lord has spared me so long! He has been the guide of my youth, my support in riper years; and his promise is, “I will never leave, I will never forsake thee.” I give myself afresh to Him.’²⁵⁰ Thus she clearly recognised God’s presence at every stage of her life.

When considering the kind of private devotions that sustained Ann and fostered her spiritual growth, the evidence is more restricted. Her journal entries point to the value of time

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 870. Entry dated 1 March [1818].

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 870. This entry is undated. Ann is quoting Job 2: 21.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 871. Entry dated 12 March 1826.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 872. This entry is undated, but is said to have been from ‘the period of retiring to Wakefield in 1841.’

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 871. Entry dated July 23 [1826].

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 872.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 872. Entry dated 10 December 1843. This is the last of Ann’s journal entries quoted in her memoir.

spent in private prayer, which stimulated much thanksgiving,²⁵¹ and the enjoyment of ‘some precious seasons ... before the Lord in secret’.²⁵² A habit of Bible study can also be inferred from a comment by Ann’s biographer, who describes her ‘acquaintance with holy Scripture’ as a particular strength.²⁵³ The sheer longevity of Ann’s practice of journal-keeping is noteworthy, for the entries in her memoir cover a period of at least forty years.²⁵⁴ Her endurance points to dedication and appreciation of the value of this spiritual aid.

There is no reference to any joint religious practices undertaken by the couple, and thus this aspect of Ann’s spiritual life and relationship with her husband must remain unknown. The reader is also told nothing about the daily religious routine of Ann’s home, a sign perhaps that by 1866 domestic worship was accepted as a norm both for Methodists and in many sections of society at large. It is surprising too to find relatively few references to the public devotional activities that Ann valued. The Methodist Covenant service is mentioned at one point as provoking reflection and rededication,²⁵⁵ whilst a particular sermon by her husband in May 1817 instilled ‘reproof and encouragement’.²⁵⁶ At the time of the 1824 Sheffield Conference Ann is said to have been challenged by preaching of the visiting Dr Clarke.²⁵⁷ The benefits of fellowship on a local level through class meetings during Ann’s mature years are not recorded, although, as shown below, her role as a class *leader* is discussed and emphasised.

Ann’s personal faith was expressed in a variety of ways during her lifetime. Her daughter’s words suggest that whilst her family were growing up she was mostly concerned with supporting her husband and running their household.²⁵⁸ As indicated earlier, given the amount of travelling that William had to do within each circuit, he would, in any case, have been away from home for much of the time so by necessity seeing to the needs of her growing family was bound to be Ann’s primary occupation. Meanwhile, though not engaged in any official capacity in the wider Methodist community at this point, Ann’s ability to manage her household affairs efficiently without burdening her husband left the latter free to concentrate

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 869. Entry dated 4 May 1817. ‘In secret ... I found my soul enlarged and blessed by God’, Ann wrote on one occasion.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 870. Entry dated 1 March 1818.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 872.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 866–872. The earliest of Ann’s reflections relates to her desire to go to the ball with her friend, an undated entry which evidently preceded her membership of the Society in December 1802. The final journal extract quoted was written by Ann on her sixtieth birthday, 10 December 1843. Though tempted to give up her diary on one occasion, Ann resumed writing shortly afterwards.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.* Entry dated 4 May 1817. William’s sermon was on Psalm 37: 5: ‘Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. (KJV)

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 870; *DMBI*, 69. Adam Clarke (c. 1760- 1832) was one of Methodism’s foremost preachers at the time.

²⁵⁸ *ALMM*, 874.

upon his duties. In this way Ann supported both her husband's ministry and the general Methodist cause.

Ann's ministrations within the home included prayers for her family, demonstrating in several journal entries a concern for the spiritual as well as material welfare of her offspring. In May 1816, for example, Ann noted that she had 'lately been much in prayer for the salvation of [her] children' in consequence of 'observing signs of strong convictions' on the mind of Mary Ann, who at that time was 'little more than seven years of age.'²⁵⁹ At a later date she recorded her thanks that Mary Ann seemed 'fully determined to be the Lord's',²⁶⁰ and her gratitude for the conversion of another of her daughters.²⁶¹ Ann's prayers extended beyond her home with petitions for her other relations and acquaintances, plus members of her Methodist class.²⁶² She interceded for the 'cause of God' in William's stations, demonstrating support for her husband's work and Methodist mission through prayer.²⁶³

Unlike Mary Entwisle, Ann took up connexional office over a long period, initially deferring this extra responsibility until most of her children had left the parental home. Her first efforts took place while William was posted at Bristol (1828-31), and as Ann is said to have sorely missed her older children, who had chosen to stay in the North East, it may be that she sought to counteract this maternal grief. It is interesting too to note that Ann's first ventures into more public work were in the some of the same fields as her father, for she was occupied 'in visiting the sick, the ignorant and in distributing tracts.'²⁶⁴ This is the only reference to Ann's work among 'the ignorant', however, so it is not possible to ascertain the specific nature of her visits, or the kind of support that she offered to such people.

At Bristol Ann also became a class leader, another important commitment. Ann's biographer informs the reader that: 'In the midst of personal trials, she performed a duty imposed by the church and became the leader of a class.'²⁶⁵ These words, with their implication of obligation, hint at the falling popularity of class meetings at this stage (1831) and a difficulty in attracting class leaders.²⁶⁶ Ann's qualities as a spiritual advisor are noted by her biographer,

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 869. Entry dated 19 May 1816. At the time Mary Ann was only seven years old.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 871.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.* Entry dated 10 Dec. [1826]. Ann wrote: 'The Lord has brought my dear E ___ into the liberty of His children'. She could be referring either to Eliza or Emma.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 870.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 871.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 871-2.

²⁶⁶ See, for example, Henry Rack, "The Decline of the Class-Meeting and the Problem of Church Membership in Nineteenth Century Wesleyanism," *PWHS* 39 (1973 - 4): 12- 21 and William W. Dean, "The Methodist Class-Meeting. The Significance of its Decline." *PWHS* 43 (1981): 41- 48.

who suggests that she soon won general recognition for her valued service. Pointing to Ann's: 'knowledge of human nature'; her 'aptitude at analysing feelings'; 'varied and long experience in the things and ways of God' and her 'acquaintance with holy Scripture', Mr Willcox provides important evidence of Ann's development in her mature years.²⁶⁷ Ann's role as a class leader continued in other circuits over the next twenty years and her efforts in this field were recognised officially in 1852, with a presentation in 'grateful appreciation' of her work.²⁶⁸

What models are being put forward here?

Despite the years separating the memoir of Mary Entwisle and that of Mrs Leach it is clear that a major concern of both accounts is the spiritual development of each individual, and although the term 'piety' is only used once in the latter memoir, the main thrust of the narrative, plus the large amount of extracts from Ann's journal, suggest that the portrayal of personal piety was no less important in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* of the 1860s than it had been in the earlier stages of the periodical. In many ways too, Mrs Leach's history models a pattern of life that was in keeping with Methodist values of former times.

In childhood Ann was not without religious training, being the daughter of Methodist members who were keen supporters of the movement's work. Yet, as her memoir suggests, she still had to make her own commitment to the Society and find a personal faith. This message was of particular importance in the 1860s, for as the 1864 volume of the *Magazine* admitted, it was often the case that 'junior members of respectable Wesleyan families ... shrink from joining Society, whilst they retain a nominal connexion with our church as hearers.'²⁶⁹ Ann's early history is especially poignant for she had to undertake this spiritual journey without the aid of her parents. The story of her attendance and perseverance at class meetings, therefore, and resulting conversion,²⁷⁰ reinforce the value of this particular Methodist institution, an important endorsement at a time when attendance at class meetings was often questioned.²⁷¹ The relation of Ann's later spiritual experience further demonstrates the successful completion of the Methodist plan of salvation, providing personal testimony of the attainment of perfection,²⁷²

²⁶⁷ *ALMM*, 872.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ *WMM* 87 (1864): 811.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 866-7.

²⁷¹ Rack, "Decline of Class-Meeting," and Dean, "Methodist Class-Meeting." *WMM* 87 (1864): 811, noted that: 'a dislike to class meetings is spreading among the families of our more wealthy people.'

²⁷² *ALMM*, 868. Ann's diary entry dated 7 November [1813] suggests that she clearly believed she had attained perfection.

later instances of further growth in grace,²⁷³ and a ‘happy’ death.²⁷⁴ The life-long and *eternal* advantages accruing to the committed Wesleyan are thus laid out for the *Magazine’s* readers.

The inclusion of so many of Ann’s journal entries provides the reader with an effective window into one woman’s approach to the spiritual and material dynamics of her life. Her unique approach to possible marriage options, for example, illustrates how it is possible to depend on faith and God’s guidance, in one of the most important decisions of life. Significantly, this was a decision that Ann was able to take without any apparent pressure from other family members, a freedom that was not always afforded to a woman.²⁷⁵ Reflecting on her action and its consequences Ann later wrote:

I thank God for [William]. He was given to me, I believe, from the Lord. I had yielded myself to God; and my prayer was that He would choose for me, and direct me aright, and that I might have one to help, and not to hinder me in my heavenly course.²⁷⁶

The publication of her words supports a view of marriage based on freedom of choice, subject to God’s purpose.²⁷⁷ As this example also shows, the bond of marriage itself, rather than being an impediment to true discipleship, which some of John Wesley’s earlier writings implied, is here portrayed as an opportunity to increase spiritual growth.²⁷⁸

As the memoir progresses different aspects of Mrs Leach’s character and actions are highlighted. The role of Ann’s biographer is important here, as observations from Reverend Willcox regularly underscore certain points. The value of Ann’s early domestic experience, for example, and the habit of keeping a spiritual journal are two details that receive a plaudit from Ann’s editor.²⁷⁹ In another instance one of Ann’s journal entries expressing concern for her children’s spiritual growth is prefaced by a wider statement from her biographer, who suggests that: ‘The solicitude of a Christian mother’ must embrace not only her children’s health and bodily comfort, but also ‘the higher interest of the opening mind.’²⁸⁰ Ann’s daughters add their own reflections on their mother’s early training, commenting also on her attributes as a parent and homemaker.²⁸¹ In this way specific modes of conduct are not only noted, but endorsed and held up for more general application.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 868-872. See the discussion in the previous section.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 873-4.

²⁷⁵ See, for example, the earlier discussion of Elizabeth Murlin, (1710-1786) [2].

²⁷⁶ *ALMM*, 868.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 867. In Ann’s earlier words, she and William were married ‘believing it to be in accordance with the will of God’.

²⁷⁸ On Wesley’s writings see chapter four.

²⁷⁹ *ALMM*, 865-6 and 867.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 869.

²⁸¹ *ALMM*, 873-4.

Ann's connection to the Wesleyan ministry is mentioned in the first paragraph of the memoir, a clear sign that she was a woman who was worthy of both public notice as well as emulation.²⁸² Meanwhile Ann's 'relative duties', in respect of her husband and family, are portrayed as an important part of her role. The act of nursing her husband, her self-denial, willingness to shoulder problems, and capable 'domestic habits', are portrayed as of essential support to William's ministry.²⁸³ As Ann's daughter made clear:

Many a sorrow did she keep within her own bosom rather than distract the mind of her husband from the great work to which he had been set apart by God; facilitating by her domestic habits, his attention to study and pastoral visitation.²⁸⁴

In contrast to the memoir of Mrs Entwisle there is much more discussion of Ann's domestic skills, and role as a parent. One reflection of her daughter, for example, notes her encouragement to 'do well' and improve the time. Whilst her mother insisted on obedience, she reveals, there was 'no harshness or severity' in her 'maternal rule'.²⁸⁵ A second daughter indicates that their 'family arrangements' were always characterised by the 'greatest punctuality and order'. Whilst this latter virtue is noted as a necessary virtue to those involved in the itinerant life,²⁸⁶ the characteristics mentioned by each daughter are clearly meant to be taken up by other Methodist women and wives.

The treatment of Ann's role within the wider Methodist community also deserves some comment, for these references point to the opportunities for service that were available to women and were being commended at this time. Little attention is paid to Ann's first foray into public work as a visitor of the sick and tract distributor, which is reported but without any amplification about the practicalities of this work.²⁸⁷ In contrast, Ann's role as a class leader is mentioned and underlined more than once.²⁸⁸ The emphasis on Ann's service in the latter office, and her many years undertaking this role is significant, as only two years earlier the *Magazine* had bemoaned the 'difficulty of finding suitable leaders to keep and cherish our classes.'²⁸⁹ Ann's memoir, therefore, provided another important model, and an implicit reminder to current Wesleyans of the pressing need for similar volunteers.

The reporting of Ann's domestic management, selfless support of her husband's ministry, and her decision to delay official connexional work until her children were older appears highly significant in view of other changes both in the Methodist movement and in wider society. During the first half of the nineteenth century, as shown earlier, there was

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 865. Mrs Leach is described as: 'the venerable relict of the Rev. William Leach.'

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 867.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 874.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 871.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 871-2.

²⁸⁹ *WMM* 87 (1864): 815.

widespread debate about the essential nature and roles of both men and women: discussions matched within Methodism, where from 1803 the boundaries of female service in public were significantly redrawn. Meanwhile, with the onset of the Victorian era it has been argued that a greater distinction arose between the public domain and home arena, with the latter being increasingly emphasised as the proper and ‘natural’ domain of women.²⁹⁰

In his prologue to the account Reverend Willcox happens to confirm the values that now prevailed. Paying tribute to a long tradition within Methodism of ‘holy and godly matrons,’ Ann’s biographer suggested that such women have filled ‘their allotted spheres’, in both the ‘secluded family circle’ and the ‘activities of Church-life’ noting that his subject was a member of this ‘worthy line’.²⁹¹ This Victorian perspective, however, is at odds with many other details provided in Ann’s life account, and thus a certain tension prevails. Given the description of the Leach’s lodgings among the poor folk of Blackburn, for example, it is difficult to imagine that their family circle was ever ‘secluded’ at this time.²⁹² The present research into the family’s living accommodation at Bramley, meanwhile, demonstrates very clearly that there was a distinct lack of seclusion in their Town Street cottage. Mr Wilcox’s phrase regarding the ‘activities of Church-life’ also calls for comment. Ann’s endeavours as a class leader over twenty years: a role involving leadership and the spiritual nurturing of many individuals surely rated as more than church ‘activities’, the latter words conjuring up images of bazaars, and chapel-teas. The changing culture, both within the Methodist Society and society at large is here revealed.

In other instances Ann’s biographer seems to be trying to impose his own perception of an appropriate pattern upon his subject’s experience. Miss Fildes’ early introduction to household management, for example, is said to have ‘strengthen[ed] her natural prudence and foresight’, but such virtues are depicted as valuable *only* to Ann’s later role as a wife and mother.²⁹³ Meanwhile, the subject of perfection, an issue widely discussed in the earlier 1804 memoir of Mary Entwisle, receives very little attention here. Ann’s 1813 diary reference to receiving this blessing is presented with a somewhat perfunctory introduction, hardly matching

²⁹⁰ As the discussion in chapter one above shows, these ideas are still subject to widespread debate. Relevant studies include Robert B Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650 - 1850. The Emergence of Separate Spheres* (London & New York: Longman, 1998); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640 - 1990* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999); and Leonore Davidoff, and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780 - 1850*, 2d ed. (London: Hutchinson, 2003).

²⁹¹ *ALMM*, 865.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 867.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 865 – 6.

the significance of the event.²⁹⁴ Mr Willcox's editing again reflects changing attitudes regarding perfection and contemporary emphasis on holiness as a gradual growth in grace.²⁹⁵

The final summary of Ann's characteristics again reverberates with Victorian sentiments. Describing Mrs Leach as 'a somewhat dignified presence ... with features in which intelligence, firmness, [and] shrewdness, seemed to be combined' Mr Willcox suggested that: 'in a secular sphere she would by thrift and well-directed energy have won a good position in the world, and have been a valuable help-mate for a husband engaged in business.'²⁹⁶ But, he went on: '... her faculties had been consecrated to higher aims: to train her family for God; to aid His servant, her husband, in his ministerial engagements; to guide souls to heaven; and to make her own "calling and election sure."²⁹⁷ With a final flourish Ann's biographer concluded that she was: 'a discreet, high-principled, and exemplary woman', who came close to the description of a 'Christian widow' given by St Paul.²⁹⁸ It is fair to conclude that if the final summary of Ann's qualities, and her credentials as a worthy role model for the current readers of the *Magazine* receive a Biblical endorsement, the foregoing picture has been tinted with Mr Willcox's later nineteenth-century views.

As this examination has revealed, though living through different times, and experiencing the Methodist movement at different stages of its development, Ann and Mary Entwisle faced many of the same privations and challenges devolving from their position as preachers' wives. Both individuals can be seen to have exhibited and *lived* the Methodist ideals of piety and domesticity that were expected of such women. Though their approaches to public service were different, Mary and Ann remained true to their own convictions, balancing family responsibilities and fulfilling their own spiritual calling, whilst very much in the public eye. Their histories illustrate the resilience and resourcefulness of these preachers' wives.

²⁹⁴ *ALMM*, 868. Mr Willcox merely notes: 'A further consecration of herself to God was thus clearly testified: - "November 7th - I believe the Lord has taken full possession of my heart."'

²⁹⁵ David Bebbington, "Holiness in Nineteenth-Century British Methodism," in *Crown and Mitre, Religion and Society in Northern Europe Since the Reformation.*, ed. W. M. and Yates Jacob, N. (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1993), 161-174. Bebbington reports a move away from the idea of perfection as an instantaneous gift bestowed by God, with teaching on the subject being toned down. The demise of band-meetings and growing respectability, Bebbington suggests, were additional factors in changing attitudes.

²⁹⁶ *ALMM*, 874-5.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 875.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

APPENDIX 2

Figure 20: Ann's Family Tree

		Thomas Fildes	Married 25/10/1778 CCM ¹	Ann Whitehead		
Mary B. 11/7/1779 ² M Thomas Bibby 22/8/1799 CCM D. 9/3/1826	Betty B. 17/5/1781 C. Canon St Independent Chapel, Manchester	Ann B. 10/12/1783 C. 4/1/1784 CCM	Thomas C. 16/4/1786 CCM	James C. 23/3/1788 CCM	Thomas C. 13/12/1789 CCM	Sarah C. 18/3/1792 CCM
		Ann Fildes B. 10/12/1783 Manchester D. 21/1/1863, Wakefield (79)	Married 16/10/1806 CCM	William Leach B. 20/8/1777 Allerton, Bradford D. 4/9/1846, Wakefield (69)		
	Mary Ann B. 25/4/1809 C. 23/6/09 Clayton St. Wesleyan Church, Blackburn	William B. 2/2/1811 C. 10/3/1811 Wesleyan Methodist Church, Heptonstall	Eliza B. 13/9/1812 C. 12/10/1812 South Parade Wesleyan Church, Halifax	Emma C. 13/8/1816 Burnley	James Fildes C. 31/12/1818 St. Alkmund St. Wesleyan Methodist Church, Derby D. Feb. – Mar. 1819	Amelia B. 21/1/1820 C. 14/2/1820 Cherry St. Wesleyan Methodist Church, Birmingham

Sources:

- 1) "Memoir of the Rev. William Leach: by one of his daughters," *WMM* 71 (1848): 361-376.
- 2) "Memoir of Mrs. Leach, late of Wakefield: by the Rev. Robert M. Willcox." *WMM* 89 (1866): 865-875.
- 3) *IGI*.

¹ CCM = The Collegiate Church, Manchester. (From 1847 Manchester Cathedral)

² This date, from *IGI* records, has been submitted by a member of the Church of the Latter Day Saints.

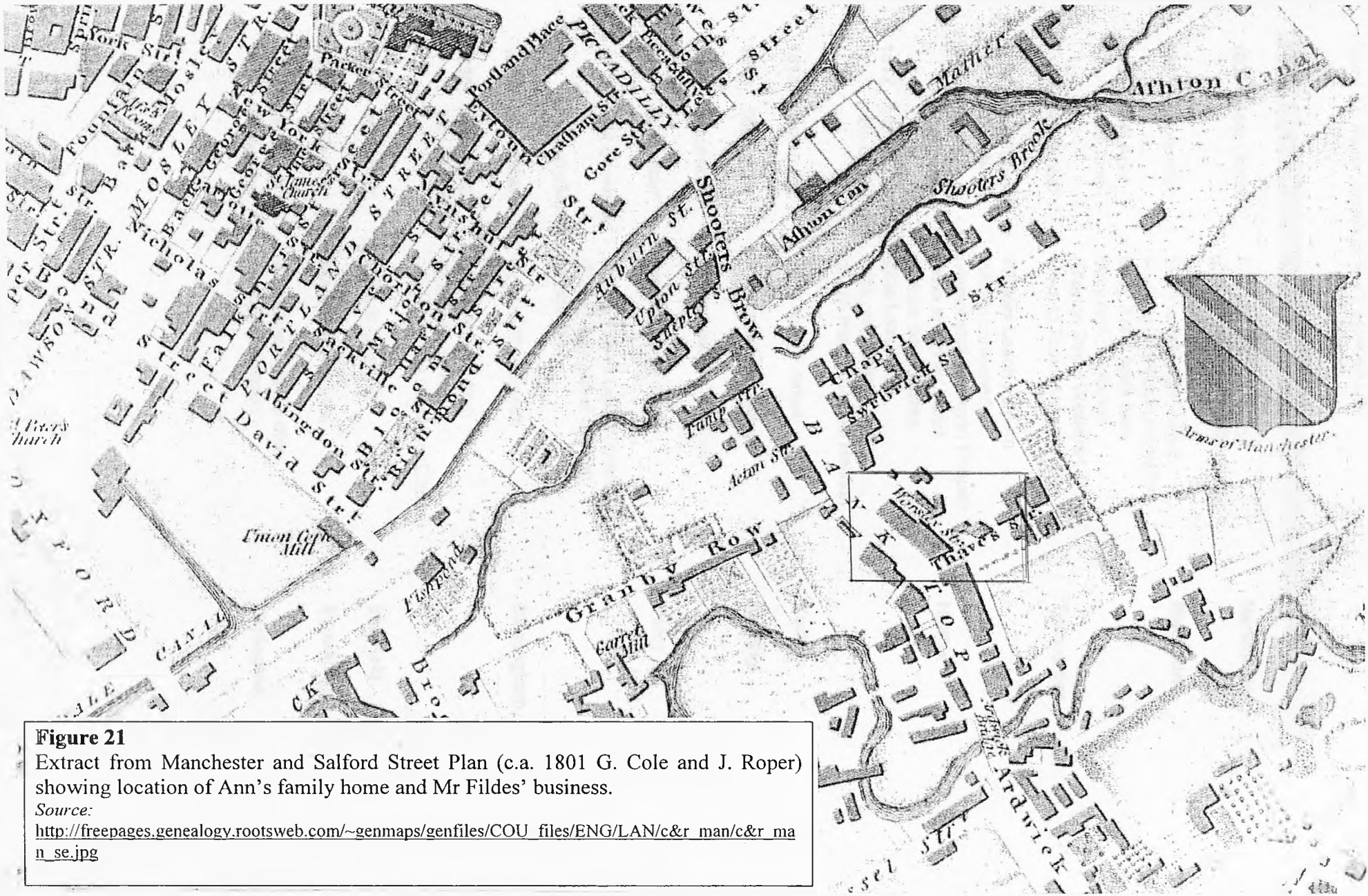


Figure 21
Extract from Manchester and Salford Street Plan (c.a. 1801 G. Cole and J. Roper)
showing location of Ann's family home and Mr Fildes' business.
Source:
http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~genmaps/genfiles/COU_files/ENG/LAN/c&r_man/c&r_ma_n_se.jpg

Figure 22: Major Events in Ann's Married Life

YEAR	DATE	EVENT	CIRCUIT
1806	16th October	Ann and William marry (Collegiate Church, Manchester)	Manchester
1807	September	Move to Blackburn circuit Housing and health problems	Blackburn
1809	25th April 23rd June	Mary Ann Leach born Mary Ann christened (Clayton Street Wesleyan Chapel)	Todmorden
	September	Move to Todmorden circuit	
1811	2nd February 10th March	William Leach jnr born William christened (Heptonstall Wesleyan Chapel)	Halifax
	September	Move to Halifax circuit Luddite disturbances	
1812	13th September 12th September	Eliza Leach born Eliza christened (South Parade Chapel Halifax)	
1813	September	Move to York circuit	York
1815	September	Move to Burnley circuit	Burnley
1816	September	Emma Leach christened	
1817	September	Move to Derby circuit	Derby
1818	31st December February/March	James Fildes Leach christened (St Alkmund Street Chapel) James dies	
1819	September	Move to Birmingham	Birmingham
1820	21st January 14th February	Amelia Leach born Amelia christened (Cherry Street Wesleyan Chapel)	
1821	September	Move to Sheffield	Sheffield
1824	September	Move to Sunderland	Sunderland
1826	9th March September	Ann's sister, Mary dies Move to Darlington	Darlington

Figure 22: Major Events in Ann's Married Life

YEAR	DATE	EVENT	CIRCUIT
1828	September	Move to Bristol (leave some of children at Darlington) Ann takes up work as a class leader	Bristol
1831	September	Move to Burslem	Burslem
1833	September	Move to Wakefield	Wakefield
1836	September	Move to Bradford Eastbrook	Bradford
1839	September	Move to Rotherham	Rotherham
1840	September	Move to Bramley	Bramley
1841	September	William becomes a supernumerary Family moves to Wakefield	
1846	4th September	Ann's husband, William dies	
1852		Ann honoured as class leader	
1860	Spring	Ann has a stroke	
1862	May	Second more severe stroke	
1863	21st January	Ann dies after short illness	

Sources:

- 1) "Memoir of the Rev. William Leach: by one of his daughters," *WMM* 71 (1848): 361-376.
- 2) "Memoir of Mrs. Leach, late of Wakefield: by the Rev. Robert M. Willcox." *WMM* 89 (1866): 865-875.
- 3) *IGI*

City or Borough of <i>Leeds</i>		Parish or Township of <i>Bramley</i>		Enumeration District		Schools		
PLACE	HOUSES Uninhabited or Inhabited	NAMES of each Person who abode therein the preceding Night.	AGE and SEX		PROFESSION, TRADE, EMPLOYMENT or of INDEPENDENT MEANS.	Where Born		
			Males	Females		Whether Born in same County	Whether Born in England, Ireland, or Possession	
<i>Town Street</i>	1	<i>George Patton</i>	45		<i>Linen Draper</i>	Y		
		<i>Ann do.</i>	50			Y		
		<i>Matthew do.</i>	15		<i>App.</i>	Y		
		<i>Mary do.</i>	13			Y		
		<i>Jane do.</i>	11			Y		
		<i>Marriott Patton</i>	20		<i>F. S. I.</i>	Y		
	<i>do.</i>	1	<i>James Walker</i>	40		<i>Grocer &c</i>	Y	
			<i>Ann do.</i>	30			Y	
			<i>John do.</i>	15			Y	
			<i>Abraham do.</i>	15			Y	
		<i>James do.</i>	10			Y		
		<i>William do.</i>	9			Y		
		<i>Mary do.</i>	5			Y		
<i>do*</i>		1	<i>William Leach</i>	60		<i>Wesleyan Minister</i>	Y	
		<i>Ann do.</i>	55			No		
		<i>Amelia do.</i>	20			No		
		<i>John Gelling</i>	15		<i>F. S. I.</i>	Yes		
	1	<i>Sarah Harrison</i>	40		<i>Widow</i>	No		
		<i>Thomas do.</i>	15		<i>Widow</i>	Yes		
		<i>Sarah do.</i>	15			Yes		
		<i>Elizabeth do.</i>	15			Yes		
<i>Sublet Row</i>	1	<i>John ...</i>	20		<i>F. S. I.</i>	Yes		

Figure 23

Extract from 1841 census record identifying the Leach family.

Source: 1841 Census returns for Bramley, Leeds, Leeds City Reference Library, film no: 1342/10
Enumeration District 9, folio 5.



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Figure 24

Extract from 1908 Ordinance Survey Map of Bramley, Leeds showing Upper Town Street.

Source: Leeds City Reference Library



Figure 25

Photographs of Upper Town Street, Bramley

Source: *Leodis: A Photographic Archive of Leeds*, Leeds Library & Information Service
<http://www.leodis.org>. (accessed 11/2/04)

**25 a**

'Upper Town Street [Bramley] showing the entrance to Hobson's Yard, numbers 202 to 214'

**25 b**

'Hobson's Yard, view of rear of shop properties in Upper Town Street Bramley'

Figure 25 continued

Photographs of Upper Town Street, Bramley

Source: *Leodis: A Photographic Archive of Leeds*, Leeds Library & Information Service
<http://www.leodis.org>. (accessed 11/2/04)

**25 c**

'Hobson's Yard off Upper Town Street'

**25 d**

'Hobson's Yard nos. 4 - 10'

Conclusion

This study has reconstructed both the changing representations of the lives of itinerant Methodist preachers' wives that the Methodist movement presented, and, in the case of the two case studies, Mary Entwisle and Ann Leach, the reality of their lives. This has been established over the very long time-frame of the study from 1750 – 1880, a period when wider societal values and those of Methodism in regard to women and their role both in society and in the movement saw significant change.

Methodism across this time period, was a thriving, mass supported religious movement that can be seen to have had great influence over contemporary society. It was part of those religious and often evangelical forces that many see as being key in remaking British culture and society during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, helping to establish the Victorian era as one of increased piety and propriety, crowned by female domesticity. There is much evidence in this current study to argue that both the representations of these women's lives that these Methodist publications presented, and their real lives as exemplars in their own homes, churches and communities, did much to reinforce key values regarding the position and role of women in wider society. Such women's roles in this process were even more significant as Methodist portrayals of their lives coupled with their own living reality were conveyed to both working class and rising middle class members of contemporary society.

Given the wide circulation of the *Magazine* and the fact that each edition is likely to have had multiple readers, there are grounds for believing that the published lives of these women did reach a fairly wide audience, and therefore that they were influential in shaping attitudes and practices outside the movement. In this way the commemorative accounts could be seen as contributing to the wider adoption of evangelical pietistic and domestic practices, thus assisting the cultural shift towards Victorian values. However, this view needs to be modified because of the numerical count, which shows relatively small numbers of accounts of preachers' wives over the years within the bulk of spiritual life-writings published in the *Magazine*.

The long-term overview of accounts demonstrates that these published texts were consistently used to set out approved female characteristics and modes of conduct. The texts illustrate the fact that throughout the period under consideration 'solid piety' remained the predominant characteristic required of a preacher's wife. This is evidenced in the many references to piety in the accounts. Examples of particular spiritual practices whether undertaken privately at home or in the various communal Methodist meetings and services,

form a regular feature throughout the period of the study, with such conduct given as practical models for the readers of the *Magazine*. Patterns of domesticity are also presented throughout the run of magazines considered here. While the accounts strongly endorse Methodist domestic ideals, with respect to their portrayal of the relationships between husband and wife, and between mothers and children, they also challenge the severe views of Methodism's founder on marriage and childrearing. The value of marriage and the strong bond between husband and wife is emphasised in many accounts. In addition, the presentation of the selfless maternal practices of individual wives, and their tender relationship with their children, reinforces ideas of motherhood and maternity that were being promulgated in wider society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through their travels and constant homemaking, meanwhile, the preachers' wives were living patterns of these devotional and domestic ideals.

The accounts also showcase and celebrate the many ways in which these women expressed their faith through active work both in the movement and in other community enterprises. However, the fact that these texts were produced under a male editorial system, which from the death of Wesley onwards was fearful of any radical activities by women, ensured that the predominant message was conservative and restrained. Hence, no mention is made of the fact that Sarah Stevens often engaged in preaching, although this can be established from other sources. In a similar way, recognition of the evangelical activities of individuals such as Jane Vasey comes later in the movement when it was possible to celebrate this without any fear of emulation. Instead the texts were prime sites in which the orthodox evangelical ideals of the mainstream movement were promulgated. Thus the preachers' wives became role models even after their deaths.

The personal case studies have shown how it is possible to reconstruct the lives of the preachers' wives by using a variety of methods and primary sources and thus illuminate other aspects of the experience of these women. These studies demonstrate the extra complexities of the itinerant way of life for women of childbearing age, illustrating also the additional tensions upon the women and their husbands arising from wider connexional problems. The combination of the published texts and evidence from the local studies has highlighted the way in which these accounts could become vehicles for denominational objectives. In the case of Mary Entwisle's published text, for example, her husband makes no mention of Mary's labours as a class leader and visitor early in her marriage, but places emphasis on her later decision to refrain from public work. The propaganda element is also seen in the memoir of Ann Leach, where the prejudices of her biographer and the prevailing tenor of the 1860s ensure that what is written parts company with the actual events of Ann's life. Ann's living space at Bramley in 1840, for example, could never be described as 'secluded'.

It is clear that these preachers' wives were making individual choices about their own service, often based on practical or personal circumstances. For all of them there was a dilemma to be resolved: how to reconcile personal family life with the need to support their husbands fully, and endeavour to fulfil their own Christian vocation honourably. This conundrum was all the more difficult to solve in full view of an ever-watchful congregation and public. It is clear from the evidence in their memoirs, especially when, as in the instance of the two case studies this representation can be set against the stark and often harsh realities of these women's lives, that each individual found a different solution to this problem. While the denominational publications presented 'pictures of perfection' which were undoubtedly constructs of their authors, the Book Room and its editorial system, they do contain enough of the reality of these women's lives to celebrate the strong faith, ingenuity and determination of such women. Undoubtedly, it was the early preachers of Methodism, including, for some years, female local preachers, who made this strong and significant movement, and both these groups have received widespread scholarly attention. However, the evidence presented here, argues for the importance of the wives of the itinerant preachers who, through both their daily experiences at home and in their communities, and the idealisation of their lives, produced enduring models of piety and female service that could be much more widely assimilated within Methodism and society at large.

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