Primitive Methodism in the Yorkshire Wolds c. 1820-1932

Priscilla Mary Truss

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

In Memory of my Grandparents: George Grasby, born Langtoft 1890, and

Mary Grasby, born Wetwang 1895. Primitive Methodists both.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Simon Green and Malcolm Chase, for their helpful and positive criticisms, my friends at Leeds University past and present – particularly Gordon Forster, and Mike and Vicky Spence – for all their support, and finally my family for putting up with it all.

Abstract

This thesis concerns the establishment and development of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds from the arrival of missionaries in Hull in 1820 to the Connexion's final sublimation into the wider Methodist Church in 1932. In its nineteenth-century heyday Primitive Methodism was a vibrant, evangelistic faith which enhanced the lives of many working people. It gave them purpose, conviviality and a shared spirituality which few had experienced before. In the later nineteenth century it became a cohesive force in village life through its services, Sunday Schools and links with the Friendly Societies.

The thesis examines why Primitive Methodism put down such powerful roots in the Wolds, a relatively isolated area with virtually no industrial development, and compares its progress there to that in other areas where it was equally strong – Durham, North Lincolnshire and Norfolk – and to those where it had a firm foothold – Shropshire, Derbyshire and Bedfordshire.

Primitive Methodism was religiously radical; it believed in the priesthood of all believers and in the capacity of all to embrace the word of God and commnicate it to others through preaching and extempore prayer. Its religious radicalism sometimes led on to political radicalism, to links with Chartism, trade unionism and the nascent Labour Party. Much recent historical writing has concentrated on this aspect of its past while neglecting its religious impact and the fact that it remained – as did all branches of Methodism – socially conservative. The thesis will consider Wolds Primitive Methodism in the context of the general historiography of the Connexion and assess the contribution it made.

Contents

Abbreviations

ERA	East Riding Archives at Beverley
JRL	John Rylands Library Manchester
PM	Primitive Methodist
PWHS	*Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*
VCH	*Victoria County History*

Note on the use of 'Circuit Reports' and 'Station Reports'. These terms were used interchangeably by the Driffield, Pocklington and Bridlington Circuits to describe the reports that were sent to Conference each year. I have not attempted to make any distinction between them.

Map

Chapter 1 Introduction to Primitive Methodism and its Historiography

Primitive Methodism was a religious movement of huge importance. Never numerically as large as the Wesleyans, it nevertheless epitomised all the characteristics of Methodism in larger and fuller measure than did the dominant group.[1] It was religiously radical; its services were loud, vulgar and exuberant; its membership and its leadership were predominantly working-class and it had stronger links with political radicalism than either the Wesleyans or the Independents. Moreover, the established church, old Dissent and Wesleyan Methodism suffered from the challenges of industrialism, enclosure and Jacobinism, and struggled to accommodate themselves to the revolutionary conditions of the early nineteenth century. The Primitives, however, were born into them and from their beginnings accommodated themselves to this new world. Primitive Methodism did not just become a working-class church; it was born as one and its leadership was the product of early industrial society.

The Primitives split away from the main body of Wesleyan Methodism in 1811. It was not the first or the last secession from the parent body but it was the largest and the most important. Although the Primitives claimed to be a national movement and were certainly represented in all English counties and in the dominions, their main strength was concentrated in the north Midlands (where the movement began), in Northumberland and Durham, in Yorkshire (particularly in the East Riding) and in Lincolnshire and Norfolk. It never made much headway in London or the south east or in Scotland. Wales, although it was strongly Nonconformist, was dominated by the Baptists and the Calvinistic Methodists.[2]

Much modern (i.e. post-1918) literature about Methodism does not differentiate between its various branches and assumes that Primitives and Wesleyans and members of the New Connexion had a common point of view – which was not always the case. The Primitives practised a particular style of popular devotion, which flourished in the nineteenth century, lost fire in the early twentieth and died at Methodist Union in 1932. Primitive Methodism had a different constituency from Wesleyan Methodism – more rural and more working-class – and its public activities, namely temperance, trade unionism, and social reform, were generally more radical than those of the Wesleyans. Nineteenth-century writers on Primitive Methodism knew this, not least because they

[1] There were 220,000 Primitive Methodists and 517,000 Wesleyans at Union in 1932.
[2] Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History 1750-1985* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), p. 302.

were often themselves members of the Connexion. Twentieth-century historians, however, were not (with the exception of Wearmouth). The following sections of this study will evaluate historical treatments of Methodism after it first burst upon the religious scene in the mid-eighteenth century. Specific treatments of Primitive Methodism will be described as such; otherwise 'Methodism' can be taken to cover all branches of the movement.

The Nineteenth-Century Tradition

Nineteenth-century histories of Primitive Methodism were generally uncritical. Indeed, they often verged on the hagiographic. These were mainly written for other Primitive Methodists and their chief purpose was to show how the growth and development of the Connexion had demonstrated the workings of the hand of God – 'Providence' as it was usually described. Thus William Patterson describes a camp meeting at Cockfield (Co. Durham) in 1860:

> […] some followers of the devil set fire to whins which sheltered the spot [where the meeting was held] […] but in answer to prayer the wind changed its course almost immediately turning in the opposite direction. The change turned the fear of the multitude into joy and God gave them a marvellous day.[3]

Bourne's *History* of 1823 was mainly a personal account, detailing and often justifying his part in the Connexion's affairs.[4] He made no mention of the radicalism of some of the early preachers (of which he disapproved) and drew a veil over his disagreements with Clowes about the 'Tunstall non-missioning rule' of 1815 which Clowes flouted.[5] Thomas Church's *Sketches,* published in 1847, concentrated on the Primitives' spiritual mission and rejected any notion that the Connexion should involve itself in external affairs: 'We think that our Connexion is not providentially called to take a part in seeking the separation of church and state; but to aim with its original simplicity and increasing ardour to convert sinners from the error of their ways and to save souls from

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[3] William Patterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism; A Record of the Rise and Progress of the Circuits in the Old Sunderland District* (London: E Dalton, 1909), p. 77.

[4] Hugh Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists, Giving an Account of their Rise and Progress up to the year 1823* (Bemersley: Primitive Methodists Book Room, 1823).

[5] The 'non-missioning rule' was intended, by the conservative Clowes, to rein in some of the more reckless of the early preachers and to consolidate Primitive Methodist gains before moving on elsewhere. Julia Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connection: Its Background and Early History* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 78-79.

death'.[6] John Petty's *History* was commissioned by the Conference of 1859 and published in 1860.[7] It was primarily a narrative describing the origin and spread of Primitive Methodism and the various triumphs of its preachers, but it was not entirely uncritical. It admitted the failure of the mission to Scotland and the problems caused in Hull by the 'false prophet' John Stamp.[8] It also alluded to the Durham pitmen's strike of 1844, which the Connexion did not support, although the strike was largely led by Primitive Methodists. Petty remarked that 'It is not within the scope of our design to discuss the merits of this unhappy contest […] We state the painful facts merely to show how they militated against the work of God.'[9]

Early Primitive Methodist biographies and collections of sermons also concentrated on the overriding importance of personal religious experience. John Nelson's sermons and lectures dwelt on the horrors of hell fire which will '[…] sweep the land as with the besom of destruction […] Be careful then to number your days […] that no day may escape from you without leaving you in possession of an increasing measure of spiritual profit.'[10] Matthew Denton, a local preacher in Beverley writing in 1842, reflected on the future rewards the converted would enjoy in heaven: 'Oh how unspeakable must be the rapture that is felt in that region of pure and unsuspecting love […] where their joy flows on like a mighty river'.[11]

The Religious Census of 1851 revealed two very significant pieces of information: first that less than half of the population was present at any place of worship on Sunday 30 March 1851, and second that of the forty per cent who were present nearly half were Protestant Nonconformists.[12] The first piece of information shocked the established church and caused it to redouble its efforts, begun in the 1830s, to reform its institutions and to establish itself in the new industrial towns which it had previously neglected.[13] The second gave new confidence to the Dissenting community.

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[6] Thomas Church, *Sketches of Primitive Methodism* (London: T.Ward & Son, 1847), p. 50. Church is referring to the campaign for disestablishment, started by Edward Miall, a Congregationalist, in 1844.
[7] John Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connection from its Origin to the Conference of 1859* (London: n.p., 1864).
[8] Petty, *History,* p. 336.
[9] Ibid,, p. 342. For a fuller discussion of the relations between the Primitives and the pitmen see Chapter 7.
[10] John Nelson: *A Series of Sermons on Important Subject*s (Hull: n.p., 1830), p. 10.
[11] Matthew Denton, *Book of Anecdotes, Religious, Interesting and Practical* (Beverley: n.p.,1842), p. 125.
[12] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: Vol. 2*, *The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 3.

[13] For instance Dr. Hook, vicar of Leeds 1837-1859, established twenty-one new parishes within the town and took a cut in his own salary to make this possible.

The Primitives' growing view of themselves as a vibrant, working-class church was confirmed by Horace Mann's remarks in his *Report* on the Census as 'The community whose operations penetrate most deeply through the lower sections of the people'.[14] With this official commendation behind them, the Primitives now stepped out on to the national stage. Jeremiah Dodsworth's sermon on *The Better Land,* preached at Leeds on the occasion of a government campaign to encourage emigration, was an important event.[15] Dodsworth was a well-known preacher and his sermon was printed for distribution not just to Primitive Methodists but to a wider public:

> Surrounded by a population affected with a kind of mania for the gold regions of California on the one hand, and by such as were longing to be off to the diggings of Australia [...] he thought it a seasonable opportunity to direct the attention of the restless millions of earth to the glory Regions of the Better Land.[16]

In 1857 Thomas King published *The Primitive Pulpit*, a selection of sermons aimed at the general religious public, particularly those with ritualist inclinations:

> Stay not in the graceful scenery of religious observances. Whether simple or splendid, rites and ceremoniers cannot save you. Halt not among sacraments. The religion of Christ is a religion of life and spirit.[17]

Thomas Russell's *Record of Events in Primitive Methodism,* a narrative of his life as a travelling preacher starting in 1827, contained a valuable description of the perils and difficulties of an itinerant's life.[18] It also demonstrated the changes, as perceived by Russell, between 1827, when old sheep bells and tins were thrown at him by angry mobs, and 1861, when all was calm for a camp meeting at Yarm: '[...] there were thirty ministers present and Dr. and Mrs. Palmer sang in power'.[19] Similarly Robert Key's *The Gospel among the Masses,* a retrospective account of Key's mission

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[14] Horace Mann, *Report on the Census of Religious Worship* (London: HMSO, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1853).
[15] Jeremiah Dodsworth, *The Better Land or the Christian Emigrant's Guide to Heaven* (London: n.p., 1853). Dodsworth was particularly important in the East Riding, because, as a young man in 1824, he had stood up to the bullying tactics of the Church of England. See Chapter 3..
[16] Preface to *The Better Land*.
[17] Thomas King, *The Primitive Pulpit: Being Original Sermons and Sketches by various Ministers of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London: Thomas King, 1857) p. 9.
[18] Thomas Russell*, Record of Events in Primitive Methodism* (London: William Lister, 1869).
[19] Ibid,, p. 210.

to Norfolk, gave a powerful account of religious conditions there in the 1830s.[20] Key's book was one among an increasing number of retrospective accounts of the early days of Primitive Methodism. Their publication reflected a nostalgia about the past as the denomination became more socially acceptable and prosperous, and was also a response to the increasing literacy of its membership in the wake of the 1870 Education Act. Key's book showed the contemporary (1870s) view of the Connexion's radical past – a concern to demonstrate that Primitive Methodists had never endorsed revolt or violence but had acted to keep it in check: An elderly man had spoken of the arson and unrest of the past.

'It is not so now. Your people came here and sung and preached and prayed about the streets [...] the word was brought to bear upon them (the perpetrators) in the open air; it fastened upon their guilty hearts, and they are now good men in your churches'.[21]

George Herod's *Sketches* of 1855 were followed by Samuel Smith's *Anecdotes* of 1872. Both reflected a view of Primitive Methodism as a disciplined and socially responsible organisation which acted as a restraining influence on those inclined to riot or revolution.[22] Another view of the radical agitations of the early nineteenth century is provided by two biographies of men who were, at one time or another, Primitive Methodists. The first, the autobiography of Thomas Cooper, described how Cooper, who was originally a Primitive Methodist, lost his faith, became an active Chartist and suffered imprisonment.[23] He later regained his Christian faith and became a Baptist. The second, a biography of Joseph Barker by his nephew, described how Barker, originally a member of the New Connexion, became an active teetotaller and Chartist.[24] He was arrested but not imprisoned, went to America and ended up as a Primitive Methodist preacher:

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[20] Robert Key, *The Gospel Among the Masses* (London: R. Davis, 1872).
[21] Ibid,, p. 126.
[22] Samuel Smith, *Anecdotes, Facts and Biographical Sketches connected with the Great Revival of the Works of God* (London: n.p.,1872); George Herod, *Sketches of Some of those Preachers whose Labours contributed to the Origin and Extension of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London: n.p., 1880).

[23] Thomas Cooper, *Autobiography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1873).
[24] John Barker, *The Life of Joseph Barker* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1880).

I was especially struck with the zeal, the labours, the usefulness of the Primitive Methodists while on my way from the wiles of error, and my intercourse with its ministers and members, since I became a Christian, has proved to me an unspeakable comfort and blessing.[25]

By the time H. B. Kendall came to write his *Origin and History* to celebrate the Connexion's centenary in 1907, Primitive Methodism had developed a view of itself – a view which in many ways still persists - of a proudly working-class denomination, democratically organised and radical, but also loyal and thoroughly respectable.[26] Moreover it was no longer ashamed of its radical past. Kendall, after referring to the Durham pit strikes – mainly in order to remark on their non-violence - went to considerable lengths to re-establish the religious credentials of those Primitive Methodists who were expelled from the Connexion because they were Chartists. He mentions, in particular, Thomas Cooper, Joseph Barker and John Skevington. Of Skevington he says that 'he has received but scant justice and deserves Connexional rehabilitation'.[27]

Like Petty's, Kendall's book is largely narrative. But, at over a thousand pages, it is much longer. It describes the foundation and extension of each Circuit and divides the history of the Connexion into three periods: the first from its beginnings until 1811; the second from 1811 until the retirement of Bourne and Clowes in 1843, 'the Period of Circuit Predominance and Enterprise'; and the third from 1843, 'the Period of Consolidation and Church Development', culminating, in 1901, in the decision to become a church rather than a Connexion, the process by which 'what began as a purely evangelical movement gradually evolved and organised itself into a Church'.[28] Joseph Ritson, also writing in 1907, covered much the same ground as Kendall, although at less length and in a more readable form.[29] He claimed for the Connexion much of the credit for the social and moral progress of the previous century and for the establishment of democratic institutions:

[…] not only did the Primitive Methodists train their members, especially their local preachers, in the art of public speaking, they instilled into their minds the instinct of law and order, together with a love of

[25] Ibid,, p. 360.
[26] Rev H. B. Kendall, *Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church,* 2 Vols. (London: Edwin Dalton, 1907).
[27] Ibid,, Vol. 1, pp. 336-38.
[28] Ibid,, Vol. 2, p. 357.
[29] Joseph Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism*, 5th edn (London: Edwin Dalton, 1919).

freedom and the spirit of democratic government. […] Its whole genius was in favour of democratic institutions and against tyranny and class domination.[30]

The centenary celebrations of 1907 produced, beside Kendall's *History* and Ritson's *Romance*, Patterson's *Northern Primitive Methodism,* a history of the Sunderland Circuit.[31] This gave an account of contemporary Primitive Methodism in one of its greatest strongholds but, like Kendall, skirts around its involvement in the miners' strike of 1844.[32]

Another retrospective account of the triumphs of Primitive Methodism was *Piety among the Peasantry* by the Rev. Henry Woodcock.[33] The author spent over forty years as a travelling preacher, mainly in the East Riding, and wrote the book while in temporary retirement in Huddersfield in 1887. *Piety among the Peasantry* suffers from the same flaws as the histories discussed earlier. It is largely uncritical and can tend to hagiography. But it is also an absorbing and lively book. It furnished an unadorned account of life on the Wolds in the 1850s and 60s and was also surprisingly accurate. The numbers of Primitive Methodist members and hearers recorded in each village tally almost exactly with those of the Religious Census of 1851 and the Returns of the Archbishop of York in 1865.[34] Woodcock praised the Reform Act of 1884 'which has sent to Parliament, in some cases, labourers instead of lordlings' and expressed agreement with John Morley MP that 'we want to give those who plough the ground […] a rather handsomer share of the sheaves when they are reaped'.[35] However, it is clear from the generally paternalist outlook which underlies *Piety among the Peasantry* and from the rest of his literary output that Woodcock was socially, if not politically,

[30] Ibid,, p. 279.
[31] Patterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism.*
[32] Ibid,, p. 95.
[33] Henry Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry: Being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* (London: Edwin Dalton, 1887). Woodcock, 1829-1922, was converted in 1844. He became a 'boy preacher' and entered the ministry in 1846. He eventually retired to Bridlington where he threw himself into the campaign against the 1902 Education Act.
[34] Edward Royle and Ruth Larsen, eds, *Archbishop Thomson's Visitation Returns for the Diocese of York 1865* (York: Borthwick Institute, 2006).

[35] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 264.

conservative.[36] He had a large family and managed to die a relatively wealthy man – presumably the result of his literary output rather than his forty years as an itinerant.[37]

The Rev. George Shaw produced several biographies of prominent Primitive Methodists in the late nineteenth century.[38] Again, these are largely uncritical, but they shed considerable light on the exhausting lives of Primitive Methodist travelling preachers and the pressures under which they laboured. They were supposed to visit forty families a week, to make conversions, to live on next to nothing and to satisfy the local Quarterly Meeting. Shaw's biography of Parkinson Milson based on the latter's diaries is particularly enlightening.[39] It demonstrates the development of the Connexion during the nineteenth century from an intense, evangelical sect into an established Nonconformist denomination – a change with which Milson was not entirely happy – and it is also very revealing of the sect's finances, a subject of no small importance. Other biographies of note include that of Joseph Arch, the Primitive Methodist labourer who founded the first Agricultural Trade Union in the 1870s; that of George Edwards, another agricultural unionist in Norfolk; and finally that of Thomas Burt, the leader of the Durham miners who became the first Primitive Methodist to be elected to Parliament in 1874 and served in Gladstone's last cabinet in the 1890s.[40]

Methodist Historiography since 1914

Any discussion of the historiography of Methodism in the twentieth century has to start with Elie Halévy. This is because he was the first secular historian to subject Methodism to serious historical analysis. The initial volume of his *Histoire du peuple anglais au XIXe siècle* was published in Paris in 1912.[41] The first English translations appeared after World War One, in 1920.[42] Halévy contended that England had only escaped a revolution such as that suffered by the French in 1789 because of Protestant

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[36] For instance: *Queen Victoria and the Royal Family; and the progress of the British Empire during Her Majesty's Reign* (London: n.d.); *Sayings and Doings of Good Boys and Girls* (London: n.d.).
[37] Information given to the author by Sandy Calder, 'Primitive Methodism, Challenging the Myth', unpublished doctoral thesis, Open University 2014.
[38] George Shaw, *John Wyndham or the Gospel among the Fishermen* (London: Simpkin Marshall & Co, 1878); *The Life of Parkinson Milson* (London: Simpkin Marshall & Co., 1893); *The Life of John Oxtoby 'Praying Johnny'* (Hull: William Andrews & Co., 1894).
[39] Parkinson Milson (1824-1892) was a prominent Primitive Methodist travelling preacher who served largely in the East Riding and North Lincolnshire.
[40] Joseph Arch, *His Life with an Introduction by the Countess of Warwick* (London: Hutchinson,1898); George Edwards, *From Crop Scaring to Westminster* (London: Labour Publishing Co., 1922); Thomas Burt, *Autobiography* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1924).
[41] Elie Halévy, *Histoire du peuple anglais au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1912).
[42] _____, *History of the English People 1815-30* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1920).

Nonconformity with its strong work ethic and its disapproval of violence. His proposal went as follows:

> They [the free churches] offered an outlet by which the despair of the proletariat in times of hunger and misery could find relief, opposed a peaceful barrier to the spread of revolutionary ideas, and supplied the want of legal control by the sway of a despotic public opinion.[43]

Halévy was suggesting nothing new as far as Methodists were concerned; historians of the Connexion had been saying the same thing for years.[44] His proposal, however, struck the academic establishment with some force and 'the Halévy thesis' remains an expression which can still strike a chord among non-historians. It has been much discussed and criticised. John Kent accused Halévy of exaggerating the conservative impact of Methodism: Bunting, for all his illiberalism, actually supported Catholic emancipation in 1829 and the 'Toryism' of early nineteenth-century Methodism has been much exaggerated.[45] Eric Hobsbawm pointed out that, far from accepting the injustices of early nineteenth-century society, many Methodists actually opposed them by becoming Luddites and Chartists.[46] Hobsbawm specifically mentions Primitive Methodism which, he says, 'was so closely identified wth Trade Unions as to become, practically, a labour religion'.[47] John Walsh, while disputing Halévy's claim that early Methodism converted large numbers of working-class people, pointed out that the movement had radical potential from the start: the communitarian ideas of the Moravians at Fulneck, which heavily influenced Wesley, and the latter's praise of the 'Godly poor'.[48] The Halévy thesis, however, has survived these various onslaughts and still remains a live proposition and a useful analytic tool, mainly because it illustrates the religious dimension of the radical tradition in British social and political history, a dimension which simply did not exist in continental Europe at the same period. [49]

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[43] _____, *History of the English People,* Vol. 2, 2nd edn (London: Ernest Benn, 1949) p. 1.
[44] George Herod*, Biographical Sketches*, p. 12; Kendall, *Origin and History,* Vol.1, p. 220.
[45] John Kent, 'M. Halévy on Methodism', *PWHS*, 29 (1953), 84-91. Bunting was the leader of Wesleyan Methodism in the early nineteenth century. He was authoritarian and conservative but has probably been maligned more than he deserves.
[46] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Methodism and the threat of Revolution in Britain', *History Today*, 7(1957), 115-24.

[47] Ibid,, p. 120.
[48] John Walsh, 'Elie Halévy and the Birth of Methodism', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 5th Series, 25(1975), 1-20.

[49] Elissa S. Itkin, 'The Halévy thesis: A working hypothesis?', *Church History*,44 (1975), 47-56.

Halévy's work was followed by that of two very different historians. The first was E. R. Taylor who, in his elegantly written memoir of 1935 – it started life as a university prize essay – traced the links between the Methodism of the middle and artisan class and the rise of Liberal sentiment, a sentiment that was to be harnessed by Gladstone later in the century. [50] John Vincent developed and enlarged this theme in his (1966) study of the formation of the Liberal party, pointing out that the formidable strength of Protestant Nonconformity revealed by the 1851 Census could hardly fail to have political repercussions.[51] The Liberation Society in particular, although it never achieved its final aim (the disestablishment of the Church of England), was 'extremely successful in making the Liberal Party feel the weight of Nonconformist views on questions of religious equaliy'.[52] In the same tradition (of links betweeen Nonconformity and the Liberal Party) Jonathan Parry claimed in 1993 that Russell's attempts to reform the admission statutes at Oxford and Cambridge in 1856 were intended to re-assure Dissenters that the Liberal Government was serious about addressing their grievances, as was the appointment of the evangelical Archbishop Tait in 1868.[53] Parry pointed to increasing Dissenting involvement in politics after 1850: 'A striking example of this was the enforced replacement of the old Whig George Grey at Morpeth by the miners' candidate Thomas Burt'.[54]

E.R.Taylor's work was followed by that of a historian of a very different stamp. In 1937 R. F. Wearmouth published the first of his three books about Methodism, the working classes and trade unionism.[55] He could not have come from a more contrasting background than Taylor. As a practising Primitive Methodist and a miner's son he had no need of the Halévy thesis to enlighten him on the links between Methodism and Radicalism as he had grown up with them from childhood. Robert Featherstone Wearmouth, 1882-1963, started life in a County Durham mining village. He went down the pit at twelve, was converted to Primitive Methodism at a Christian Endeavour meeting, and eventually entered the ministry via training at Hartley College Manchester

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[50] E. R. Taylor, *Methodism and Politics 1791-1851* (Cambridge: University Press, 1935).
[51] John Vincent, *The Formation of the British Liberal Party 1857-68* (London: Constable, 1966).
[52] Ibid,, p.68.
[53] Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 200.
[54] Ibid,, p.264.
[55] R. F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England 1800-1850* (London: Epworth, 1937); *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes 1850-1900* (Leicester: E. Backus, 1954); *The Social and Political Influence of Methodism in the Twentieth Century* (London: Epworth, 1957).

in the early years of the twentieth century. He then served as chaplain in World War One and saw action at the Battle of the Somme. Completely self-educated, he went on to take an MA at Birmingham University and a Ph.D at Manchester, both achieved whilst a serving minister. His life was an expression of the Primitive Methodist virtues: hard work, pure living, devotion to God.[56] His books were among the first to explore the links between Methodism, trade unionism and socialism. Particularly useful are his brief biographies of the (mainly Durham) men who made significant contributions to local and national politics.[57] Wearmouth's books describe how the culture of the chapel – self-help, self-discipline, education - helped prepare working men for leadership in the world of trade unions and in local and national politics where they were able to transform the material conditions of their communities. His last book, *The Social and Political Influence of Methodism in the Twentieth Century* (1957), is less satisfactory than the other two, being more of a list of worthies than an unfolding analysis.

The forty years following the Second World War saw the advent of a more sociological approach to the writing of history. As applied to religious history it meant an analysis of chapel or church communities according to social position and occupation rather than on the basis of the strength and direction of religious belief. Eric Hobsbawm, a Marxist, led the way in 1959 with *Primitive Rebels*, in which he claimed that Primitive Methodism, because of its close links with trade unionism, was virtually 'a labour sect'.[58] He based his assertion on the Primitives' strong working-class following, on their democratic organisation and on their strong links with temperance. He therefore claimed Primitive Methodism as a radical and reformist movement.[59] Hobsbawm's appoach was challenged by that of E. P Thompson who published *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963.[60] Thompson's argument was that Methodism (in general, not just Primitive Methodism), far from being a radical movement, was actually a conservative force which encouraged obedience to authority and to the dictates of industrial society. He portrayed it as part of a malign capitalist conspiracy designed to chain workers to their factory benches and deny the revolution.

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[56] J. Munsey-Taylor, 'Robert Wearmouth 1882-1963: Methodist Historian'*, PWHS*, 43 (1981-82), 111-16.
[57] For instance: Tommy Hepburn, John Iley, George Charlton, Thomas Pratt, William Dawson: R.F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England 1800-1850* , Part III, Chapter I, pp. 222-38.
[58] Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester: University Press, 1959).
[59] Ibid,, p. 135.
[60] E.P. Thompson*, The Making of the English Working Class*, rev. edn (London: Penguin, 1968).

His provocative prose, in which he castigated Methodist practices as 'psychic masturbation' or 'a Sabbath orgasm of feeling', have fascinated readers ever since.

The Making of the English Working Class is a fundamental text which inspired a whole generation of historians. It is original and challenging but also seriously flawed. Thompson's analysis under-estimated the enormous spiritual power of Methodism and its ability to inspire in its members huge efforts of will. He assumed that all those who preached in the chapels, all those who listened to them and all who toiled at the coal face of industry without complaint, did so under the duress of some ill-intentioned conspiracy rather than of their own free will. Thompson's intense dislike of Methodism (he was the product of a Methodist public school which he hated) and, to a lesser extent, his Marxism blinded him to the movement's huge spiritual and emotional power.[61] Thompson also under-estimated the variety of Methodist experience and the complexities of its geography, although he did allow that the Primitives were very different from the Wesleyans: 'We can scarcely discuss the two churches in the same terms'.[62]

Critics of Thompson included John Kent, who claimed that Methodist rules forbidding political involvement were made for religious reasons – to prevent internal divisions within the Connexion – and not out of deference to the interests of the governing classes. If one accepted Thompson's thesis, Kent claimed, 'no decent Christian could have been a Tory in the 1830s', but many were.[63] In a later review, David Hempton and John Walsh pointed out that, far from being the puppet of the ruling classes, Methodism was often deliberately counter-cultural.[64]

> The moral code of its serious-minded preachers collided with many traditional customs, pastimes and recreations (particularly if they desecrated the Sabbath).[...] Methodism at this point ran closely parallel to the movement for rational recreation that took place among trade unionists, plebeian radicals and the 'labour aristocracy' who often shared their dislike of drunken wakes and brutal sports, which they saw as childish and degrading and obstacles to the progress of the working man.[65]

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[61] John Rule, 'Edward Palmer Thompson 1924-1993', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: University Press, 2004).
[62] Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class,* p. 436.
[63] Kent, *Age of Disunity,* p. 133.
[64] David Hempton and John Walsh, 'E.P. Thompson and Methodism'. *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money and the Market 1790-1860,* ed. Mark A. Noll (Oxford: University Press, 2002) pp.99-115.
[65] Ibid,, pp. 108-09.

Yet Thompson's work was enormously influential. 'History from below', which took less account of the rich and powerful and more of those at the bottom of society, became the intellectual fashion of the next forty years. Thompson's influence was still apparent in several studies of Nonconformity and society written in the late twentieth century. The first, by A. D. Gilbert, gave a very clear account of the relations between the church, the chapels and industrial society in the nineteenth century.[66] Gilbert was particularly enlightening on the effects of Methodism on working-class aspirations: '[...] evangelical Nonconformity echoed the aspiration, not the despair of the working classes'.[67] David Hempton, in 1984, emphasised the different cultures within Methodism, 'Methodisms' as he called it. His work demonstrated the popular appeal of Methodist worship and spirituality – something which Hobsbawm and Thompson had simply ignored.[68] In a later book Hempton explored the links between Methodism and popular religion and introduced a welcome trans-Atlantic perspective into the debate.[69] In 1985, Deborah Valenze's *Prophetic Sons and Daughters* examined the influence on Methodism of women – another previously neglected group.[70] Valenze showed how cottage religion empowered women – as managers of cottage meetings, as members of Methodist Societies and as preachers.[71] In Filey, a strongly Primitive Methodist fishing village on the Yorkshire coast, she claimed, women, through their influence in the chapel, came largely to control the fortunes of the Filey fishing fleet.[72]

The 1970s and 80s saw the publication of a large number of more-general books on religious history. In the Thompsonian tradition were four general histories published between 1977 and 1990. Ian Sellers traced the generally received narrative of Methodist progress from marginalised, radical sect at the beginning of the nineteenth century to fully fledged, respectable denomination at its end.[73] G.I.T. Machin covered much the same ground, although in increased detail, and gave prominence to the debates

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[66] Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (London: Longman, 1976).

[67] Ibid,, p. 83.

[68] David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics 1750-1850* (Stanford Ca.: University Press, 1984).

[69] _____, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

[70] Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton: University Press, 1985).

[71] Before it was possible to build a chapel, many Methodist societies met in cottages, barns or workshops.

[72] Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, Chapter 11, pp. 245-80.

[73] Ian Sellers, *Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977).

over education in 1870.[74] Gerald Parsons, in the five volumes which he edited on Victorian religion, surveyed the whole field and provided extensive documentary evidence in Volume 3.[75] Finally, Adrian Hastings covered the period after the First World War when the inexorable decline in Methodist adherents, already apparent by the time of the political triumphs of 1906, led to the Union of 1932.[76] A fifth publication, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth since 1700* by Robert Currie and others, added a very welcome statistical element to the more general histories mentioned above.[77] By using information in the 1851 Religious Census and official figures from the various denominations Currie *et al.* were able to demonstrate the comparative strength of Primitive Methodism in its core areas, the weakness of the Church of England in industrial towns and the alarmingly low rates of church or chapel attendance among the urban poor. Their efforts have added considerable substance to the debates about the extent of evangelical Nonconformity and its effects on the general population. Another, later, publication should be considered here: *Rival Jerusalems* by Keith Snell and Paul Ell.[78] The authors updated the results of the 1851 Religious Census using new methods of statistical analysis. They looked at fifteen counties in detail, one of which was the East Riding, and calculated patterns of church attendance at various denominations. They found that the East Riding had one of the highest attendance indices at Primitive Methodist chapels: 7.8 per thousand compared with an average, over the fifteen counties, of 2.2.[79]

The Thompsonian revolution did not carry all before it. In the older, more historical tradition, four books, all written after 1963, did not attribute developments in Methodism to purely social causes. The first – and the least satisfactory – was the four volumes of *The History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* published between 1965 and 1988.[80] In spite of their distinguished contributors, these are surprisingly disappointing volumes. Some chapters, particularly those on theology, are quite uncritical and almost hark back to the nineteenth-century tradition. The series' long-

[74] G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches Vol.1 1832-1869* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); *Politics and the Churches Vol. 2 1869-1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).
[75] Gerald Parsons, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, 5 Vols (Manchester: University Press, 1987-97).
[76] Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1985* (London: Collins, 1986).
[77] Robert Currie, Lee Horsley and A.D. Gilbert, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).
[78] Keith Snell and Paul Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000).
[79] Ibid,, p.230.
[80] Rupert Davies, Gordon Rupp and A. Raymond George, eds, *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 4 Vols (London: Epworth Press, Vol. 1 1965, Vol. 2 1978, Vol. 3 1983, Vol. 4 1988).

drawn-out publication – over twenty years – clearly sapped the energies of its editors. More engaging was John Kent's *Holding the Fort*, a straightforward study of religious revivalism published in 1966.[81] Kent suggested that Nonconformity had lost its evangelical dynamism by 1850 and therefore looked elsewhere – to America - for spiritual revival. Bernard Semmel's *The Methodist Revolution* comes from a very different tradition – in essence it is a piece of intellectual history.[82] Semmel attempts to portray Methodism as the religious arm of the European Enlightenment and Wesley's synthesis of personal authoritarianism and political liberalism as 'the essential peculiarity of what Toqueville called "Anglo-American civilisation"' – an extravagant claim.[83] *The Methodist Revolution* is a thoughtful and original book but relies too much on intellectual theory and too little on the evidence of events. In W.R. Ward's *Religion and Society*, published in 1972, the dynamic is provided not by economic change but by the pressure of events – the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars.[84] Ward's complex study demonstrated how the European crisis gave rise to tensions in Methodism and the established church which had to be addressed, producing division in Methodism and reform in the Church of England. Ward is particularly good on the consequences of Peterloo which, he says, 'forever severed official Methodism from urban revivalism' and on the influence of events in Ireland, a point often forgotten.[85] Another great merit of his book is that he manages to link the study of the local – the Rochdale Vestry dispute of the 1830s, the Manchester education scheme of 1850 – with events on the national scene, thus avoiding the Thompsonian pitfall of assuming that Methodism was the same everywhere**.**

Three studies on particular aspects of Nonconformity need to be mentioned here: firstly, Clyde Binfield's 1977 book on the lives of prominent Nonconformists, among them Baines of Leeds, the educational voluntaryist, and Edward Miall, the founder of the 'Anti-State-Church Association'; secondly, David Bebbington's 1989 study of the Nonconformist conscience, which details the birth of the 'social gospel' within Nonconformity and its Late Victorian flowering in the form of opposition to the

[81] John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth, 1978).
[82] Bernard Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
[83] Ibid,, p. 198.
[84] W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England 1790-1850* (London: Batsford, 1972).
[85] Ibid,, p. 43.

Contagious Diseases Act and the Education Act of 1902;[86] finally comes Julia Werner's study of the origins of Primitive Methodism, published in 1984.[87] This well-researched book places as much emphasis on the enthusiasms of the Connexion's unschooled and working-class following as it does on its leading figures. It also makes clear that the beginnings of Primitive Methodism owed more to Wesleyan failure than to any radical secessionist initiative.

Into the New Century

In the 1990s there was a move away from socio-economic interpretations of the past towards a less reductionist approach. James Munson's *The Nonconformists*, published in 1991, is a study of Nonconformist thought and its social impact with a particular emphasis on the passive-resistance campaign against the 1902 Education Act.[88] In 1994 Michael Watts published Vol 2 of *The Dissenters*, and in 2015 Vol. 3 was published posthumously.[89] These volumes represent the fullest and most recent attempt so far to describe the history of evangelical dissent. In his introduction to the second volume Watts points out that

> The Nonconformist chapel touched the lives of far more working-class people in the first half of the nineteenth century than did either political radicalism or trade unionism. The adherents of Evangelical Dissent vastly outnumbered those of Owenism, Socialism or even Chartism.[90]

This is a valid point. Radical social movements have attracted far more attention from historians than radical religious ones, in spite of the fact that the latter were vastly more popular. Watts's comprehensive survey covers both the 'Dissidence' and the 'Community' of Dissent – its practices and its relations with the established church, and its membership and their place in society. He does not concentrate too heavily on the public face of political Nonconformity, but attempts to dig beneath the surface into the huge hinterland of Nonconfomist support in small-town and rural chapels. The maps

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[86] Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity 1780-1920* (London: Dent, 1977); David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914* (London: Allan and Unwin, 1982).

[87] JuliaWerner, *The Primitive Methodist Connection* (London, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

[88] James Munson, *The Nonconformists: In Search of a Lost Culture* (London: SPCK, 1991).

[89] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*: *Vol. 2: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Vol. 3, *The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015).

[90] Watts, *The Dissenters*,Vol. 2, p.3.

and tables at the back of the book, many the result of new searches in the Dissenting Registers, are particularly useful. Finally David Hempton's *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, published in 2005, emphasises the cultural diversity of Methodism.[91] It was a movement which 'thrived on the margins and frontiers of race and class', but which, because of the discipline and work ethic it encouraged, inevitably moved into the cultural mainstream and absorbed its ethics. In England it first allowed women preachers and then banned them; in America 'it first renounced slavery then accommodated it'.[92] It was a movement full of contradictions.

Local Histories of Methodism and the Questions they Raise

Since the 1960s there has been a huge expansion of local studies of Methodism. These were motivated, in part at least, by E.P. Thompson's advocacy of 'history from below' and the ideas of the 'History Workshop'.[93] But in more recent years they have been characterised by an increasing interest in family history, increased leisure and the availability of information on the internet. These studies can be roughly divided into two groups: the first, those primarily sociological in scope which sought to discover how Methodism affected social behaviour in particular areas; the second, more historical, which described how Methodism developed locally and what religious impact it had. The first group includes Robert Moore's 1974 study of Methodism in Durham, James Obelkevich's classic study of Lincolnshire, Alan Howkins's work in Norfolk, and many others;[94] the second, Simon Green's and Edward Royle's work in Yorkshire, Colin Dews's study also in Yorkshire and largely on Primitive Methodism, Jonathan Rodell's work in Bedfordshire and, again, many others.[95]

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[91] David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (London: Yale University Press, 2005).
[92] Ibid,, p. 31.
[93] 'History Workshop' was launched by Raphael Samuel in Oxford in 1976 and is dedicated to the study of those at the bottom of society rather than its leaders or intellectual elites.
[94] Robert Moore, *Pit-Men, Preachers and Politics*: *The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Comunity* (Cambridge: University Press, 1974); Robert Colls, *The Pit-Men of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest 1790-1850* (Manchester: University Press, 1987); James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: University Press, 1976); Rodney Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reform: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire 1817-1875* (Hull: University Press,1989); Nigel Scotland, *Methodism and the Revolt of the Field: A Study of the Methodist Contribution to Agricultural Trade Unionism in East Anglia 1872-96* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1981); Alun Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norflok 1870-1923* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul,1985).
[95] D.A.Gowland*, Methodist Secessions: The Origins of Free Methodism in Three Lancashire Towns, Manchester, Rochdale and Liverpool* (Manchester: University Press for the Chetham Society, 1979); S.J.D.Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: University Press,1996); Edward Royle, 'Church of England and Methodism in

It would not be possible – nor much use - to summarise the conclusions expressed in all these different studies. They demonstrate the huge variations in Methodist experience from the burgeoning confidence of independent-minded artisans in early nineteenth-century Lancashire towns to the close-knit and family-based Primitive Methodism of small villages in Cornwall or Lincolnshire.[96] These studies do, however, reflect the controversies expressed in the more general histories outlined above. The most important of these, and certainly the one on which most prose has been expended, is the question of how radical nineteenth-century Methodism really was, and, in particular, how politically radical Primitive Methodism was? Was it, as its officials would certainly have claimed, and as Halévy suggested, a restraining force which 'while fostering the spirit of freedom and independence was always on the side of law and order'?[97] These were the views of E. P. Thompson who thereby saw Methodism as a brake on the popular revolution which should have broken out in the 1830s. Or did Primitive Methodism, as Hobsbawm and Wearmouth have maintained, carry an essentially subversive message which led, eventually, to a critique of society, to trade unionism and socialism. The various local studies mentioned above give a continuum of answers to the question from Stephen Hatcher's study of Primitive Methodism in Hull – which hardly mentions radicalism at all - to Howkins's study of Norfolk which allows Primitive Methodism a leading role in the formation of agricultural trade unions. Robert Moore in the 1974 introduction to his study of Methodism in Durham remarks that 'the debate about the Halévy thesis has not reached a satisfactory conclusion'.[98] Forty years later is this still the case?

Yorkshire 1750-1830', *Northern History*, 33(1997), 37-61; Colin Dews, 'The Ripon Primitive Methodist Circuit 1822-1842', *PWHS*, 56(2009), 186-206; John Hargreaves, 'Hats off'! Methodism and Popular Protest in the West Riding', *PWHS*, 57(2010), 161-78; Brian Greaves, 'Methodism in Yorkshire' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Liverpool, 1968); Wayne Johnson, 'In Triumph of Faith; Primitive Methodism and the Labouring People of the North Midlands 1812-1862' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Keele, 1989); Delia Garrett, 'Primitive Methodism in Shropshire'(unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 2000); Stephen Hatcher, 'Origin and Expansion of Primitive Methodism in the Hull Circuit' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 1993); John Rule, 'Methodism, Popular Belief and Village Culture in Cornwall 1800-1850', in *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century* England, ed. Robert Storch (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 48-67; Jonathan Rodell, *The Rise of Methodism: A Study in Befordshire 1736-1851* (London: Boydell Press, 2014).

[96] Gowland, *Methodist Secessions*. pp. 68-81; Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp.220-58; Rule, 'Methodism, Popular Belief and Village Culture', pp. 48-67.

[97] Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodism*, p. 283.
[98] Moore,, *Pit-Men and Preachers,* p. 25.

The second question posed by general studies of Methodism is linked with the first. How far did Primitive Methodism oppose the culture which surrounded it and how far was it absorbed by it? Obelkevich claimed that Primitive Methodism in Lincolnshire 'provided for the village poor a comprehensive counter culture' and that 'everything the Primitives did implied a rejection of the parish church' – a claim also made by E.P Thompson.[99] Robert Moore, however, found that there was little conflict between Methodists and Anglicans in the Deerness Valley until the struggles over the Education Act in 1902.[100] In Yorkshire, according to Edward Royle, many rural Methodists continued to attend their parish church into the 1890s regarding it not as a rival to the chapel, but in an almost neutral light as the place where everyone customarily went to be baptised, married or buried.[101]

Finally how far was Primitive Methodism a genuinely popular church ? Kendall and Ritson in the early twentieth century represented it as the people's church, one which was very much in touch with working-class aspirations and which appealed particularly to those in dangerous and lowly occupations - miners, fishermen and agricultural labourers. This impression still persists, mainly because historians have concentrated on Primitive Methodism's public activities – on its links with trade unionism, the Labour Party and the politics of Nonconformity. However Primitive Methodism was more than a seed-bed for socialism, as Wayne Johnson has cogently pointed out.[102] It was primarily a vibrant, religious movement with its hopes fixed on the next world, not this one. Did this popular religiosity persist or was it swamped later in the century by a leadership increasingly divorced from the experience of its followers, as Howkins suggests?

> We see two separate chronologies within Primitive Methodism, one a central one of a chapel moving along the line of respectability towards becoming another denomination; another a local one, lagging behind in its heroic phase, still one of the chuches of the disinherited.[103]

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[99] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society,* pp. 257-58; Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class,* p. 437.
[100] Moore, *Pit-Men and Preachers*, p. 76.
[101] Edward Royle, 'When did Methodists stop attending their Parish Church', *PWHS*, 56(2008), pp. 275-95.
[102] Wayne Johnson, 'In Triumph of Faith', Chapter 6.
[103] Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, p. 48.

The Present Study

The present study will attempt to shed light on the questions outlined above through an exploration of Primitive Methodism in the Yorkshire Wolds. The East Riding was one of the strongholds of Primitive Methodism.[104] According to Michael Watts's figures based on the 1851 Religious Census, between 10 and 15% of the population attended Primitive Methodist chapels in the Driffield, Goole and Holderness registration districts on 30 March 1851. The same was true of Pickering in the North Riding. Only three other areas rivalled this figure – Lindsey in Lincolnshire (the area around Brigg), North and West Norfolk (the areas around Downham and Walsingham) and Weardale in County Durham, where the figure of attendees was over 15% of the population.[105] There have been studies of Durham, of Lindsey and of Norfolk, but none of the East Riding apart from a brief memoir by Edward Royle in a publication celebrating fifty years of the Wesley Historical Society in Yorkshire.[106] This present study seeks to fill in some of the gaps and make a contribution to the understanding of Primitive Methodism.

The main sources used for this study were the records of the Driffield, Pocklington and Bridlington Primitive Methodist Circuits in the East Riding Archive at Beverley. There are also some records of the Filey and Malton Circuits in the North Riding Archive at Northallerton which have been used for comparative purposes. The yearly 'returns' of the Circuits, the 'Station Reports' as they were called – an almost military metaphor – proved the most fruitful. The returns were where the Circuits recorded the number of members, number of 'fallen', number of local preachers, class leaders and Sunday School teachers to be sent to Conference each year.[107] The returns also recorded disciplinary action taken against members - for drunkenness, sexual misconduct or financial irregularities – and the appointment of travelling preachers. They are useful, not just for the numbers given, which are generally accurate (when compared with those recorded by Petty, Kendall and Woodcock) but also for the light they shed on Conference itself. As the century progressed, increasing pressure was put on the Circuits by the central authorities of the Connexion to increase the number of

[104] Ward, *Religion and Society*, pp. 11 and 76; Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 107 and 178; Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 167.
[105] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, pp. 809-62.
[106] Moore, *Pit-Men and Preachers*; Ambler, *Ranters and Revivalists*; Scotland, *The Revolt of the Field*; Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*; Edward Royle, 'Aspects of Methodism in the East Riding', *Yorkshire Methodism: Essays to Commemorate the Jubilee Year of the Wesley Historical Society* (Yorkshire), ed. Edward Royle (Wesley Historical Society (Yorks), 2013), pp.83-110.
[107] For an explanation of the role of the Circuits and Conference see Chapter 6.

Sunday Schools and to encourage temperance organisations and 'Catechumen' classes. These instructions did not always suit the Circuits, as will be seen in the case of Driffield and Pocklington. Records also exist for individual chapels. These tend to be sparse but have been used where possible – for instance lists of trustees at various chapels including Cranswick, Langtoft and Bishop Wilton, and the unusually full records of Flamborough Chapel in the Bridlington Circuit.

The main source for the discussion of Primitive Methodist activity on the School Boards is, again, the East Riding Archive. The Archive holds all the records of the East Riding Boards from 1870 until their abolition in 1903. It also holds the log-books of several 'National Schools' which were not managed by the Boards but by the Church of England and their nominees – usually local tenant farmers. Those of Fimber School are particularly interesting because they demonstrate the patrician, but generally well-meant, efforts of the Rev. Maule Cole to improve the education of local children.[108]

Information about the Church of England has largely come from the Borthwick Institute in York. The records of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding are held there as are the (published) records of Archbishop Thomson's 1865 Visitation.[109] The library of York Minster also holds an interesting collection of tracts written by East Riding clergymen on the subject of hiring fairs and the correct relations of farmers with their servants.[110] The national records of the Primitive Methodist Connexion are held in the Rylands Library in Manchester. These include copies of the *Primitive Methodist Magazine,* a reliable source of (generally hagiographic) obituaries of deceased members of the Connexion and collections of sermons and biographies. Englesea Brook Museum, an old chapel near Mow Cop where the Connexion started life in 1807, holds a collection of works by the Rev. Woodcock and copies of Petty's and Kendall's *Histories*.

A limited number of diaries and biographies have been used wherever possible (there is not a huge number to choose from). The *Diaries of Robert Sharp*, schoolmaster of South Cave, have proved a useful source of information for life in the East Riding in the early part of the nineteenth century.[111] Those of Robert Allan, vicar of Driffield,

[108] ERA, Log-book of Fimber School 1874-1895: SL 39/1.
[109] Royle and Larsen, eds, *Archbishop Thomson's Visitation Returns 1865*.

[110] Collection of ten tracts in York Minster Library: Special Collections XXVI.G.2.
[111] Robert Sharp, *The Diaries of Robert Sharp: Life in a Yorkshire Village 1812-1837*, ed. J.E. & P.A. Crowther (Oxford: University Press, 1997).

give a brief account of social life in Driffield at the same time, but have very little to say about religion.[112] The life of Joseph Smith of Southolme (a tenant farmer and Wesleyan local preacher), who lived for a time in Huggate in the 1870s, gives a picture of mid-Victorian life on the High Wold.[113] Biographies of popular East Riding preachers such as Johnny Oxtoby, Atkinson Smith and Parkinson Milson vividly illustrate the enormous popular enthusiasm generated by Primitive Methodism and the spontaneity of its worship.[114] Finally Kenneth Lysons gives an engaging account of growing up as a Primitive Methodist in the early twentieth century, albeit in Lancashire rather than the East Ridng.[115]

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis will cover the history of Primitive Methodism in the East Riding from the arrival of missionaries in Hull in 1819 until Methodist Union in 1932 just over one hundred years later. Chapter 2 will describe the social and economic conditions in the East Riding just before and during the first Primitive Methodist missions to the area in the 1820s. Chapter 3 will first give an account of how the Connexion began in an obscure corner of Staffordshire in 1807 and then spread northwards and eastwards down the Trent into the East Riding, Lincolnshire and County Durham. The second part of the chapter will also trace the establishment of Primitive Methodism on the Wolds, its social constituency and its position relative to Wesleyan Methodism. Finally it will assess the local impact of Primitive Methodisim in the light of the 1851 Religious Census. Chapters 4 and 5 will consider the theology of Primitive Methodism and how it was practised in the rural East Riding. It will ask what made the Connexion such an inspiring and popular faith and why it aroused such huge popular enthusiasm. Chapter 6 will

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[112] Richard Allan, 'Diaries' 1828-32: ERA, DDX 904.

[113] Memoir of Joseph Smith (Malton, 1900), York Minster Library, Special Collections – Yorkshire Collections Y/C 87 SMI.

[114] Harvey Leigh, '*Praying Johnny' or, the Life and Labours of John Oxtoby Primitive Methodist Preacher* (London: R. Fenwick, 1882); Charles Kendall, *The Christian Minister in Earnest: or The Life of Atkinson Smith* (London: Ward & Co., 1854); Shaw, *The Life of Rev. Parkinson Milson* ; Shaw, *Life of John Oxtoby.*

[115] Lysons, Kenneth, *A Little Primitive: Primitive Methodism from Macro and Micro Perspectives,* (Buxton: Church in the Market Place Publications, 2001).

examine the organisation and discipline of Primitive Methodism and show how both contributed to the Connexion's success in the East Riding and other rural areas.

Chapters 7 and 8 will look at Primitive Methodism's relations with the outside community, its 'public face', first in the period before 1870 and then in the period from 1870 to 1914. These relations will include Sunday Schools, temperance activities, the Connexion's links with Friendly Societies and trade unions and its espousal of popular Liberalism after 1870. One particular focus in these chapters will be to compare East Riding Primitive Methodism with its considerably more radical counterparts in Durham and Norfolk. In these counties there were much closer links between the Connexion and the local trade unions – mining in Durham and agriculture in Norfolk – which eventually led on to socialism and the election of Labour MPs in the twentieth century. In the East Riding this close connection never occurred and the thesis will attempt to discover why it did not. Chapter 9 will trace the decline and eventual demise of Wolds Primitive Methodism in 1932 in the context of current theories of secularisation. In particular it will consider the effect of World War 1 on religion in general and Primitive Methodism in particular. A final chapter will summarise the findings of the thesis and consider whether the questions posed above have been answered, and whether a definitive answer is ever going to be possible.

Chapter 2 The Economic and Social Background: The Wolds 1790-1900

Introduction

The English rural landscape – and particularly that of the Wolds – was transformed by the process of enclosure between the years 1750 and 1850. Enclosure was the process whereby the old medieval system of 'feudal tenure' was replaced by 'capitalistic agriculture'. In medieval times each village had an 'infield' - in which all held strips for individual cultivation – and an 'outfield' which was held in common for grazing and occasional crops. In addition the 'waste' – land which was not cultivated at all – was available for gathering firewood, rough grazing and squatting for those without rights of tenure.[1] This is a very general picture and in every locality there were huge variations of tenure – for freemen, husbandmen, cottars, squatters and those with 'customary rights' – and variations in the use of land according to local conditions. The system began to break down in the sixteenth century when high prices for wool encouraged landowners to extend sheep grazing at the expense of arable crops. A process of 'old' enclosure began whereby the wealthier and more adventurous began to consolidate their own holdings by buying up those of the less advantaged. In the Wolds the history of a 'deserted village' such as Wharram Percy is a good example of this.[2]

The process of voluntary or 'old' enclosure continued into the mid-eighteenth century when pressure for enclosure became such that landowners resorted to the process of parliamentary enclosure: if a majority of tenants (in proportion to acreage owned) agreed on an enclosure, then an Act was passed making it compulsory. Commissioners were appointed to parcel out land to individual tenants and to arrange compensation for others. They were also responsible for the building of roads, for access to the newly enclosed land, and to ensure that there was an adequate water supply. The majority of parliamentary enclosures took place between 1780 and 1820

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[1] G.E. Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure in England: An Introduction to its Causes, Incidence and Impact* (London: Longman, 1997), pp.7-11; Michael Turner, *Enclosure in Britain 1780-1830* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 16-26; Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History 1750-1985* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), pp. 1-3.

[2] Maurice Beresford and John Hurst, *Wharram Percy: Deserted Medieval Village* (London: Batsford for English Heritage, 1990), passim.

(encouraged by high agricultural prices during the Napoleonic wars) and most common land had been enclosed by 1850. The result was a transformation of the landscape – from a jumble of individual holdings to large fields held by a single owner – and a new social order: wealthy landowners, substantial tenant farmers and landless labourers who were dependent on wages. The process of enclosure clearly favoured the already rich and powerful, but there were compensations for all in the shape of an improved road system in the countryside and improvements in drainage.[3]

This chapter will first consider the historiographical debate about the advantages and the disadvantages of enclosure and its effects in the Wolds. It will then look at the social structure of the area after enclosure and its social institutions. Around the foot of the Wolds were four market towns – Driffield, Pocklington, Market Weighton and Malton. Their economic development will be considered in relation to the surrounding countryside, particularly after the coming of the railways in the middle years of the century. Finally this chapter will consider the decline of agriculture after 1870 - the so-called 'Great Depression' – and its effect on the Wolds and its rural population.

Enclosure: The General Background

In 1911 the Hammonds published *The Village Labourer*, a famous account of the countryside which ascribed the dispossession of the rural labourer and subsequent rural unrest entirely to the process of parliamentary enclosure.[4] Their view prevailed until the work of J.A. Clapham and J.D. Chambers, whose opinion was almost opposite to that of the Hammonds. They claimed that enclosure was only one among many of the causes of nineteenth-century rural poverty and that, in any case, it gave huge new opportunities for employment, besides increasing the food supply for the growing industrial towns.[5] Chambers's view was widely challenged. In 1963 E.P. Thompson declared himself with the Hammonds and described enclosure as 'a plain enough case of class robbery'. Keith Snell in 1985 argued first that enclosure did not increase opportunities of employment, and second that Chambers's conclusions were based on flawed calculations on output

[3] Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, pp. 48-54.
[4] J.L. & Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer*: *A Study in the Government of England before the Reform Bill* (London: Guild Books, 1948 [First published, 1911]).
[5] John Clapham, *Economic History of Modern Britain Vol. I* (Cambridge: University Press, 1930); J.D. Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply in the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 3(1953), 319-43.

and labourers' level of pay.[6] Snell's book is, however, entirely based on evidence from the south of England where the effects of enclosure were generally worse than in the more sparsely populated north.

Since then a host of local studies have demonstrated that enclosure was very much a regional process. Some counties were much more affected than others and the effect of the process on the rural poor depended very much on local circumstances, for instance on how much 'waste' as opposed to arable land was enclosed and on local rights of squatting and use of commons.[7] Mingay in his summary of the debate in 1997 took the middle ground. He emphasised, above all, that parliamentary enclosure was a local process and generalisations from particular examples are not useful. He cited, several times, the contrary evidence of the Swing Riots, which took place in 1830 in counties little affected by the process of enclosure. He concluded that parliamentary enclosure, devastating though it was in some areas, was only one cause among many of nineteenth-century rural poverty.[8] The following section will examine the process of enclosure in the East Riding and consider to what extent it conforms to the patterns suggested by Chambers, Snell and Mingay.

Enclosure in the East Riding

The Yorkshire Wolds by the early-nineteenth century were, in many respects, a new country: their improvement in the course of the previous hundred years was a source of some considerable pride to contemporary observers. As late as 1700,

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[6] Keith Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge: University Press, 1985), pp. 180-94 and 209-77.

[7] David Brown, 'The Variety of Motives for Parliamentary Enclosure: the Example of Cannock Chase 1773-1887', *Midland History*, 19 (1994), 105-27; John Chapman, 'The Later Parliamentary Enclosures in South Wales', *Agricultural History Review*, 39 (1991), 116-25; Michael Turner, 'Economic Protest in Rural Society: Opposition to Parliamentary Enclosure in Buckinghamshire', *Southern History*, 10 (1988), 94-128; A. G. Parton,' Parliamentary Enclosure in Nineteenth-Century Surrey', *Agricultural History Review*, 33 (1985), 51-88; Janice Crowther, *Parliamentary Enclosure in Eastern Yorkshire* (Hull: University Press, 1983); John Chapman, 'Parliamentary Enclosure in the Uplands: the Case of the North York Moors', *Agricultural History Review*, 24 (1976), 1-17.

[8] Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, pp. 148-58. An alternative opinion is provided by Robert Allan, *Enclosure and the Yeoman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 310-11. Allan argues that the 'yeoman revolution' in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century increased agricultural production to a level which would have been sufficient to feed an increased population in the nineteenth century. Enclosure superimposed on this was a 'landlord revolution' which made landlords rich but contributed little to the economy.

It would have been possible to travel the length and breadth of the district without passing more than half a dozen hedged areas. It is true that no open township was without some old enclosed ground, but on the Wolds this seldom extended beyond the immediate vicinity of the village.[9]

In 1800 the retired seaman and amateur poet Edward Anderson, who lived at Filey, was able to write of the Wolds:

On barren hills, scarce all but flint and stones

A few short whins, and strewed with dead sheep's bones

On those cold hills now large plantations rise,

And blooming cinquefoil there delights your eyes.

The towns, the fields, now everything looks new

The old thatched cottages have ta'en their flight

And new tiled houses now appear in sight.[10]

Anderson was a Wesleyan, an anti-slavery advocate and temperance reformer. He was also present at the great Mow Cop camp meeting in 1807 that marked the beginning of Primitive Methodism. He later became a Primitive himself. He died in 1843 and is buried at Kilham. His life and works demonstrate both the strong connection between Nonconformity and the Wolds and the area's startling transformation over a period of less than a hundred years.[11]

Yet the Wolds had a long history of settlement, as demonstrated by the survival of a number of medieval parish churches including those at at Weaverthorpe, Garton,

[9] Alan Harris, *The Rural Landscape of the East Riding of Yorkshire 1700-1850: A Study in Historical Geography* (Oxford: University Press for the University of Hull, 1961), p. 9.
[10] Edward Anderson, *The Sailor: A Poem* (Newcastle, 1800), p. 39.
[11] Henry Woodcock*, Piety among the Peasantry: Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* (London: Edwin Dalton, 1889), p. 141.

Wetwang and Wharram.[12] In the Late Middle Ages oats and barley had been grown on the Wolds by an 'in-field' and 'out-field' system of cultivation.[13] But, in 1349, the Black Death struck, reducing the population of some villages by a half or more.[14] Buildings decayed, marginal land went out of cultivation and local leadership failed. On the Wolds several villages never recovered and the only signs that they once had existed are raised areas of ground and the remains of field systems. Wharram Percy is the best-known example, but there are deserted-village sites all over the Wolds, for example, at Towthorpe, Cottam and Raisthorpe.[15]

In the early sixteenth century a general rise in the price of wool had made sheep rearing more profitable to landowners than arable farming.[16] Many took advantage of this by evicting the last few tenants from decayed villages and turning the land over to sheep. This happened at Wharram Percy about the year 1500. The last four families in the village were evicted and both the arable land of Wharram Percy and its house sites were incorporated into a sheep-run.[17] This pattern was repeated all over the Wolds.[18] By the mid-eighteenth century the area was largely occupied by sheep, interspersed with a few sparsely populated villages and the occasional rabbit warren.[19] Arthur Young, on his tour of the northern counties in the late 1760s, was not impressed. He felt the land could be put to better use:

> There are several warrens in this neighbourhood which appear, from the luxuriance and verdure of the grass, and from the multiplicity and height of the thistles to be excellent land – indeed the soil must be naturally good or it could not yield such spontaneous growth; but yet these large tracts of country are suffered to remain in their present state.[20]

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[12] David Hey, *A History of Yorkshire: County of the Broad Acres* 2nd edn (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2005) p. 12; Nikolaus Pevsner and David Neave, *Yorkshire: York and the East Riding*, 2nd rev. edn (London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 29-50.
[13] Harris, *Rural Landscape,* p. 24.
[14] Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2003), p. 156.
[15] Beresford and Hurst, *Wharram Percy: Deserted Medieval Village*, pp. 85-100.
[16] Susan Brigden, *New Worlds, Lost Worlds, The Rule of the Tudors 1485-1603* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), p.3.
[17] Beresford and Hurst, *Wharram Percy*, p. 15.
[18] Ibid,,, p. 18.
[19] Harris, *Rural Landscape*, p.19.
[20] Arthur Young, *An Abridgement of the Six Weeks and Six Months Tours of Arthur Young Esq. through the Southern and Northern Counties of England and Part of Wales* (Dublin: Printed for S. Powell, 1771), p. 75.

Young also disapproved of the habit of 'snatching' the occasional crop from land on which sheep had been folded:

> The general use made of the open Wold land is to stock it with sheep and cultivate a small part with the plough […] [the farmer] every year has been accustomed to plough up a fresh part of his sheep walk to take a crop or two […] This ruinous practice is but too common.[21]

When Young wrote this in the 1770s, the end of such 'ruinous practice' was already at hand. The Norfolk crop-rotation system, pioneered by Charles Townshend in the early eighteenth century, had been rapidly adopted by improving landlords and was moving north.[22] The four-year rotation involved wheat in the first year followed by turnips in the next, then barley and finally a fodder crop of grass or clover. Turnips were used as a winter feed for animals whose manure then nourished the soil to produce a better crop of grain. Turnips and clover 'came in slowly', as the saying went; the first reference to turnips in the area dates from only 1745. But by the early nineteenth century they had become an established crop.[23] Land improvement implied enclosure. In the East Riding a good deal of land had already been enclosed before the mid-eighteenth century by voluntary agreement, or 'old' enclosure as it was called. Most of this had taken place in the more heavily cultivated farm lands of the Hull valley and the Vale of York.[24] It was the Wolds which bore the brunt of parliamentary enclosure; by 1810, 206,000 acres of Wold land had been enclosed; the remaining 20,000 acres all followed by 1850.[25]

The Sykes family was the largest and best-known of the Wolds enclosers.[26] Richard Sykes, scion of a Hull banking family, inherited property in Sledmere in 1748. In 1753 he completed a splendid new house and park on the site of the old manor

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[21] Arthur Young, *A Six Month Tour through the North of England Containing an Account of the Present State of Agriculture, Manufacture and Population in Several Counties of this Kingdom*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: W Stratton and others, 1771), Vol. 2, p. 13.
[22] Hey, *A History of Yorkshire,* p. 373.
[23] Harris*, Rural Landscape,* p. 61.
[24] Keith Allison, *The East Riding of Yorkshire Landscape* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976)*,* p.130.
[25] Harris, *Rural Landscape,* p. 62.
[26] Christopher Simon Sykes, *The Big House: The Story of a Country House and its Family* (London: Harper Collins, 2004).

house.[27] It was however his nephew, Christopher Sykes, who established the family fortunes by buying up and enclosing Wold land: at East Heslerton in 1772, Huggate in 1773, Thixendale in 1775 and North Dalton in 1779. This policy was continued by his successor who acquired land in the Great Wold Valley, at Wetwang, Fimber and finally at Fridaythorpe in 1817.[28] The land was parcelled out into large 'post-enclosure' farms which still dominate the Wold landscape – substantial brick-built farm houses, often protected from the wind by a belt of trees - standing in the middle of heavily cultivated fields far from the centres of settlement. These farms were let to tenant farmers who had to have some capital – this was not a career for the indigent - who would then employ young men and women as live-in farm servants, and older married men from the villages. The names of these farms – Life Hill, Cowlam Grange, Croome, Gritts – still stand out on maps of the area.

In 1841 the Sykes controlled 34,000 acres of the Wolds. They were not, however, its only large landowners: just behind them were the Londesboroughs, who held 33,000 acres on the western escarpment, the Stricklands with 20,000 acres at Howsham and Boynton near Bridlington, the Hothams with 18,000 acres around South Dalton in the southern Wolds and, up in the north-western corner near Malton, the Middletons who held 12,000 acres at Birdsall.[29] There were also smaller landlords; for instance James Christie of Melbourne near Pocklington owned the land farmed by the Wesleyan preacher Joseph Smith at Huggate in the 1870s.[30] However, the Wolds were overwhelmingly controlled by large, wealthy and, on the whole, benevolent landowners.[31] This was to be a point of some significance later in the century.

In the East Riding enclosure was generally welcomed by the educated and the literate. Thomas Edmundson, the historian of the village of Fimber, wrote in 1857 that

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[27] Ibid,,, pp. 5-35.
[28] Barbara English, *The Great Landowners of East Yorkshire 1530-1910* (London: Harvester, 1990), p.174.
[29] Barbara English, 'Patterns of Estate Management in East Yorkshire', *Agricultural History Review,* 32 (1984), 29-48.
[30] Joseph Smith, *Memoir of Joseph Smith of South Holme, late of Huggate and Risborough, Wesleyan local Preacher, with records from his Diary together with speeches and sermons from 1823-1898* (Malton: R. J. Smithson, 1900), p. 166. (York Minster Library, Yorkshire collection Y/C 87 SMI)
[31] In comparison with, for instance, Norfolk: see Alan Howkins*, Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870-1923* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

There are now to be seen round the little village the fruitful field and quick wood hedge. Not fifty years since Fimber field was all one open field […] all the stock grazing in tethers […] and [when the first wagon-load of oats was harvested] all the old women and children left their nooks and followed the wagon as far as Towthorpe hill.[32]

Christopher Sykes's memorial in Sledmere village, erected by his son in 1802, declared that he

[…] in building, planting and inclosing on the Yorkshire Wolds in the short span of thirty years, set such an example to other owners of land as has caused what was once a bleak and barren tract of country to become now one of the most productive and best cultivated districts in the County of York.[33]

Strickland, in 1812, writing on behalf of the Board of Agriculture, was rather less complimentary and, like Arthur Young before him, criticised the 'rage for ploughing' and the growing of crops on poorly manured land.[34] However, he agreed that 'the habitations of the labouring class are here more comfortable than in many parts of England. Their houses generally consist of two lower rooms with two bedrooms over them.'[35]

The voices of those who lost from enclosure – cottars, landless labourers and the very poor – were rarely heard. They had to riot, as they did in the eastern counties in 1816, or rely on the testimony of others – journalists, radicals and the occasional clergyman. The journalist William Cobbett, countryman and radical, railed against the appropriation of land in the south of England by the rich and those who had profited by the wars:

In this beautiful island [the area around Ramsgate], every inch of land is appropriated by the rich. No hedges, no ditches, no commons, no grassy lanes; a country divided into great farms; a few trees surround

[32] Thomas Edmondson, *A History of Fimber* (Malton, 1857), pp.4-8.
[33] Inscription on the well opposite the Park Gates in Sledmere.
[34] H.E. Strickland*, A General View of the Agriculture of the East Riding, Published by the Board of Agriculture* (York: Wilson & Son, 1812), p. 94.
[35] Ibid,,, p.41.

the great farm house. All the rest is bare of trees and the wretched labourer has not a stick of wood, no place for his pig or cow to graze or even to lie down upon.[36]

In the East Riding, the Rev. Richard Allan vicar of Driffield, a man whose Diary rarely mentions much beyond the state of the weather and the local social round, was moved to record in September 1828 that 'the distress throughout the country must be great and almost general as the portable machines [threshers] are daily employed'.[37] In October he observed that the price of wheat has advanced 'beyond the reach of the poor. What relief can be devised for them is only known to Infinite Wisdom.'[38] That Allan should have made such an entry suggests that there was an obvious rise in distress that year as the result of enclosure and high prices.

Those made destitute by enclosure often went to live rough in the lanes and chalk-pits up on the Wolds where they were joined in their miseries by groups of discharged soldiers and sailors and were known collectively as 'The Wolds Rangers'. These were itinerant gangs who roamed the Wolds after Waterloo, looking out for casual employment, rustling sheep, stealing food from lonely farm houses and terrorising respectable inhabitants.[39] They were part of the disturbed social background which the Primitive Methodists encountered when they reached the East Riding in 1820.[40]

Social Effects of Enclosure on the Wolds So how severe was social distress in the East Riding compared with that in the worst-affected midland and eastern counties such as Northamptonshire or Norfolk? Forty per cent of its arable area had been enclosed by 1820 compared with Northamptonshire at 50% (the highest) and Lancashire at less than 10% (amongst the lowest).[41] The amount of 'commons and waste' enclosed was only

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[36] William Cobbett, *Rural Rides in the Counties of Surrey, Kent, Sussex, Herts, Berks* (London: 1830), pp. 207-08.
[37] ERA, Diary of the Rev. Richard Allan, 1828-1832: DDX 904, 6 September 1828.
[38] Ibid,,, 9 October 1828.
[39] Angela Antrim, *TheYorkshire Wold Rangers* (Driffield: Hutton Press, 1981), Chapter 4. The 'Rangers' still roamed over the Wolds in the early twentieth century and became part of local memory. Antrim's memoir reflects this.

[40] Julia Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connection: Its Background and Early History* (London: University of Wisconsin Press,1984), p. 104.
[41] Mingay, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, pp. 160-61. Reproduced from Michael Turner, *English Parliamentary Enclosure: Its Historical Geography and Economic History* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1980).

5%, much lower than in Cumberland (20%) or Northumberland (over 15%). However, according to Barbara English, there never had been a great deal of common land in the area anyway: '[...] extensive common pastures or woodland with numerous commoners were scarce in the East Riding'.[42] Instead, claimed Strickland '[...] the greater part [of married day labourers] have gardens attached to their cottages for the growth of vegetables, and are able to feed annually a bacon hog; some have land allotted to them for keeping a cow'.[43] Michael Adams, in his thesis on 'Agricultural Changes in the East Riding', confirms Strickland's view: 'Most labourers had gardens or access to allotments and were able to supply a significant part of their food requirements. Gleaning was generally available.'[44]

In her 1983 study of East Riding enclosures, Barbara Crowther found little evidence of large-scale popular opposition.[45] She calculated that 52% of enclosure acts in the area were unopposed and 27% of those were supported by 90% of owners. By contrast in Northamptonshire, the most heavily enclosed county of all, almost every Act was opposed and in Buckinghamshire there was 'almost always' some opposition.[46] There was only one case of a group action against an enclosure – at South Dalton in 1819 where Lord Hotham's agent, John Hall, had, against parliamentary rules, acted as a government commissioner and awarded land to his own employer.[47] John Hall had harassed tenants and had a generally bad reputation. According to Barbara English the case was not representitive of East Riding enclosures.[48] Crowther summarises her enquiries by remarking that

> […] the present study which covers the period from 1725 to 1860 has not revealed any evidence of violence or group action protesting about enclosure in particular or agricultural change in general, with the single exception of […] South Dalton.[49]

Jennifer Lawler, in a more local study of enclosure in four High Wold villages, echoes the conclusions of Crowther's wider work on East Riding enclosures. Lawler

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[42] English, *Great Landowners*, p. 552.
[43] Strickland, *A General View,* p. 285.
[44] Michael G Adams, 'Agricultural Change in the East Riding 1850-1880' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hull, 1977), p. 34.
[45] Janice Crowther, *Parliamentary Enclosure in Eastern Yorkshire 1725-1860,* 2 Vols.(Hull: University Press, 1983).
[46] Crowther, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, Vol. 1, p. 335.
[47] Ibid,,, Vol. 1, p.335.
[48] English*, Great Landowners*, p. 66.
[49] Crowther, *Parliamentary Enclosure*, Vol. 1, p. 340.

argues that population growth and migration increased after enclosure, contrary to the view that people were driven from the land.[50] Rather, she claimed, 'people were drawn to the villages as employment increased'. The population of Weaverthorpe increased from 182 in 1801 to 640 in 1851 and that of Luttons from 207 to 426.[51] Harris found similar increases in the same period in Fridaythorpe and in Grindale (on the Low Wold near Bridlington).[52] Lawler concluded that, although enclosure favoured large landowners such as the Sykes, the concurrent laying-down of roads and improvements in the water supply benefited all. The Wolds were a highly successful agricultural area and the four villages covered grew and prospered in the years up to 1860. Weaverthorpe in particular became a large and lively village boasting, besides the usual blacksmith's, saddler's and tailor's, a resident doctor and a veterinary surgeon.[53]

In a more recent account Katrina Navickas has argued that the absence of large-scale rural protest (against enclosure or in support of Chartism) does not mean that working people were content with the status quo and did not bitterly resent their treatment at the hands of the rich and powerful.[54] Instead they demonstrated their opposition by 'traditional' forms of protest such as rick-burning, trespassing or maiming of animals and trees. She quotes several examples from the Wolds which she says has a long history of popular agitation (but she fails to produce any evidence for this apart from some irregular sixteenth-century ploughing). In Pocklington in 1791, a town crier voiced threats of hedge-breaking if people were denied firewood; in the 1790s there was minor trespassing on the Sykes estate and several young trees were 'chipped'; in 1830 (during the course of the Swing Riots in the south) there were rick-burnings in Etton near Driffield and in Holderness.[55] R. P. Hastings also recorded attacks on threshing machines and outbreaks of arson at Malton and in other places in the North Riding in 1830.[56] 'The indications are,' said Hastings, 'that the North Riding labourer in 1830, although under considerable pressure, was never pushed beyond the pale.'[57] This is surely the point: the acts recorded by Navickas and Hastings were certainly evidence of

[50] Jennifer Lawler, 'The Effect of Enclosure on Four Wolds Villages', *East Yorkshire Historian,* 3 (2002), 55-145.
[51] Ibid,,, 55-61.
[52] Harris, *Rural Landscapes*, p. 98.
[53] Lawler, 'The Effect of Enclosure on Four Wolds Villages', 138-40.
[54] Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space, 1789-1848* (Manchester: University Press, 2015).
[55] Ibid,,, pp. 256, 260, 268-69.
[56] R.P. Hastings, *Essays in North Riding History* (Northallerton: North Riding County Council, 1981), pp. 99-100.
[57] Ibid,,,

anger and distress among the rural population experiencing enclosure, but they did not lead to riot as in the southern counties, or to organised protest as in Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire. Most sources conclude that distress caused by enclosure, sharp though it was, did not goad the population of the East Riding into open protest as it did further south.

Conclusion The Wolds were sparsely populated in the early nineteenth century and the population density was much lower than that in Northamptonshire or Norfolk. The establishment of large, post-enclosure farms therefore meant full employment for those who wanted it and rates of pay higher than in the south. Strickland estimated a labourer's weekly wage in the East Riding at fifteen shillings in 1811; the national average for England and Wales in the same year was twelve shillings.[58] The majority of labourers had land around their cottages and were able to grow vegetables and keep a pig. Of course there were losers - those who had no customary rights, had squatted on common land or who were displaced by the coming of threshing machines – the people whose plight was apparent even to the generally unobservant Rev. Allan. It was these people who were perhaps responsible for the protests recorded by Navickas and Hastings. The majority of the population however benefited from enclosure. It provided employment, a more regular supply of food and – in the end – a rise in the standard of living which would never have been possible under the old system.

Social Structures on the Post-Enclosure Wolds

As Barbara English has demonstrated, the High Wolds in the nineteenth century were overwhelmingly controlled by large, wealthy landowners.[59] David Neave has estimated that by 1873 82% of the north-eastern Wolds (which includes Sledmere and the Wold valley) were controlled by just three owners – the Sykes (53%), the Rivis (17.5%) and the Chomleys (11.5%).[60] Not all these owners were resident. The Londesboroughs spent very little time in the East Riding and, although 'old' Sir Tatton Sykes, who was in charge of the estate from 1824 to 1863, spent his entire life there, his son, the fifth

[58] Strickland, *A General View*, p. 258; G. E. Mingay, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales Vol.6, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: University Press, 1989), p. 1107.
[59] English, *Great Landowners*, pp. 29-31.
[60] Victoria County History of England, East Yorkshire Vol. 8, *The Northern Wolds*,ed. by David and Susan Neave (Oxford: University Press, 2008), p. 29.

baronet, in charge from 1863 to 1911, was a compulsive traveller and spent a great deal of his time abroad. None of these large landowners farmed their own land directly but let it to substantial tenants, mainly on short leases which were renewable annually. David Neave has calculated that, in the period 1824 to 1914, the average length of lease on the Sledmere estate was sixteen years with a quarter of farms held for twenty-five years or more.[61] It was these substantial tenant farmers, rather than the great landowners themselves, who were the leaders of local society – the Meggisons at Towthorpe, the Tophams at Weaverthorpe, the Wharrams at Fridaythorpe. Most were Anglicans (the exception being Robert Wharram who was a Wesleyan and a trustee of the Primitive Methodist chapel in the village). They served as Guardians of the Poor, as managers of national (i.e. Church of England) schools and as churchwardens. George Jackson, Anglican, Tory and owner / editor of the *Driffield Times* from 1860 to 1893, was the son of a tenant farmer at Garton.[62]

At the bottom of the social pile, and forming much the largest group in the rural population, were the farm labourers. These can be divided into three groups: farm servants, mainly young and unmarried, who were hired annually at local 'hiring fairs' and were boarded in the farm house; married day labourers who lived in the local village or often further away; and casual workers hired at busy times – harvest or turnip singling – and were paid piece rates. Strickland observed in 1811 that

> The population in most parts of the East Riding being very thin, and there also being a great want of habitations for the labourers, the principal part of the agricultural labour is performed by yearly servants kept in farmers' houses.[63]

June Sheppard, using information from the census of 1851, has estimated that in that year the agricultural labour force of the East Riding consisted of 43% weekly-paid labourers, 33% farm servants and 24% family labour, but that the proportion of farm servants on the Wolds was probably much higher, mainly because the farms were so

[61] English, *Great Landowners*, Chapter 7; VCH East Yorkshire Vol. 8, p. 32.
[62] Victoria County History of England East Yorkshire Vol. 9, *Great Driffield and its Townships*, ed. Graham Kent with David and Susan Neave (Oxford: University Press, 2012), p. 117.
[63] Strickland, *A General View*, p. 260.

isolated.[64] Gary Moses has suggested that East Riding farmers became more rather than less dependent on farm servants as the century progressed, in spite of the decline of hiring fairs in other parts of the country.[65] According to Legard, writing in 1848, a foreman might earn £25 a year with board and lodging, a shepherd £23, a wagoner (in charge of the horses) £16 and plough lads and kitchen girls (usually in their teens) between £8 and £12.[66] The only day off was Sunday and even that small amount of leisure was eroded by necessary tasks such as 'fothering' the horses. The only holiday was Martinmas week (in late November), when farm servants returned to their families for a week before the next hiring fair and a possible move to another 'place'.

Stephen Caunce has described the life and culture of the East Riding 'horse lads'.[67] It was a stark and isolated existence but not without its compensations. There was often a great camaraderie between the lads. After supper they would organise boxing games in the barns and on Sundays visit each other's farms to admire the horses. They were also the target of much concern by religious groups. The Church of England complained that farmers did not do enough to control the lads: they failed to make them attend church or to censure their relations with kitchen maids: 'They please themselves on Sundays', complained Robert Wilberforce, Archdeacon of the East Riding in 1842.[68] 'Therefore the day of the Lord becomes to many the Devil's day more than any other in the week.'[69] Over twenty years later the same complaint was made by the rector of Kirby Underdale:

> There are about sixty farm servants in the parish. The difficulty of installing any good into their minds is very great and the first obstacle is the late hours they are kept at work and the indifference manifested by their employers for their well being.[70]

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[64] June Shepherd, 'The East Yorkshire Agricultural Labour Force in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Agricultural History Review*, 9 (1961), 43-55; VCH East Yorkshire Vol. 8, p. 33.
[65] Gary Moses, 'East Riding Farm Servants 1850-75', *Agricultural History Review*, 47 (1999), 78-94.
[66] George Legard, 'Farming in the East Riding', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, 9 (1848), 85-136, 125.
[67] Stephen Caunce, *Amongst Farm Horses: The Horselads of East Yorkshire* (Stroud: Allan Sutton, 1991), passim.

[68] Robert Wilberforce, 1802-1857, was the second son of William Wilberforce 'the great Emancipator'. He was involved in the Oxford Movement and became Archdeacon of the East Riding in 1841. He later joined the Roman Catholic Church and died on his way to Rome in 1857.
[69] Robert Wilberforce, *Letter to the Gentry, Yeomen and Farmers of the East Riding (*York: Robert Sunter, 1842), p. 5.
[70] Edward Royle and Ruth Larson., eds, *Archbishop Thomson's Visitation Returns for the Diocese of York 1865* (York: Borthwick Institute, 2006), p. 252.

When the lads were induced to attend a place of worship it was generally a Methodist one – they enjoyed the singing and there was plenty of company.[71]

Life for married labourers was no easier than it was for farm servants – indeed, in many ways it was more difficult. Hours were long and work was physically taxing. Threshing machines were in use from the 1820s and mowing machines generally from the 1870s.[72] But sheaves still had to be 'stooked' (stacked) and hand tools remained in general use for planting and hoeing until after 1900.[73] Work was generally plentiful in the summer but winter unemployment was not uncommon, particularly in a cold winter if the fields were frozen and cultivation impossible. According to Strickland, in 1811 wage rates stood at twelve to fifteen shillings a week in summer and nine to ten shillings in winter; and much the same rates were still being paid in 1848.[74] It was not until after 1850 that the economic benefits of the Industrial Revolution finally filtered down to benefit the labouring poor.[75] On the Wolds in 1867 the average agricultural wage had risen to 17/6d. (In Norfolk it was14/9d.)[76] Skilled hinds (in charge of horses) could earn considerably more.

Women and children were able to eke out the family income by doing casual field work, particularly during harvest when wages were higher. Families could earn substantial sums and it was at this time of year that the more provident invested in boots, shoes and household supplies for the coming winter. There was also casual work available at other times of year:

'In winter the out-door employment is hoeing up the bottom of turnips [...] in spring women are employed in wicking, sodding, weeding wheat and the spring corn'. 'Wages are ten pence to one shilling per day and women [...] are engaged for a month and have their food found for them'.[77]

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[71] Caunce, *Amongst Farm Horses,* p. 166.
[72] The first reaping machine to be used in the Wolds was by Mr. F. C. Matthews of Hey Wold in 1851: *Driffield Times*, 7 August 1875.
[73] Stephen Caunce, 'Mechanisation in English Agriculture 1850-1914'*, Rural History*, 17 (2006), 23-43.
[74] Strickland, *A General View*, p. 258; Legard, 'Farming in the East Riding', 125.
[75] Charles Feinstein, 'Pessimism Perpetuated: Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Britain during and after the Industrial Revolution', *Journal of Economic History*, 58 (1998), 625-658.
[76] E.J. Collins, ed., *Agrarian History of England and Wales Vol. 7* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), Part 2, p. 2003.
[77] *Report of the Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture*, 1843, Command Publication 510. Evidence from Mr. Dalline of Rudston p. 329.

Later in the century the amount of field work available for women decreased. This was partly because of social pressure – it was felt that field work was 'unwomanly' and spoilt women for their prime role as wife and mother in the home.[78] Another reason was the fall in the number of people working in agriculture after 1850 with the result that there was less opportunity for casual work at odd times. [79] By the 1880s, the agricultural depression reduced the workforce further and compulsory schooling meant that children's hours were much restricted.

From their wages a labouring family had to pay rent for their cottage, which, said Strickland in 1812, 'generally consist of two lower rooms with two bedrooms over them. In the Wolds they are almost universally built of chalk and covered with thatch.'[80] The rent for such a cottage in 1848 was said to be between three and six pounds a year (somewhere around one shilling and sixpence a week).[81] Dr. Hunter, in his report on housing for rural labourers in 1865, roundly condemned the generally 'insufficient quantity and miserable quality' of most rural housing.[82] His report on the Wolds gives a mixed picture: 'At Londesborough the great owner has repaired and rebuilt, until every house is good and there are houses for all who work regularly upon the estate'.[83] At Fridaythorpe 'Nearly all the old cots have been cleared away, and very poor new rows, destined to a much earlier decrepitude have been substituted'; and at Settrington 'where there is a great owner, the cots are large and excellent, and let with a bit of land for £5.'[84] Finally, at Warter:

> Warter is an extraordinarily shabby village, but the population is far from wretched. They have to put up with mossy, mouldy thatch with bulging walls, uneven floors, windows that will not open and doors which will not shut [...] but there is attached by custom to many of these old places on the chief estate, a nice piece of land at a rent of perhaps £10 a year.[85]

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[78] Alan Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England, 1850-1925* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 102-03.
[79] The number of people employed in agriculture fell from one and a half million in 1851 to one and a quarter million in 1871 and to just under a million in 1901: *Agrarian History of England Vol. 7*, Part 2, p. 1970.
[80] Strickland, *A General View*, p. 42.
[81] Legard, 'Farming in the East Riding', 125.
[82] *Seventh Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council on the Dwelling of Rural Labourers* 1865 (Sessional Paper 3484), p. 9.
[83] Ibid,,, p. 293.
[84] Ibid,,, p. 294.
[85] Ibid,,, p.294.

This last quotation illustrates the difficulty of making any generalisation about the quality of labourers' housing. There was an enormous variety; moreover some, crucially, had land attached while others did not. The cheap rows run up at Fridaythorpe were typical of large 'open' villages, such as Fridaythorpe, Weaverthorpe and Hutton Cranswick.[86] A local tradesman would build rows of poorly constructed cottages and let them at a low rent for a quick return. They were soon occupied by families unable to rent in the more restricted 'closed' villages such as Sledmere, where landowners were reluctant to build cottages because it might make them liable to poor relief.[87] These rules on settlement were not lifted until 1865 (with the passing of the Union Chargeability Act), after which more cottages were built by the Sykes and others – but there were never enough.[88] Another consequence of the shortage of cottages was that men had to walk long distances from the open villages to their work at some isolated farm. This partly explains the longevity of the 'live in' system on the Wolds and the popularity of a kind of mixed contract whereby men were 'meated' on a farm and sometimes lodged there for the night. Their weekly wage was therefore reduced – usually to the detriment of wives and children. Food on Wold farms, though plain, was generally plentiful and nutritious and a good deal better than what could be afforded at home; for instance 'for dinner hot meat pie or boiled meat and dumplings with small beer. No ale given except during harvest'.[89]

The final group of agricultural labourers was the least well-off – casual workers who moved from place to place and picked up jobs where they could. They might follow the threshing machines around the farms during the autumn and winter (contractors paid them directly), join in the hoeing and weeding in the spring and then work at harvest where, in 1848, 'best mowers' could earn seventeen shillings a week with board or seven shillings and sixpence an acre for piecework.[90] These people generally formed the 'rough' element in the villages. They frequented the public houses, got involved in fights and were one of the prime targets of Primitive Methodist evangelism. Woodcock mentions one Harry McCue of Frodingham, 'prize fighter and boxer', who had a fearsome reputation but was later converted and became a local

[86] For an explanation of the terms 'open' and 'closed' villages, see below.
[87] Allison, *East Yorkshire Landscape,* p. 193.
[88] *Agrarian History of England* Vol 7, Part 2 pp. 1551-1556
[89] Strickland, *A General View*, p. 261.
[90] Legard, 'Farming in the East Riding', 125.

preacher and Sunday School teacher.[91] The 'roughs' were disapproved of but tolerated by the more respectable village inhabitants. Their way of life, albeit in Oxfordshire in the later nineteenth century, was well described in Raphael Samuel's 'Quarry Roughs'.[92]

Opportunities for casual work, as with opportunities for women and children, declined after 1850 and for the same reasons – a decline in the numbers employed in agriculture. For the fit and able, work on the railways offered a possible alternative – large numbers of men were employed on the construction of the Burdale tunnel on the Driffield to Malton line in 1853. By 1914, there was little casual agricultural work left and the itinerant gangs of Irishmen who used to appear in the Wolds every summer had largely disappeared.[93]

Village Life 1840-1870

The terms 'open' and 'closed' villages were first used by nineteenth-century commentators on the Poor Law.[94] They alleged that in 'closed' villages, where the housing stock was controlled by a single or very few landlords, there was a reluctance to build new labourers' cottages because of the burden of poor rates, should the inhabitants become indigent. Therefore new housing stock was concentrated in 'open' villages where there were a multiplicity of landlords and poor rates were spread more evenly. As a result the population of open villages grew while that of closed villages remained static. A change in the law in 1865 (partly as a result of the campaign by Caird and others) made the building of cottages more attractive to landlords.

In 1972 B. A. Holderness proposed a definition of 'closed' villages as those where there were no more than three major landlords and 'open' villages as those with a multiplicity of landowners.[95] He largely upheld the nineteenth-century view that closed

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[91] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 145.
[92] Raphael Samuel, 'Quarry Roughs', *Village Life and Labour*, ed. Samuel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 141-243, especially 141-163.
[93] E.J.T. Collins, 'Migrant Labour in British Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, 29 (1976), 38-59.
[94] For instance: Caird, *English Agriculture,* 1850-51, Second edn. (London: Cass, 1968) [Original published by Longman in 1851)
[95] B.A. Holderness, 'Open and Closed Parishes in England in the 18th and 19th Centuries', *Agricultural History Review*, 20 (1972), 126-39.

villages led to a poor distribution of labour, but contested the suggestion that their population remained static – using the village of Duggleby (on the Wolds) as an example.[96] Sarah Banks, writing sixteen year later, challenged Holderness's definition, and also those of Mingay, Obelkevich and Dennis Mills.[97] She suggested that they had been misled by Caird and his contemporaries and had taken at face value statements which were in fact propaganda intended to secure the repeal of the settlement laws - for instance the suggestion that the population in open villages expanded while that in closed ones remained static, and that landlords always opposed local initiatives such as the building of chapels. Banks then went on to consider the evidence from villages in West Norfolk and came to the conclusion that 'open' and 'closed' definitions, although useful, were not predictive of how a village might develop in terms of population or institutions such as chapels or Friendly Societies. Dennis Mills, writing in 2006, made a comparative study between an open village in Cambridgeshire and a closed one in Lincolnshire using what he called a 'behavioural model' i.e. comparing attitudes to the poor and poor relief in two very different places.[98] He concluded that such a model could well refine the rather crude definitions of 'open' and 'closed' villages, and prove a better predictive tool.

The Wolds had a very high proportion of 'closed' villages – 43% according to Holderness - compared with 33% in West Norfolk and Kesteven (Lincs), both entirely agricultural counties, and 6% in Essex and Cambridgeshire.[99] The division between 'open' and 'closed' villages was not a sharp one, but rather a continuum from one extreme to the other. On the Wolds only Sledmere and Cowlam were completely closed as the Sykes owned the entirety of land and housing. At the other extreme Cranswick and Fridaythorpe were totally open as there was a multiplicity of landlords and plenty of housing for rent. The rest lay somewhere in between. David Neave has produced a useful table of villages in the Northern Wolds showing the extent to which they were landlord controlled and the rise in their populations between 1801 and 1911.[100] Sledmere

[96] Ibid,,, 138.

[97] Sarah Banks, 'Nineteenth-Century Scandal or Twentieth-Century Model? A New Look at "Open" and "Close" Parishes', *Economic History Review,* 41 (1988), 51-73.

[98] Dennis Mills, 'Canwick (Lincs.) and Melbourne (Cambs.) in Comparative Perspective within the Open-Closed Village Model', *Rural History*, 17 (2006), 1-22.
[99] Holderness, 'Open and Closed Parishes', 135.
[100] VCH East Yorkshire Vol. 8, *The Northern Wolds*, p. 38.

grew by 106%, Fridaythorpe by 195% and Weaverthorpe by over 200% - emphasising Holderness's point that open villages generally grew faster than closed ones. The more open villages had a full complement of what were called the 'usual trades' - blacksmiths, joiners, butchers, bootmakers, tailors, and saddle makers. It was this so-called 'artisan' class who formed the backbone of village Methodism. Men such as Robert Belt (blacksmith of Luttons) and William Bowes (bootmaker of Cranswick), were both local preachers and officials of their respective chapels.[101] Being self-employed they were able to find time for chapel affairs and often had a little more education than the rest. Larger villages, like Weaverthorpe, might have a ropemaker or a resident veterinary surgeon. The village shop was a later development. Before 1870 meat and dairy products were obtained directly from the farms; people made their own bread from wheat or barley milled locally and were largely self-sufficient in potatoes and vegetables. Itinerant tradesmen sold things unobtainable locally such as tea, haberdashery, or pots and pans.

Most labouring people on the Wolds had little opportunity to travel outside the village except for work. Before the coming of the railways and the invention of the bicycle carriers' carts – or simply walking – were the only means of transport to the local market towns. Yet life was not unvaried: young men and girls, from thirteen upwards, travelled to their 'situations' on the farms, then returned at Martinmas after the 'hirings' to the family home before perhaps moving on somewhere new. The larger landlords, particularly the Sykes who were great 'improvers', employed teams of labourers to undertake large building-projects on their estates, and families moved with them from village to village wherever the work was going on.[102]

Social life in Wolds villages was dominated by the church, the chapel, the public house and, after 1830, the Friendly Societies. Methodism and its chapels will be discussed in the next chapter. The following sections will describe the state of the Church of England on the Wolds in the early nineteenth century; the role of public houses and the development of one of the most important institutions in East Riding villages – the Friendly Societies.

The Church of England

[101] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 138 and 99.
[102] Information recalled by members of present author's family.

The old (pre-1945) view of the eighteenth-century church accused it of indolence, complacency and a failure to confront the challenges of the Industrial Revolution. Subsequent historians, led by Norman Sykes, have taken a kinder view of an institution which often struggled to improve its pastoral efficiency.[103] Two more recent studies have shown the Church, before the Pluralities Act of 1838 and other reforming legislation, to have endeavoured, and sometimes succeeded, in reforming itself in spite of legislative and organisational hurdles.[104] Like the debate about enclosure, the debate about the failures of the Church of England depends on geography and there are as many answers as there are counties or parishes. The question to be answered here is how far local failures in the East Riding encouraged the growth of Methodism and how far were those failures typical of the national picture.

The Visitation Reports of the Archdeacons of the East Riding between 1806 and 1840 do not give a reassuring picture. Many clergy failed to appear at, or even send a representative to, the annual reviews held in Beverley or Scarborough.[105] In 1819 the churchwardens were called to account for failing to keep the church at Langton in repair, and in the same year the vicars of Burythorpe, Birdsall, Kirby Underdale, Kirby Grindalythe and Langton were among many others who failed to make an appearace before the Archdeacon at Beverley Minster. One problem was the lack of living accomodation for the clergy, meaning that many had to live a long distance away their flocks and found it difficult to attend to their duties properly. 35% of East Riding livings had no house provided in 1830 and Brian Greaves records that there was no vicarage at Foston, Lowthorpe, Ruston Parva, Skerne, Dalton, Langtoft or Fridaythorpe in 1800.[106]

The Rev. Woodcock was not an unbiased observer of the Anglican clergy. However, he went out of his way to praise those whom he considered conscientious and allies in the fight against ignorance and drink such as the Rev. Bailey at Weaverthorpe

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[103] Norman Sykes, *Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century* (London: G. Bell, 1930).
[104] Peter Virgin, *The Church in an Age of Negligence* (Cambridge: University Press, 1989); John Walsh, Colin Haydon and Stephen Taylor, eds, *The Church of England 1681-1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993).
[105] *Visitation Reports of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding 1806-1826*, Borthwick Institute for Historical Research at York, Microfilm number 1867.
[106] Keith Snell and Paul Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), p. 86; Brian Greaves, 'Methodism in Yorkshire' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Liverpool, 1968), Chapter 7.

and the Rev. Aitken at Wold Newton.[107] He reserved his fiercest condemnation for those who 'at night would return with maudlin tones and staggering steps, to the parsonage of which they were a disgrace', and names the vicar of Barmston as a particular example.[108] Other clergy whose failings were obvious to those around them included the Rev. Richard Allan at Driffield and Joseph Rigby at Hutton Cranswick. Allan was a pluralist who held livings at Kirkburn and Little Driffield as well as his cure at Great Driffield, a town of over two thousand people. A glance at his Diaries reveals a man a good deal more interested in the price of pigs and sheep than in the state of his soul.[109] He was succeeded in 1833 by his nephew George Allan, who held the living until 1877 when he finally retired aged 84.[110] Both men are described as being 'of limited ability'.[111] Joseph Rigby was inducted at Hutton Cranswick in 1819 and remained there until his death in 1871. Although conscientious as a young man (he published a defence of the church entitled *The Spirit of the Age* in 1835), he had clearly given up by the mid-century. There was no Sunday School in the parish and, when questioned about Nonconformist places of worship in 1865, he replied: 'Alas! There are three. The Independents, the Methodist and the Ranters places, the masses being steeped in ignorance frequenting these Schismatic Displays as they would Theatres'.[112] Perhaps as a result of this, Primitive Methodism was particularly strong in Hutton Cranswick. There were two chapels in the village and, according to Woodcock, a quarter of the entire population worshipped at one or other of them.[113] Rigby was so unpopular in his parish that, as David Neave recorded, the village Friendly Society actually asked a different clergyman to officiate in his (Rigby's) own church for the annual club feast. This was most unusual.[114]

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[107] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry,* pp. 79, 140.
[108] Ibid,,, p. 28.
[109] Diaries of Richard Allan, ERA, DDX 904.
[110] Royle and Larsen, *Archbishop Thomson's Visitation Returns*, p. 123.
[111] VCH East Yorkshire Vol. 9, p.116.
[112] *Archbishop Thomson's Visitation Returns,* p. 234.
[113] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 98.
[114] David Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside: Friendly Societies in the Rural East Riding 1830-1914* (Hull: University Press, 1991), p. 92.

In South Cave, Robert Sharp, diarist, village official and schoolmaster, took a low view of the Church of England.[115] He particularly objected to the lazy habit of clergy reading other people's sermons.

> I have I think almost as little to say as the Parson had on Sunday last when he forgot his Book. I fancy the Apostles did not travel about relying on Sermons in their Pockets: these idle Priests ought to be taught at least to speak grammatically for a Quarter of an hour at a time [...] I will take the Methodist preacher who travels from one place to another and he shall be better understood without his Sermons written down than a lazy reader with his bad writing before him.[116]

The appointment in 1840 of a new reforming Archdeacon – Robert Wilberforce, son of the great emancipator and brother of the Bishop of Oxford – saw a stricter discipline imposed on the clergy of the East Riding. Wilberforce's *Charge* of 1842 highlights their various failings. Baptisms had not been properly observed ('I fear this important duty has been neglected'), some clergy did not offer Communion when they should ('in some parishes only four or even three times a year'), and most importantly, 'above all the enemies from whom in our day the church suffers, the greatest is worldly and self indulgent clergymen'.[117] Wilberforce had a paternalist view of society and in his *Letter to the Gentry, Yeomen and Farmers* urged better treatment and care of farm servants.[118] However his good intentions were cut short by his conversion to Rome in 1851 (he was a Tractarian). Further reform had to wait until the appointment of William Thomson as Archbishop in 1865.

From the evidence of the Visitation Reports and the comments of contemporaries it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the East Riding was ill-served by the Church of England before 1840. By contrast, in Leeds, three new 'Waterloo churches' were built between 1815 and 1830 to serve a growing population and Dr. Hook, legendary vicar of the Parish Church, began his reforming pastorate in 1837.[119]

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[115] Robert Sharp 1777-1843 was a parish official and school master at South Cave, a village at the western edge of the Wolds. He was an intelligent observer of the world around him and his diary, which he kept from 1812 to 1837, records both local and national events.

[116] *The Diary of Robert Sharp of South Cave: Life in a Yorkshire Village 1812-1837*, ed. Janice E and Peter A. Crowther (Oxford: University Press for the British Academy, 1997), pp. 291-92 (22 December 1830).

[117] Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding at the Ordinary Visitation 1842* (London: John Murray, 1842), pp. 7, 21.

[118] Wilberforce*, Letter to the Gentry, Yeomen and Farmers*, pp. 2-6.

[119] The churches were St. Mark's Woodhouse, All Saints Meadow Lane and St. Mary's Quarry Hill, all paid for with money voted by Parliament after the Napoleonic wars.

But, in the East Riding, before reform had taken hold and, particularly, where 'well-entrenched clergymen were serving out the closing years of long pastorates' there was plenty of opportunity for a vibrant, reforming faith such as Primitive Methodism .[120]

Public Houses

The public house in the early nineteenth century was not regarded, as it often was in the later Victorian years, as the fount of all sin and social evil. In fact English public houses became more respectable in the course of the early nineteenth century. The influence of the evangelical party (particularly Wilberforce) and 'The Royal Proclamation Against Vice' of 1787 had led to closer attention by magistrates and the suppression, although not the extinction, of prostitution, gaming, and cock-fighting. That said, many publicans still acted as pawnbrokers and many employers still paid wages in pubs – a practice that led to drunkenness and fights.[121] Most East Riding villages had a public house; the larger, open villages had more. Cranswick with 917 inhabitants in 1823 had three.[122] Only the St. Quintins at Burton Agnes and the Stricklands at Boynton refused to allow a public house in their respective villages. Up on the Wolds, the Sykes seem to have been fairly liberal. Public houses were generally male preserves, although the landlady might be female and women might send in for a 'jug'. In general they were warm, convivial places where men could smoke, sing, drink, hear a newspaper read or simply escape the claustrophobia of cottage life. However there was a darker side to pubs – fighting, petty criminality, drunkenness – which an increasingly moralistic public opinion wanted to control.[123] In 1830, the passing of the Beer Acts, which allowed practically anyone to sell beer, led to a public outcry, demands for the control of the drink trade and the beginnings of the temperance campaign.[124] Significantly, it was the Primitive Methodists who were the first religious group to become closely linked with temperance in the 1830s.[125]

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[120] Royle and Larsen, *Archbishop Thomson's Returns,* p.viii.
[121] Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200-1830* (London: Longman, 1983), Chapters 11-14.
[122] Edward Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County of York*, *Vol. 2 East and North Riding* (Leeds: Leeds Mercury Office, 1823), p. 358.
[123] Brain Harrison*, Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), Chapter 5, pp. 107-26.
[124] Ibid,,, pp. 64-86.
[125] H.B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist* Church, 2 Vols, (London: Edwin Dalton, [c. 1907]), Vol. 1, pp. 469-76.

The Friendly Societies

Friendly Societies were mutual help associations whose origins lay in the seventeenth-century 'box clubs' of Scottish fishing communities.[126] They established themselves in working-class communities in Lancashire and the industrial West Riding in the early nineteenth century and then spread into rural areas. Friendly Societies were an early form of social insurance. Members paid a small amount of money into a central fund each week and, in return, should they die or become incapacitated, they were assured of a decent funeral and benefits paid to their dependants. Simon Cordery in a general descripion of Friendly Societies emphasised their commitment to voluntaryism and the self-help principle.[127] Regulations varied between Societies and some got into serious financial difficulties (eventually regulated by Act of Parliament), but the majority played a prominent and useful part in the life of working-class communities.[128]

Friendly Societies reached the East Riding in the 1830s. By 1843, there were over one hundred branches there and their popularity increased throughout the nineteenth century.[129] They were loosely organised into different 'Orders' or 'Lodges' - often with elaborate names: the Ancient Order of Foresters, the Oddfellows, the Loyal Order of Ancient Shepherds and the National Order of Free Gardeners were all active in the East Riding. Many originated in meetings in public houses and were secular in outlook. The exception was the Rechabites, founded in 1835 as part of the temperance movement, which had strong links with Nonconformity. The Rechabites had eight lodges in the East Riding in the mid-century, all of them in the towns.[130]

Village Friendly Societies were run by and for working people and were not, as Obelkevich and others have suggested, vehicles for 'social control' by parsons and landowners.[131] Members made their own rules, decided whether to hold their annual service in church or chapel and named their branch after the local landowner, e.g. 'Court Hotham', not out of deference but as a canny way of raising money. The

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[126] Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unions: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (London: Ashgate, 2000), p. 57.
[127] Simon Cordery, *British Friendly Societies 1750-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Chapter 1.
[128] For a fuller discussion of the role of Friendly Societies in the village community later in the nineteenth century see Chapter 8.
[129] Neave, *Mutual Aid*, pp. 1-9.
[130] Ibid,,, p. 104.
[131] Neave, *Mutual Aid*, pp. 86-96; Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 89.

Societies had a social as well as an economic function. Every year there was a 'Club Feast' – often the most prominent date in the village calendar – when members dressed up in 'regalia' which often harked back to the old 'Plough Monday' tradition.[132] There was a procession through the village, a meal in a public house and then more processions with the local brass band. In the evening there were children's games, dancing and drinking. At Burton Fleming in 1876, the Independent Order of Ancient Shepherds marched to the parish church led by the Nafferton brass band where the Rev. John Clarke MA 'endeavoured to impress on his hearers the duty of dependence on God in all things both spiritual and temporal'. The procession then proceeded to the Buck Inn 'where Mr. and Mrs.Webster had provided a substantial dinner'. There were toasts to the Queen, the Prince of Wales, 'the Archbishop and clergy' and Dr. Dawson of Hunmanby, medical officer to the Society. In return the Rev. Clarke proposed a toast to the The Ancient Order of Shepherds and Mr. and Mrs.Watson.[133]

Friendly Societies were useful and popular institutions in the nineteenth-century countryside and their importance has been badly under-estimated. In 1891, they had four million members – approaching half of the adult male population – in comparison with one and a half million Trade Unionists and seven hundred and fifty thousand members of the various Methodist groups.[134]

Railways and Market Towns

The coming of the railways made an enormous difference to rural life in the East Riding. The Hull - Scarborough line was built in 1846, the Malton - Driffield line (which crossed the Wolds via a spectacular tunnel at Burdale) in 1853, and the Driffield – Selby line in 1875. The last gave the town direct access to the West Riding and made a railway junction of Market Weighton.[135] The effect was immediate. It became cheaper to transport grain and stock to markets in York, Hull and further afield thus increasing profits, and it became easier for the unemployed or disaffected to find a better-paid mill job in the West Riding or Lancashire. Most unexpected of all, the railway provided an opportunity for those who had never ventured far from their villages to see a wider

[132] On 'Plough Monday' fantastically dressed ploughboys visited the local gentry, performed a ritualised play and asked for financial contributions. The custom was dying out in the East Riding by 1830.
[133] *Driffield Times*, 3 June 1876.
[134] Neave, *Mutual Aid*, p. 1.
[135] K. Hoole*, A Regional History of the Railways in Great Britain, Vol. 4 The North East* (London: David and Charles, 1965), pp. 53-60.

world. The authorities were amazed by the numbers of working people who took advantage of cheap tickets to visit the Great Exhibition of 1851 on 'shilling days'.[136] One of them was J.R. Mortimer (1825-1911), the son of a Wolds tenant farmer who was educated at the village school in Fridaythorpe. He became friendly with William Cooper, a Primitive Methodist local preacher. The two of them accompanied Ishmael Fish (Primitive Methodist missionary to the railway works at Burdale) on a visit to London in 1851. The visit entranced Mortimer and encouraged all his burgeoning interests. He later became a local historian and archaeologist.[137]

The Market Towns The railways also enormously increased the importance of the four market towns at the foot of the Wolds – Malton, Market Weighton, Pocklington and Driffield. They became magnets for the surrounding rural hinterland. Their flour mills and maltings attracted migrant labour from the countryside and their cattle and sheep markets fixed prices for the entire area. They also provided a day out for farmers' wives and daughters, who spent money in the shops for clothing materials and household goods which the new prosperity had brought. Driffield in particular thrived and became a minor manufacturing centre. In 1821 the population stood at 2,500. By 1881 it numbered 6,300.[138] There were several breweries, two makers of agricultural machinery, a brick works, a flour mill, and Matthews's cattle-cake works, the largest employer in the town.[139] There was a busy cattle market, numerous pubs and, from 1837, a Mechanics' Institute, opened by a committee of local ministers and business men, which played a leading part in the life of the town. In 1870 it hosted a meeting about the foundation of a School Board, and numerous local amateur concerts and temperance meetings were held there.[140]

Hiring Fairs

One of the most important events in the life of Wolds market towns was the annual Hiring Fair held at Martinmas (late November) at the end of the agricultural year.

[136] Special 'shilling days' were offered in order to attract the labouring population to visit the Exhibition: Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886* (Oxford: University Press, 1998), p. 240.
[137] J.R. Mortimer, *A Victorian Boyhood on the Wolds: The Recollection of J.R. Mortimer*, ed. J.D. Hicks (East Riding Local History Society, 1978). William Cooper later left for America in 1853 and Ishmael Fish ended his career in the Church of England as Superintendant of the Castle Howard Reformatory.
[138] VCH East Yorkshire Vol. 9, p. 15.
[139] Information collected from advertisements in the *Driffield Times* 1870-75.
[140] VCH East Yorkshire Vol. 9, pp. 129-30.

Young men and girls (mostly unmarried) came from all over the Riding to find a 'place' for the following year.[141] All were dressed in their best and bore the signs of their trade. A horseman had a bit of horse-hair in his collar and a shepherd a bit of wool. 'The wagoner had a piece of fancifully twisted cord in his cap, a bright flower (it may be artificial) in his buttonhole, and his jacket is not buttoned – that would not be correct. The proper fastening is two or three inches of brass chain the better to display a capacious chest.'[142]

Once hired by a farmer, the farm servant would be given a 'fest' or hiring penny and then allowed to please themselves for the next few days before turning up at the farm ready for work at the end of the holiday. The Fairs were always announced in the local press and the rates of pay given in the next issue. Those for 1875: 'experienced Foremen £30-34, younger Foremen £28-30, 'wags' £23 -26, 'third lads' £18-20, lads 'just off' £8-10, servant maids £8-10'.[143] The Hiring Fairs were always lively. People would stream into the town on foot or by train and shops stayed open late to sell the boots and stout working clothes needed for the year ahead. There were stalls selling ribbons and trinkets, fairground attractions and plenty to drink, as many of the transactions between farmers and servants took place in pubs.[144] Sometimes there was trouble. This included drunkenness, fighting, petty thieving and the seduction of servant girls. In 1875 the *Driffield Times* reported that 'The riot assumed such a desperate character that it was deemed necessary to telegraph to Beverley and Bridlington for assistance [...] but before it could arrive the concentrated disturbance had abated'.[145]

In spite of all the supposed ribaldry and drunkenness the fairs served a serious purpose. As Stephen Caunce has shown, they allowed for open, direct bargaining between master and man in an age before labour exchanges or trade-union agreements.[146] In fact they may have been a good deal more effective than labour agreements and one of the reasons why trade unionism made such little progress in the East Riding before 1914. If labour was in short supply then the labourers had the upper

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[141] Moses, *Rural Moral Reform*, pp. 71-101.

[142] Caunce*, Amongst Farm Horses,* p. 57, quoting the *Bridlington Gazette*, 16 November, 1895.
[143] *Driffield Times*, 13 November 1875.
[144] Caunce, *Amongst Farm Horses,* p.57.
[145] *Driffield Times*, 13 Nov. 1875.
[146] Stephen Caunce, 'The Hiring Fairs of Northern England 1890-1930: A Regional Analysis of Commercial and Social Networking', *Past and Present,* 217 (2012), 213-46.

hand; if there was too much then the masters did. But if a farmer treated his men badly or the food was bad ('a bad meat house' as the saying went), then word passed around the Hiring Fairs at speed. The system worked both ways.

> In the East Riding the yearly bond preserved the servants' independence rather than reducing it. Lads left jobs freely at the end of their term because they knew they could find others […] it was accepted that lads moved when they wanted a better job or even when they wanted a change.[147]

In the mid-nineteenth century there was an attempt – led by the Church of England - to suppress the Hiring Fairs and replace them with a reference system, on the grounds that they were 'degrading' and a cause of 'immorality'.[148] The attempt largely failed, because those directly involved – farmers and servants – saw the advantages of the system and did not want it replaced, however 'immoral' it was said to be. So Hiring Fairs continued to flourish in the East Riding until 1914 and beyond. The last took place in the 1930s, diminished by both by wage legislation and the desire of farm servants for a less restricted life.[149]

The Golden Age of Agriculture

The years between 1850 and the late 1870s have been described as the 'golden age' of British agriculture.[150] They were golden anyway for landowners and farmers - and for agricultural labourers at least a little less stark than in the earlier decades of the century. After the social unrest of the 1840s – Chartism, the Irish famine, the repeal of the Corn Laws – the country settled down to the long Victorian peace. Corn prices, after a dip caused by the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, rose again in response to the Crimean War in 1853.[151] Yield increased because of technical improvements, in particular the use of artificial fertiliser (guano, imported from South America), and the use of linseed cake to feed cattle over the winter (so lessening dependence on hay and producing better

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[147] Caunce, *Amongst Farm Horses*, p. 43.
[148] The Church of England campaign will be discussed in Chapter 8.
[149] Caunce, *Amongst Farm Horses*, pp. 206-20.
[150] R.E. Prothero, *English Farming Past and Present* (London: Longman, 1912), p. 370; F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge& Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 240-56.
[151] Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp. 9-30.

manure).[152] A large cattle-cake mill opened in Driffield and become became the major employer in the town.[153] The great landowners therefore enjoyed an increased income, tenant farmers made good profits and even agricultural labourers saw a modest rise in their wages. Day labourers' pay went up to 17/6d per. week in the 1860s compared with 14/- in the 1840s; farm servants were paid £28-30 a year (for foremen) compared with £22-25 in the 1840s.[154]

William Wright, in 1861, went as far as to suggest that these material improvements had also produced a social and moral amelioration among rural labourers.

> The length of this article prevents our enlarging on this subject or showing by statistical reports the unmistakeable social and moral advance among the working classes as evidenced in part by a diminution of crime, vagrancy and pauperism.[155]

The diminution in vagrancy and pauperism may have been the result, not only of voluntary effort, but also of an increase in mobility and employment opportunities offered by the railways. There was also another factor at work. The year 1851 saw the high point of the number of men employed in agriculture in England and Wales – at nearly one and a half million. Thereafter it fell to 1.2 million in 1871 and was down to 935,000 in 1901 – the result of migration to the towns or overseas.[156] In the East Riding this often produced a labour shortage (reflected in wage rates at hiring fairs) and generally worked to the economic advantage of labourers.

The Great Depression: Social and Economic Conditions on the Wolds 1870-1914

After 1875 the onset of international competition, particularly from the United States and Australia, caused a drop in prices for staples such as wheat, beef and wool. This, combined with a run of bad harvests from 1879 to 1882, produced what has become

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[152] William Wright, 'On the Improvement of Farming in Yorkshire', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society,* 22 (1861), 87-131.
[153] V CH East Yorkshire Vol. 9, *Great Driffield and its Townships*, p. 58.
[154] Collins, ed., *Agrarian History of England Vol. 7*, Part 2, p. 2003; Legard, 'Farming in the East Riding', 125; *Driffield Times*, 13 November 1875.
[155] William Wright, 'On the Improvement of Farming in Yorkshire', 128.
[156] Collins, ed., *Agrarian History of England Vol. 7*, Part 2, p. 1970.

known as 'The Great Depression' in English agriculture.[157] Prothero, writing in 1912, recognised that international competition meant that there would never again be huge profits on staples. He recommended a gradual move away from corn production to stock rearing, market gardening and poultry. Variety was the key.[158] He remained optimistic about the future of British farming but lamented that the events of the depression had 'broadened the gap between the classes'. Many of course would hold that it was already very wide before 1870.[159]

Fletcher's 1961 article suggested that the impact of 'The Great Depression' was regionally varied.[160] In western upland areas, mainly dependent on mixed stock farming, there was little hardship, but things were much worse in the arable eastern counties. F.M.L.Thompson refers to the 'Fletcher effect', which he says distorted the picture in eastern corn-growing areas such as the Wolds.[161] Because contemporary comment was so negative, it has been assumed that economic conditions were disastrous. In fact, says Thompson, wages held up reasonably well and, although rents and prices dropped, so did the cost of living. He concludes that, in most eastern counties (in which he includes the Wolds), there was real decline and hardship in the 1880s but recovery was well underway by the 1890s. In 1992 Michael Turner added to the debate by suggesting that the two Royal Commissions appointed to look into the depressed state of agriculture in the 1890s concentrated far too heavily on grain prices without looking at compensating movements elsewhere.[162] He concluded that:

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[157] T.W. Fletcher, 'The Great Depression in English Agriculture 1873-96', *English Historical Review*, 13 (1961), 417-32.

[158] Prothero, *English Farming,* pp. 374-92.

[159] For example, Allan Armstrong, *Farmworkers: A Social and Economic History 1770-1980* (London: Batsford, 1988); Alan Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870-1914*; Robert Jones, *Rebecca's Children: A Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Barry Reay*, Rural Englands: Labouring Lives in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor.*

[160] Fletcher, 'The Great Depression in English Agriculture', 423.

[161] FM.L. Thompson, 'An Anatomy of English Agriculture 1870-1914', *Land, Labour and Agriculture 1700-1920: Essays for Gordon Mingay,* ed. B.A. Holderness and Michael Edward (London: Hambledon, 1991), pp. 211-40, p. 235.

[162] Michael Turner, 'Output and Prices in U.K. Agriculture 1867-1914: the Great Agricultural Depression Reconsidered'*, Agricultural History Review*, 40 (1992), 38-51.

Grain output [...] decreased from the late 1860s, while livestock output increased. The notion of national depression is not entirely discredited by these findings, but it requires more sophisticated language than that we have inherited, largely unchanged, from the Royal Commissions of the 1890s.[163]

In the East Riding, Susan Parrott has shown that farmers on Low Wold land and in the Hull valley did better than those on the High Wold during the depression.[164] The immediate reaction of Sir Tatton Sykes to falling profits was to raise rents.[165] This brought protests from his tenants and his brother, Christopher Sykes, who was Tory MP for the East Riding and feared for his seat. Sykes relented and, in 1879, gave his tenants linseed cake to the value of 10% of their rents.[166] In the 1880s he further relented and reduced rents, as did Lord Halifax at Garrowby and the Fitzwilliams at Malton.[167] In the end Sykes proved a generous landlord. He embarked on an improvement programme, building field drains and covered stock-yards and providing more cottages. He remained, however, a shy and difficult man who fell out with several of his agents in the course of the 1870s. He refused point-blank to have anything to do with the recommendations of Hunter-Pringle in the 1895 *Royal Commission Report*, which advised a limited abandonment of 'high farming' and different crop rotations. His tenants were firmly told that they must stick to the original 'Norfolk system' and no deviation was to be allowed. Sir Tatton became convinced of the value of dew-ponds for watering stock, thus enabling a larger number of cattle to be kept on the High Wolds where water was in short supply. He became quite an expert in their construction.

The large landlords generally had enough capital to absorb the losses caused by the fall in prices, but smaller tenant farmers did not. Many let their leases lapse and some of the largest farms, for instance Croome outside Sledmere, had to be split up.[168] There was also a move away from reliance on corn to more stock farming and, in the Hull valley, to market gardening for the nearby Hull market. On the High Wolds about 20% of arable land was turned over to grass, more elsewhere. The labourers did not lose much in terms of wages. Rates at the 1885 'statties' were £26 - 29 for foremen and £16

[163] Ibid,,, p. 50.
[164] Susan Parrott, 'Agricultural Conditions in the East Riding in the late Nineteenth Century' (unpublished M. Phil dissertation, University of Leeds, 2002).
[165] Tatton Sykes II, son of Tatton Sykes I 'the old squire', inherited the estate in 1863.
[166] *Driffield Times*, 4 Jan. 1879.
[167] Barbara English, 'The Sledmere Estate on the Eve of the Great Depression: The Economy of the Sledmere Estate 1869-1878', *Business History*, 24 (1982), 24-47; *Driffield Times*, 7 January 1881.
[168] VCH East Yorkshire Vol. 8, p. 37.

-18 for wagoners; weekly wages stood at 17/- (in Norfolk they were 15/-).[169] However, there was less employment because farmers, themselves hit by falling profits, increasingly abandoned 'high farming' and with it the weeding, hoeing, ketlocking and flinting that had occupied so many hands. At the same time, the process of mechanisation (which had been slow in earlier years when labour was cheap) began to speed up. The reaper - binder came into general use in the 1870s, although it had been used much earlier in the Wolds:

> The first reaping machine used in the North of England was at Haywold twenty four years ago by Mr. F.C. Matthews, proprietor of the extensive cake and artificial manure works at Driffield, who also in the same year introduced the first steam engine.[170]

At the same time as employment in agriculture was decreasing, village trades such as tailoring and bootmaking were succumbing to large-scale factory-manufactured goods. The result was considerable local unemployment. Soup kitchens were opened in Nafferton and Weaverthorpe during the winter of 1886.[171] The 1893 report of the *Royal Commission on Labour* found 'surplus labour' in Cranswick, Kilham, Langtoft, Luttons and Weaverthorpe, all large, open villages.[172]

Unemployed labourers moved to the towns and found jobs in local industries such as flour mills, agricultural-implement makers or brick yards. The populations of Driffield, Pocklington and Market Weighton all rose during the late nineteenth century. Others went further afield – to Hull to work in the docks or to the industrial West Riding. The most extreme solution was to emigrate to America, Australia or New Zealand. Throughout the 1870s and 80s the *Driffield Times* carried adverts for emigrant ships to New Zealand: 'Assisted passages for foremen, shepherds and wagoners, single female servants free'.[173] In 1874 and 1875 there were similar advertisements for the USA and Canada, and one for Natal in 1881.[174] In the particularly cold winter of 1889-

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[169] *Driffield Times,* 7 November 1885; Collins, ed., *Agrarian History Vol. 7*, Part 2, p. 2003.
[170] *Driffield Times*, 7 August 1875.
[171] *Driffield Times* 13 February 1885.
[172] *Royal Commission on Labour 1893: The Agricultural Labourer*. Vol.1 England, Part 3, Reports by Mr. Wilson Fox,1893-94 [C 6894-III], p. 62.
[173] *Driffield Times*, 4 January 1873.
[174] *Driffield Times* 11 January 1874, 17 July 1875, 2 May 1881.

90 emigration agents from Queensland toured the Wolds villages recruiting would-be emigrants.[175] Frodingham, in the Hull valley, was described by the Rev. Woodcock in 1889 as

A dull, dispirited village, and the population (680) has been decreasing for years. An old man said 'I've been reckoning up and find that whereas we used to have twenty four farm houses in our parish now there are eight […] Some have tumbled down […] others have been turned into cottages, and the land thrown to other farms, some are standing empty, and much of the land that was ploughed is now grass.[176]

Frodingham was not the only village to shrink. Fridaythorpe declined form 330 to 250, Weaverthorpe from 640 to 380 and Luttons from 426 to 317.[177] Too often it was the young, intelligent and energetic who left, leaving behind the old and the more vulnerable.

Some families chose to stay where they were in the villages. Although pay was small and poor relief grudging, they did at least have access to fresh air and a garden to cultivate, unlike the squalid conditions they would have had to endure in the towns. There were also more allotments. As a result of new legislation in 1882, allotments were provided at Kirkburn, Wetwang, and Hutton Cranswick.[178] At Middleton the rector, Rev. Blanchard, gave land at his own expense.[179] The *Royal Commission on Labour* of 1893 also emphasised the frequent provision of 'cow gates' (access to grazing land) near labourers' cottages in the East Riding and remarked that

A large majority of the labourers keep pigs, several keep poultry and several keep cows […] I think on the whole the condition of the agricultural labourer is satisfactory in this district. He certainly lives, as a rule, sufficiently well and his house is comfortably furnished.[180]

The Wolds labouring family was also becoming less isolated. The appearance of the bicycle in the 1880s made more difference even than the railways to working-class

[175] Ibid,,, 2 November 1889.
[176] Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry,* p. 145.
[177] VCH East Yorkshire Vol. 8, *The Northern Wolds*, p. 38.
[178] Keith Allison 'Provision of Alottment Gardens in the East Riding', *Northern History*, 37 (2000), 75-92.
[179] *Driffield Times*, 2 May 1885.
[180] *Royal Commission on Labour* 1893,Vol 1 Part 6, p.61.

mobility in rural areas.[181] Bicycles were relatively cheap, working lads and girls could save up for one, or buy one on hire purchase. Once bought, they made an enormous difference to life. It was possible to visit friends or family on Sundays, to go to the local pub, to court someone in a different village or to look for a better job. Village life was also more varied and less monotonous. Free trade and improvements in shipping and refrigeration meant a much wider array of goods than had been available fifty years before – tinned Argentine meat, Edam cheese, dried fruit, margarine – and the arrival of the village shop. The Sykes, when they built new cottages in the closed village of Kirby Grindalythe in the 1880s, included in the design a village shop and a post office. Although the population of East Riding villages declined in the late nineteenth century, the institutions of village life were more varied and more engaging than they had ever been. The Church of England, under a new, reforming Archbishop of York, was attempting to win back those it had lost to dissent. Methodism, both Wesleyan and Primitive, was at the height of its success and at the centre of village life providing Sunday Schools, tea meetings, temperance lectures and, for the young, the Band of Hope. Friendly Societies flourished and, most importantly of all, education was available to all (1870), compulsory (1876) and free (1891).

Education

There were some schools in East Riding villages before 1870. They were usually national schools (i.e. under the aegis of the Church of England) and usually established by the local landowner. The Sykes built schools in Kirkburn, Fimber, Bishop Wilton, Thixendale and Wansford; the Londesboroughs at Goodmanham and Willerby; the Grimshaws at Bainton.[182] However, the 1843 Royal Commission *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* gave an unfavourable account of rural education:

[181] Philip Mackintosh and Glen Norcliffe, 'Men, Women and the Bicycle: Gender and Social Geography of Cycling in the late Nineteenth Century', *Cycling and Society*, ed. Dave Horton, Paul Rosen and Peter Cox (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 153-79.
[182] J. Lawson, *Primary Education in East Yorkshire 1560-1902* (East Riding Local History Society, 1962).

> […] generally speaking what the children of the poor learn is worth little to them and, as such, is rapidly thrown aside and forgotten […] a question may arise whether reading made easy, bad writing and worse arithmetic, are the best preparations for a labourer's life or not […][183]

But these small rural schools did at least give children some kind of education, as did the burgeoning numbers of Sunday Schools, both established and dissenting. They also provided a base for the operation of the 1870 Education Act. The East Riding was actually ahead of many urban areas in the percentage of children attending schools before 1870: 59% in the Driffield area and 63% in Beverley.[184]

In 1870 Gladstone's Liberal Government came to the conclusion that public education was too important an issue to be left to voluntary effort by the churches and introduced the Education Act of that year.[185] Its immediate effect was to make illegal child labour in the fields (connived at by both parents and farmers) and, in the long term, to end the cycle whereby village boys followed their fathers into agriculture or a trade, and village girls their mothers into domestic service. One obvious route out of the monotony of farm service was to train to become a teacher; many boys and girls stayed on at school, aged 12 or 13, as monitors or pupil teachers in order to begin the process. It took some time for the employment of children to cease. In 1878 the Rev. Maule Cole reported that Mr. Baker-Cooper (who was one of the school managers) was employing children in Fimber and, as late as 1900, Mr. Reynard, a wealthy farmer at Kirkburn, was found employing children on his estate as 'beaters'.[186]

Conclusion

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Wolds presented a 'new' landscape of enclosed fields and a nascent arable economy based on oats, barley and – increasingly - on wheat. By the middle of the century the area enjoyed unprecedented prosperity – high rents for landowners, good prices for farmers and a rise in living standards for even

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[183] *Report on Women and Children in Agriculture* 1843, p.292.
[184] W.B Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society 1830-1870: The Geography of Diversity in Provincial England,* (Manchester: Universiy Press, 1987) p. 237.
[185] For a discussion of the effects of the Education Act on relations between dissent and the Church of England on the School Boards see Chapter 8.
[186] ERA, Fimber School Log-Book 1874-1895: S.L. 39/1 Record for 1887; Minutes of Hutton Cranswick School Board 1889-1903:S.B. 20/2: Record for January 1900.

the poorest. In the 1840s and 50s the coming of the railways ended the isolation of the Wolds, and the market towns – particularly Driffield - grew and prospered. The last quarter of the century brought more difficult conditions. The agricultural depression and the progress of mechanisation on the farms meant less employment for agricultural labourers and a decline in the population of villages on the Wolds. People drifted to the towns or further afield – to the West Riding or Durham or even to Australia and New Zealand. Emigrants were usually young and often the most spirited and ambitious among the local labouring population.

More difficult to quantify than changes in material well-being however, were changes in what might be called the 'moral climate'. Commentators as far apart as William Wright (wealthy local landowner) and the Rev. Henry Woodcock (Primitive Methodist minister) agreed on 'the unmistakable social and moral advance among the working classes'.[187] Woodcock, writing in 1887, says of the common shows (exhibiting specimens of human abnormality), which used to traverse the Wolds:

> There are signs, happily that the day of these revolting exhibitions is waning, and that the travelling showman will have to merit a share of public patronage by attractions of a more legitimate and elevating, if less startling, character.[188]

That these changes came about at all can largely be traced to the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century, to Methodism and, particularly in the East Riding, to Primitive Methodism.

[187] See above, note xxx.
[188] Woodcock*, Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 27.

Chapter 3 The Birth of Primitive Methodism and its Development on the Wolds 1820-1870

Introduction

The essential point about Methodism, and the one which most struck contemporaries in the early nineteenth century, was the huge spurts of growth which it enjoyed: up to 9% (of its existing membership and across all Methodist groups) between 1819 and 1829 and up to 10% between 1829 and 1839.[1] Historians have attempted to trace the connection between Methodist progress and the economic cycle. Hobsbawm linked the growth of Methodism with the economic distress and political ferment of the years between 1795 and 1820. Radicalism and Methodism he claimed were two sides of the same coin and thrived in desperate economic circumstances.[2] E.P. Thompson modified Hobsbawm's thesis, suggesting that Methodist revivalism 'took over' when political aspirations met with defeat i.e. at the bottom of the economic cycle, the 'chiliasm of despair'.[3] He cited as an example the Primitives' revival in the East Midlands in 1818, the year after the failure of the Pentridge Rising.[4] W.R. Ward disputed this interpretation:

> Methodism has often been regarded as a recession phenomenon, a competitor with radical politics; but the reverse is true. Bad years for business were almost always bad or indifferent years for Methodism.[5]

Ward's figures however relate to a later period than Thompson's and both are open to contrary interpretations. Julia Werner's conclusion was that Primitive Methodist revivalism had a particular appeal to the indigent and disadvantaged but that, once a Society was established, economic recession had an adverse effect because people had

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[1] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 2 The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 73.

[2] Eric Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men; Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1964), p. 29.

[3] E.P. Thompson, The *Making of the English Working Class* New ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991). First published Gollanz 1963, pp. 426-429. The Pentridge rising was a failed attempt at armed insurrection in 1817 led by the unemployed and disaffected in North Derbyshire.

[4] Ibid, p. 428.

[5] W.R. Ward 'Church and Society in the first half of the Nineteenth Century', *History of Methodism in Great Britain,* Vol. 2 eds. Davies, Rupp and George (London: Epworth, 1978), pp. 44-6.

no means to pay preachers or support a chapel.[6] Michael Watts, who produced a table showing the oscillations of Methodist growth against average wages, comes to much the same conclusion.[7]

One thing is, however, certain – there was enormous fluidity in early Methodist membership – as Watts's table demonstrates.[8] James Obelkevich pointed out of Primitive Methodism in rural Lincolnshire that it was impossible to sustain the high level of religious emotion generated by initial conversion over months and years: 'an initial "wildcat" expansion was followed by irregular contractions until a settled group of viable societies was formed'.[9] Expansion in Bedfordshire followed much the same pattern.[10] In the East Riding the Bridlington Society had to be resuscitated more than once and the society at Rudston had a precarious beginning.[11]

This chapter will trace the rise of Primitive Methodism from its birth in Tunstall to its triumphant arrival in Hull in 1819. It will then follow the success of Clowes and Oxtoby in their conversion of the Wolds and their establishment of the Connexion in this sparsely populated area. Finally it will describe the progess of Wolds Primitive Methodism up to 1870 and consider how far it conforms to or differs from the historiographical approaches outlined in Chapter 1.

Background and Early Progress of Primitive Methodism 1790-1819

Primitive Methodism was born in Tunstall, Staffordshire, in 1811. It was part of a general reaction against the perceived self-regard and lack of evangelistic endeavour of what came to be known as the 'old' or Wesleyan Connexion.[12] John Wesley, the founder

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[6] Julia Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connection: Its Background and Early History* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 170-3.
[7] Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 2*, pp. 71-3.
[8] Ibid,
[9] James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: University Press, 1976), p. 250.

[10] Jonathan Rodell, *The Rise of Methodism: A Study in Befordshire 1736-1851* (London: Boydell Press, 2014), pp. 270-4.

[11] Henry Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry: Being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* (London: Joseph Toulson, 1889), pp. 53 and 68.

[12] Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber, 1968), Chapter 2, pp. 44-88.

of Methodism, had died in 1792.[13] The thirty years which followed were among the most turbulent in modern British history. The French revolutionary government declared war on Great Britain in 1793. From then until the Peace of Amiens in 1802, and again from 1806 to 1815, the two countries were in a constant state of war. The British government was terrified of revolutionary ideas, or 'Jacobinism' as it was described, taking hold in Great Britain. The threat, although it was exaggerated, was real enough as demonstrated by Wolfe Tone's attempted rising in Ireland in 1798 which was supported by the French.[14] In response to the threat Pitt suspended the Habeas Corpus Act in 1794 and introduced the Combination Laws in 1799.[15]

The continuing war and subsequent social and economic distress produced an anxious public mood. The two decades following 1790 were a time of religious revivalism, millenarian prophecy and apocalyptic frenzy.[16] In the West Riding William Bramwell led an 'awakening' that produced hundreds of converts in Dewsbury, Bradford and Leeds.[17] Robert Miller revitalised religion in Bolton. In Nottingham, where there was an economic depression among the stocking-frame knitters, the Wesleyan society was inspired with a new zeal.[18] All these were revivals of orthodox Methodism but smaller, fringe, groups also flourished: these included the Kirkgate Screamers in Leeds, the Manchester Band Room Methodists, and the 'Magic' Methodists of Delamere Forest led by the charismatic 'old man of the forest', James Crawfoot.[19] These groups were religiously radical. There was no hierarchy. Anyone could preach and all could participate. Their meetings were often noisy and apparently disorganised. Although not necessarily politically radical, they were often suspected of being so, and suspicion fell particularly on the itinerant evangelists with whom they were associated. For instance in Kent, during the Swing Riots in 1816, it was rumoured that 'itinerant radicals' had stirred up the people to violence.[20] The government, urged on by the Bishops of Gloucester and Durham, decided to take action against such

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[13] Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1989), pp. 65-74.
[14] Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp. 80-81.
[15] The Combination Acts forbad large outdoor gatherings of workmen, or anyone else, as they were seen as a threat to public order. These included large outdoor religious meetings. Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People,* pp. 65-74.
[16] Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People*, pp. 400-404.
[17] Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion,* pp. 34-39.
[18] Ibid,, pp. 40-44.
[19] Ibid,, p. 69.
[20] Eric Hobsbawm and George Rude, *Captain Swing* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969), p. 181.

itinerant evangelists whose activities were especially disturbing because they lay beyond the reach of the civic authorities.[21] Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, attempted, with the connivance of two leading Wesleyans, Thomas Coke and Adam Clarke, to introduce a parliamentary bill to limit their activities in 1811.[22] There was such an outcry from lay Methodists and from well-placed representatives of Dissent, such as Lord Holland, that the bill was withdrawn. It was eventually replaced, after further negotiations between the Connexional Solicitor Thomas Allan and Lord Liverpool, by the new Toleration Bill of 1812.[23] The whole episode demonstrated the dilemma of the Wesleyan leadership. Persecution forced them 'into a conservative posture in order to obtain a liberal measure'.[24] They achieved a degree of religious freedom but it was at the cost of stifling the evangelistic enthusiasm of their most devoted supporters.

Methodist societies were generally appalled by the social unrest that surrounded them during the war years and responded by re-affirming their loyalty to the civic authorities – as their founder would most certainly have done. [25] To the end of his life Wesley had maintained the High Church and High Tory traditions in which he had been raised: passive obedience and non-resistance. For him, Methodism was about saving souls, not about improving governments. 'The selfsame authority', he said, 'enjoins me to fear God and honour the king'. [26] Leading Wesleyans, of whom Coke and Clarke were representatives, were therefore determined to prove to the Government that Methodists were loyal subjects of the Crown and untainted with Jacobinism. Various attempts were made to curtail the activities of itinerants and, in 1803, Conference, alarmed by reports of 'wildfire' at Love-feasts, declared that only those holding Class Tickets should be allowed to attend. In the same year, they severely restricted the activities of female itinerants because of the radical image they might project.[27] Julia Werner even suggests that the ejection from Conference in 1798 of Alexander Kilham,

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[21] Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 16;
[22] David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics 1750-1850* (Stanford Ca.: University Press, 1984), pp. 98-104; W.R. Ward, *Religion and Society* (London:Batsford, 1972) pp. 54-62.

[23] The New Toleration Bill was passed because Magistrates, who were often clergymen, were refusing to administer the Oath of Allegiance (to the civic authorities) to Dissenting Preachers. The Act ensured that all who presented themselves would be able to take the oath. The Five Mile Act and Conventicle Act were repealed at the same time.
[24] Hempton, *Methodism and Politics,* p. 102.
[25] Ward, *Religion and Society,* pp. 21-54; Watts, *The Dissenters,* pp. 367- 370.
[26] Quoted in Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 371.
[27] Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 49.

whose pamphlet *The Progress of Liberty among the People Called Methodists* had aroused suspicion, was, in itself, a sop to the civil authorities.[28]

Hugh Bourne and William Clowes were recent converts to Methodism in the district of Tunstall in Staffordshire around the year 1805. Both were working men – Bourne was a carpenter and Clowes a potter. Bourne, a serious and thoughtful man and largely self-taught, was converted through joining a Methodist class in 1799. Clowes, by contrast, had a rougher background. He had spent some time working in Hull where he led an allegedly depraved life, and had nearly been press-ganged during a drinking session in a public house. Bruised by this experience he returned to Tunstall and was converted to Methodism during a revival in 1805 – part of the general Methodist 'awakening'.[29]

Hugh Bourne became an active member of the Bemersley chapel but yearned for something more – for a more deeply spiritual, a more evangelistic religion. In 1801 he established a prayer meeting at Harriseahead, a bleak settlement high up on the Staffordshire moors which drew in those on the fringes of society who eked out a living from mining, potting and subsistence agriculture. Eventually the group built their own chapel. In 1802, Bourne asked the Tunstall Methodist Circuit to include the Harriseahead chapel in its preaching plan. The ministers reluctantly agreed, but soon attempted – in response to Conference's nervousness about public displays of enthusiasm - to quell the zeal of their new adherents.[30] Meanwhile, Bourne had met Clowes and the two were drawn together through a shared spiritual vision and a longing for greater fervency in religion. In 1805, they went together to visit the Magic Methodists in Delamere Forest whose leader, James Crawfoot, made a deep impression on both of them. That year also saw another event of great significance for the future of Methodism: this was the visit to Britain of the American evangelist Lorenzo Dow.[31]

Dow was an odd figure, 'one of the strangest vessels God ever condescended to use and honour' according to Kendall.[32] An asthmatic and epileptic, he nevertheless had a commanding presence and had converted thousands at gatherings along the

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[28] Ibid, p. 6. This view is not shared by Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided*, pp. 58-60. Currie suggests that Conference was hostile towards Kilham only because he was a layman and championed lay representation, not because of any threat to public order. For a more recent analysis of the Kilham episode see David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics,*, pp. 67-73.
[29] Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 65-6.
[30] Ibid,, p. 57.
[31] Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, p. 94-5.
[32] Holiday Bickerstaffe Kendall, *Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* 2 Vols. (London: Edwin Dalton, 1907), Vol. 1, p. 58.

western frontier known as 'Camp Meetings'.[33] The very name itself was a conscious throwback to the days of Wesley's great open-air meetings where he reached out to the poor and dispossessed who might never have darkened the door of a church or chapel. Such meetings had never been entirely abandoned by the Connexion but were certainly far less frequent in the 1790s than they had been earlier. According to Bourne, 'I never knew a Burslem Travelling Preacher perform what Mr. Wesley called 'field preaching' all the time I was a member'.[34]

American Camp Meetings were loud, exuberant affairs. People attended from miles around, often as they travelled west in their wagons, and stayed for several days. Evangelists of all denominations or none mounted upturned carts and held forth. There were extempore prayers, fallings-down and callings-out, accompanied by loud singing and music from whatever instruments were available. The atmosphere of intense spirituality was sometimes tempered by a carnival air as people settled down for a few days rest from the hardships of frontier life. Mark Twain, writing in 1884, looked back to the Camp Meetings he remembered from his youth:

> Then the preacher began to preach and began in earnest too: and went weaving first to one side of the platform and then the other, and then leaning down the table in front of him with his body going all the time […] and every time he would hold up his Bible and spread it open and kind of pass it around this way and that shouting 'It's the brazen serpent of the wilderness! Look upon it and live!' And the people would shout 'Glory! Amen!'.[35]

Dow's visit in 1805 was doubly unwelcome to the Wesleyan authorities. Not only were Camp Meetings on the American model of dubious legality; Dow was also a republican and avowed opponent of monarchy.[36] They hastened to distance themselves from such doubtful evangelism. The Conference of 1807 declared that

> Even supposing such meetings to be allowable in America they are highly improper in England and likely to be the productive of considerable mischief and we disclaim any connection with them.[37]

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[33] Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 45.
[34] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 1, p. 39.
[35] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* ed. Sculley Bradley and others (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 107 [first published 1884].
[36] John Kent*, Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth, 1978), p. 59.
[37] Minutes of Conference 1807, quoted in Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2002), p. 3.

Hugh Bourne attended Dow's final Camp Meeting at Congleton in December 1806, before the latter left for America, and was inspired. He promised his friends a 'day's preaching on Mow' and proceeded to organise his first Camp Meeting.[38] The meeting took place on Mow Cop, a rocky hill top above the Cheshire plain, on 31 May 1807 and was also attended by William Clowes. It was a huge success. The meeting was not advertised but news travelled by word of mouth and people came from miles around. There were four preaching stands, loud singing, extempore prayers and an atmosphere of high religious emotion, 'a sublime and magnificent spectacle' as Bourne described it.[39] The reaction of the Wesleyan authorities was to threaten Bourne and Clowes with expulsion from the Connexion should they organise any further Camp Meetings. This they immediately proceeded to do. Their first was held at Woolstantan, Staffordshire, in July 1807, another at Norton in August and another on the Wrekin in Shropshire in 1808. Duly expelled, Hugh Bourne, William Clowes, James Crawfoot and others formed a loose group of 'Camp Meeting Methodists'. It was this group which met in the kitchen of Joseph Smith, another local preacher expelled by the Old Connexion, in January 1811 to form the so-called Primitive Methodists.[40] The epithet 'primitive' was deliberately chosen and referred, not to primitive Christianity, but to the 'primitive' evangelism of Wesley – to his field preaching and direct appeal to the poor before the advent of chapels and an institutionalised ministry. The name was suggested to Bourne and Clowes by Crawfoot, who told them that in 1790 he had heard Wesley say:

> Go out into the streets and lanes and preach the gospel wherever there is an open door […] or two or three under a hedge […] This is the way the Primitive Methodists did.[41]

As Julia Werner has observed,

> The frenetic determination of Wesleyan officialdom to prove their loyalty to King and country made the Old Connection unable either to absorb contemporary revivalist impulses or to respond constructively to lay opinion.[42]

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[38] Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 60.
[39] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 1, p. 64.
[40] Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 72.
[41] Ibid,, p. 77.
[42] Ibid,, p. 4.

It was thus that the Primitive Methodists benefited from the Wesleyan failure and 'harvested a second crop from the Wesleyan mission fields'.[43] The Primitives were not the only group who flourished in the fervid religious and political atmosphere of the years around Waterloo, but they were the most successful and the longest-lived.[44] Their success they owed mainly to their founders – Clowes was a gifted preacher and Bourne a superb organiser – and to the fact that both were working men who could appeal directly to other working men without the aura of superiority or patronage which had already affected contemporary Wesleyanism.[45]

Primitive Methodism rapidly established itself in Staffordshire and was soon sending missionaries out into Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Most were working volunteers who subsidised their missionary activities out of their own wages; a few were paid employees of Hugh Bourne and his brother James who managed the Bemersley Book Room.[46] One of these was James Crawfoot, who was paid as a local preacher until his increasingly eccentric behaviour led to a rift between him and Bourne in 1813.[47] Over the next few years, as permanent Circuits were established, Bourne set up a system, indistinguishable from the Wesleyan model, of using unpaid local preachers and paid travelling preachers to sustain the religious life of the Connexion. By 1821 the Primitive Methodists had over 16,000 adherents, the majority of whom (80%) were either artisans, labourers or miners.[48]

In 1816 Primitive Methodist missionaries entered Nottingham, a town then in the grip of Luddite riots precipitated by the introduction of stocking-making frames and the consequent catastrophic drop in labouring wages. Wearmouth maintained that the riots had a purely economic cause and that Methodism, as a loyalist movement, was 'hostile to every form of mob violence'.[49] Methodists may not have taken part in the violence itself, but they must certainly have been involved in the disaffection that led up to it and in dealing with its consequences. Certainly Hempton details events in the West

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[43] Ward, *Religion and Society,* p. 100.
[44] Other groups which flourished and then died or were absorbed into different traditions included the Band Room Methodists of Manchester, the Quaker Methodists of Warrington, the Magic Methodists of Delamere Forest and the followers of Joanna Southcott. Ward, *Religion and Society*, pp. 78-85; Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 2*, pp. 105-107.
[45] Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connection*, pp. 15-20.
[46] The Book Room remained the source of Primitive Methodist publications until 1836.
[47] Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 71.
[48] Alan Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914 (London: Longman,1976), pp..31 and 63

[49] Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England 1800-1850* (London: Epworth Press, 1937), p. 54.

Riding where the Wesleyans were under heavy pressure from Luddite sympathisers.[50] There was even an attempt to use Holmfirth Chapel as an arms store, and Bunting, who was then superintendant at Halifax, refused to carry out Luddite funerals and had to be protected by a bodyguard.[51] Most significantly, circulars urging Methodist societies to 'Fear the Lord and the King, and meddle not with them that are given to change' were sent out repeatedly between the years 1812 and 1820. 'The very number of them' says Hempton, 'testify to their ineffectiveness'.[52]

Later historians of Primitive Methodism, anxious to conceal the Connexion's radical past, maintained that the missionaries had acted as a brake on popular unrest and served as a calming influence. For instance George Herod, described the effect of Primitive Methodist preachers on the crowds at the Nottingham Forest Camp Meeting in 1816 in the midst of the Luddite agitations.[53]

> …what numbers there were from both town and country that felt the glorious effects of Gospel truths; many to our knowledge, became sobered down and were soon brought into the enjoyment of religion, and became as zealous (if not more so) ,for the cause of Christianity, as they had been for Luddism or the Levelling system. [54]

Herod made a similar point to that of Wearmouth a hundred years later. Primitive Methodism was a popular movement. It was of the people and understood their aspirations and suffering – which, however, it addressed through spiritual not material means. Primitive Methodism gave new life, the power to rise above material suffering and rejoice in the Love of God; hence the channelling of the 'Levellers' influence into Christian zeal. Although not opposed to peaceful political activity Primitive Methodism was never, of itself, a political movement and always opposed violence.

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[50] Hempton, *Methodism and Politics,* pp. 104-110.

[51] Jabez Bunting 1779-1858, was the leading Wesleyan minister of the early nineteenth century. He was four times President of Conference and Connexional Editor 1821-4. Although he was the son of a radical Manchester tailor, he became a Tory under the pressure of the war years and kept an iron grip on Conference until he was finally ousted in 1849. He has been criticised for his conservatism and authoritarian behaviour, but he kept the Connexion together during a turbulent period and was pragmatic enough to welcome Catholic Emancipation in 1829. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (on line version).

[52] Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, p. 104.

[53] George Herod was converted to Primitive Methodism during the Nottingham revival of 1816. He later became a preacher and wrote his *Biographical Sketches* and a *Catechism for Primitive Methodist Families* in the 1850s.

[54] George Herod, *Biographical Sketches of some of those Preachers whose Labours contributed to the Origin and Early Extension of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London: T. King,?1855), p. 13. JRL Methodist Printed Collection MAB M 1720.

The Tunstall area, where Bourne and Clowes found their first converts, was typical of the kind of place where, according to Julia Werner, David Hempton and Michael Watts, evangelistic religion was likely to take a firm hold: places undergoing economic and social change, places with large numbers of migrant labourers, places on the boundary between one type of economic activity and another, for instance between subsistence farming and large-scale capitalised agriculture.[55] In the early eighteenth century the Tunstall area had been largely agricultural, although small-scale mining and the extraction of clay for pot making had always gone on. By the late eighteenth century mining was becoming commercially viable and large-scale expansion of the pottery industry, led by the Wedgwoods, had begun in Stoke and Burslem. Tunstall and Burslem itself had become industrial villages with large migratory populations and – so the theory goes – a large number of people felt displaced and unsure about the future. As Julia Werner herself points out, such theories are useful but do not explain everything, for instance the failure of Primitive Methodism to establish itself in the London area. Revivalism had an 'inner dynamic' of its own which depended on charismatic preachers, communication and willing participants untrammelled by previous allegiances.[56] This dynamic was well understood by American revivalist preachers, such as Charles Finney, whose *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* was used by generations of Primitive Methodist preachers.[57]

Expansion on the Wolds 1819-1851

Primitive Methodism continued its missionary progress from Nottingham to Leicester and Loughborough and, by boat, along the Trent to the Humber. On 15 January 1819 William Clowes landed in Hull. The conquest of the East Riding had begun.

Hull, 'a town which, since the days when Charles 1 tried in vain to wrest it from Parliament, has long been a stronghold of evangelical religion and liberal sentiment', proved a propitious base for the Primitive Methodist mission.[58] The fact that Clowes was accompanied by a female itinerant, Jane Brown, was, in itself, something of a sensation and was bound to attract a crowd.[59] Female missionaries had been banned by

[55] Hempton, *Religion of the People*, p. 7; Watts, *The Dissenters*, pp. 124-5; Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connection,* p. 19.
[56] Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 33-4, 49-50.
[57] Charles A Finney*, Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Minneapolis, Minn., Bethany House, 1988). [Originally published 185?]
[58] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 1, p. 361.
[59] Ibid,, p. 364.

the Wesleyans in 1803 as part of their campaign to dissociate themselves from radicalism, but the Primitives were subject to no such rules and continued to employ female itinerants into the 1850s.[60] Clowes and his companion were welcomed to Hull by Hannah Woolhouse, an ardent Methodist who had travelled to Nottingham to engage in the mission there and had requested Clowes's visit to Hull. She was married to a sailcloth merchant who was also sympathetic to the cause. Within months classes were established and the foundations of a chapel built in Mill St.[61] One of Clowes's first converts in Hull, and the most important, was John Oxtoby, or 'praying Johnny' as he was always known.[62] Oxtoby was already nearly fifty and a Wesleyan class leader when he first met Clowes, but he was totally captivated by the younger man and almost immediately threw in his lot with the Primitive Methodists. Although illiterate he was a gifted preacher:

> He would encourage the praying hosts to exercise stronger faith and, with clasped hands and uplifted eyes, walk to and fro crying out 'God bless you honeys, believe: bless you honeys, believe'.[63]

While Clowes moved north and east out of Hull to take the faith to Holderness and the east coast, Oxtoby moved westwards to the area where he had been born near Great Givendale. His first success was at North Cave where a chapel was built, with almost incredible speed, in 1819. Next he moved to Acklam, high on the western escarpment of the Wolds (chapel 1821), and Leavening (also 1821). At Acklam he encountered a sympathetic clergyman, Mr. Simpson. As Clowes's biographer recounted,

> In the afternoon he [Oxtoby] went to the parish church and heard a truly gospel sermon by the Rev. Mr. Simpson. In the evening he preached at a dwelling-house, and the clergyman, in his turn, went to hear the humble itinerant missionary. 'Oh', says he on this circumstance. 'When will Ephraim learn no longer to vex Judah, and Judah no longer to vex Ephraim'.[64]

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[60] For a discussion of female preachers in Primitive Methodism, see Chapter 6 pp. xxx
[61] Kendall, *Origin and History*, pp. 364-386.
[62] Rev. George Shaw, *The Life of John Oxtoby 'Praying Johnny'* (Hull: William Andrew & Co., 1894); Harvey Lee, *'Praying Johnny': The Life and Labours of John Oxtoby* (London: Fenwick, 1887).
[63] Woodcock*, Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 38.
[64] John Davison, *The Life of the Venerable William Clowes, One of the Founders of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London: Thomas King, 1854), p. 124.

At Fimber Oxtoby established a small society which met in a house until a chapel was built in 1839. According to the village's local historian writing in 1857,

> […] the preaching of the Rev Mr. Oxtoby was rendered eminently useful in winning over a great number of the village inhabitants to Christianity. After this a great and speedy change was brought about in the village, the hopes of the inhabitants became realised and a Wesleyan chapel, a Primitive chapel, a day school and a Sunday School were built.[65]

At Warter, a village near Pocklington, Oxtoby made another important convert: Tommy Wood, a shoemaker's apprentice. Tommy came to Driffield, aged 22, in 1820, became the leader of the first class meeting in the town and established the infant society there.[66] It was said that he often walked twenty miles on a Sunday and preached three times. He spent the rest of his life in Driffield, a local preacher for sixty years, provider of hospitality to numerous itinerants and a pillar of Primitive Methodism. Woodcock describes the scene at one of the early Camp Meetings in the Driffield Circuit: '[...] men convinced of sin rolled on the ground crying for mercy and then rose up shouting, "Glory, God has pardoned me". One man jumped up a yard high and then shouted , "I've got it. I've got it".'[67] William Sanderson, a tailor's apprentice, was converted by Tommy in 1820: 'I shouted in the street on my way home, "He has pardoned all my sins, I am happy"'.[68] Sanderson too became a travelling preacher and is said to have saved 1,330 souls in the circuits in which he laboured. George Bullock was another convert of Oxtoby's. He came from Wetwang, a village high on the Wolds, and established the faith there (chapel built 1824). He became a local preacher and stalwart of the Wetwang Society for over sixty years. Although of humble origins he rose in life to own his own shop in the village and became an agent for the *Yorkshire Post*.[69] Finally John Coulson, another early convert, took the faith to Bridlington, Flamborough and the villages along the coast. The first chapel in Flamborough was erected in 1821, to be replaced by a much grander and elaborate affair in 1874. The village was always a staunch centre of Primitive Methodism. The people, says Woodcock,

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[65] Thomas Edmundson, *History of Fimber* (Malton, 1857) p. 6.
[66] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 43
[67] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*,, p. 170.
[68] Ibid,, p. 45.
[69] Ibid, p. 47.

[...] possess an intensely religious nature, as is manifest from the large number of the population (1,700) who attend religious services and especially from the position and influence of Methodism among them.[70]

Filey, a tough fishing village north of Flamborough 'long noted for wickedness of every description', initially resisted the efforts of the early missionaries. Its conquest was the final victory of 'praying Johnny' before he departed on his mission to Weardale and County Durham. Before he entered the village he spent the night on his knees under a hedge praying for success:

Fresh from the Mercy-seat he entered the place and commenced singing in the streets 'Turn to the Lord and seek salvation'. A crowd of stalwart fisher-men flocked to listen. Unusual power attended his address, hardened sinners wept, strong men trembled, and while he prayed, over a dozen of them fell on their knees, and cried aloud for mercy, and found it.[71]

In South Cave in September 1826, Robert Sharp, schoolmaster, recorded in his Diary:

There has been a Camp Meeting of the Ranters this day at Cockle Pit Row on the Brough Road, which I understand has not been very strongly attended: Indeed the day has been... rather cold and blustering.[72]

On 12 December his impression was more favourable:

At night the Ranters had a missionary meeting at the West End Congregational Chapel (which they had borrowed). There was, I understand, a large congregation and a tolerable collection.[73]

Progress was sometimes patchy, as Woodcock himself admits. Bridlington had to be missioned twice, as the first Society collapsed and there was sometimes 'persecution', either from the local roughs or, more rarely, from landlords or the Church.[74] In Bridlington someone made discordant noises and said 'Amen' in mockery but

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[70] Ibid, p. 63.
[71] Shaw, *Life of John Oxtoby*, p. 33.
[72] Janice E. and Peter A. Crowther ed. *The Diary of Robert Sharp: Life in a Yorkshire Village 1812-1837 (*Oxford: University Press, 1997), p. 68. Primitive Methodists in the early days were often described as 'Ranters'. The name was said to have originated in Belpur in 1825.
[73] Ibid,, p. 545.
[74] For a wider discussion of 'persecution' see Chapter 7.

[...] he met his match. The preacher, the late Rev. T. Holliday, who, before his conversion had been an expert in the use of gloves [...] seized the disturber and threw him out into the street.[75]

All descriptions of early Primitive Methodism record 'persecution'.[76] This was to a certain extent expected as a kind of badge of honour. Primitive Methodists were returning to the ways of Wesley and like him they suffered persecution at the hands of the prejudiced and ignorant. However some accounts were undoubtedly exaggerated and need to be read with a degree of caution.[77] At a meeting in Brinkworth (Hampshire) around the year 1830 Thomas Russell recalled how

About two hundred [people] got sheep bells, old tins and anything they would use for making a noise [...] Soon they threw stones and other missiles and shouted with vehemence, so that few could hear what I said. Their cry was 'Church and King and no Ranters here!'.[78]

'Church and King' was a cry not much heard from mobs after Peterloo. This example was perhaps chosen by Russell himself to suggest that the Brinkworth crowd were particularly rustic and boorish and exhibiting the kind of behaviour that Primitive Methodism would eventually help to eradicate. This is not to suggest that the persecution was not genuine or that preachers did not suffer physical harm, for many did, but that their recollections in later years always took a certain admonitory form.

These setbacks aside, Primitive Methodism spread rapidly across the Wolds. In the 1830s Eleanor Brown, another female itinerant, led a mission to the isolated villages that lay to the north and west of Filey.[79] Chapels were opened at Burton Fleming in 1838 and at Langtoft and Wold Newton in 1839. The Circuit minutes record 'a good spirit' at Butterwick and Thwing, and a preaching service held in 'a blacksmith's shop at Helperthorpe'.[80] Societies were soon established but a chapel was only ever built at

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[75] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 50.

[76] See Thomas Church, *Gospel Victories or Missionary Anecdotes of Imprisonment, Labours and Persecutions endured by Primitive Methodist Preachers between the years 1812 and 1844* (London: Aylott and Jones, 1851); Matthew Denton, *A Book of Anecdotes, Religious, Interesting and Practical* (Beverley, 1842).

[77] Jonathan Rodell, *The Rise of Methodism: A Study in Bedfordshire 1736-1851* (Bedfordshire Records Society, 2014), pp. 63-7; John Walsh, 'Methodism and the Mob in the Eighteenth Century', *Studies in Church History Vol. 9* (1972), ed. G.J. Cummings and Derek Baker (Cambridge: University Press, 1972) pp. 213-229 (p. 215).

[78] Thomas Russell, *Record of Events in Primitive Methodism* (London: William Lister, 1869) p.27.

[79] Eleanor Brown was a Travelling Preacher who later served in Hull in 1841. Dorothy Graham, *Chosen by God: A list of the Female Travelling Preachers of Early Primitive Methodism* (Bunbury, Cheshire: Bankhead Press, 1989).

[80] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit, Circuit Reports 1839-61', MRD 2/4/1, record for 1839.

Thwing (in 1840) which always struggled – 'we have but a small society here' admitted Woodcock in 1887. Further west a chapel was opened at Duggleby in 1835, where there was already a Wesleyan chapel but no church. Duggleby was significant in that it belonged to the Sykes, the major landowners on the Wolds. The village was relatively open and was one of the first of the Sykes villages to have a Primitive Methodist chapel. Others followed as the century progressed, Weaverthorpe in 1841, Luttons in 1848 and Fridaythorpe in 1851. However, it was not until after the passage of the Third Reform Act in 1884 that the Sykes family allowed chapels, both Wesleyan and Primitive, in their home village of Sledmere. They had always been relatively accepting of Methodism and had raised no objection to two cottage meetings already held in the village, one at Pry cottages and one at Mill cottages. However full-blown chapels on the main street and in view of their mansion was too much for them to stomach until Sir Christopher Sykes, brother of the baronet and himself Conservative MP for Buckrose, nearly lost his seat in the election of 1885.[81]

Further south in the Hull valley the Primitives built a chapel in the large open village of Etton, which was also intended to serve the Society in nearby South Dalton where the Hothams had refused permission for a site. A chapel was built at Frodingham in 1842 and one at Lund in 1839. By 1840 there were thirty-six Primitive Methodist chapels on the Wolds; by 1851 there were fifty.[82] In the same year, the Driffield Circuit had 840 members, sixty-six local preachers and employed four itinerants. The Pocklington Circuit had 513 members, the Bridlington Circuit 365, and Filey about the same number.[83] A rough estimate might therefore be around 1,800 members and more than double that number of 'hearers' – a total of around six thousand people.[84]

General studies of religion and social change in the nineteenth century have asserted that the social composition of Primitive Methodism was predominantly artisan

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[81] The result of the enfranchisement of agricultural labourers under the Reform Act of 1884.They all voted Liberal to a man. *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of York: East Riding Vol. 8, East Buckrose, Sledmere and the Northern Wolds*, ed. David and Susan Neave (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2008), p. 44.

[82] David and Susan Neave, *East Riding Chapels and Meeting Houses* (East Yorkshire Local History Society, 1990), p, 4.

[83] ERA , 'Driffield PM Circuit', Circuit Records 1839-1861, MRD 2/4/1, record for 1851; 'Pocklington PM Circuit', Circuit Records 1850-1859, MRP 4/27, record for 1850; 'Bridlington P M Circuit', Circuit Records 1849-1879, MRQ 2/25, record for 1851.

[84] 'Hearers' was the name usually give to those who attended the chapel but were not members of the Primitive Methodist Society. David Hempton has estimated their number at 2/3 for each actual society member. David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirt* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 2.

and working-class.[85] Werner showed this to be the case among the early followers of Bourne and Clowes in Staffordshire, and particular studies of Durham, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Shropshire and Derbyshire have come to the same conclusion.[86] The Wolds were no exception. Outside the three Circuit towns – Driffield, Pocklington and Market Weighton – the majority of members were village labourers and a smaller number were artisans. Primitive Methodist baptismal registers for four places in the Driffield Circuit between 1843 and 1858 show that the largest number of children baptised came from labouring families; only in Driffield itself did the number of artisans exceed the number of labourers.[87]

Later in the century railway employees, namely plate-layers, signalmen and station staff, took on a leading role as chapel trustees or local preachers to an extent which seems out of proportion to their numbers; a fact which perhaps reflects the importance of this particular occupation in rural communities.[88] A few of the smaller farmers (the 'others' on the baptismal registers) were also Primitives – the Knaggs in Wetwang, the Horseleys and Coopers in Fimber, the Kirbys in Bishop Wilton.[89] Most of the larger farmers, however, were Wesleyan and the largest, along with their landlords, were members of the Church of England.

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[85] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, pp. 322-3, Gilbert , *Religion and Society*, p. 63; Ward, *Religion and Society,* p. 289.

[86] Robert Moore, *Pit-men, Preachers and Politics: the Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Cambridge: University Press, 1974); Alun Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1872-1923* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsay 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Rodney Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism in Rural Society, South Lincolnshire 1817-1875* (Hull: University Press, 1989); Wayne Johnson, 'In Triumph of Faith; Primitive Methodism and the Labouring People of the North Midlands 1812-1862' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Keele, 1989); Delia Garrett, 'Primitive Methodism in Shropshire', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester 2000.)

[87] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit Records', PM Baptismal Registers 1843-58, MRD 2/1/1. Figures for Nafferton: 56 labourers, 21 artisans, 15 others ; for Langtoft: 27 labourers, 6 artisans, 3 others; for Driffield: 38 labourers, 70 artisans, 27 others (including 2 ministers).

[88] Four railwaymen were Trustees at Gristhorpe on the Bridlington to Filey line in 1861 (Northallerton Record Office 2/5/2); and two at Fimber (ERA'Driffield PM Circuit Records', Trustees of Fimber Chapel 1860, MRD 10/1); William Gill, Station master at Cranswick, was a prominent member of Cranswick chapel(Driffield Times 12 May 1888, 14 Dec 1889, Kelly's Directory 1893).

[89] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 127; ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit Records', Trustees of Fimber Chapel 1860, MRD 10/1; 'Pocklington PM Circuit Records', Trustees of Bishop Wilton Chapel 1863, MRP 4/78.

The Relative Success of Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism on the Wolds

Wesleyan Methodism (or the Old Connexion as it was sometimes called) had predated Primitivism on the Wolds and was always the major Methodist denomination there (as it was everywhere else except in parts of Durham).[90] Wesley had first visited the East Riding in 1752 and the first chapel, at Market Weighton, had been built in 1786.[91] In comparison with the Primitives' eighty chapels by 1851, the Wesleyans had eighty seven on the Wolds, of which forty-seven had been built before 1820 when the Primitives first exploded on to the scene. These figures make it clear that, although the Primitives were late arrivals, they established themselves much more quickly than the Wesleyans had done and, once established, they grew at a faster rate. It was a similar story in Norfolk where the Wesleyans initially had made little impact. It was the Primitives, arriving in 1832 in the wake of Swing Riots, who set the place alight.[92] Jonathan Rodell in his study of Bedfordshire Methodism found that, at the 1851 Religious Census, '[...] in seventeen years the Primitives achieved what had taken the Wesleyans fifty years'.[93]

In 1820 Wesleyan Methodism in the East Riding was quiescent, anxious to avoid notice and fearful of proselytising. But Bourne, Oxtoby and Coultas came burning with the fire of the Gospel and a message of life and hope for the dispossessed and the marginalised. They may not have been successful at the first attempt. They had their fair share of rotten eggs, sheep droppings and rough handling, much as the early Wesleyans had done, but they made a stir, they were talked about, people wanted to see them. They were different and they were new. The Rev. M.C.F. Morris, son of the vicar of Nunburnholme, recalled: 'It would seem that the Primitive Methodists was the particular denomination which gained the chief influence over the people of the villages [...] their methods were simple and unconventional'.[94]

Camp Meetings were particularly attractive. Like their counterparts on the American frontier they had a social as well as a religious element. Whole families would come with baskets of food to enjoy a day out. The prospect of a day's preaching was not unattractive and there was always a theatrical element in Primitive Methodism, as Morris shows in his description of a Camp Meeting:

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[90] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, p. 710.
[91] Neave, *East Riding Chapels,* p. 10.
[92] Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, Chapter 3 passim.
[93] Jonathan Rodell, *The Rise of Methodism: A Study in Bedfordshire 1736-1851*, p. 141.
[94] M.C.F. Morris, *Yorkshire Reminiscences* (Oxford: University Press, 1922) p. 193.

These gatherings were always popular and crowds used to attend them.The feelings of the people were wrought upon by the fiery oratory of the preachers until they reached the highest point of excitement, so much so indeed that sometimes [...] they would roll on the ground and shout for mercy.[95]

There was little rivalry between the Wesleyans and Primitives on the Wolds. Most larger villages had a chapel belonging to each denomination and people would attend either or both and sometimes the parish church as well.[96] Committed members of each Society would generally attend only their own chapel except on special occasions, but the much larger group of 'hearers' might attend either or both depending on what was on offer – a particularly popular local preacher, such as Parkinson Milson, or, in the later nineteenth century, a lantern-slide or tea meeting. Considerable care was taken with the ever popular Sunday School Anniversary celebrations to ensure that there was no clash with the Wesleyans or with neighbouring villages.[97] When Morris's father at Nunburnholme introduced an evening service in 1845 he took care to make sure that it did not interfere with those of the Methodists.[98]

The Primitive Methodists did not resent being numerically smaller than the Wesleyans – in their own view they made up the deficiency by greater evangelical zeal and noisier hymn singing. There were also several of the more open villages, notably Hutton Cranswick and Lund, where Primitive Methodists were more numerous than Wesleyans and had a significant influence on village life.[99] Neither Woodcock, Parkinson Milson or George Shaw betray any antagonism towards the Wesleyans, and Woodcock goes out of his way to stress that the two worked together:

For seventy years the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists have worked side by side, and shoulder to shoulder, in dispelling ignorance and saving souls along these Wolds, with but little friction. Early prejudices have expired amid the growing influence of a mutual charity.[100]

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[95] Ibid,,
[96] In 1851, fifty nine East Riding settlements had both a Wesleyan and a Primitive Chapel, thirty four had a Wesleyan chapel only and seventeen a Primitive chapel only. The seventeen tended to be small settlements, often just a large farm, adjacent to a village where the landlord had refused permission for a chapel, e. g. Thornholme near Burton Agnes, or Gembling near Foston.
[97] See for instance. ERA 'Records of Driffield PM Circuit', Circuit Committee Minutes 1845-51, record for 1851 MRD 2/2/7.
[98] Morris, *Yorks. Reminiscences*, p. 208.
[99] David Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside: Friendly Societies in the Rural East Riding 1830-1912* (Hull: University Press 1991), p. 60.
[100] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry,* p. 18.

The emerging difference in social composition between the two groups may also have contributed to the harmony between them: each appealed to a different constituency. In its post-1820 form Wesleyanism was becoming more restrained and less radical; the long reign of Jabez Bunting was only to accentuate this tendency. In the Wolds it still had a large number of working-class adherents but also many wealthier patrons – large farmers, seed or malt merchants, town tradesmen – who tended to become local leaders of Wesleyanism and to a certain extent imposed what might be called a 'bourgeois' culture on their co-religionists. David Anderson, a Driffield seed merchant, was a prominent member of the Wesleyan Society in the early nineteenth century; prominent also were the Kirbys of Bell Mills and the Foley family, makers of agricultural machinery, in the later years of the century.[101] The wholesale grocer, George Wrangham, also a Wesleyan, was one of the early members of the Driffield School Boards. The Primitives had few wealthy members. Apart from the Hodges of Hull (who had begun as Holderness labourers and risen to become large employers on the Hull docks by the1860s) their membership and leadership remained entirely working-class until well after 1850. They recruited agricultural labourers, smaller tenant farmers, fishermen and village artisans such as Robert Belt, the Luttons blacksmith, and Thomas Escrit, farm servant of Hutton Cranswick.[102] In 1863 the trustees of Bishop Wilton chapel included a joiner, a shoemaker, a blacksmith, a brickmaker and seven tenant farmers.[103] At Gristhorpe, on the coast near Filey, the trustees comprised four railway employees (a signalman and three plate-layers), two fishermen, three labourers, a machinist, a grocer and three farmers.[104]

Reasons for the Successful Establishment of the Primitives on the Wolds

The majority of post-war historians writing about Methodism in general or Primitive Methodism in particular have ascribed its success to social factors – industrialisation, the effects of enclosure, the capitalisation of agriculture or the anonymity of urban

[101] *VCH Yorkshire, East Riding Vol. 9: Harthill Wapentake, Great Driffield and Its Townships* ed. Graham Kent with David and Susan Neave (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), p. 176.
[102] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 100.
[103] ERA, 'Records of Bishop Wilton Chapel', MRP 4/78.
[104] Northallerton Record Office 2/5/2 , 'Gristhorpe PM Chapel Leaders' Minutes 1915-1938'. (In 1915 the Trustees were re-constituted. Examples are from the 1862 list which was used at the time).

society.[105] W.R. Ward writing in 1972 took a less determinist view which has been echoed in more recent work by Michael Watts (1996) and David Hempton (1984 and 1996).[106] Where do the Wolds fit in?

On the face of it the Wolds were unpropitious territory for Primitive Methodism. They do not fit into any of the categories prescribed by social historians as a likely seed-bed for radical religion. There was little or no industry, no 'decayed' market towns, and the area was heavily landlord-controlled. 43% of townships were 'closed', compared with 33% in Kesteven (Lincs), 6% in Essex and 33% in West Norfolk (an area where the Primitives were also very successful). However, the process of enclosure had created a migrant population of artisans and farm labourers who were to prove receptive to the new religion.

The history of enclosure on the Wolds has been described in a previous chapter. Its results were to increase enormously the amount of arable land and to encourage the building of new farms, many of them distant from existing habitations. The population of the East Riding increased from 111,000 in 1801 to 154,000 in 1820.[107] Much of this can be accounted for by natural increase but there was clearly a good deal of in-migration to work on the new farmsteads. The population of Fridaythorpe, one of the most isolated villages on the Wolds, rose from 180 in 1811 to 275 in 1821.[108] Thus there was a new, migratory population, many of them young, working in unfamiliar and often very isolated places. It was to such people that Primitive Methodism made its greatest appeal – to Tommy Wood and William Sanderson, both apprentices and both early converts, to the Scruton brothers and Michael Grice, all farm labourers and to Willie Lovell as he singled turnips in a lonely field at Hutton Cranswick.[109] It gave them hope for a better future, a different and all-absorbing way of life; it gave them community and friendship:

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[105] For example: Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, Alan Everitt , *The Pattern of Rural Dissent: The Nineteenth Century,* Occasional Papers University of Leicester Dept. Of English Local History: 2nd. Ser., no. 4 (Leicester: University Press, 1972).

[106] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2.; David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*; Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

[107] B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: University Press, 1988), p. 163.
[108] Alan Harris, *The Rural Landscape of the East Riding of Yorkshire 1700-1850: A Study in Historical Geography* (Oxford: University Press, 1961), p. 98.
[109] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, Chapters 4, pp 32-48 and Chapter 7, pp. 97-152; Woodcock, *The Romance of Reality: Being sketches of Homespun Heroes and Heroines and the Part they Played in the Making of Primitive Methodism* (London: E. Dalton, 1910), p. 58.

> Thousands who had sunk to a level of dull monotony, unbroken from year to year except by fairs, races and foxhunting, found, in our oft-recurring means of grace, soul-searching preaching services, fervent prayer meetings, lively class meetings and hearty singing – a life, a freedom and a joy to which they had been strangers.[110]

However hard the experience of daily life, however tedious or back-breaking the daily routine, the spirit found liberty. Fed by the Word of God, it soared above the concerns of the world and gave inner peace, the joy of fellowship and a close-knit social and community life. Spirtiual life was nurtured by prayer meetings, Love-feasts and frequent, fervent preaching delivered, not by the parson – a member of a different and sometimes alien class - but by local preachers who lived the same lives as their congregations and spoke as they did. This was the great appeal of Primitive Methodism.

The young and disadvantaged were not the whole story; many people who were clearly already settled in life joined the Primitives: Mrs. Ellis, the housewife in Scarborough who provided the missionaries with board and lodging; Robert Coulson, the early convert who was a small farmer; Thomas Byas, another farmer who gave money to the Driffield chapel; and Oxtoby himself who was neither young nor rootless and had, in the past, been employed by Byas.[111] The speed with which chapels were erected at South Cave (1819) and Acklam (1821) suggests that at least some of the early converts were people of substance with a little money to spare. There was also some sympathy towards the Primitives from the leaders of local society such as Robert Sharp, the South Cave schoolmaster, and the Rev. Simpson at Acklam. According to Kendall the latter even attended a Camp Meeting.[112]

Julia Werner has referred to the 'inner dynamic' of revivalism and it is this which seems to have operated on the Wolds.[113] Social and political uncertainty produced a desire for spiritual revival and a willingness to experiment with something new. Charismatic preachers – Clowes and Oxtoby - who had organisational support and a little money seized the moment and Primitive Methodism exploded on to the Wolds with a force not seen since Wesley's visits forty years previously.

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[110] Woodcock*, Piety among the Peasantry*, p 262.
[111] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 32 and Chapter 4.
[112] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 2, p. 88.
[113] Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connection*, pp. 33-4.

The beginnings of Primitive Methodism on the Wolds seem to support the W. R. Ward approach rather than the more socially inclined analyses of Thompson and Gilbert. It was the message that was important, not the circumstances in which it was delivered. People heard the missionaries and liked what they heard. It was new and it was different. Camp Meetings provided a religious excitement not seen since the visits of Wesley in the 1760s and 70s. It is quite true, as John Kent points out, that Camp Meetings were 'declarations of social independence'.[114] They were lay-organised, they drew in ordinary working-class people and did not involve squires, parsons or Justices of the Peace. It was this aspect of Camp Meetings which had so alarmed the authorities in the war years and prompted Sidmouth's abortive Bill of 1811. By the 1820s, however, things were more relaxed (the Combination Laws were withdrawn in 1824) and there seems to have been little opposition to Camp Meetings on the Wolds by the civic authorities – although there was plenty by the local roughs.[115] People joined the Primitives because their preaching appealed to them and their hearts were moved, not because they wanted to make a statement of political independence.

The second reason for the success of Primitive Methodism on the Wolds was the relatively somnolent state of the Church of England. In comparison with the reforming zeal shown in industrial towns such as Leeds, Wolds clergy lagged far behind.[116] The established church had also made itself unpopular in rural areas by appearing, in the lean years after Waterloo, to be always on the side of the rich and powerful. Tithe (a compulsory payment to the Church) had always raised resentment and the rise in the price of land after the wars had made rich men of many clergymen. [117] At the same time enclosure had deprived many small landowners of their income. The result, as Cobbett pointed out, was that

> […] all the little gentlemen are gone; and, hence it is, that parsons are now made justices of the peace! There are few other persons left who are at all capable of filling the office in a way to suit the system.[118]

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[114] Kent, *Holding the Fort*, p. 40.
[115] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 33 and 50.
[116] See Chapter 2 pp. xxx
[117] Eric Evans, *The Contentious Tithe: the Tithe Problem in English Agriculture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976).

[118] William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* ed. George Woodcock (Penguin, 1985), p. 348. [First published 1830]. William Cobbett 1763-1835 was a radical journalist who opposed the Corn Laws and blamed the lot of the poor on corruption, place-men and the unreformed Parliament. He was the first MP for Oldham in the Parliament of 1832.

Clerical Justices of the Peace were particularly disliked because they enforced the laws of an oppressive state while, supposedly, being guardians of that state's spiritual values.[119] In 1824, in Lockington, a few miles north of Beverley, Jeremiah Dodsworth, an agricultural labourer, refused to pay tithe to the vicar of Lockington, Francis Lundy. Labourers were not usually asked for tithe, so this was a particular piece of spite, for whatever reason, on the part of Lundy. Dodsworth was arrested and taken before a clerical magistrate, the Rev. Blanchard rector of Middleton on the Wolds.[120] The case came to the attention of William Cobbett who published the following damning account:

> He [Dodsworth] having no goods or chattels, John Blanchard the parson as magistrate committed him to the House of Correction at Beverley there to be kept for the space of three calendar months, as punishment for not paying his tithes […] But […] how came the Justices of the Peace to have anything to do with this matter? Tithes were an affair known only to the ecclesiastical courts but the parsons wanted a swifter way to come at poor men. [121]

Dodsworth was sent to Beverley jail but was soon released after a public protest. As if to make the point even more forcibly, he was later converted to Primitive Methodism by Clowes in 1834 and became a well-known travelling preacher.[122] Dodsworth died in 1867. His obituary in the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* describes how 'he soon began to manifest, as a lad, more than ordinary shrewdness and intelligence among his fellow servants', but makes no mention of the tithe episode. [123] This omission is another example, and there are many, of the attempt by later Victorian Primitive Methodists to erase the Connexion's radical past.[124]

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[119] Edward Royle, *Radical Politics 1790-1900: Religion and Unbelief* (London: Longman, 1971) p. 7.
[120] Blanchard was a typical clerical magistrate. The family were hereditary parsons and squires 'squarsons' of Middleton on the Wolds, owned 900 acres and lived in a large Georgian mansion. John Blanchard's son however, when he took over the living, adopted a more paternalist attitude. He supported Friendly Societies and was a popular preacher at anniversary services and feasts. He also became Vice Chairman of the Driffield Guardians of the Poor. (David Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside,* p. 20.)
[121] William Cobbett, *Legacy to Parsons* (London, 1833) p. 121- 124.
[122] He wrote the '*Christian Emigrants' Guide to Heaven'* in 1853, see Chapter 1.
[123] *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1867, p. 486.
[124] See Chapter 8.

Anti-clericalism was not as strong in the East Riding as it was in East Anglia where it fuelled riots in 1816 and in 1830.[125] There were no riots in the East Riding but the behaviour of clergy such as Blanchard and Lundy must have increased the alienation many village labourers felt from their local parson with his fine house and social pretensions, and made them more likely to accept the 'honest and hearty message' of Primitive Methodism. Nor can the fact that one of the magistrates at Peterloo was a clergyman – the Rev. William Hay, later vicar of Rochdale – have done much for the reputation of the Church of England among the poor.[126]

The third reason for the success of Primitive Methodism was the relatively relaxed attitude to the building of chapels on the part of some, although by no means all, East Riding landlords. E. P. Thompson, convinced that class was the major factor in early nineteenth-century human relations, assumed that landlords and clergymen were always in league against the building of a chapel because they saw it as a challenge to their authority. 'The chapel in the agricultural village was inevitably an affront to the vicar and the squire, and a centre in which the labourers gained independence and self-respect.'[127] This was just not true of the Wolds where the major landlords, the Sykes, proved remarkably tolerant of Methodist chapels. Sir Tatton Sykes, fourth baronet (1772-1863) and the largest landowner on the Wolds (34,000 acres), was a generous landlord and popular with his tenants and employees.[128] He allowed chapels in Wetwang (1824), Duggleby (1835), Fimber (1839), Weaverthorpe (1841), Luttons (1848) and Fridaythorpe (1851).[129] Lord Londesborough (33,000 acres) gave land for a chapel at Rudston in 1876.[130]

In the towns, which were not controlled by any particular landlord interest, there was little to prevent the building of a chapel apart from a lack of money. At Pocklington the first chapel was built in 1820, at Driffield in 1821 and at Market

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[125] Robert Lee, *Rural Society and the Anglican Clergy* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), Chapters 1 and 2; Eric Hobsbawm and Georg Rude, *Captain Swing* (London: Peregrine, 1985) [First published by LAwrence and Wishart, 1969] p, 127.

[126] Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History 1750-1985* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), p. 290; Ward, Religion and Society, p. 185.
[127] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* p. 437
[128] Christopher Simon Sykes, *The Big House* (London: Harper Collins, 1004) p.114-136
[129] *VCH* Yorkshire, *East Riding Vol. 8,* p. 38.
[130] *Hull Packet*, 13 October, 1876.

Weighton in 1828. On the coast, where again there was minimal landlord interest, a chapel was built at Flamborough in 1821, at Filey in 1824 and at Bridlington in 1833.[131]

In the large, open villages around the foot of the Wolds and in the Hull valley - Lund, Hutton Cranswick, North Cave, Bainton - there was usually no difficulty about finding a site. Worship commenced in a barn or cottage, and a chapel was built when the Society could afford it. At Hutton Cranswick 'Our pioneers began their work on the beautiful village green. Afterwards a cart shed was procured as a preaching room; next a barn like place in Dove's Court.'[132]

There was some opposition to chapel building from the smaller landlords on the Low Wold. Lord Hotham refused a chapel at South Dalton, Lord Muncaster at Warter, and permission was also refused by the landowner at Foston on the Wolds. In two cases the Primitives simply built chapels in nearby open villages where there was no church, at Etton near South Dalton and at Gembling near Foston.[133] The dispute at Warter, however, was not resolved until 1892 when Lord Muncaster sold out to the Hull shipowner Charles Wilson. Only at Burton Agnes, a village near Bridlington owned by the St. Quintins, was there a confrontation along classic church-versus-chapel lines. In 1845, the Rev. Isaac Wilberforce, the previously mentioned Archdeacon of the East Riding, attempted to prevent a local shoe-repairer, Mark Normandale, from holding Primitive Methodist services in his cottage. The Archdeacon tried to stop the services by persuading a local farmer to take people to the parish church in his wagons. When this failed, he put pressure on Normandale's landlord, Lord St. Quintin, to throw the latter out of his cottage. Of course the Primitive Methodists outwitted the Archdeacon, and Woodcock ends the story with unchristian satisfaction by remarking that 'The Archdeacon turned Papist and started for Rome but died before he got there. Mark survived these enemies, lived to a good old age, then died at peace with God and men [...].'[134]

Perhaps the Primitive Methodists were fortunate in their landlords. More likely the fact that the Wolds were an area of high wages and full employment meant that there was less social friction and therefore less confrontation. Whatever the balance of the reasons for its success – popular enthusiasm, the failure of the established church, tolerant landlords - Primitive Methodism had an easier birth on the Wolds than it did in

[131] Neave, *East Riding Chapels and Meeting Houses*, pp. 45-60.
[132] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 98.
[133] Ibid,, p. 148.
[134] Ibid,, p. 82.

more heavily populated and well-established farming areas such as Norfolk or Hampshire.[135]

Expansion and Maturity: 1851-1870

At the 1851 Religious Census the Primitives had 131 chapels in the East Riding and attendance at the evening service on census Sunday (30 March) was 14,612. The Wesleyans had 223 chapels and 34,811 worshippers – an attendance roughly two and a half times as large.[136] However in the Driffield Poor Law Union (roughly contiguous with the Driffield Methodist Circuits) the figures were 21 chapels and 1,660 attendances for the Primitives; 29 chapels and 1,923 attendances for the Wesleyans – an attendance larger only by about one sixth. [137] The Driffield Primitive Circuit was particulary strong, a fact borne out by Kendall who describes it in 1907 as 'One of the widest and numerically the strongest country circuits in the Connexion'.[138]

By 1853 the Primitive Methodists had established seven Sunday Schools; in Driffield, Gembling, Frodingham, Etton, Middleton, Langtoft and Weaverthorpe.[139] By 1868 they had opened another five and had a total of over one thousand scholars.[140] Primitive Sunday Schools taught writing as well as reading (Wesleyan Sunday Schools usually only taught reading), and were the only form of education many country children received before 1870.[141] The Primitives were not a wealthy denomination and, realising they had no hope of competing with the Church of England or the Wesleyans, they wisely did not involve themselves in the agitation over voluntary schools in the 1850s and 60s, preferring to build up their own Sunday Schools.[142]

In 1851 work began on the 'Malton Dodger', the railway line between Malton and Driffield which crossed the Wolds by a spectacular tunnel at Burdale.[143] Large

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[135] Robert Key, The Gospel among the Masses (London: R.Davies, 1872); Russell , *Record of Events in Primitive Methodism* .

[136] *Census of Great Britain, 1851. Religious Worship. England and Wales. Report and Tables* (Great Britain, General Register Office: Printed by Eyre and Spottiswoode for HMSO, 1853), p. 230.
[137] Ibid,, p. 108.
[138] Kendall, *Origin and History*,Vol. 2, p. 96.
[139] Ibid,,
[140] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit', Circuit Records 1861-1875, MRD 2/4/2, Record for 1868.
[141] Ward, *Religion and Society*, p. 96; Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, p. 296; John Kent, 'The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849', *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* Vol. 2 ed. Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth, 1978), p. 260.
[142] For a wider discussion on Primitive Methodist Sunday Schools see Chapter 7.
[143] K. Hoole, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, Vol.4, The North East* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1965), pp. 56-7.

numbers of navvies were employed and the Primitive Methodists despatched a 'railway missionary' to minister to them. His name was Ishmael Fish. The number of navvies he converted is not recorded, but Fish was a poet (of sorts) and in *The Stranger's Tale* (about a Suffolk lad who came to work in Burdale tunnel) he aims some sarcastic comments at those who opposed the education of the poor.

> For Toby held that a working man
> Should live by a very simple plan,
> Should work and sleep – should eat and drink
> But never should be allowed to think.[144]

After the completion of the tunnel Fish trained as an Anglican clergyman. He became Chaplain and Manager of the Castle Howard Reformatory and then incumbent of Huttons Ambo, near Malton. He died in 1880.[145] His story demonstrates the pervasive influence of the Primitives in the East Riding. Their numbers may have been relatively small but they were bold and they were innovative. Without their initiative the Church of England would never have been able to use the talents of Ishmael Fish.

The Primitives continued to expand over the next three decades, although at a slower rate than in the earlier part of the century.[146] This was true of all the Methodist denominations, but also reflected increased activity on the part of the Church of England. After the shock of the 1851 Religious Census, which revealed that in some areas, including Yorkshire, attendance at chapels was higher than at the established church, the latter began to try to win back lost ground. The Pluralities Act of 1838 and other reforming legislation had begun the process of accommodating the Church to the industrial age. New churches were built in industrial areas, zealous new clergy appointed and attempts made to make services more attractive by the introduction of lay readers, Harvest Festivals, Sunday School activities and choirs. In the East Riding, as we have seen, the reforming Archdeacon Wilberforce was appointed in 1841, but it was not until 1868 that a new Archbishop of York, William Thomson, was able to sweep away the last vestiges of pluralism and indolence. Relations between the

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[144] Ishmael Fish, *The Stranger's Tale* (Driffield, 1851).
[145] Information collected by Keith Allison from the researches of the late Philip Brown. ERA, DDX 1409 7/10.
[146] Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 110.

Primitives and the Church of England remained good except where Tractarian clergy were appointed. The Primitives regarded them as almost worse than Roman Catholics. Woodcock records, with ill-concealed triumphalism, the Primitives' banishment of 'the Popish curate' at Middleton and their defeat of Canon Trevor, the Tractarian vicar of Beeford, who had attempted to claim that their chapel was on glebe (Church-owned) land. Trevor lost the case.[147]

The Late Nineteenth-Century Chapel-Building Boom

Anyone visiting the Wolds in the late nineteenth century would have been struck by the large, and often ornate chapels, both Wesleyan and Primitive, which dominated the main street of all but the smallest hamlets. The great era of chapel building, in the East Riding and elsewhere, was during the 1860s and 70s, and the reasons for this sudden expansion were not far to see. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 had caused a fall in the price of grain. However, by 1860, the Crimean War and rising demand from a growing industrial population had pushed prices back to a record high.[148] Farmers made profits, incomes from rents went up and even agricultural wages rose a little. The major landowners, such as the Sykes, who had invested profitably in railway shares, expended capital in agricultural improvements: farm drainage, new barns, stack-yards, and in cottages for labourers .[149]

Sir Tatton Sykes, the fifth baronet, inherited the Sledmere estate in 1863. He was a man of a very different stamp from his father, who had bullied him unmercifully.[150] A nervous and shy bachelor (he was to make a disastrous marriage in 1874), he was mainly interested in church architecture and foreign travel. He immediately set about commissioning the architect Street to prepare plans for new churches at Wansford and Thixendale. By the time of his death in 1913 he had built seven new churches and 'restored' another eight, expending several million pounds.[151] Sir Tatton was even more sympathetic towards Methodism than his father had been. According to Woodcock, he remarked to 'one of our officials' that

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[147] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 123, 148.
[148] F.M.L.Thompson, ., English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century (London: Routledge& Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 240-256.

[149] Barbara English, *Great Landowners of East Yorkshire 1530-1910* (London: Simon and Shuster, 1990), p.112.
[150] Sykes, *The Big House*, p. 136.
[151] *The Buildings of England, Yorkshire: York and the East Riding* ed. Nikolaus Pevsner and David Neave (London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 94-5.

If it had not been for the Dissenters the English people would have been heathens and they are worthy of a site on which to build a chapel in every village in the land. Most of the religion between Malton and Driffield is to be found among the Methodists.[152]

In 1864 Sir Tatton released land at a low rent for the building of a new chapel at Wansford and for the extension of chapels at Wetwang and Garton. In this new and optimistic atmosphere the Primitives went ahead to build fourteen new chapels on the Wolds between 1860 and 1879, mainly in the smaller, more remote villages where they had previously met in a barn or cottage, e.g. Fangfoss in 1865, Millington and Scagglethorpe in 1866, Westow in 1873, Little Driffield in 1878.[153] At Little Driffield the Society had previously met in a stable: 'The crib remained for many years. The entrance abutted a manure heap and the stench was, in summer, almost unbearable.'[154] The new chapel could accomodate 200 people and was described as 'an ornament to the village', but it also cost £270, largely raised by loans, and was unnecessarily large for a settlement of less than 300 people.[155]

This folly at Little Driffield, and others like it, was to cost the Primitives dear in future years. In addition to the fourteen country chapels already mentioned the Connexion enlarged or rebuilt another sixteen existing chapels in the larger villages and towns between 1860 and 1879.[156] Not all of these replacements were strictly necessary in numerical terms. Garton for instance, with a population of 493 in 1879, replaced its simple square 'preaching box' with a Gothic-style edifice seating 250 people which could rarely, if ever, have been filled to capacity. The problem was that Victorian Nonconformity 'made chapel building its basic strategy for the recruitment and retention of members'. If a Society wanted a new chapel and was prepared to pay for it, or more likely raise a loan, then a chapel there would be, irrespective of whether one was actually needed.[157] It was simply assumed that if a new chapel was built people would automatically attend. This might have been true in the 1820s but it was certainly not true after 1850 when the rate of growth of all churches began to decline.[158]

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[152] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 135
[153] Neave, *East Riding Chapels,* p. 4.
[154] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 126.
[155] VCH, *Yorkshire, East Riding Vol.9*, p. 15.
[156] Neave, *East Riding Chapels*, p. 4.
[157] Alan Gilbert ,*Religion and Society*, p. 170; S.J.D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire 1870-1920* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), pp. 89-90.
[158] Currie et al., *Churches and Churchgoers*, p. 110.

The reason for this apparent hubris, or, it might be more kindly said, lack of forethought, lay in changes within the ethos of Primitive Methodism itself and its relations with the world outside. In becoming part of the local culture and being accepted by it, the organisation had inevitably been affected by popular attitudes towards wealth and influence. Whereas in 1830 members had been happy to worship in a plain and simple chapel and rely on the glory of the light within, by 1860 they wanted a new chapel to demonstrate their success and local importance. Simple piety was embellished by tea meetings, social events and fund-raising efforts to service the inevitable debt. Obelkevich found the same change in Primitive Methodism in Lincolnshire: 'the ideal of saintliness was replaced by service' and '[…] piety was challenged by thrift, industry, self-improvement and respectability'.[159] Weber called it 'the routinisation of religion'.[160]

This new, worldly face of Primitive Methodism is revealed in the chapels of the 1860s and 70s: Pocklington (1865), Bridlington (1870), Driffield (1874), Wold Newton (1870), North Newbald (1878). These chapels were built for devotion and the greater glory of God, but there is no mistaking the concessions to worldliness: the prominent position on the 'Front Street', the polished American-oak pulpits, the towers and turretts. These chapels were built to impress. They tell the world that Primitive Methodism has arrived, that it is no longer a sect for the poor and the disadvantaged but has a dignity of its own.

The Driffield chapel in particular marked the apogee of Primitive Methodist aspirations. It was built in the 'Lombardic style' in 1874, incidentally the half-way mark between 1820 and 1932 – the lifespan of Wolds Primitive Methodism.[161] The chapel cost £5,000 and held over 1,000 people – in a town with a population of 6,000.[162] It could rarely have been full. The records claim a membership of 248 and an average attendance of 750.[163] It may have been bursting for the annual Sunday School Anniversary extravaganza, but for most of its life it was rarely filled to capacity and was an enormous drain on the funds of the local Society. This was to prove a huge problem in future years but for the moment – right up to the outbreak of war in 1914 – the Driffield chapel was a successful enterprise. It was a thriving centre of social and

[159] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 225.
[160] See Chapter 4 for a fuller discussion of this process.
[161] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 89
[162] Neave, *East Riding Chapels and Meeting Houses,* p. 69.
[163] ERA, 'Driffield P M Circuit', Circuit Records 1877-89: MRD 2/4/3, schedule for 1881.

religious life in Driffield and its position – on one of the main thoroughfares of the town – demonstrated its importance in local affairs.

Chapter 4 Theological Beliefs and Religious Practices of Primitive Methodism

Introduction and Historiography

Primitive Methodism was primarily a religion of experience, only secondarily a body of theological doctrine. As David Hempton has pointed out, '[…] the Methodist message is not the same as its theology, though theology is no doubt an important component of the message'.[1] Theology was not unimportant for it underlay experience and directed its expression, but it was not central to the life of the denomination, as Kenneth Lysons makes clear in his memoir of Primitive Methodism in early twentieth-century Lancashire.[2] Julia Werner, writing about the beginnings of the movement in Staffordshire, emphasised that conversion was always an emotional, not an intellectual, experience. The early preachers made no attempt to rationalise the convert's feelings:

> Because assurance was experiential, ignorance of theology (or, by extension, the lack of formal education) was no obstacle. Primitive Methodist preachers consciously avoided highflown language and allusions to topics outside the ken of their hearers.[3]

The reference to 'lack of formal education' is significant. Many early converts to Methodism were probably illiterate – an enormous obstacle to any kind of theological understanding.[4] Michael Watts goes as far as to suggest that areas with high illiteracy levels often had high numbers of attendees at Methodist chapels.[5] For these early converts an underlying theology was absorbed rather than taught, through prayers, sermons and, most importantly, through hymns.

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[1] David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 84.
[2] Kenneth Lysons, *A Little Primitive* (Buxton: Church in the Marketplace Publications, 2001), p. 141.
[3] Julia Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p.147.
[4] According to a survey of East Riding marriage registers 30% of men and women could only 'make a mark' in the decade 1830-40, 27% ten years later. W. Baker *Parish Registers and Illiteracy in the East Riding* (East Yorkshire Local History Society, 1961) p. 12. W. B. Stephens put the figure at 21% of men and 38% of women in 1840, and 20% and 37% ten years later. W. B Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society: the Geography of Diversity in Provincial England* (Manchester: University Press, 1987), p. 322.
[5] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: Vol.2 The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 103.

Primitive Methodism was an evangelistic faith whose emphasis was firmly on the practice of religion rather than on its theory. More important to its development and historical significance than its theology were its links with popular religion and popular superstition and its engagement with the poor and dispossessed through the Camp Meeting movement. This chapter will therefore consider: firstly, Primitive Methodist theology in relation to that of Wesley and the Church of England; secondly, the links between Primitive Methodism and popular religion; and thirdly, the influence and significance of the Camp Meeting movement and how far it reflected Wesley's original intentions.

The Theology of Primitive Methodism

Given that theological engagement was not a central feature of Primitive Methodism, it is hardly surprising that John Wilkinson makes no mention of it at all in either of his articles on the Connexion in *The History of the Methodist Church*.[6] William Strawson's article on 'Methodist Theology' in the same publication strikes an almost apologetic note:

> It has to be admitted that, with one or two notable exceptions, Methodist theology is mainly of interest within the Methodist family. Methodism has not in fact produced many outstanding scholars and has depended on other Churches for leadership in theological matters.[7]

Robert Currie has shown that none of the major, or indeed minor, secessions from the Methodist fold in the nineteenth century turned on theological questions except perhaps the Leeds organ dispute of 1827 (ostensibly about music but in fact about class and control).[8] The major cause of contention was always lay involvement and lay control, not questions of religious belief. Similarly, within Primitive Methodism, the secession

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[6] John Wilkinson, 'The Rise of Other Methodist Traditions', *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* ed. Rupert Davies, Gordon Rupp and Raymond George, *Vol. 2* (London: Epworth, 1978), pp. 276-329; 'The Non-Wesleyan Traditions from 1849', *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Vol. 3* (London: Epworth, 1985), pp.167-182.

[7] William Strawson, 'Methodist Theology 1850-1950', *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain Vol. 3* (London: Epworth, 1985), pp.182-232..

[8] Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), pp. 44-85.

of John Stamp in the 1840s was all about teetotalism and radicalism; the secession at Sunderland in the 1870s concerned a wealthy elite who did not want to be associated with the old, working-class, Flagg Lane Chapel.[9] Michael Watts details two further secessions, one in 1828 and another in 1830; both were about money.[10] What follows is a brief description of Primitive Methodist theology, as laid down by Bourne in 1830, and a comparison of it with the views of Wesley and those of the Church of England.

In the *Deed Poll* of 1830 Bourne, one of the founders of Primitive Methodism, claimed that the Connexion's theology was based firmly on that of Wesley which was, in turn, based on that of the Church of England:

> The doctrines believed and taught […] were and are that system of religious doctrine which was laid down and established by John Wesley, and which doctrines the said John Wesley believed to be the doctrines of the Church of England by law established.[11]

Wesley lived and died as an ordained minister of the Church of England and always claimed that he had no quarrel with Anglican doctrine, only with its practice.[12] Bourne committed himself to the same position. He goes on to list, in the 1830 *Deed Poll*, the beliefs of Primitive Methodism:

> The Being of God including the Holy Spirit
>
> Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ
>
> Innocence of our first parents and their fall
>
> Redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ
>
> Repentance and Reformation
>
> Justification by Faith of the Ungodly and their turning to God

[9] Colin Dews, 'Rev John Stamp Primitive Methodist Secessionist and the Christian Temperance Brethren', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* Vol. 57 (2010), pp. 178-190; Geoffrey Milburn, 'Tensions in Primitive Methodism in the 1870's', *Ibid,,* Vol. 40 (1976), pp. 93-101 and 135-43.
[10] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, p. 238-9.
[11] Hugh Bourne, *Deed Poll of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (Bemersley, 1837), p. 9.
[12] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans, Talcott Parsons (London: Unwin University Books, 1930), p. 140.

Witness of the Holy Spirit and their adoption into the family of God

Sanctification producing inward and outward holiness

Resurrection of the dead

The general judgement.[13]

In the 1860s Conference decided that there should be an attempt to define Primitive Methodist beliefs for the benefit of the Circuits and, in 1863, John Petty published his *Primitive Methodist Catechism compiled by order of Conference* based directly on Bourne's *Deed Poll*. [14] The *Catechism* was used by the Circuits as a means of ensuring that those aspiring to preach in their chapels subscribed to the same basic theological principles. The questions asked of local preachers in the Driffield Circuit are based directly on it.[15] Probably in connection with this, there was an attempt to introduce some theological clarity. Societies were asked to establish 'Catechumen classes'. These appeared in Driffield in the 1870s but did not long survive the century.[16] They seem to have been aimed at recruiting ministerial candidates rather than as an exercise in popular theology. In 1898 H. B Kendall repeated Petty's list in his *Handbook of Church Principles* with the following comment:

It will be noticed that these articles are merely specified not defined […] We are told they are to be interpreted according to the teachings of Wesley as set forth in his sermons and Notes on the Old Testament in 1755. These books form our 'Standard of Doctrine' which it behoves us to know, although Wesley's claim that his teaching in no way differed from that of the Articles of the Church of England can substantially be admitted.[17]

This is ambiguous, the phrase 'substantially be admitted' suggesting some concern on Kendall's part. His unease perhaps reflects the controversy at the 1896 Primitive

[13] Bourne, *Deed Poll,,* p.15.
[14] John Petty, *The Primitive Methodist Catechism compiled by order of Conference* (London: Primitive Methodist Book Room, 1863).
[15] ERA, 'Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Circuit Records 1861-1879', MRD 2/4/2.
[16] They were abandoned in 1893. ERA, Driffield PM Circuit, 'Circuit Record 1890-94: MRD 2/4/4
[17] Rev. H. B. Kendall, *Handbook of Primitive Methodist Church Principles History and Polity* (London: T. Mitchell, 1898), p. 60-1.

Methodist Conference concerning the views of John Day Thompson.[18] Thompson was an 'advanced' minister who was influenced by the work of A.S. Peake.[19] Thompson proposed a more open approach to biblical criticism by the Connexion and suggested that the teaching of 'the simple Gospel' was insufficient. His views were firmly rejected at the time and he was even accused of heresy, which perhaps explains Kendall's comments. However, under the influence of A.S. Peake, who became Principal of Hartley Victoria College (the training institution for Primitive Methodist ministers) in 1898, biblical criticism was gradually accepted by the leadership of the Connexion (although not by many members). By 1915 opinion had so far moved that Thompson was elected President of Conference and, in 1916, initiated the changes that were to lead to the final revision of the *Deed Poll* in 1921. This revision included, surprisingly, the removal of all mention of Wesley's name.[20]

A comparison between the 1830 *Deed Poll* and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England reveals substantial differences between the two.[21] The Primitives' Articles more or less correspond with the first twenty Anglican ones, although, as Kendall says, they are less specific. They cover the deity of Christ, Articles 1-3; the fall of man, Article 9; justification by faith, Article 11; redemption and resurrection, Article 18; biblical truth, Article 6; and the general judgement, Article 4. The *Deed Poll*, however, is silent on the Authority of the Church, on Bishops, on Baptismal regeneration, on the Sacraments and on Purgatory, although Primitive Methodists would certainly have agreed that the last is 'a fond thing, vainly invented'.[22] How were these Primitive Methodist Articles of Faith actually put into practice and how far do they correspond with Wesley's views?

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[18] Stuart Mews, 'Against the Simple Gospel: John Day Thompson and the New Evangelism in Primitive Methodism', *Modern Religious Rebels* ed. Stuart Mews (London: Epworth, 1993) pp. 206-225.

[19] Arthur Samuel Peake, 1865-1929, Primitive Methodist layman and first Non Anglican to hold a Chair of Divinity in a British University (Manchester). He was an outstanding Biblical Scholar and author who was 'largely responsible for saving British Nonconformity from fundamentalism in the early twentieth century'. (Lysons, *A Little Primitive*, p. 142.)

[20] Stuart Mews, *Modern Religious Rebels*, pp. 219-21. Thompson died in 1919 and Mews suggests that the revision reflected the final triumph of his ideas. An alternative explanation might involve the machinations in advance of the 1932 Methodist Union.

[21] Articles of Religion, *Book of Common Prayer*, Texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: University Press, 2010), pp. 674-85.

[22] *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 679.

Full, Free and Present Salvation

Articles 4-9 in Bourne's list refer to this, the central tenet of Wesley's theology. 'Full, free and present salvation' is the characteristic doctrine of Primitive Methodism, wrote Thomas Church, one of the early apologists of the Connexion, in 1847.[23] Wesley believed that anyone, whatever their social status, age or level of education, could obtain God's grace and win everlasting life provided they acknowledged their present, sinful condition and were prepared to trust everything to Him.

So that, for the sake of His well beloved Son, of what He has done and suffered for us, God vouchsafes on one condition (which he himself enables us to perform), both to remit the punishment due for our sins, to reinstate us in his favour and to restore our dead souls to spiritual life.[24]

All that was necessary for salvation was personal commitment, not the agency of clergymen, nor the intervention of saints, nor previous membership of any religious organisation. This was the kernel of Wesley's doctrine of justification by faith. People must choose Christ of their own free will because they had faith in Him and, in doing so, they must reject the ways of the world and the Devil. His doctrine was Arminian.[25] He totally rejected the views of George Whitefield and Howell Harris, who accepted the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.[26] This held that God chose in advance those who were destined for salvation and those who were not; human choice played no part.[27]

Thus the object of Primitive Methodist preaching (and that of other Methodist groups) was to awaken people to their sins, to alarm them about their prospects after death and induce them to choose salvation i.e. to be 'converted'. The actual process of

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[23] Thomas Church, *Sketches of Primitive Methodism* (London: T. Ward and Co., 1847), p. 45.
[24] John Wesley, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1 ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), Sermon 1, p. 18. 'The condition which he himself enables us to perform' is the individual's acknowledgement of sin.
[25] Arminius, 1560-1609, was a Dutch reformed theologian who upheld the doctrine of 'free will' i.e. God has given to men the power to decide between good and evil and thus between heaven and hell. Most Methodist groups were Arminian with the exception of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists.
[26] George Whitefield (1714-1770) and Howell Harris (1714-1773) were figures in the early evangelical revival before the emergence of Wesley. Both were Calvinist and Harris was instrumental in the establishment of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism. Whitefield was initially a friend of Wesley's but the two later fell out.
[27] John Calvin, 1509-1554, was a French reformed theologian who believed in the doctrine of 'Predestination'. This held that God decided, in advance, who was worthy of heaven and who not: 'the chosen few'. Men had no choice in the matter.

conversion will be discussed in Chapter 5. It was often sudden, during the course of a Camp or Prayer Meeting, and, in the case of Primitive Methodism, often accompanied by physical phenomena such as shouting out, or falling down on the ground. When Joseph Spoor addressed a Prayer Meeting in a cottage at Appleton (North Riding) in 1830, 'The neighbours were attracted by strange noises […] some came in and looked upon the extraordinary scene, and were smitten to the floor by the power of God […]'.[28] Wesley himself was suspicious of emotional conversion scenes and loud 'shoutings out', but came to tolerate them among his followers where he felt they were genuine.[29] After his death in 1791 and certainly by the 1820s sudden, emotional conversion was regarded almost as a necessity by Primitive Methodists; hence the overdramatic accounts of conversion scenes in much nineteenth-century literature.[30]

Christian Perfection

Article 8 (Sanctification producing inward and outward holiness) refers to 'Christian Perfection', the most controversial of Wesley's doctrines. Wesley held that it was possible for Christians to grow in faith and ultimately to achieve 'Christian Perfection', in which state it was impossible to act in any way contrary to God's will. He expounded his views in Sermon 40, on which Albert Outler, his most recent editor, adds the following remarks: 'Christian perfection came to be the most distinctive and also the most widely misunderstood of all Wesley's doctrines. He continued to teach it however, in season and out, as the farthest horizon of his vision of Christian existence […].'[31] Indeed, Wesley recorded in his *Journal* for 1764 that, during a visit to Grimsby, 'In the morning, Wed. 4, I explained at large the nature of Christian Perfection. Many who had doubted of it before were fully satisfied. It remains only the experience of what we

[28] Rev E. Hall, *The Earnest Preacher: Memoirs of the Rev J. Spoor* (London: Joseph Toulson, 1870), p.50. Joseph Spoor (born 1813), the son of a keel man, was converted in 1827 and led the Primitive Methodist advance on Tyneside.

[29] Maldwyn Edwards, 'Wesley', *History of Methodism in Great Britain* Vol. 1, Chapter 2, pp. 35-81.

[30] William Patterson, Northern Primitive Methodism; A record of the Rise and Progress of the Circuits in the Old Sunderland District (London: E Dalton, 1909), pp. 20, 58, 78, 147; Charles Kendall, The Christian Minister in Earnest: The Life of Atkinson Smith (London: Ward & Co., 1854). pp. 15-17 and p. 47; George Herod, Biographical Sketches of Those Preachers whose Labours Contributed to the Origin and Early Extension of the Primitive Methodist Connexion (London: n.p., 1855), pp. 34-5, 307-9, 346-7.

[31] Wesley, *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, ed. Albert C. Outler, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), pp. 98-9; Wesley's views on Christian Perfection are also discussed by D.W. Bebbington in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s(* London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 60. Bebbington's view is that Wesley maintained that perfection is possible but not always permanent. It was always possible to 'fall' from a state of Christian perfection.

believe.'[32] Doubts however continued and, throughout his life, Wesley had to defend his doctrine in numerous sermons and pamphlets.[33] Rupert Davies concludes that, although Wesley's views were largely at one with Anglicanism, the doctrine of Christian Perfection 'could be said to be pushing certain elements in received doctrine to an unjustifiable extreme'.[34]

In terms of actual practice the whole concept of Christian Perfection was difficult to put across. Published sermons concentrated on biblical exegesis or on the choice between salvation and damnation.[35] We can only speculate on the content of unpublished sermons (the published ones were only a tiny minority). According to Obelkevich 'Christian perfection was advocated only by a minority of ministers'.[36] He cites, as part of his evidence, the career of Atkinson Smith, a travelling preacher in Lincolnshire and the East Riding. Smith 'believed in the doctrine of entire sanctification; he taught it, he enjoyed it, it was his great salvation'.[37] However his biographer implies that since Smith's death (in 1852) preaching on the subject of sanctification had been allowed to lapse: 'Does religion flourish better, or as well as it did, when this doctrine was better and more energetically enjoined? What can be done to raise the standard of holiness and awake up the church's energies?'[38]

Parkinson Milson, one of the most popular travelling preachers in the East Riding, also struggled with the concept of Christian Perfection, yet decided that he must attempt to preach it: 'I feel persuaded that unless the doctrine be kept alive in the Connexion we shall become a formal people, and lose the converting glory'.[39] Milson

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[32] Wesley, *Collected Works Vol. 21, Journal and Diaries, 1755-65*, ed. Albert Outler, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 4 April 1764, p. 450.
[33] Henry Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism (London: Epworth, 1989), pp. 388-402 and 453-461.

[34] Rupert Davies, *Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1963), p. 105.
[35] *The Primitive Pulpit – being original Sermons and Sketches by various Ministers of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London: Thomas King, 1842) passim.

[36]James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: University Press, 1976), p. 233.

[37] Charles Kendall, *The Christian Minister in Earnest: or The Life of Atkinson Smith* (London: Ward &Co, 1854), p. 72.

[38] Ibid,,

[39] Rev. George Shaw, *The Life of Rev. Parkinson. Milson,* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1893), p. 175

was here expressing his fear that a failure to fully explain the concept of 'perfection' would mean losing the full value of the conversion experience and make it merely a 'formal' experience. However, his actions (in preaching Christian Perfection) led to a disagreement with his superior, the Rev. Garner, who did not feel the concept was helpful to congregations. This disagreement caused Milson considerable pain.[40] However he continued to preach 'perfection' until the end of his career in the 1890s but he was clearly in a minority.

The Means of Grace

The comparison between Bourne's *Deed Poll* articles and those of the Church of England shows that, although Primitive Methodism remained close to Wesley's example in matters of theology, it differed from it considerably in matters of church authority and religious practice.[41] It was in these areas, not in matters of theology, that friction arose.

For Primitive Methodists, the Connexion was a community of believers whose authority was paramount in Conference and who directly deployed and paid their preachers.[42] For Anglicans, authority rested with the bishops and clergy who ministered to the people. Mary Simpson, daughter of the vicar of Carnaby in the East Riding and staunch opponent of the Primitives, put the point succinctly, when she admonished local ploughboys about 'getting converted' by the Methodists:

> We may not be able to tell how, or in what way, we shall 'get most good' by going to church, but it is enough that it MUST BE most for our good if we take for our guidance whatever God knows. Can it really be good to go against His will.[43]

She meant that they (the ploughboys) should rely on the word of the clergy who baptised them and on that of the bishops who confirmed them that, through the operation of the sacraments, they were part of God's church on earth and of the

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[40] Ibid,,
[41] Rupert E Davies, *Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1963), Chapter 6, pp. 105-112.
[42] Lysons, *A Little Primitive*, p. 103.
[43] Mary Simpson, *Why Church is Better than Chapel: A Word to Those who Like Chapel Best* (London: J.C. Mosley, 1863), p. 4.

heavenly city after death. A sudden, religious conversion was unnecessary; that was simply 'to be led astray by one's own feelings'.[44] Authority lay with an ordained ministry not with lay preachers possessing a dubious knowledge of theology.

Wesley taught that the religious life was nurtured by what he called 'the means of grace'. These were three – prayer, searching the scriptures, and receiving the Lord's supper (communion).[45] He insisted that they were of equal importance to conversion and assurance (the knowledge of Christian Perfection). 'Some speak as if outward religion were absolutely nothing, as if it had no place in the religion of Christ', he wrote, but such people were wrong. All who desired to grow in the knowledge and love of God must attend to the means of grace.[46] There was nothing in Wesley's teaching about the means of grace that was contrary to Anglican practice. However, the interpretation put upon Wesley's teaching by Primitive Methodism resulted in a difference of emphasis which conventional Anglicans found almost shocking.

Prayer

Prayer was pre-eminent in Primitive Methodism. Whole meetings (Prayer Meetings) were devoted to it and there were extensive prayers before and after every preaching service. Extempore prayers, it was felt, which took no specific form but came 'directly from the heart' gave 'liberty' to both preacher and hearer, and sometimes led on to a higher level of response – religious ecstasy.[47] Prayer was the best means of expressing the direct, personal connection between each believer, man, woman or child, and his Saviour. Primitive Methodists prided themselves upon their fervency in prayer. After a Camp Meeting at Bainton in 1842,

> Returning home at midnight, it was proposed they should have a prayer meeting. A ring was formed and there, beneath the silent stars and silver moon, they sang a hymn and prayed all round. Another hymn was

[44] Ibid,
[45] Wesley, *Collected Works, Vol. 1*, Sermon 16, pp. 378-397.
[46] Ibid, p. 380.
[47] Lester Ruth, 'Liturgical Revolutions', *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. Abraham and Kirby (Oxford: University Press, 2002), pp. 319-20.

sung and they all prayed a second time. It was a blessed season and they felt it hard to part, late as the hour was.[48]

To Anglicans such proceedings appeared anarchic and ill-conceived. Archdeacon Wilberforce warned his clergy against such effusions in 1844: 'Some believe that only extempore prayer is genuine. They are open to the delusion that written prayers are in some measure inconsistent with fervency of spirit.'[49] Wilberforce's insistence on adherence to the rubric reflected both his distaste for Primitive Methodism and his fear that any deviation would undermine the authority and dignity of the Church. Written prayers, he insisted, reflected not a mindless incantation by clergymen (to which he was much opposed), but a living example of the Church assisting the communication between God and man.

Biblical Truth

Primitive Methodists were also devoted to Wesley's second means of grace – searching out biblical truth. As in the case of prayer, it was felt that a personal knowledge of the Bible, and perhaps a personal interpretation of its meaning, cemented the relationship between God and the believer. The majority of sermons were therefore devoted to biblical exegesis and Bible study played a major part in Sunday School teaching. Again there was nothing in this to which Anglicans might object, except that the Sunday preaching service came to dominate Methodist worship to the exclusion of the communion service and those celebrating baptism and marriage.[50]

The Lord's Supper

Stephen Hatcher has shown how the Lord's Supper (as it was usually known among Primitive Methodists) was neglected in early Primitive Methodism.[51] Before 1830 it was celebrated only once a quarter in town chapels and less frequently in the countryside. Bourne made no mention of it in his preface to the 1825 hymn book, 'On Worship', although he included instructions for preaching services and Love-feasts. As

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[48] Henry Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry: Being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* (London: Joseph Toulson, 1889), p. 170.
[49] Robert Wilberforce, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding at the Ordinary Visitation 1844* (London: John Murray, 1844), p.14.
[50] Davies, *Methodism*, p. 134.
[51] Stephen Hatcher, 'The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Primitive Methodism with Particular Reference to the Hull Circuit and its Branches', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society,* Vol. 47 (1989-1990), pp. 221-231.

time went on the number of communion services increased – ten were held in the Driffield Circuit in the summer of 1845.[52] However, it was not until the 1860s that Conference finally authorised a printed rubric for the service, and even then it was entirely optional.[53] Primitive Methodists did not accord the communion service the same importance that Wesley had done. His theology – although it was important – remained subservient to the popular religious belief which underlay it.

Primitive Methodism and Popular Religion

It would not be possible to discuss religious belief in the nineteenth century, or indeed in the twentieth, without referring to the superstition and folk belief that underlay much orthodox religion. Keith Thomas has pointed out that, although magic may have declined since the sixteenth century in the face of intellectual advance and modern technology, it still has a role in modern society which may be more extensive than we appreciate.[54] Similarly Bryan Wilson has demonstrated the intimate relationship between religion and modern culture in both East and West.[55] This section will consider the role of folk belief and popular superstition in the origins of Primitive Methodism, and its survival within the Connexion in different parts of England including the East Riding.

The origins of Primitive Methodism were closely linked with popular religion. This might be defined as a vulgar interpretation of Christian theology superimposed on plebeian beliefs about witches and magical practices.[56] As John Harrison has shown, the years between 1780 and 1825 were marked by an upsurge in popular millenarian beliefs, fuelled, at least in part, by the outbreak of the French Revolution and the

[52] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit Records', Collection of Circuit Plans, MRD 2/6/1
[53] Hatcher, op. cit., p. 225.

[54] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1971), pp. 640-668.
[55] Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: University Press, 1982).

[56] Thomas Waters, 'Encounters with the Supernatural: Belief in Witchcraft and Ghosts in Victorian and Edwardian Oxfordshire and Warwickshire', (doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2010), p.7; Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, p. 106; James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: University Press, 1976), pp. 301-12.

subsequent European wars.[57] The best-known of the millenarians was the daughter of a Devonshire farmer, Joanna Southcott, who claimed to see visions and, in 1813, claimed to be about to give birth to 'Shiloh' - a child who would prepare the way for the Second Advent.[58] However, she was not alone, and, as Harrison demonstrates, her movement was only the most sensational of a number of groups which flourished at the time, among them the followers of Richard Brothers, 'the Nephew of the Almighty', the believers in 'The Household of Faith', and the Magic Methodists of Delamere Forest led by James Crawfoot.[59] Primitive Methodism flourished in the same milieu of popular enthusiasm and popular apprehension. Its survival where other groups failed was due both to the organisational skills of its founders and the sanity of its doctrines.

James Crawfoot, the leader of the Magic Methodists, was a powerful influence on Bourne and Clowes, who both visited him on several occasions. Crawfoot claimed to see visions and to have powers of exorcism.[60] John Walford, Bourne's biographer, also records that, in 1810, Bourne and Clowes visited Joanna Southcott in London.[61] Although the pair later fell out with Crawfoot, his influence remained pervasive in terms of the intense spiritual imagery of early Primitive Methodism – Clowes's continuing struggles with the terrifying 'Kidsgrove bogget' and his experience with the Ramsor woman who was 'in witchcraft'.[62]

Wesley himself believed strongly in the power of evil, in the form of the Devil and in witchcraft. For instance in 1768 he visited a young woman in Sunderland who gave him an extraordinary account of her experience of witchcraft. Wesley was convinced of the truth of her story but others were not. Wesley then took it upon himself to denounce these doubters. In his opinion the denial of witchcraft meant the denial of all supernatural aspects of the Bible and thus of spiritual truth:

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[57] J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

[58] The birth did not happen and Joanna died soon afterwards. However the cult continued as she had a huge following which included several ministers of the Church of England. Harrison, *The Second Coming,* Chapter 5.

[59] Harrison, *The Second Coming,* Chapters 4 and 6; W.R.Ward, *Religion and Society* (London: Batsford, 1972), p. 78.

[60] Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 68-75; Ward, *Religion and Society*, p. 78.

[61] John Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne* (London: T. King, 1854), p. 290.

[62] Ward, *Religion and Society*, p. 79.

I am sorry for it, and I am willing to take this opportunity of entering my solemn protest against this violent compliment which so many that believe in the Bible pay to those who do not believe it […] the giving up of witchcraft is, in effect, giving up the Bible.[63]

Wesley was not alone in his views, which were shared by many, both rich and poor, in late eighteenth-century England.[64] It is therefore hardly surprising that beneath orthodox religious practice lay a web of supernatural and folk belief, much of which pre-dated the arrival of Christianity.

Owen Davies has suggested that, contrary to eighteenth-century clerical opinion – namely that the spread of Methodism helped to inflame superstitious beliefs - the truth is more likely to be the other way round, that existing superstitious belief encouraged Methodism, whose practices were far closer to the popular idiom than were the more distant rituals of the Church of England.[65] John Rule has shown how the superstitious beliefs of the Cornish miners and fishermen provided a perfect seed-bed for the reception of Methodism.[66] Consider one important example: Luck played a large part in the lives of miners and fishermen. Life underground was dangerous, spirits known as 'knockers' dictated the timing of rock falls or floods. Out at sea, high winds and tides, the arrival or non-arrival of the shoals made the difference between life and death, between economic success and failure. Methodism with its characteristic belief in 'Providence' was able to translate the community's dependence on random acts of nature to a dependence on the will of God.[67] It was He who decided which rocks would fall and who would be struck down by high winds and toppling waves. Not all would be saved from destruction but God would take care of His own, if not in this world then in

[63] Wesley, *Collected Works Vol. 22, Journals and Diaries 1765-1775,* eds. W.R. Ward and Richard Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 25 May 1768, p. 135.
[64] Harrison, *The Second Coming,* Chapter 2; Thomas Waters, 'Magic and the British Middle Classes 1750-1900', *Journal of British Studies* Vol. 54 (2015), pp. 632-653.
[65] Owen Davies, 'Methodism,The Clergy, and Popular Belief in Witchcraft and Magic', *History* Vol. 82 (1997), pp. 252-265.
[66] John Rule, 'Methodism, Popular Beliefs and Village Culture', *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth Century England* ed. Robert D. Storch (London:Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 48-70.

[67] Providence means 'the protective care of God or nature' (O.E.D.) It was a favourite evangelical device used to show how God intervened in history to further His plan for the world – from the dividing of the Red Sea in the Old Testament to the sudden death of those who had defied the progress of true religion.

the next. Methodism, says Rule, 'did not so much replace folk-belief as translate it into a religious idiom'.[68]

A similar translation seems to have occurred in nineteenth-century Filey, a fishing village on the Yorkshire coast at the foot of the Wolds, where John Oxtoby famously led the first Primitive Methodist mission in 1824. According to the local folklore, Filey people had always been superstitious. It was considered very unlucky for fishermen to meet a pig on the way to their boats (in fact most refused to sail if they did so), and a similar prejudice was attached to the buying of eggs after sunset.[69] By the 1860s, Filey was a strongly Primitive Methodist village; it was said that seven eighths of the fishermen along the coast were members of the Connexion.[70] In 1867 the Rev. George Shaw, another Primitive Methodist travelling preacher, described the conversion of the fishermen and their subsequent moral and upright lives: '…the most glorious evidences of its [the revival's] power are to be witnessed in the entire change it wrought in the habits and circumstances of the people generally'.[71] Superstition was transformed into piety, drinking into sobriety and a careless attitude to life into a deep devotion to God. All this was reflected in the names of the fishing boats which, instead of being called 'Mary Jane' or 'Northern Star', became 'Eye of Providence', 'Tranquility' or 'William Clowes'.[72] The hopes and fears of the community had been subsumed into a religious ethos, and the seemingly random behaviour of the winds and tides explained by the workings of Providence. For instance, Shaw describes how a group of pious fishermen refused to go out on Sunday, but on Monday drew a huge catch, far larger than the group who had fished on Sunday.[73] This was the work of 'providence'. From that day on Sunday fishing was doomed and 'if there were twea herrings in the sea, Ranter Jack would be searr to get yan on'em'.

Farming was perhaps a less dangerous occupation than fishing or mining, but it was still associated with a good deal of superstition. Canon Atkinson, on his arrival in the North Yorkshire village of Danby in the 1850s, recorded many examples of half-

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[68] Rule in*, Popular Culture and Custom*, p. 63.
[69] Eliza Gutch*, Examples of printed Folk lore concerning the East Riding of Yorkshire,* Collected and edited by Mrs. Gutch (London: published for the Folklore Society by D. Nutt, 1912) p. 22.
[70] A.N. Cooper, *Across Broad Acres: Being Sketches of Yorkshire Life and Character* (London: A. Brown & Sons, 1909), p. 224.
[71] Rev. George Shaw*, Our Filey Fishermen with Sketches of their Manners, Customs, Social Habits and Religious Condition* (London: Hamilton and Adams, 1867), Chapter 5.
[72] Ibid,, p. 111.
[73] Ibid,, Chapter 5.

pagan belief. [74] One concerned a special mixture of animal blood, hair, pins, needles and other ingredients which had to be boiled together at a certain hour of the day to ward off illness in farmyard beasts. The crucial point was that certain psalms had to be read over the bubbling pot – a pagan charm given a Christian gloss. Another concerned a special charm to ward off witches. It consisted of laying branches of rowan wood around the door and eaves of the house; but the branches had to be collected on St. Helen's Day or the charm was not effective.[75] At the other end of the scale of rural literacy, Canon Atkinson recorded 'with amazement' a parishioner who had read Colenso's *Pentateuch* – and had offered Atkinson his copy because 'it was hardly a book he cared much for […] and I could keep it if I liked'.[76]

In the East Riding such self-taught theologians were rare. Either that or there was no Canon Atkinson to record them. However, Woodcock gives several instances of superstition. Old Nancy Varey in Sledmere reckoned that the Devil did a good deal of 'flitting around at night', so left her Bible open to deter him. Many nooks (cottages) had a charm stone in the doorway to deter witches and wizards. [77] Johnny Oxtoby too was familiar with Satan. He struggled with him outside Filey and had several encounters with him during his work in Weardale: 'Preached at Westgate at nine and two and at Stanhope at six – a full chapel; the devil raged and the people put an ass into the chapel'.[78] Woodcock's work is heavy with incidents of 'Providence', for instance the safe return of the merchant ship to Bridlington which John Oxtoby had seen in prayer. [79] The miraculous escape of Matthew Denton (well-known Beverley Primitive Methodist) from a railway accident in 1857 is worth quoting:

> At the time of the accident Mr. D was reading, *Our Home in Heaven*. 'Surely', he says, 'the eye of the Lord was upon me for good. I think God sent His angels to take care of me'. He got some compensation

[74] Rev. J. C. Atkinson, *Forty years in a Moorland Parish: Reminiscences and Researches in Danby in Cleveland* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1907). Canon Atkinson spent forty years in the rural parish of Danby in Cleveland. He recorded the natural history of his parish, its antiquities, the many curious, half-pagan customs he encountered on his arrival there and how life changed for its inhabitants with the coming of the railways and the growth of industry.
[75] Atkinson, *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish*, pp. 99 and 124.
[76] Ibid, pp. 16-17. I must thank Malcolm Chase for pointing this incident out to me.
[77] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 22 and 132.
[78] Harvey Leigh, *Praying Johnny: The Life and Labours of John Oxtoby, Primitive Methodist Preacher* (London: R. Fenwick, 1882), p. 27.
[79] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 58 and 82.

from the Railway Company, and soon after, we are told, preached from, 'I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto Thee O Lord will I sing.' [80]

Several other twentieth-century local studies have demonstrated the links between superstition and orthodox religion. James Obelkevich, in his study of south Lindsey, detailed many instances of folk belief which had been woven into religious practice: for instance the making of the sign of the cross after seeing a magpie, the pagan significance of St. Mark's Day and the non-religious associations of Good Friday.[81] David Clark in his study of the (largely Methodist) fishing community at Staithes in the North Riding found that houses had been 'witched' as recently as 1858 and that the fishing cobles carried ring-shaped 'luck stones' in spite of having 'reformed' names such as 'Good Samaritan' and 'Kindly Light' painted on the prows.[82] More recently, Thomas Waters has shown the prevalence of belief in ghosts and witchcraft among the working classes of Oxfordshire and Warwickshire well into the early twentieth century.[83] The records of the Warwickshire Asylum recorded several cases where the belief of the patient that he / she was the subject of witchcraft led to psychiatric illness. One farmer was convinced that an employee was bewitching his cows; a woman was sure that the death of her child was due to witchcraft, another that her neighbours were bewitching her and causing her face and ears to burn when they were nearby.[84]

Waters has also shown how middle-class attitudes to working-class beliefs changed in the later nineteenth century.[85] Fear of popular superstition and witchcraft, fanned perhaps by the social unrest of the early nineteenth century, was transformed in the late Victorian years into a tolerance, if not nostalgia, for a world that was disappearing and an academic interest in folklore – of which the researches of Eliza Gutch in the East Riding are an example. Woodcock and Ritson, both East Riding travelling preachers, exemplify this development. Ritson, writing in 1909, was anxious

[80] Ibid, p.158.
[81] Obelkevich*, Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 264 and 268.
[82] David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village (Cambridge: University Press*, 1982), pp. 146-151.
[83] Thomas Waters, 'Encounters with the Supernatural: Belief in Witchcraft and Ghosts in Victorian and Edwardian Oxfordshire and Warwickshire' (Oxford: D. Phil, 2010).
[84] Ibid, pp. 119-20.
[85] Thomas Waters, 'Magic and the British Middle Classes 1780-1900', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 54 (2015) pp. 632-653.

to portray Primitive Methodism as a 'modern' religion which had left old superstitions behind:

> […] it is almost impossible for us to reconstruct the England of one hundred years ago. The whole religious tone of the country has changed, and forces have everywhere been called into activity which scarcely then existed.[86]

He went on to describe the part played by Primitive Methodism in sweeping away ignorance and 'coarse revelry' and improving the moral tone of society. He ended with two chapters detailing the 'National Service' of the Connexion and its 'Modern Progress'.[87] Woodcock, while mentioning Nancy Varey's Bible and the ghosts and hobgoblins that used to terrify travellers on the road between Wetwang and Fimber, was also anxious to point out that these were manifestations of the past and that Primitive Methodism had by now (1887) redeemed the Wolds from such outdated superstitions. His intention was to describe the 'moral improvement' of the Wolds, not any physical or intellectual change. Methodists, of all colours, by their example of pure family life, hard work and responsible social behaviour (no drinking, no fighting, strict financial probity), had banished the old raucous and ignorant village culture and replaced it with something far more respectable. Like Ritson he devoted his final chapters to the 'social progress' of the Primitives, to their responsible political behaviour and their contribution to the rural economy.[88]

Religious Practice of Primitive Methodism

Primitive Methodists believed themselves to be the true inheritors of the traditions of Wesley in his concern with outdoor preaching and the importance of spreading the gospel of salvation to the poor. This section will attempt to demonstrate how faithful the Primitives were to Wesley's legacy and how far his legacy was tempered by circumstance – particularly by transatlantic revivalism.

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[86] Joseph Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (London: Edwin Dalton, 1909), p.9.
[87] Ibid,, Chapters 16 and 17
[88] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, Chapter 17.

The name 'Primitive Methodist' had been deliberately chosen by Bourne and Clowes as a reference to the 'primitive' practice of John Wesley. Wesley preached outside, in the lanes, on the commons, indeed anywhere he could find where people would listen to his message of redemption and hope. He first preached outside to the Kingswood miners in 1739.[89] Such was his success that he made outdoor preaching one of the main vehicles of his evangelism. Behind his field preaching lay his commitment to the poor and dispossessed: 'But through these [the poor] I see one that has an immortal spirit, made to know and love and dwell with God to eternity. I honour him for my Creator's sake […] I love him for the sake of his Redeemer'.[90] Field preaching, said Wesley, was the best way to reach out to the poor, who might well not attend regular church services. It is, he wrote in his *Journals*, 'the most effective way to overturn Satan'.[91] He continued to preach outside until the end of his life. He did not denounce wealth or privilege as such but was suspicious of its effect on spiritual life. He urged the rich to give away their wealth (as he did himself):

> After you have gained all you can and saved all you can […] lay up no treasure on earth, but give all you can, that is all you have. I defy all the men on earth, yea all the angels in heaven to find any other way of extracting the poison from riches.[92]

The Primitive Methodists regarded themselves as the true inheritors of Wesley's tradition of outside preaching and concern for the poor. 'Primitive Methodism', wrote Woodcock in 1887, 'was born in the open air […] We must stick to that which was our earliest distinct characteristic, and which perhaps, more than anything else, contributed to our usefulness, growth and prosperity'.[93] Camp Meetings were a quite deliberate attempt to extend and revive the principle of outdoor preaching. They were introduced from America, where they had played a crucial role in Christianising the frontier, by Lorenzo Dow, whose example had inspired Bourne and Clowes.[94] They adopted the idea of Camp Meetings with enthusiasm as a novel and effective way of spreading the

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[89] Henry Rack*, Reasonable Enthusiast,* p 194.
[90] Wesley, *Collected Works*, Sermons Vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), Sermon 100, p. 425.
[91] Ibid,, Vol. 23, *Journals 1776-86*, eds. W.R. Heitzenrater and W. R. Ward (Nashville, 1992) ,p. 52.
[92] Wesley, *Collected Works, Sermons Vol. 4,* nos. 115-131 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), Sermon 131, p. 185.
[93] Henry Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry: Being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* (London: Joseph Toulson, 1887), p. 16.
[94] See Chapter 3. Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 2* pp. 139-144; Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion* pp. 59-65.

word of God and, at the same time, countering the ill effects of the local wakes.[95] This was the declared object of the Norton Camp Meeting in August 1807 and of later ones during the revival in Leicestershire in 1818.[96]

Camp Meetings

Thus Camp Meetings became one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Connexion and, as Geoffrey Milburn put it, 'the dynamo of early Primitive Methodism. It took Methodism back into the open air and liberated it from clerical control and obstructive ecclesiastical machinery.'[97] In his preface to the *Deed Poll* written in 1830 Bourne wrote: 'It [Primitive Methodism] has been a means in the hand of God of reviving open-air worship as it was practised by Wesley and Whitefield'.[98] Camp Meetings were the chief means of recruitment in early Primitive Methodism. A few cottage meetings were established, an embryo Circuit formed and then missionaries arrived to hold a Camp Meeting.[99] A time and place were agreed and word of mouth did the rest. At Congleton in 1823,

> […] soon the congregation was so large that we had a preaching stand out of doors and continued the meeting in the barn for the mourners. Many who were wounded yesterday on account of sin, were today filled with joy and peace through believing, and went home rejoicing.[100]

As we have seen Camp Meetings became enormously popular in the East Riding:

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[95] 'Wakes' were local holidays. Although usually religious in origin –the patronal festival of the parish church – they involved a good deal of secular activity: drinking, dancing, and, according to the moralists, illicit sexual activity. See Gary Moses, *Rural Moral Reform in Nineteenth Century England: The Crusade against Adolescent Farm Servants and Hiring Fairs* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), Chapter 4.

[96] Werner, The *Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 163.
[97] Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism* (London: Epworth, 2004), p.11.
[98] Hugh Bourne, *Deed Poll of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (Bemersley: James Bourne,1837), Preface p. iii.
[99] Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 184.
[100] John Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne* (London: T. King, 1854), p.124.

> The annual camp-meetings are events without which the machinery of Wolds Primitive Methodism would seem to be defective and out of gear […] Thousands flocked to these gatherings who were conspicuous by their absence from all other religious services.[101]

Woodcock records the results of the Driffield Camp Meeting in 1842. 'The Circuit increased from 1,132 members to 1,350 members and the quarterly income from £75 17s. and 8p. to £171 18s.' In the summer of 1845 Camp Meetings were held in Driffield and in three of the larger Circuit villages – Cranswick, Nafferton and Kilham. In 1859, after the success of further missionary enterprise, another five were held in Lund, Bainton, Frodingham, Langtoft and Weaverthope.[102] Not all who attended Camp Meetings came for solely religious reasons; many turned up simply from curiosity or a mischievous desire to cause trouble. A frequent feature of later, pious, descriptions of these occasions is of the sinner who came to scoff but stayed to pray. For instance in Norfolk

> […] some of the roughs who stood mocking, were suddenly smitten to the ground, and increased the number of the slain. Some of their old companions, seeing them among the mourners, made an attempt to break through into the ring, swearing one minute and down among the seekers the next, praying for mercy.[103]

Hostile contemporary comment denounced the apparently random and anarchic nature of Camp Meetings, the 'tendency to confusion' and the gestures and actions nearer to the 'orgies of the Heathen than to the dignified deportment and calm devoutness of the Christian worshipper'.[104] Such comment was, in fact, largely misplaced. Bourne went to great trouble to ensure that Camp Meetings were well organised and that people's enthusiasm was channelled into positive religious activity. In his *Preface to the Large Hymn Book* he warned against excessive preaching at Camp Meetings and suggested that participants should be divided into 'companies' alternately praying, singing or listening to the preachers because 'the going out and coming in are a

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[101] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 169.
[102] E. R. A. Driffield PM Circuit, Circuit Plans MRD 2/6/1, Plans for 1845 and 1859.
[103] Robert Key, *The Gospel among the Masses* (London: R. Davies, 1872), p. 49.
[104] *Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury*, 16 June 1820. Quoted in R.W.Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reform: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire 1817-1875* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989), p. 48.

great relief to body and mind; and are of great service to the people in other respects'.[105] Evidence that his advice was followed is provided by Thomas Russell's description of the 1835 Brinkworth Camp Meeting: 'The first going out into companies for prayer was very powerful; the second going out seemed to open heaven. In one of the companies converting grace was poured out from on high like a flood.'[106] Some Camp Meetings were deliberately misconstrued and rumours of 'vice' persisted into the late nineteenth century. Some of these rumours were even quoted by the vicar of Dalton in the East Riding as reasons for his opposition to the Burials Bill of 1880.[107] However Primitive Methodism was, by that date, an established and respectable cause, and the vicar's opposition did not arouse much support.

James Obelkevich claims that, after 1850, Primitive Methodism became institutionalised and lost its spiritual momentum. There was less revivalism, less attention to outdoor preaching, more concentration on chapel building and financial considerations. 'Camp Meetings survived', he says, 'but contributed more to nostalgia than revivalism'.[108]

Wayne Johnson, in 'Triumph of Faith: Primitive Methodism in the North Midlands', disputes this and says that Obelkevich's view is an external one, based on Weberian social analysis, and does not reflect contemporary perceptions.[109] There is a measure of truth in Johnson's remarks. Max Weber had claimed that, in all religious revivals, once the first charismatic generation of leaders has left the scene, the ideas and behaviours which they inspired in their followers gradually degenerate into a routine; he called it the 'routinization of charisma'. [110] This process certainly took hold in all branches of Methodism after 1870, but Obelkevich is premature in dating it to the 1850s in the case of Primitive Methodism. There were signs perhaps of a change in dynamic, as there had to be, but it did not amount to a decline. It was more a diversion into other fields of activity, such as Sunday Schools, and an engagement with the wider world –

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[105] Hugh Bourne, *Large Hymn Book for the Use of Primitive Methodists* (Bemersley, 1825), Preface xi.
[106] Thomas Russell, *Record of Events in Primitive Methodism* (London: William Lister, 1869), p. 114.
[107] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 174.
[108] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 253
[109] Wayne Johnson, 'In Triumph of Faith: Primitive Methodism in the North Midlands' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Keele, 1989), Chapter 2.
[110] Max Weber, 'Charisma and Institution Building', *Selected Papers by Max Weber*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt (London: University of Chicago, 1963) p.54.

Friendly Societies, trade nnions, overseas missions. Numbers continued to rise and chapels became an established part of village life.

In the Wolds the number of Camp Meetings, far from falling off, actually increased from five in 1845 to nine in 1859 and twelve in 1867.[111] These were popular events, widely reported in the local press; they clearly remained lively and could sometimes get out of control. Two policemen were recruited to control the crowds at the Driffield Camp Meeting in 1865.[112] It therefore seems premature to declare that outdoor preaching was in decline in the Wolds by the 1860s; on the contrary Camp Meetings there were actually extended in the 1880s and 90s to serve a new purpose – to draw in members of working groups who had a particular connection with the Primitives. One of these was the railwaymen – an influential group who, because of the mobility of their occupation, had links with the wider world.[113] Reports on Camp Meetings for Railway Servants frequently appeared in the *Driffield Times.*[114] William Gill, stationmaster at Cranswick, was prominent in the affairs of Cranswick chapel, and Joseph Warrington, a plate-layer, was one of the trustees at Fimber.[115] There were also attempts to include the police, another influential group, many of whom were drawn from rural areas; a special Camp Meeting was arranged for them in 1885.[116]

The Continuing Appeal to the Working Classes in the Later Nineteenth Century

In addition to the assumption that evangelistic activity declined after 1850, many historians have assumed that Primitive Methodism lost its working-class roots in the later nineteenth century. According to Michael Watts:

> The rise of respectability and the decline of itineracy were accompanied by the neglect of many of the other means by which Nonconformity had attracted working-class people in the earlier, less inhibited years of the century.[117]

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[111] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Collection of Circuit Plans', MRD 2/6/1.
[112] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Circuit Committee Minutes 1859-1866, MRD 2/2/9.
[113] The only Trade Union which made any progress in the rural East Riding before 1914 was the National Union of Railwaymen. It was one of their officials, George Dawson, (Labour Candidate in the election of 1918), who helped organise a farm workers' strike in 1917 and negotiated a settlement with the farmers in 1919. Peter Howorth, *The Impact of War: Driffield and the Wolds*, 1914-19 (Driffield:Lowndes, 2002).
[114] *Driffield Times,* 2 July 1881, 13 August 1887, 22 June 1901, 14 June 1902.
[115] *Driffield Times*, 22 May 1888, ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit,' Records of Fimber Chapel, MRD 10/1.
[116] *Driffield Times,* 18 July 1885.
[117] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2 p. 611.

To talk of the 'decline of itineracy' suggests that preachers were ceasing to travel. Certainly there was a decline in undenominational itineracy after 1820 with the return of peace and an amelioration of the social atmosphere. Such a diminution was almost inevitable given the rigours of the outdoor life and a normal desire on the part of preachers to settle down and have children.[118] Primitive Methodism, however, formally included itineracy in its organisational structure. Travelling preachers, in the early years at least, had to move on from Circuit to Circuit every year and, even in the later nineteenth century, were rarely able to extend their stay beyond three years.[119] The whole emphasis of the organisation was on dynamism and growth.

Wearmouth, Watts and Wilkinson all agree that Primitive Methodism was a largely working-class organisation which catered for the religious needs of its own group. Moreover, it continued to recruit more new members from the lowest ranks of society in the later nineteenth century than any other religious group apart from the Salvation Army.[120] Kent and Gilbert, however, suggest that the Primitives exaggerated their plebeian strength and, in fact, became more middle-class as the century progressed.[121] These two books are both general studies of nineteenth-century religion and Gilbert is more concerned with the towns than the countryside. In fact, a number of local studies have demonstrated that rural Primitive Methodism remained heavily working-class until 1914. In Norfolk and in South Lincolnshire its constituency was among farm labourers and village artisans. In Durham, among the miners, and in Shropshire and the north Midlands, it inhabited the hinterland between new industrial communities and traditional agriculture.[122] The same was certainly true of the Wolds

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[118] W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England 1790-1850* (London: Batsford, 1972) pp. 44-62.

[119] The early records of Driffield PM Circuit show an almost yearly turnover of Travelling Preachers. After 1861 the usual term was three years. In 1865 the extension of Smith Birch's stay (in order to build another chapel) involved the Circuit in much correspondence. ERA Driffield P.M Circuit, Circuit Reports 1839-1861, MRD 2/4/1, records for 1839-43; Ibid,, Circuit Reports1861-76, MRD 2/4/2, Report for 1865.

[120] Watts op. cit. p. 771; R. W Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England 1800-1850* (London: Epworth, 1937) p. 208; John T Wilkinson, 'The Non-Wesleyan Traditions from 1849', *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain Vol. 3* ed. Davies and Rupp (London: Epworth, 1983) p. 177.

[121] Alan Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (London: Longman, 1976), p. 62-5; John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth, 1978) p. 39.

[122] Alun Howkins , *Poor Working Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870-1923* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), Chapter 3; R.A. Ambler, *Ranters Revivalists and Reform: Primitive Methodism in South Lincolnshire 1817-1875* (Hull: University Press, 1989), Chapter 3; Robert Moore; *Pit-men,*

where the village population was almost entirely working-class; only in the towns was there a majority of artisans and small shopkeepers.

John Kent claimed that, as Primitive Methodists made money and moved upwards in the social scale, they lost touch with the movement's working-class roots: 'the leaders became urban and middle- rather than working-class in their outlook; the demand for a hell-fire religion and the will to supply one disappeared'.[123] Again there were few middle-class leaders among Wolds Primitive Methodists, except perhaps the Railtons (coal merchants) or the Dossors (wholesale grocers) who were both based in Driffield.[124] It was true that the central Committee of the Connexion in the later nineteenth century was dominated by men such as Colin McKechnie, a well-educated Scot who was responsible for publishing the *Primitive Methodist Quarterly*, a serious magazine with articles on Natural History. [125] It is also true that the centre pressed upon the Circuits initiatives which it felt were progressive and in keeping with the Connexion's sober and serious public image, for instance ministerial education and temperance societies.[126] The majority of the trustees of East Riding chapels, however, remained firmly working-class. In Fimber, in 1860, of thirteen trustees seven were labourers and two railwaymen.[127] In Garton in 1912 the list included six labourers and a shepherd out of a total of nine.[128] Only in Driffield was the list of trustees more middle-class and even there a labourer, a joiner, a postman and four railway employees were included in a total of eighteen.[129] Moreover the local preachers, of whom there were fifty-seven in 1880, were overwhelmingly working-class.[130] Rural Primitive Methodist

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Preachers and Politics: the Effect of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community (Oxford: University Press, 1974), pp, 72-4; Wayne Johnson, 'In Triumph of Faith' , Chapter 2; Delia Garrett,' Primitive Methodism in Shropshire' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Leicester, 2000), Chapter 5.

[123] John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth, 1978), p. 189.

[124] Both families were prominent in the Driffield Circuit in the early twentieth century.

[125] Colin McKechnie was a Scottish Primitive Methodist Minister who had been Superintendant at Weardale in the 1851 Revival. He was interested in theology, was an authority on Bishop Butler and a leading spirit in the campaign for better ministerial education, (which made him unpopular in some quarters). He died in 1896. Milburn, *Primitive Methodism*, Chapter 5.

[126] Societies were constantly asked if they had branches of the Band of Hope, See records of Driffield P;M Circuit, Circuit Reports 1876-1889, MRD 2/4/3. Ministerial education was not popular in some quarters. People felt it was unnecessary, expensive and put fine words before true devotion. Lysons, *A Little Primitive,* pp. 68-74.

[127] ERA, Records of Fimber PM Chapel', MRD 10/1.

[128] ERA , Records of Garton PM chapel: MRD 13/1

[129] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit Records, Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1916-1922', Minutes for 5 March 1920, MRD 2/2/6. The other trustees included a bank manager, several shop keepers and five railway employees. Railway employees were well represented among PM trustees. There were two at Fimber, four at Gristhorpe and Robert Gill, station master at Cranswick was a leading figure at Cranswick chapel.

[130] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit Records ,Circuit Report 1876-1889', MRD 2/4/3.

chapels continued to offer, in addition to Sunday Schools and Prayer Meetings, robust public worship with plenty of hearty singing and 'shouting-out' as they always had done. According to two elderly farm workers, Mr. and Mr. Ripson, interviewed in the 1960s about chapel going at the turn of the twentieth century, services were still pretty lively:

> […] him that used to be bawling and shouting at other side; singing, you know he was always two lines afront of anybody else.
>
> That Tommy Vickerman and them used to be saying, 'Hallelujah', didn't they? 'Praise the Lord! Amen.'
>
> Tommy Scott used to, didn't he? 'Aaamen!' he used to say.[131]

Alan Howkins has also drawn attention to the divisions between the middle-class-dominated central committee and the working-class leadership of local chapels in Norfolk. The former tried to prevent union meetings being held in Dereham Chapel in the 1870s, but the chapel trustees took no notice.

> We see here two separate chronologies within Primitive Methodism, one a central one of a chapel moving along the line of respectability towards becoming another denomination; the other a local one, lagging behind still in its heroic phase, still one of the churches of the disinherited.[132]

Howkins's analysis reflects the divisions in the East Riding although in a more acute form. Social relations in Norfolk were more oppositional than in the East Riding and the Farm Workers' Union in the latter never really took off until after 1918. There still remained some tension between the centre and the Circuits in the East Riding. The latter very much objected to the decision made by Conference that the stationing of ministers should be directed from the centre and not by the district (thus reducing the latter's

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[131] Stephen Caunce, *Among Farm Horses: The Horse Lads of the East Riding* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1991), p.166.
[132] Howkins, *Poor Working Men*, p. 48.

power).[133] A degree of tension is also discernible between a wealthy minority in Driffield and the working-class bulk of the membership. Some of the former took themselves off to the parish church: 'They are said to prefer a liturgy to simple worship; robed priests and surpliced choirs to men in ordinary garb […] association with the rich to the companionship of shop keepers and the labouring classes'.[134] However, there was never any division of the Circuits on class lines as happened in Sunderland and Keighley in the 1870s.[135] There was only one attempt to divide a Circuit in the East Riding – the failed experiment at Nafferton – but the reasons for this seem to have been purely administrative.[136]

Primitive Methodists were certainly correct in regarding themselves as the true heirs of Wesley's tradition of outside preaching and concern for the lowest members of society. Indeed, it was Bourne's and Clowes's insistence on the holding of Camp Meetings which was the cause of the original split from the 'Old Connexion' (as they referred to the Wesleyans) in 1811. Thereafter, Camp Meetings became the dynamo of Primitive Methodist progress from their heartlands in the East Midlands down the Trent into Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Yorkshire and Durham. Because of their transatlantic origins early nineteenth-century Camp Meetings were noisier, more populous and less restrained than Wesley's had been, but were accompanied by equal amounts of popular opposition and official denunciation. Wesley might not have recognised the more extreme forms of conversion - the fallings down and burstings forth into tongues – but he would certainly have approved of the large numbers of people thus brought to Christ. The suggestion, by Obelkevich and Watts, that Camp Meetings lost momentum in the 1850s is not true of the East Riding where the tradition continued, and developed new

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[133] John T. Wilkinson, 'The Non-Wesleyan Tradition from 1849', *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Vol.3,* ed. Rupert Davis, Raymond George and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth, 1985) pp. 167-181 p.176; Lysons, *A Little Primitive*, p. 94.

[134] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 258.

[135] In Sunderland a group of wealthy members wanted to form a new Circuit which did not include the old Flagg Lane chapel in the town. There was a dispute which was eventually settled by the Central Committee in favour of the breakaway faction. Geoffrey Milburn, 'Tensions in Primitive Methodism in the 1870's', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society,* Vol. 40, (1976), pp. 93-101 and 135-43. In the West Riding, the small, isolated and working-class chapel at Denholme Clough was one of the principal victims of a split in the Keighley Circuit in 1874 . S.J.D.Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire 1870-1920*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1996) pp. 110-111.

[136] ERA, 'Driffield P.M Circuit, Circuit Records 1861-1879, MRD 2/4/2, 6 July 1876.

forms, into the 1880s and 90s. Nor is it correct to suggest that the movement lost its working-class character. In the East Riding it remained predominantly working-class and rural until after 1914.

Conclusion

Primitive Methodism was a religion of experience not of theology. It did have a theology, largely based on that of Wesley and the Church of England, but for most adherents, certainly those in the East Riding, theology simply underlay their experience and was not actively expressed. It was not until the late nineteenth century that Conference became aware of the challenges of biblical criticism. There were attempts to address these challenges but they did not concern the majority of rural Primitive Methodists. Of far more importance to the history of Primitive Methodism was the popular religious belief which underlay it and the exuberant religious practices which appealed to its largely working-class membership.

As Michael Watts has observed, 'The ease with which Evangelical Christianity was grafted on to popular superstitious beliefs is in part explained by the Evangelical doctrine of divine providence'.[137] If people already believed that natural phenomena such as tides, the weather and storms at sea were controlled by supernatural forces, it was not too large a leap of faith to believe that divine Providence controlled the natural world and that fortuitous events such as sudden death, mine explosions or floods were part of the divine plan for the world. Evangelical Christianity laid great stress on biblical truth and the Bible was replete with examples of Providence from the parting of the Red Sea to the life and death of Jesus Christ Himself. Such beliefs became, of course, much harder to sustain in the face of evolutionary theory, the discoveries of physics and biblical criticism. A.S. Peake and educated ministers such as John Day Thompson attempted to address the issue but with little success as far as the mass of the membership was concerned. On the contrary, Thompson's views were attacked at the Conference of 1896 and he only narrowly escaped a charge of heresy.

Camp Meetings were the vehicle of Primitive Methodist evangelism. They both continued John Wesley's tradition of outdoor preaching and contained a new,

[137] Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 2,* p. 107.

transatlantic element of popular entertainment – hymn singing, extempore preaching and, later in the century, brass bands. In this sense at least, the Primitive Methodists can be said to be the true inheritors of Wesley's traditions. Some historians have suggested that Camp Meetings declined after 1850 and that the membership and appeal of Primitive Methodism became less working-class. This was not true of the East Riding where Camp Meetings were turned to new purposes after 1850 and a vibrant, working-class culture continued to inform the Connexion into the late nineteenth century.

Chapter 5 A Great Hunger for Souls: The Primitive Methodist Experience

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the theology of Primitive Methodism and its religious practices. It also demonstrated that, although its theology was firmly rooted within the Anglican tradition, Primitive Methodism had strong roots in popular religious belief with its acceptance of ghosts, witchcraft and the supernatural. In the East Riding, where its membership was almost entirely working-class and its leadership largely so, it provided a lively, more robust alternative to the more restrained practices of the Wesleyans and the Church of England. For all that, there was little friction with the Wesleyans as Woodcock makes clear in his memoir of Wolds Primitive Methodism.[1] Although Society members usually attended services only in their own chapels, the wider village community was less discriminating and often attended services in either or both chapels depending on who was preaching or on special occasions such as the annual Sunday School Anniversary. They sometimes also attended the parish church which was still seen as significant from a social, if not a religious, point of view; it was not unusual in East Riding villages for people to attend the parish church in the morning and the chapel in the evening.[2] Indeed, Woodcock complained about Primitive Methodists who favoured the church over the chapel for weddings:

> Many entertain antiquated and superstitious notions about the sacredness of being married in church […] The example set by such persons is not calculated to raise our church in the estimation of the young and rising race who dwell under its shadow.[3]

This chapter will examine the Primitive Methodist conversion experience; both the contemporary justification that lay behind it and the later explanations scholars have suggested in the light of developments in psychology and sociology. It will show how religious revivalism and the powerful feelings it aroused sustained the spirituality of Wolds Primitive Methodism through Class Meetings, Love-feasts and Prayer Meetings until the end of the century and beyond. Finally, it will examine the part Primitive

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[1] Henry Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry: Being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* (London: Joseph Toulson, 1889), p. 18.
[2] Edward Royle, 'When did Methodists stop attending their Parish Church?', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society,* Vol. 58, (2008), pp. 275-296.
[3] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 92-3.

Methodism played in East Riding village life and consider how far it influenced and was influenced by the culture that surrounded it.

Conversion, Revival and a Holy Death

The Conversion Experience

Conversion was the central experience of Primitive Methodism.[4] Crucially it was an active, not a passive, process by which the individual chose the salvation offered by God through the sacrifice of His son and rejected the ways of the world and the Devil. Wesley taught that salvation was available to all on one condition 'which God Himself enables us to perform' – namely the acknowledgement of sin.[5] Conversion therefore involved a realisation by the convert that he had sinned against God by rejecting grace and following his own (the convert's) inclinations. The would-be convert reflected on his / her own baseness and imperfection in comparison with the huge benevolence of God; he / she longed to lead a new life devoted entirely to Him and to leave his / her old life behind. By the act of conversion 'the whole tenor of life was changed'.[6] Nationally most converts were young and a majority were women. Evangelical religion had a stronger appeal to women than men and 'the Methodist chapel and Nonconformist meeting house had a social value as an escape from the home that was greater for women than men'.[7] Watts also claims – from a sample of six hundred and seventy conversions described in various evangelical magazines - that nearly 90% of those who experienced evangelical conversion between 1780 and 1850 already had a religious upbringing.[8] In the Wolds converts were almost entirely working-class – agricultural labourers and their wives, or small village tradesmen.[9] How much of a religious background they had it is hard to say. Oxtoby, it was claimed, had spent the first thirty-seven years of his life 'in the most hardened wickedness', but Milson, Woodcock and Tommy Wood were all converted young and from more orthodox backgrounds.[10]

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[4] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters, Vol. 2 The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 49-80; David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (London: Yale University Press, 2005) p. 60; Joseph Ritson in The *Romance of Primitive Methodism* relates the centrality of conversion for Primitive Methodists to Bourne's experiences in 1799. Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (London: Dalton, 1909) pp. 12-17.

[5] See Chapter 4.

[6] Watts, quoting Wesley, op. cit, p. 647.

[7] Watts, op. cit., p. 55.

[8] Watts, op.cit., pp. 51-2

[9] See Chapter 3 xxx

[10] Harvey Leigh, *Praying Johnny: The life and labours of John Oxtoby, Primitive Methodist preacher* (London: R. Fenwick, 1882), p.13.

Pastoral provision on the Wolds was anyway poor and, for many, the Church of England must have seemed a distant and alien entity.[11] It seems likely that most converts came from a nominally religious but, in practical terms, uncommitted background.

Most conversions in the early days of Primitive Methodism took place in the open air, at meetings addressed by preachers such as Clowes, Oxtoby or William Sanderson in the East Riding or, further north in Co. Durham, by John Nelson or Joseph Spoor.[12] A blameless life was no guarantee that an individual was among the saved; all have sinned and all will be judged. Primitive Methodist preachers, at Camp or Missionary Meetings, dwelt on sin and the fate that awaited the ungodly – the fires of hell, the loss of family and friends, the awful judgements of Providence: 'You are suspended across the fiery gulf by a thread which is weak in a thousand places […] The flaming tongue of destruction is moving towards you', thundered John Nelson in 1830.[13] 'Many of your kin may be there [in heaven] – maybe your mother, father, brother, sister, wife, child', cautioned the Rev. Thomas Newell; 'But what of that […]Ye may be born again or denied the companionship of the glorified saints […] excluded from the realms of endless bliss. Awful conclusion!'. Finally the Rev. William Sanderson: 'You may not class yourself with the vilest, but you have come short. You need Christ. Moral evil may have produced a more luxuriant crop in the hearts of others but the root is in you and it must be plucked out or you perish.'[14]

There were different kinds of conversion experience. The most dramatic, and therefore the ones most commented on, were sudden and unexpected. When Johnny Oxtoby, after praying in a ditch all night, entered the village of Filey,

> […] [he] sung along the streets to the beach where he preached to a rough and rude audience. Presently backs straightened, cheeks flushed, hearts softened, tears began to flow and numbers were convinced of the wickedness of their lives. [15]

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[11] See Chapter 3.
[12] Joseph Spoor (1813-1869) was the son of a keel-man. He was largely responsible for establishing the Connexion in the Durham coal field. William Paterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism: A Record of the Rise and Progress of the Circuits in the Old Sunderland District (*London: E. Dalton, 1909), Chapter 8, pp. 66-93.
[13] John Nelson, *A Series of Sermons on Important Subjects* (Hull: n.p., 1830), p. 22.
[14] *The Primitive Pulpit: Being Original Sermons and Sketches by Various Members of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London: Thomas King, 1842), Vol. 1, pp. 13 and 266.
[15] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 35.

At a Love-feast in Norfolk in 1830 the local roughs assembled to taunt the preacher Robert Key, but although they had come to mock they stayed to pray:

> Some of the roughs who stood mocking were suddenly smitten to the ground and increased the number of the slain. Some of their old companions seeing them amongst the mourners, made an attempt to break through into the ring, swearing one minute and down among the seekers the next praying for mercy.[16]

Joseph Spoor addressed a Camp Meeting at Cockfield Co. Durham in 1832: '[…] as he prayed and preached strong men trembled and many were slain of the Lord. It was the turning of the tide in the moral and spiritual condition of that village.'[17]

The actual process of conversion often involved something akin to a physical struggle. At the Driffield Camp Meeting in 1844

> […] men were convinced of sin, rolled on the ground crying for mercy, and then rose up shouting, 'Glory; God has pardoned me.' One man jumped a yard high, and then shouted 'I've got it, I've got it'.[18]

In the case of Jane Brown of Brassingham (Norfolk) '[…] the Lord so powerfully worked on her mind that she nearly fainted and could scarce stand'.[19] Such stories were clearly good propaganda for Primitive Methodism and must have been widely recounted at the time. However, many were not written down until much later and there were other, less dramatic, conversion experiences, which were of equal significance.

There were many cases in which conversion was more gradual. Early converts often described how they had previously felt oppressed by a sense of sin and of the 'dull monotony' of life.[20] John Oxtoby suffered a long period of illness and melancholy until

> […] under a sermon on the Saving Faith delivered by a Methodist preacher, light entered his soul. He attended prayer meetings and […] ultimately ventured by simple faith on the all-atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, and was filled with joy and peace through believing.[21]

In Bedfordshire Jonathan Rodell has recorded that many conversions were gradual, in contrast to the more dramatic contemporary examples involving fainting and 'shouting

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[16] Robert Key, *The Gospel among the Masses* (London: R. Davies, 1872), p. 49
[17] Patterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism,*, p. 72.
[18] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 170.
[19] Memoir of Jane Brown of Brassingham, *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, 1826 p. 84
[20] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry,* p. 262.
[21] George Shaw, *The Life of John Oxtoby* (Hull: William Andrews & Co, 1894), p. 14.

out'.[22] Thomas Russell suffered misery and unhappiness before he heard Bourne preach in Hampshire and became converted in 1826.[23] Parkinson Milson had strange disturbing dreams and felt his life empty and unfulfilled before the Lord spoke to him while chopping wood on his parents' Lincolnshire smallholding in 1841.

> I dreamed I was dying – a deep solemnity seemed to settle like a cloud on my departing spirit. I seemed to enter into the immediate presence of God. The passage from time to eternity – from a state of trial to one of destiny and retribution – seemed to be realised with all the vividity, solemnity and unspeakable consciousness of perfect reality.[24]

Other conversions were the result of persuasion by friends. Woodcock relates how the conversion of William Sanderson was initiated by his friend Tommy Wood who 'got religion first' and persuaded Sanderson to acknowledge sin and seek a new life as they worked together in the fields at Warter near Pocklington.[25] Both men later became local preachers.

When the struggle, whether short or long, was over the convert 'found liberty' – which meant that they had accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and were ready to devote their lives to him. Converts had 'found liberty' because, from now on, they were free of the strictures of worldly concern and need only devote themselves to God. The central point was that the convert had made an active choice. He had acknowledged that, on his own, he could do nothing to achieve salvation and had thrown himself – physically or metaphorically – on God's infinite mercy. 'Christ died for all', declared the Primitive Methodist rubric for local preachers and 'all are capable of full and perfect salvation if they confess their sins'.[26] Having embraced this truth the convert could now put all his trust in God and lead a transformed life. According to Bryan Wilson conversion

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[22] Jonathan Rodell, *The Rise of Methodism: A Study in Bedfordshire 1736-1851* (Bedfordshire Records Society, The Boydell Press, 2014), p. 55.
[23] Thomas Russell, *Record of Events in Primitive Methodism* (London: Williams & Lister, 1869), Chapter 1.
[24] Rev. George Shaw*, The Life of Rev. Parkinson. Milson,* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1893), p. 17. Parkinson Milson became a well-known Travelling Preacher. He served in Hull, Grimsby, Scarborough Louth and Selby. George Shaw knew him well and had access to his diaries.

[25] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 43.
[26] There were eleven articles of belief to which all Ministers and Local Preachers subscribed; See Bro. Fleetham's subscription in 1888, ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Circuit Reports 1877-1889', MRD 2/4/3; H.B. Kendall, *Handbook of Church Principles, History and Polity* (London: T. Mitchell, 1898) p. 60.

> […] is a process of re-socialisation to distinctive ideas and values. The convert learns a language and life -style that becomes part of himself as he takes on a new definition of his own individuality and personality and of the social collectivities in which he participates.[27]

The transformed life meant one in which the convert put himself entirely in God's hands. Every decision, every concern was put before Him in prayer and every activity, however mundane, was done for His glory. The physicality of life remained the same: the convert must still earn his living and feed his children, but his life was spiritually transformed in that all his labours were done willingly in the service of God and in the sure expectation of the life to come. He was welcomed into the community of the saved - a community of those who thought and felt as he did and who would support him in his struggles with the flesh and the Devil through Prayer Meetings, Love-feasts and the means of grace. He also accepted, as a member of the community of the saved, a strict discipline of life – family purity, sexual continence, financial probity and prohibitions on dancing, rough sports and, increasingly as the century progressed, the consumption of alcohol.[28] Within this strict code the convert 'found liberty' from the cares and vain concerns of the world.

A transformed life was the ideal. For some it may even have been the reality. Woodcock describes Mary Petch who,

> […] with nine children, one an infant in arms, used to labour at camp-meetings the Sunday through, borne up by the joyous excitement of soul-saving power, and go to the wash tub next morning with arms as stiff as a poker.[29]

But it was a difficult ideal to follow. Certainly many struggled or fell. For every Mary Petch, or Thomas Escrit, the saintly labourer of Cranswick, or the Latimer family who gave so much to the chapel at Loftus, there were many who sank beneath the demands of so exacting a life. [30] They gave up, ceased to attend chapel and formed the human story behind the 'fallen' statistics in the yearly Circuit returns.[31]

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[27] Brian Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: University Press, 1982), p. 119.
[28] See Chapter 6.xxx
[29] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 99.
[30] Patterson*, Northern Primitive Methodism*, p. 38.
[31] On 27 April 1855 John Sutton was declared 'no longer a member because of his repeated drunkenness', ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit, Minutes of Quarterly Meetings 1849-57', MRD 2/2/1; on 13 June 1856, Bro. Hope 'has rendered himself unfit for the office of Local Preacher because of his inconsistent conduct', ERA, ' Minutes of Preparations for Quarterly Meetings 1852-73', MRD 2/2/2; on 19 June 1874, Bro Smith 'had absconded in debt', ERA, 'Minutes of Quarterly Meetings 1874-88', MRD 2/2/3.

Revivalism

James Obelkevich has claimed that within Primitive Methodism, and the Methodist Societies in general, conversions were fewer after 1850 as direct evangelism lapsed and Societies came to rely more on their Sunday Schools and on casual 'hearers' for recruits.[32] This process was demonstrated by the arrival of a succession of American revivalists who crossed the Atlantic to fan the faltering embers of home-grown evangelism. The first was James Caughey, who came twice between 1842 and 1847, and again in 1857-59 accompanied by Phoebe Palmer.[33] Charles Grandison Finney, a Congregationalist, came in the 1860s and, in the 1870s, the evangelist Thomas Moody, accompanied by the hymn writer Ira Sankey, paid three visits to the United Kingdom. Moody and Sankey were populist and vulgar. Their appeal to the lower-middle classes and their ability to arouse popular sentiment (on the subject of the Bulgarian atrocities) greatly impressed Mr. Gladstone.[34]

John Kent claims that Caughey's visits, although popular at the time, had no long-term effect in terms of conversions.[35] However they did have an indirect effect in that Caughey's enthusiasm and evangelical techniques filtered down to local preachers. Parkinson Milson met Caughey in Hull in 1859 and the latter clearly made a strong impression on him.[36] Woodcock relates that the revival in Hutton Cranswick in 1860 was directly connected to the revival in Ireland: 'We began by giving a lecture on "the Great Revival" then spreading in Ireland'. [37] During the Hutton Cranswick revival

> We sang around the village every night and the mass of the people were awakened. The Spirit came, not in drops but in floods. An extraordinary power rested on the village. One night twelve persons were converted in the Wesleyan chapel and eight in our own.[38]

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[32] James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society, South Lindsay 1825-1875* (Oxford: University Press, 1976), pp. 248-256.

[33] Haughey was an Irish American. The Wesleyans were initially suspicious and banned him from their pulpits – they considered him too theatrical – and his main impact was on the New Connexion and the Primitive Methodists. His mission of 1857-9 was closely connected with the religious revival in Wales and Ireland. Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 2*, pp. 615-18 and 656-665; John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth, 1978), pp.77-87.

[34] John Kent, *Holding the Fort*, pp. 132-168; Michael Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 3 The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015), pp. 126-7.

[35] Ibid,, p. 86.

[36] George Shaw, *Life of Milson*, p, 200.

[37] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 106.

[38] Ibid,,

The Cranswick revival was 'planned'; it did not break out spontaneously and this increasingly became the pattern. Preachers learned how revival could be stimulated by particular techniques, many of them emanating from the United States. Some of these were contained in Charles Grandison Finlay's *Lectures on the Revival of Religion* published in 1836.[39] The 1868 Plan for the Driffield Circuit included five planned revival meetings – at Hutton, West Lutton, Langtoft, Lockington and Kelk.[40] Spontaneous revival was by now unusual; it had to be helped along by revivalist techniques or even a specially employed 'revivalist'. Wesleyans remained suspicious of such props, as they had been of Caughey in 1842, but the Primitives embraced them wholeheartedly. In 1889 two evangelists, 'Tom and Isaac', were employed by the Driffield Circuit to open the 'Seaside Gospel Tent Tabernacle' on the sands at Cleethorpes.[41]

Another example of a relatively late revival was that in the Deerness Valley in Durham, the subject of Robert Moore's 1974 investigation *Pit-men, Preachers and Politics*. William Patterson related how the Primitives built their first chapel at Cornsay in 1872, another at Quebec in 1875 and a third at Esh Winning in 1899. The area became a full Circuit in 1892 and conversions here 'do not take place at rare intervals but are almost a constant occurrence'.[42] The mines in the Deerness Valley had not long been established in 1892 and most of the workforce had come from Weardale or Lincolnshire, both areas with a strong Primitive Methodist tradition.[43] Social uprooting could still produce religious revivals, but a little more prompting was sometimes necessary. The resulting conversions (at Cranswick, Cleethorpes and the Deerness Valley) took place in a more sober atmosphere than that prevailing in the 1830s with the 'shoutings out' and 'fallings down' described by Patterson and Woodcock. Primitive Methodism had, by the 1880s, become respectable and anxious to preserve decorum in its public behaviour. In Lincolnshire '[…] vulgarity, once a virtue, at length became an embarrassment, and spontaneity yielded to decorum in the chapels and in the wider

[39] David Bebbington, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (Oxford: University Press. 2012), p. 49.
[40] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit', Circuit Plans 2/6/1
[41] Woodcock, *Piety among the Pesantry*, p.125. 'Tom' was a young fisherman converted by Parkinson Milson during the latter's ministry there in 1878. Shaw, *Life of Milson*, p. 397.
[42] Paterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism,* pp. 87-8.
[43] Robert Moore, *Pit-men, Preachers and Politics', The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Comunity* (Cambridge: University Press, 1974), p.66.

community'.[44] According to Michael Watts, conversion had become, for some Dissenters, 'at best an irrelevance and at worst an embarrassment'. An emotional conversion, from being essential to Methodist membership, had become one of several routes – education and moral action among them – into true faith.[45]

The methods of emotional conversion were also criticised by contemporaries who thought they took advantage of the young and the uneducated. Mary Simpson, the daughter of the vicar of Carnaby near Bridlington, bravely attempted to undertake the education of young ploughboys (aged 13-18) in her father's parish in the 1860s. She was also a staunch opponent of Methodism. Her memoirs clearly demonstrate how the Primitives must have appeared to educated contemporary opinion. She particularly deplores the 'conversion' of simple fellows like 'poor John', one of her ploughboys: 'He seemed to think that now he was "brought in" and had "joined" he never should do a wrong again'.[46] She quite rightly deplored such a simplistic approach.

By the end of the century the Primitive Methodist conversion experience had become institutionalised. Revivals and 'Protracted meetings' were planned and the penitents' bench stood ready in the chapel for those who heard the call.[47] Conversions were prayed for in services and Sunday Schools, expected by parents and teachers, and eagerly awaited by the Circuit Committee, anxious to fill in the year's 'returns' with a triumphant flourish. The process had become more of an obligation than a spontaneous event. Parkinson Milson worried that his son, Clowes, had never had a full conversion experience comparable with his own.[48] But the different experiences of father and son probably reflected a change within Primitive Methodism rather than a lack of religious commitment on the part of Clowes.

Holy Dying

At the other end of life from conversion (the new birth) lay death. Dying well was important to Methodists of all persuasions. Death was not something to be dreaded, but looked forward to as the triumphant end of a convert's life and his final acceptance into

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[44] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 234.
[45] Watts, The *Dissenters* Vol. 3, pp. 92-100; S.J.D.Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire 1870-1920* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), pp. 349-50
[46] Rev.Digby Legard, ed. *Ploughing and Sowing or Annals of an Evening School in a Yorkshire Village* (London: J.& C. Mozley, 1861), p. 109.
[47] The 'penitents' bench' was a feature of chapel life from the 1840s. It stood ready for those who sought salvation and the help of the Minister or local preacher. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p.225.
[48] Shaw, *Life of Parkinson Milson*, p.171

heaven. A good death justified the sacrifices of his life and the truth of the Methodist ethic.[49] Physical pain and suffering were never denied in the death narratives of Primitive Methodism; rather the power of the spirit always overcame: the convert shook off his earthly burdens and went forward into the Kingdom of Heaven. Atkinson Smith, a travelling preacher in Lincolnshire and the East Riding, had suffered a stroke:

A few days before he died, I called and prayed with him; when I had risen from my knees, he said 'Glory – be – to - God, Glory – be – to – God'. This was his favourite ascription of praise with him; he had said it thousands of times. He used to say 'I can shout Glory when I feel Glory'. He felt glory at last but could not shout it […] Soon after this Mr. Smith fell asleep in Jesus, in the fifty-second year of his age.[50]

The *Primitive Methodist Magazine* gave zealous accounts of the deaths of the faithful, often to the exclusion of details about their lives (which were not considered of equal importance). Of Anne Barton of Meltonby (near Pocklington):

About 7 p.m. she entreated her husband to give her back to Him who had lent her for a time […] on his expression, his resignation to the Divine will, she exclaimed with a degree of joyous rapture, 'That will do. Come, come Lord Jesus', and in a few minutes the happy spirit winged her away.[51]

Henry Woodcock described the death of John Oxtoby (whom he had never met) in dramatic terms:

His death was glorious […] To his sister he said 'Oh! What have I beheld? Such a sight as I cannot describe. There were three shining forms stood beside me whose garments were so bright and whose countenances were so glorious that I never saw anything to compare with them before. Oh how sweetly they smiled up on me, when they departed they beckoned me to come away.'[52]

However Woodcock's description of the death of Mr. Cass of Weaverthorpe (whom he knew well) was less dramatic:

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[49] David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 67.
[50] Charles Kendall, *The Christian Minister in Earnest or The Life of Atkinson Smith* (London: Ward & Co., 1854), pp. 96-7.
[51] *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1826, p. 417.
[52] Woodcock*, Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 41

He suffered a long affliction, and the Rev Mr. Bailey, vicar, who often visited him, was present when he died. He preached his funeral sermon, and made this statement in the church. 'I never visited Mr. Cass without being blessed, and always found him in the same trustful, peaceable state of mind.'[53]

The less well the subject was known to the writer the more high-flown the language became. This was particularly true of the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* which collected reports of 'holy deaths' from the Circuits and then recast them in suitably pious tones. Jonathan Rodell, in his study of Methodism in Befordshire, remarked that Methodist obituaries did not reflect the general experience of the believer but rather the pious hopes of magazine editors.[54]

Interpreting the Conversion Experience

Wesley described his own experience of conversion in simple terms. He 'felt his heart strangely warmed' during a reading of Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans at 'about a quarter to nine' on 24 May 1738:

Then I was taught that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation, but as to the transports of joy which usually attend the beginnings of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth them, according to the counsel of his own will.[55]

In these words Wesley expressed the essential Methodist view that admission of sin was essential to salvation and that conversion was something that came from within the individual; it was an active choice, not one imposed from outside. Wesley's account of his conversion was simple and unadorned but, as time went on, the conversion narrative became more dramatic and stereotyped and the 'transports of joy' that evaded Wesley were described in ever more florid tones. As with descriptions of death, the accounts became more dramatic as the distance in space and time between the biographer and his subject increased. Here *The Primitive Methodist Magazine* describes the conversion of one Jane Brown of Brassingham (Norfolk) in 1826:

[she] was addicted to most of the practices and vices of this wicked world, but, under the influence of Primitive Methodist preachers, the Lord so powerfully worked upon her mind that she nearly fainted and

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[53] Ibid,, p. 140.
[54] Rodell, *The Rise of Methodism in Bedfordshire*, pp. 117-120.
[55] John Wesley *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, General editor Richard P. Heitzenrater, Vol. 18: *Journal and Diaries 1735-1738*, ed. W. R. Ward (Nashville Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1988), p.250.

could scarce stand […] but at the same time, as she afterwards told her husband, she could have shouted for joy she was so happy.[56]

Samuel Smith, writing in 1872, describes events at Nottingham in 1830 when a man turned up at a Camp Meeting and started throwing stones:

[…] [he] then took another stone from his pocket, and, as he swung his arm to effect his design, he was seized with a trembling conviction of sin. The arrows sunk deep in his heart and rankled sorely. He was directed to God through Jesus Christ, obtained pardon of sin and in fourteen days became a powerful preacher of the Gospel he sought to destroy.[57]

And here William Patterson, writing in 1909, describes events at Appleton Whiske in the North Riding in 1830. Joseph Spoor

[…] while having breakfast at a house […] 'laid hold on the Most High'. The inmates fell upon the floor, and cried aloud for mercy, and the neighbours were attracted by the strange noises. All the village became excited, and those who went into the house were overmastered by the mighty influence.[58]

Both of the above descriptions were written several years after the events they describe. In common with many other conversion narratives they present the reader with several problems of interpretation. Many Primitive Methodist converts before 1850 were largely illiterate and had no means of recording their experiences. Their experiences were therefore recorded for them in the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* in the pious tones then considered appropriate, or by other contemporary commentators. Often they were written down, much later in the nineteenth century, in compendia such as George Herod's *Biographical Sketches*, or Smith's *Anecdotes* of 1872 by people who had no personal recollection of the events at all.[59] Inevitably such compendia became repetitive and stereotypical. There was also a certain monotony of language, a kind of specialised vocabulary invariably used in such accounts – 'finding liberty', 'roaring for mercy',

[56] *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, 1826 p. 84.
[57] Samuel Smith, *Anecdotes, Facts and Biographical Sketches Connected with the Great Revival of the Work of God in Raising and Progressing the Primitive Methodist Connection* (Douglas: Glover, 1872), p. 69.
[58] Patterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism,* p.21.
[59] George Herod, *Biographical Sketches of Some of Those Preachers whose Labours Contributed to the Origin and early Extension of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London c.1855); Smith, *Anecdotes, Facts amd Biographical Sketches.*

'acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour', and so on. However varied the experiences, the language used to describe them was the same.

The explanation lay partly in the limited education of those who composed such accounts and partly in the orthodoxy imposed by the Primitive Methodist organisation itself. James Beckford in his account of conversion among twentieth-century Jehovah's Witnesses shows how a 'process of verbal construction' reduced all conversion experiences to a basic formula and, in doing so, tended to subsume the experience of the individual convert to the benefit of the organisation itself. Michael Watts comes to the same conclusion: 'Accounts of conversion experiences tended to become increasingly stereotyped as the years went by and to reflect the peculiar characteristics of the denomination to which the subject belonged'.[60]

To take an example, we can consider Woodcock's *Piety among the Peasantry.* It was written in 1887, some forty years after some of the events it describes. It was not a piece of standard hagiography (as perhaps the works of Herod and Smith might be described) because it had distinctive, individual touches and was critical of some tendencies in contemporary Primitive Methodism.[61] Nonetheless it did contain a good deal of 'pious' vocabulary; generic stories about the roughs who 'came to mock and stayed to pray' and, clearly, Woodcock has an interest in painting an appealing picture of his own past. The book was written for consumption by a pious audience who were perhaps in need of inspiration; we must bear this in mind when reading it. Similarly the works of the Rev. Shaw – who wrote several biographies of Primitive Methodist worthies – need to be treated with a degree of caution.[62] As in Woodcock's case they were written a long time after the events they describe and for a pious, uncritical audience. His biography of Milson is undoubtedly the best of his books, as he knew Milson personally and had access to his diaries. Like *Piety among the Peasantry* the

[60] James A Beckford, 'Accounting for Conversion' *British Journal of Sociology* Vol. 29, (1978), pp. 249-262; Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 2* p. 51.
[61] Woodcock criticizes contemporary preachers (1880) who put on airs and used high-flown language, 'a great deal of powder, smoke and noise but no shot' as he described it.: *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 217.
[62] Rev. George Shaw, *John Wyndham or the Gospel among the Fishermen* (London: Simpkin Marshall & Co., 1878; *Life of John Oxtoby' Praying Johnnie'* (Hull: W Andrews, 1894)*; Life of Mrs. Anne Nicholson of Asselby and Drax* (London: H. Williams, 1880); *Our Filey Fishermen, their Manners and Customs* (London: Hamilton, Andrews & Co.,1867); *Life of Parkinson Milson* (London: Simkin, Marshall & Co., 1893).

book has some distinctly individual touches and is prepared to be critical: for example Milson's reaction to 'vulgar' tea meetings.[63]

In spite of a certain predictability in their prose style, religious narratives about the process of conversion remain important. At an absolute minimum, they demonstrate how things appeared at the time rather than with the benefit of hindsight. More generally, they were written for a religious public who expected an uplifting account because that was their own experience in Prayer Meetings, in Love-feasts and among the companionship of the saved. Such narratives provide an insight into a state of mind – religious, emotional and uncritical – very different from our own.

The Reasons for Conversion

All nineteenth-century conversion narratives assumed that conversion was an entirely religious experience. Preachers, inspired by the love of God, took His word out into a fallen world and invited others to choose the way of salvation. Some responded and some did not. If the world were not corrupt then the choice would be easy, but such were the powers of sin and the devil that to choose the ways of the Lord required huge personal commitment and discipline. This was essentially the Primitive Methodist view of the world. It was divided into two halves, the saved and the damned, and Primitive Methodism had one overriding objective – the salvation of souls. This approach was exemplified in the works of Kendall, Herod and Ritson and in local narratives such as those by Woodcock (the East Riding), Russell (Wiltshire and Hampshire) and Patterson (Northumberland and Durham). Indeed the 'providential approach', as it might be termed, continued well into the twentieth century with works by the American authors Edwin Orr and Earle E Cairns.[64] The 'providential view' was satisfying and simple, but it could not withstand the attacks, from the middle of the nineteenth century, of biblical criticism, evolutionary theory, advances in physical science and the beginnings of sociology and psychology. From the early twentieth century, scholars have questioned the integrity of conversion as a purely religious experience and suggested other explanations – the psychological, the sociological and the economic.

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[63] Shaw, *Life of Parkinson Milson*, p. 171. Milson was very critical of a tea meeting at which tea was described as 'brown stout'. 'Religious zeal should furnish all the money we need' was Milson's comment.
[64] Edwin Orr, *The Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain* (London: Marshall ,Morgan and Scott, 1949); Earle E Cairns*, An Endless line of Splendour: Revivals and their leaders from the Great Assembly to the Present* (Wheaton, Ill., Tyndale House, 1986).

Psychological

Perhaps the first to suggest a psychological explanation was the American philosopher William James.[65] Writing in 1902 about religious conversion in general, he suggested that, in states of despair or inertia brought about by hunger, deprivation or economic uncertainty, 'the person ceases to resist [the persuasion of preachers], or make any effort in the direction he desires to go and sub-conscious forces take over'.[66] In such a state, said James, 'Psychology and religion are thus in perfect harmony […] since both admit there are forces seemingly outside of the conscious individual that bring redemption to his life'.[67] Many early converts to Primitive Methodism in the years after Waterloo were certainly extremely poor, and in occupations, such as hand-loom weaving, which were severely affected by the advent of mass manufacture. Perhaps only a few were in such an extreme state as the young man near Nottingham in 1819 who

> […] was on his knees for three hours and he refused to rise until he got his soul converted. He at last obtained pardon but with prayer, and wrestling and sorrowing for sin he was so exhausted that we had to lift him up.[68]

Many, however, must have been cold and hungry and in a state receptive to the hell-fire oratory of, for instance, William Clowes, who spoke at York in 1821 and 'warned the people of the wrath to come', or the Rev. Thomas Barrass, who harangued the people on the verdict of Solomon 'which deserves to be engraved on the portal of every temple of worldly amusement and sensual gratification'.[69] James's psychological explanation of conversion still convinces, over a hundred years since it was published. However, his work was followed by several pseudo-scientific explanations of conversion including Frederick Davenport's *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals*

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[65] William James (1842-1910) was an American philosopher and psychiatrist who had also trained as a physician. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* he took a pragmatic view of religion which held that truth could be verified by experience. He published widely and influenced, among others, Durkheim, Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein. His brother was the novelist Henry James.

[66] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London, Penguin, 1985). [First published 1902], p. 208

[67] Ibid, p. 211.

[68] Herod, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 345-6.

[69] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry,* p. 32; *The Primitive Pulpit*, Vol. 1, p. 49.

(1905) and Catherine Cleveland's *The Great Revival in the West* (1916).[70] Both of these relied heavily on arguments based on social Darwinism – an approach which has been subsequently discredited. By the 1950s, according to David Bebbington, 'the tide of scholarly fashion turned against psychological explanation' and no more have been published.[71] 'By the second half of the twentieth century', he adds, 'psychology and its cognate disciplines had branched into too many schools for any one approach to be convincing'. [72]

A more extreme psychological explanation of conversion might suggest the operation of some kind of mass hysteria. Beneath the appearance of human rationality lurks the subconscious, primeval and irrational, that surfaces in dreams and in response to certain outside stimuli, be it preaching, dancing, hypnosis, singing, or something else. E. R. Dodds was one of the first scholars to apply the insights of Freud to the ancient world.[73] In his discussion of the *Bacchae* by Euripides, he demonstrated how the existence of such primeval impulses are ignored at our peril and are best explored under controlled circumstances − such as conversion meetings, religious rituals, popular concerts, and so on.[74]

> To repress Dionysus is to repress the elemental in one's own nature; the punishment is the sudden collapse of the inward dykes when the elemental breaks through perforce and civilisation vanishes.[75]

On this reading, the Primitive Methodist conversion experience was one such 'controlled' expression of the subconscious. Crowds were worked into a high state of excitement and fear of damnation by fiery preachers and then reacted en masse with physical phenomena such as jumping, shouting, or falling down on the floor. One person often set off the same reaction in the next. In Weardale in 1825 at Oxtoby's Camp Meeting,

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[70] Frederick Davenport, *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals: A Study in Mental and Social Evolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1905); Catherine Cleveland, *The Great Revival in the West, 1797-1805* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916).
[71] David Bebbington, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (Oxford: University Press, 2012) pp. 24-6.
[72] Ibid,, p. 25.
[73] E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 271-2.
[74] In the course of the play, Pentheus, who has adopted a moralistic and censorious attitude to the behaviour of the Bacchantes (the followers of the God Dionysus), intrudes upon their rituals and is torn limb from limb, because he has presumed to criticize their ecstasies.
[75] Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 273.

A man fell down and tumbled about the floor so that three or four could not hold him. In a little time three others were rolling about in the same manner. About half an hour after they arose with uplifted hand shouting 'Glory! Glory! Glory! etc.' and blessing and praising God. All four were fully sanctified.[76]

E. P Thompson had no doubts at all about the 'mass hysteria' of the years between 1790 and 1830. What he called the 'chiliasm of despair' caused by the failure of the radical cause and the Government clamp-down after 1800 produced, he says, a climate of fear and hysteria. In this climate, bizarre religious revivals, such as that led by Joanna Southcott, flourished and attracted many working people.[77] After her death in 1814 the hysteria continued, leading to the Wesleyan Methodist revival of 1816-17 and the huge success of the nascent Primitive Methodists as they moved down the Trent into Nottingham and Leicester. Thompson also points out the latent sexual imagery present in so much conversion literature: the enormous physical effort – rolling around, shouting out, jumping up and down – followed by huge physical release; the desire to subjugate oneself totally in the love of God; 'psychic masturbation'; and so on.[78] Weber makes much the same point: 'The intoxication of the sexual orgy can […] be sublimated explicitly or implicitly into erotic love for God or the Saviour'.[79]

Socio-Economic Explanations

A more socio-economically inclined explanation of the conversion experience was first advanced by Robert Wearmouth, a Methodist historian writing in the 1930s. Wearmouth largely accepted the Halévy thesis.[80] However, he refined it to show how a religious ideal had inspired poor working men to combine together in mutually

[76] *The Primitive Methodist Magazine,* August 1825, extract from Oxtoby's Diaries, pp. 271-3.

[77] Joanna Southcott, a woman of humble birth, claimed to be a prophetess and achieved a huge following in the years 1801-14. She died in 1814 in the course of a 'hysterical pregnancy' which she promised would produce Shiloh, the son of God. J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 133; David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1996). p. 94.

[78] Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 405.

[79] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* ed. with an introduction by Talcott Parsons, trans. Ephraim Fischoff (London: Methuen, 1965) [First published 1927] p. 237.

[80] The thesis, originally propounded by the French historian Elie Halevy in 1913, suggested that evangelical religion had provided a safety valve for popular emotion. Its beliefs and disciplines had absorbed the energies of the poor and turned them away from anarchy and revolution in the years between 1790 and 1810. See Chapter 1 for a wider discussion of the thesis.

supportive religious societies.[81] Methodism was welcomed, particularly among miners, because it gave them 'homely and religious joy', a community of their own where they could control their own affairs away from the working environment.[82] This sense of community and shared experience was one of the great benefits of Methodism, well described in Robert Moore's study of a Methodist community in County Durham later in the nineteenth century.[83]

Robert Wearmouth was a Christian Socialist who, although he accepted that there was a socio-economic element in Methodist conversion, always put the religious element first. E. P. Thompson, however, took a far less benign view of conversion. Thompson acknowledged that there was a psychological element in the conversion process, and that many people in the early nineteenth century felt displaced and uncertain and were, perhaps unconsciously, looking for something to fill a gap in their lives. However he took the view that the religious movement which filled the gap - Methodism - was a kind of psychic confidence trick. It drew in the labouring classes with promises of heavenly bliss and then locked them into a relentless moral discipline which served the purposes of industrial capitalism.[84] Methodism provided an 'inner compulsion which would prove more effective in harnessing all energies to work than any outer compulsion could ever be'.[85]

Thompson's example heavily influenced the work of three local studies of Methodism written in the 70s and 80s: Robert Moore on the Deerness Valley in County Durham; James Obelkevich on South Lindsey in Lincolnshire and Alan Howkins on West Norfolk.[86] All three adopted a sociological approach and related the spread of Methodism to local economic developments, in Moore's case to the beginnings of deep mining in the Deerness Valley in the 1870s using labour largely imported from Weardale and Lincolnshire. Economic necessity pushed the new arrivals into forming close-knit communities bound together by a Methodist ethic.[87] In Lindsey, the onset of

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[81] Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England 1800-1850* (London: Epworth, 1937).
[82] Ibid,, Chapter 6
[83] Robert Moore*, Pit-men, Preachers and Politics: The Influence of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Oxford: University Press, 1974), Chapters 4 and 5, pp. 93-140.
[84] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Pelican, 1968) Chapter 11, pp. 385- 440 [First published, 1963]
[85] Ibid,, p. 395.
[86] Moore, Pit-Men, Preachers and Politics; Obelkevich, Religion and Rural Society, Alun Howkins, Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870-1923 (London: Routledge Kegan Paul,1985).

[87] Moore, *Pit-Men, Preachers and Politics*, Chapter 2, pp. 64-78.

capitalistic farming, as a result of enclosure, created a class of landless labourers who, as in Durham at a later date, formed close-knit working-class religious communities to replace the old socially mixed agricultural community which had been lost.[88] Alan Howkins's approach is different in that his book is a history of unionism rather than of Methodism but the point is the same: that the Methodist chapel became the focus of community opposition to poor working conditions and that its religious function eventually became subservient to its economic one: '[…] an organisational base within Nonconformity began with traditional dissenting grievances and, willingly or unwillingly, moved into local politics'.[89]

None of the above studies adopts an entirely determinist approach. Thompson allowed that there was a psychological element in Methodist conversion - the 'chiliasm of despair'. Moore and Howkins both allowed that there were religious reasons for conversion besides economic ones and the latter acknowledged the power of biblical language in the subsequent history of the Agricultural Trade Union.[90] Obelkevich perhaps comes nearest to a determinist position in his suggestion that Methodism was a form of social control and that

> […] the 'pardon' offered to labourers by Primitive Methodism was for a guilt and unworthiness that had been induced in them not by the preachers but by the dominant social classes, quite outside the religious sphere.[91]

This rather bizarre suggestion (for which he produced no evidence at all) perhaps marked the high point of the 1970s and 80s fashion for sociological interpretations of history.

Historical Explanations

W.R.Ward, stoutly bucking the trend in 1972, put the emphasis firmly on the importance of individual preachers and the pressure of events rather than on any psychological or socio-economic element in the conversion process. Bourne, says Ward, was particularly impressive in prayer and, by his encouragement of cottage Prayer

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[88] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 220-224.
[89] Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, p. 51.
[90] Ibid, p, 56.
[91] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society,* p. 231

Meetings, released a 'far-reaching process not only of political but of spiritual education […] among working-men'.[92]

Subsequent historians have been even less theoretically inclined. Michael Watts, in a more general work published in 1995, identified fear of hell and damnation as one of the most potent reasons for conversion.[93] In support of Watts's opinion Currie, Gilbert and Horsley found that, during the cholera epidemic of 1830-31, membership in four north-eastern Primitive Methodist Circuits jumped from one thousand six hundred to over four thousand. Another wave of revivalism followed the return of the cholera in 1849, when the Primitive Methodists recorded their highest ever increase in membership – 8,878 converts.[94] That such gains proved transitory (many new faces simply faded away) probably only represents a deviation from a graph of membership which anyway had a high turnover – thus proving Watts's point.

Many Primitive Methodists worked in dangerous occupations such as fishing or mining. Even on the mid-century Wolds, death was never far away. Many children did not see their first birthday – Parkinson Milson lost his first child at Hull in 1857.[95] Accidents were common and the threat of disease always present: Nancy Varey's husband was 'smitten with affliction' and for many years was unable to do a day's work.[96] The devil and all his works were very much alive in the nineteenth-century countryside and one way of making sure one did not fall into his clutches if death came suddenly was evangelical conversion. It gave assurance of life after death and the possibility of seeing one's family again – in a very material sense. Much religious literature dwelt on the joys of heaven, which was seen as a physical reality: 'Those foundations of sapphire, those jasper walls, those immortal rivers, crystal seas and trees of life are yours'.[97] It was seen as a place where '[…] unspeakable must be the rapture that is felt in the region of pure and unsuspecting love, where free from the fears of change or the possibility of decline, [their] joy flows on like a mighty river'.[98] Perhaps it

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[92] W. R.Ward, *Religion and Society* (London: Batsford, 1972) pp. 78-9.
[93] Watts*, The Dissenters Vol 2,* p. 72.
[94] Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 141; Robert Colls, *The Pit-Men of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest 1790-1850* (Manchester: University Press, 1987), p. 152; Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, p. 77.

[95] George Shaw, *Life of Parkinson Milson*, p. 175.
[96] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p.130.
[97] Jeremiah Dodsworth, *The Better Land or the Christian Emigrants Guide to Heaven* (London, 1853), p. 298
[98] Matthew Denton*, Book of Anecdotes, Religious, Interesting and Practical* (Beverley, 1842), p. 125.

was in expectation of such joy that the two Primitive Methodist Haxby brothers tied themselves to the mast of their fishing boat during a storm off Filey and sent the rest of the crew below deck.[99]

Psychological and socio-economic explanations of the conversion experience are not mutually exclusive. Even Thompson allowed that the close religious relationships of the chapel were a powerful influence: '[…] with its open chapel doors, [it] did offer to the uprooted and abandoned […] some kind of community to replace the older community patterns which were being displaced'.[100] David Hempton, writing in 1996, concluded that all attempts at an entirely sociological or religious or psychological explanation are doomed to failure and 'simply replace one incomplete explanation with another'; so the field remains open.[101] A sensible compromise might accept a basically psychological experience, much influenced by the power of individual preachers and tempered by individual social circumstances. A dispossessed labourer, or more likely his wife, was more vulnerable to instant conversion at a Camp Meeting addressed by a charismatic preacher than a relatively educated and prosperous smallholder such as Parkinson Milson whose conversion might take place over a longer period of time.

The Expression of Primitive Methodist Spirituality

Once a convert had acknowledged sin and shown, after a period 'on trial', that his or her commitment was firm, he or she was accepted into full membership of the Primitive Methodist Society. The following will attempt to show how the popular spirituality of the Societies, in the East Riding and elsewhere, sustained their development into the late nineteenth century and beyond through Class Meetings, services, celebrations and hymns. These Societies also developed a rich community life which sustained the wider group of 'hearers' within the culture of the village.

Class Meetings

The Class Meeting was the backbone of Methodism. It had been introduced by Wesley at the very beginning of the movement in the 1740s under the influence of the

[99] H. B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church,* 2 Vols. (London: Edwin Dalton, 1907), Vol. 2 p. 107.
[100] Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 417.
[101] David Hempton, *The Religion of the People*, pp. 26-7.

Moravians.[102] Each Class had twelve to twenty members and a leader, usually an older and more experienced member of the Society. Thomas Escritt, 'one of the most pious, gifted labourers and useful laymen we ever met with', led a Class at Cranswick in the East Riding from the 1830s until his death in 1883.[103] Each week the Class discussed the spiritual progress of each member and all were urged to bear witness to their successes and failures. Early Class Meetings were intensely spiritual and sometimes unpredictable affairs as demonstrated by the records of the Pocklington Circuit: in 1833, Elizabeth Rispin was 'not to be allowed to pray in public' and Brother Larkin's outbursts were said to be 'a distraction from the peace of the Society'. Harriet Dales was not to be allowed in Class at all, 'on account of the instability of her character'.[104] Later in the century, M.C.R. Morris, son of the vicar of Nunburnholme, recalled an account of a Class Meeting given to him by an elderly man in the 1890s:

> A hymn was first sung as the leader prayed and asked God's blessing upon them […] An old man spoke thus: 'Why ah's verry glad 'at ah can cum this morning to the hus of the Lord […] Ah felt very dowly yah bit, bud ah ax'd the Lord t'help ma, an He has helped me to cum'.[105]

According to Woodcock, Class Tickets (which were issued quarterly by the travelling preachers) were prized possessions among Wolds Primitive Methodists and people even asked to be buried with them.[106] Morris, who was a Church of England clergyman, remarked that Class Meetings over time must have become 'more or less conventional and perfunctory'.[107] Bourne had indeed foreseen the difficulty and remarked in the *Preface to the Large Hymnbook* that 'if any member acquire a habit of long speaking, the leader, after dropping a word or two, should pass on to the next. If this be not attended to then the meeting will soon be damaged.'[108] It is certainly true

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[102] Henry Rack*, Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1989) pp. 183-214; Maldwyn Edwards, 'John Wesley', *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* Vol. 1 eds. Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth, 1965), pp. 51-2; David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989) pp. 39-40.

[103] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 100.
[104] ERA, 'Pocklington PM Circuit, Leaders' Minute Book 1832-1854', Minutes for 1833, MRP 4/5.
[105] M.C.M. Morris and others, *Yorkshire Recollections* (Oxford: University Press, 1922), p. 202.
[106] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 86.
[107] Morris, *Yorkshire Reminiscences*, p. 200
[108] Hugh Bourne*, Large Hymn Book for the use of Primitive Methodists* (Bemersley: Office of the PM Connexion, 1825), Preface section, IX. JRL, Methodist Printed Collections (MAB, H 322.31.2). Bourne

that, in the later nineteenth century, there was a certain dissatisfaction in many town Societies with the institution of the Class Meeting. It had become all but irrelevant to the more sophisticated and a source of social embarrassment.[109] However, evidence from the Wolds suggests that Class Meetings remained popular well into the 1890s. Lists of members exist for several villages for the year 1895. There were three Classes in Wetwang, three in Frodingham and two in Sledmere. Even a village as small as Kelk could muster a Class of ten people.[110] There were over ninety people involved in the Wetwang Classes: twenty-nine, all men, in one; thirty-seven, all women, in the second (with two male Class leaders); and twenty-eight of mixed sex in the third.

One of the objects of Class Meetings was to teach people how to organise their own devotional life and, in particular, how to pray. Prayer was important because it was the channel of communication between the believer and God, the basis of true personal religion. Wesley had insisted on the necessity of private prayer as one of the 'means of grace' and as part of Methodist discipline, but it was not something that came naturally to everyone – particularly those with no previous religious experience or those who had only heard gabbled imprecations in the local parish church. Parkinson Milson struggled in prayer: 'I resolved to spend the night in private prayer for the blessing [of entire sanctification]. It was a night of temptation and distress unimaginable.'[111] Perhaps prayer came more easily to those of little education. Michael Grice, the converted rat-catcher in Cranswick,

> […] often prayed for hours together in cow-sheds, stables or pig-sties and sometimes spent all night alone in the chapel without light or fire, on his knees, saying, 'Me and the Lord had a good time'. He carried his religion wherever he went.[112]

Prayer Meetings

Prayer Meetings were a regular feature of Primitive Methodist Circuit plans. Over twenty were 'planned' in the winter of 1847-48 in the Driffield Circuit plus another half dozen on 'work nights'.[113] This was in addition to those that 'broke out'. Woodcock

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attached a substantial Preface to the Hymn Book which explained how Primitive Methodists should conduct Prayer meetings, Love Feasts and Camp Meetings. It was quite directional.

[109] Henry Rack,'The Decline of the Class Meeting', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Vol. 39 (1973), p. 12; Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, Chapter 8, pp 325-350

[110] ERA,'Driffield PM Circuit', Roll Books for Wetwang, Sledmere and Kelk', MRD 2/5/7,8 and 9

[111] Shaw, *Life of Parkinson Milson*, p, 30.

[112] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 104-5

[113] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit', Collection of Circuit Plans MRD 2/6/1

describes how, after the Driffield Camp Meeting in 1844, such was the fervency of the participants that an impromptu Prayer Meeting followed. 'Many lingered in the town long after the shadows of night had begun to fall, bound by a mysterious spell as they journeyed home, "their hearts burned within" them as they talked over the day's doings.'[114]

Love-feasts

Love-feasts were held less frequently than Prayer Meetings, generally once a quarter in each chapel and – as in Class Meetings – participants had to be in possession of a ticket (in order to exclude the merely curious and trouble-makers). Where Class Meetings were admonitory and directional, Love-feasts were celebratory. As in the case of the Class Meeting, Wesley had borrowed the idea from the Moravians who, in turn, had adapted it from the 'agapē' of the early Christian church.[115] A Love-feast was, quite literally, a celebration of God's love among the members of the Society. A 'loving cup', usually containing only water, from which all members drank, was sent round, and sometimes a small amount of bread. There would be prayers and hymns, and members would recall the moment of their conversion and their spiritual experiences. The object of the Love-feast was to strengthen and deepen members' spirituality and to reinforce their bonds with each other. Bourne, as usual, had left instructions about how they were to be carried out:

> [A Love-feast] usually opens with singing and prayer […] The preacher makes a few remarks, the people rise in succession and speak their own experience, and distant comers sometimes say a little about the work of God in other places. But none is allowed to run into useless exhortation.[116]

Love-feasts were uplifting spiritual experiences to which all believers could contribute. At Driffield during the revival of 1844,

> […] believers spoke in the Spirit and looked by faith for the present blessings. Some seemed to join hands with members of the church triumphant as they sang of the bliss of the ransomed. The sacredness and bliss of that service the writer can never forget.[117]

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[114] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 172.
[115] Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 410; Frank Baker, *Methodism and the Love Feast* (London: Epworth, 1956), p. 10.
[116] Bourne, *Preface to the Large Hymn Book*, Article X.
[117] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 172.

In Norfolk, George Edwards remembered

> […] [that] the simple, faithful, uneducated, saintly people [members of his local chapel], in relating what to them was Christian experience, would express themselves in peculiar phrases. I call to mind […] one brother who said he felt like 'a fool at a fair'.[118]

Later in the century, Parkinson Milson recorded his feelings at a Love-feast at Grimsby in 1879:

> In the evening he conducted the Love Feast and felt 'very tender and happy' when speaking of its being the thirtieth anniversary of his leaving home for the ministry. Before him sat his dear wife, two sons and two daughters, one of whom spoke all on fire. He thought of all the help he had received, temporal and spiritual, and of his two dear ones in heaven. He was lost in adoring wonder and love.[119]

Love-feasts were still held in the Driffield Circuit at the end of the nineteenth century; all the larger chapels held one each quarter in 1896. They may have been 'planned' rather than 'breaking out', and they may have been more controlled and respectable, but they were still looked forward to and fulfilled a necessary religious function. In the twentieth century there was a decline, as there was everywhere, in Class Meetings and in Love-feasts. This came later, much later, in the rural East Riding than it did in the urban circuits of the West Riding.[120]

Meetings for Worship and Sermons

The regular Sunday service in Primitive Methodist chapels (usually held in the evening) was primarily a vehicle for the sermon. There was a hymn, announcements, a couple of extempore prayers and then the sermon, usually given by a local preacher.[121] Local preachers were working men, like their hearers, who felt a special call to preach. The only requirement was fervency of spirit and they were generally people of little formal education. They relied heavily on their Bibles and a few works of devotional literature

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[118] George Edwards, *From Crow Scaring to Westminster* (London: Labour Publishing Co., 1922), p.35. George Edwards (1850-1933), was a Primitive Methodist local preacher who founded the Agricultural Trade Union in Norfolk and later became an M.P.

[119] Shaw, *Life of Parkinson Milson*, p. 289.

[120] Green, *Religion in the age of Decline*, p. 349; Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 155.

[121] Travelling Preachers, of whom there were only four in the Driffield Circuit to serve over thirty chapels, usually only preached in the town chapel or in the villages on special occasions.

which they might have acquired. Preparing their sermons was hard work. They 'spent their days in the peaceful pursuit of agriculture and at night, when tired and sleepy, prepared for their Sabbath's work'.[122] Nevertheless there was no shortage of such men; forty-eight in 1845; seventy in 1859; seventy-two in 1893 – a testimony to individual piety and the popular spirituality that produced it.[123]

The majority of sermons were on biblical subjects and, according to David Hempton, dwelt on 'grace, godliness, repentance, joy, perseverance, vigilance and assurance'.[124] Knowledge of the Bible was one of Wesley's 'means of grace' and, when large numbers of hearers were illiterate, it was an obvious necessity that sermons (and Sunday School teaching) should concentrate on biblical exposition. Kenneth Lysons recalled, from his early twentieth-century Primitive Methodist childhood in Lancashire, that 'sermons were invariably based on a text announced at the commencement of the sermon'.[125] Most sermons were delivered extempore, perished with their preachers and were only remembered in hearsay. A few, by popular travelling or (less likely) local preachers, were published in collected editions.[126] The majority concentrated on biblical exegesis; others ventured into wider realms such as the punishment of sin or the glories of the life to come. There follow a few examples.

The Rev. Charles Kendall, a member of a prominent Primitive family in Lincolnshire who served in several East Riding Circuits, warned his audience about the perils of worldly attachments:

> Let us not judge of things by their present influence, so much as by their bearing upon eternity. There is a fearful possibility of being hoodwinked by the aspect and influence of earthly things. Faith however will look beyond these things.[127]

The Rev. W. Lonsdale addressed his audience on the significance of Moses' drawing water from the rock:

> When the millions stood in the Great Desert of Arabia, literally thirsting and clamouring for water […] God sent Salvation by bidding Moses speak unto the rock […] When Christ, our Rock was smitten on

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[122] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 227.
[123] ERA, Driffield PM Circuit, Collection of Circuit Plans MRD 2/6/1.
[124] Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, p. 75.
[125] Kenneth Lysons, *A Little Primitive: Primitive Methodism from Macro and Micro Perspectives,* (Buxton: Church in the Market Place Publications, 2001), p. 214.
[126] Robert H. Ellison, *The Victorian Pulpit: Spoken and Written Sermons in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), pp. 43-56.
[127] *The Primitive Pulpit*, p. 31.

Calvary, from him rivers of living water went forth in different directions into the great moral desert – the fallen world.[128]

The Rev. Thomas Newell spoke of peace with God.

Believers then are justified, and this justification includes pardon and the deliverance from the penal consequences of sin. The crime being forgiven, judgement is arrested, the sword no longer gleams with wrath and the soul has peace with God.[129]

On the printed page in a musty book, these imprecations sound empty and tedious. Such sermons needed to be heard on a cold night in a quiet chapel, lit by candlelight and crowded with recent converts full of the joys of belief. The scene cannot easily be re-created but the emotions of the congregation can at least be imagined – the excitement and anticipation of hearing a new preacher, the expectation of souls to be saved, the fear of damnation. Certainly services at Primitive Methodist chapels were never dull. There were always new preachers; the 'plan' was careful to rotate local preachers; travelling preachers changed every year to guard against stagnation. The Societies requested 'specials' for particular events – Camp Meetings or Mission Services – and there were always new faces. The contrast with the local parish church was striking. The whole point of a Primitive Methodist service was that it was dynamic. Travelling preachers moved on to pastures new, teachers and leaders learned from each other and renewed each other's faith, the people grew in grace.[130]

The nearness, both socially and physically, of local preachers to their audience meant that Primitive Methodist services were often lively and always interactive affairs. If the congregation was insufficiently engaged or dozing off, someone would shout out, 'Wakken 'em up Lord; wakken 'em up'. If people particularly agreed with something a preacher said they would shout out 'Yeah Lord' or simply 'Aye'. According to Woodcock, seasoned Wolds chapel-goers had no hesitation in criticising the efforts of young, aspiring travelling preachers: 'Ah say mister, you preached a goodish sermon tonight; but if it had been cut short at beath end and set a-fire in the middle, it wud a dean us mare good'.[131]

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[128] Ibid,, p. 66.
[129] Ibid,, p. 266
[130] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 224.
[131] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 67 and 217; Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 233.

Hymns

Robust, heart-felt hymn singing was one of the hall-marks of Primitive Methodism. Every service began and ended with a hymn and, in the summer months, members processed together to the main Sunday service in chapel singing hymns.[132] Communal hymn singing was a new experience for many people. In the eighteenth-century church, music was largely confined to public performances and singing was a largely secular experience – singing in public houses for instance.[133] Singing hymns together gave people a sense of solidarity and shared religious experience. Moreover hymns expressed in simple, forthright language the great truths of religion, something to be memorised and sung in the fields, or at home, or on the lonely High Wold farms where many worked. Like Primitive Methodism itself its hymns were expressions of action and experience not of meditation or theology and, true to its working-class traditions, popular tunes were unashamedly pressed into service as accompaniments.[134] The best-known example of this is the 'borrowing' of the Chartist rallying cry, 'The Lion of Freedom is come from his den / We'll rally around him again and again', by the Primitive Methodist hymn writer William Jefferson. He adopted the tune but changed the words to: 'The Lion of Judah shall break every chain /And give us the victory again and again'.[135]

The Primitive Methodist hymn book was revivalist, emotional and designed to appeal to the simple and uneducated. Popular hymns included this one published at Easingwold:

Hallelujah to Jesus who Died on the Tree,
To raise up this ladder of mercy for me,
Press forward, press forward, the prize is in view,

[132] This tradition continued in Hull into the 1930s. Ron Neiman, born 1918, joined the 'Continuing Primitive Methodist Church' in Hull in 1932. The Continuing church rejected union with the Wesleyans and wanted to continue the Primitive tradition. He remembers that, in Hull in the 1930s, there was always a procession before evening service. Members would gather at 5.45 for the service at 6.30, and go up and down the streets, knocking on doors and inviting people to join in. Information from an interview conducted between the author and Mr. Neiman on 29 Jan. 2009.

[133] Mark Smith, 'Anglicanism in Saddleworth', *The Church of England 1689 to 1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism*, ed. Colin Hayden, Stephen Taylor and John Walsh (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), p. 120.

[134] Rack*, Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 415.

[135] Joseph Ritson*, The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (London: Edwin Dalton, 1909), p. 271.; Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 1, p. 336. The 'Lion of Freedom' was Feargus O'Connor, the Chartist leader. Ritson remarks, 'the Lion of Judah was successfully pitted against the 'the Lion of Freedom' – Christ against Feargus O'Connor.'

A crown of bright glory is waiting for you.[136]

Many favourite hymns appeared in a collection made by Hugh Bourne which went into several editions during the 1820s and 30s:

Christ he sits on Zion's Hill,
He receives poor sinners still.
Would you serve this blessed King?
Come enlist with me and sing
I a soldier sure shall be,
Happy in eternity.[137]

Primitive Methodist hymns were also positive, joyful, and dynamic. They looked forward to conversion, success, the ultimate triumph of the Primitive Methodist spirit. They could be marched to and accompany processions around the village or to Camp Meetings:

Servants of the Great Jehovah,
Now go forth at His Command.
He will bless your feeble efforts,
Own the labours of your hand.
Run ye heralds, spread the gospel through the land

Enter every town and village,
Light and Truth shall then abound,
Tell poor guilty dying sinners
What a Saviour you have found
Lift your voices, tho' the powers of Hell surround.[138]

A new collection of Primitive Methodist hymns appeared in 1854, published by John Flesher, a popular travelling preacher. The reason behind the new collection was, according to John Petty an early historian of the Connexion, '[…] to meet the improved

[136] *Six Primitive Methodist Hymns* (Todd & Son printers, Easingwold, 1837).
[137] Hugh Bourne ed. A *Collection of Hymns for Camp Meetings and Revivals for the Use of Primitive Methodists* (Bemersley, Office of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, 1825), no. 1.
[138] Hugh Bourne ed., *Collection of Hymns for Camp Meetings*, No. 96.

tastes and enlarged knowledge of the congregations'.[139] However, when Mrs Knaggs of Wetwang, 'a mother in Israel', found that the new collection did not include 'Christ he sits on Zion's hill', she expressed disappointment. 'Where is Jesus now? He used to sit on Zion's Hill, bless Him, but where is he now. I know where He is. He lives still yonder […] and here in my heart.'[140] George Edwards, Norfolk Primitive Methodist, memorised one of the most popular Primitive Methodist hymns:

Hark the Gospel news is sounding,
Christ has suffered on the tree,
Streams of mercy are abounding,
Grace for all is rich and free.
Now poor sinner,
Look to him who died for thee.[141]

Primitive Methodist Circuit plans usually had a hymn printed on the bottom. That chosen by the Driffield Circuit in 1848 had a topical theme. The Hull – Bridlington line which passed through the town was opened in 1846:

The line to Heaven by Christ was made
With truth Divine the Rails were laid.
From earth the sacred line extends
To life eternal where it ends.

Repentance is the station then
Where passengers are taken in,
No fees required for them to pay
For Jesus is himself the Way.[142]

In the early days of the Connexion hymns were sung unaccompanied; it was felt that honest, heartfelt singing was all the Lord required, indeed that any accompaniment was mere vanity. However, as larger chapels were established and Societies became less poverty-stricken, pressure mounted to allow the introduction of musical instruments.

[139] John Petty. History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion from its Origin to the Conference of 1859 (London, 1860), p. 425.

[140] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p.128.
[141] Bourne*, Large Hymn Book for the use of Primitive Methodists* (Bemersley, 1825*)*, no. 16; George Edwards, *From Crow Scaring to Westminster*, p.32.
[142] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Collection of Circuit Plans', Plan for 1848, MRD 2/6/1.

The acquisition of an organ in the (Wesleyan) Brunswick Chapel in Leeds in 1827 led to the secession of the Protestant Methodists, who held that any musical accompaniment to worship was irreligious.[143] Their apologist, Daniel Isaac, declared that

> […] although the figured and theatrical style [of singing] may be more agreeable to vain minds; yet as far as edification is concerned […] the simple melody produced by congregational singing cannot be improved by any artificial help.[144]

He went on to claim that 'warmly as Mr Wesley was attached to the Church of England he disapproved of her music'.[145] At the root of all this was the belief (shared by Parkinson Milson and many Primitive Methodists) that human joy, faith and hope should furnish all the embellishment that congregational singing needed and that anything else was mere vanity, or still worse, Popery. The Old Testament, it was acknowledged, was full of references to musical instruments. The trumpets of the Lord sounded at Sinai and at the court of King David. The New Testament, however, with the slightly dubious exception of the Book of Revelation, was silent on the subject. It therefore behoved Christian worship to eschew all musical accompaniments.[146]

Hugh Bourne, following Wesley's lead, had left the matter rather open to interpretation in his preface to the *Large Hymn Book* of 1825. On the one hand he quoted Amos: 'Woe to them that are at ease in Zion […] that chant to the sound of the viol and invent to themselves instruments of music like David'.[147] On the other, he allowed that the angels made a huge noise on their trumpets in the Book of Revelation and ends by saying: 'It will be evident that great caution should be used in admitting instruments to public worship'. He further declared that 'only the pious' should be allowed to play them.[148]

In the end instrumental accompaniment (almost exclusively organs) won. Perhaps this was inevitable. Congregations liked them, they aided worship, and, although this was never openly stated, they gilded the public face of the Connexion and put it on the same level of approval enjoyed by the Wesleyans and the Congregationalists. Consequently organs began to appear in Primitive Methodist

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[143] John Kent, 'Wesleyan Methodism to 1848', *A History of the Methodist Church Vol. 2*, p. 314.
[144] Daniel Isaacs*, Vocal Melody or Singing – The Only Music Sanctioned by Divine Authority in the Public Worship of Christians* (York: Richard Burdekin, 1827), p. 30.
[145] Ibid,, p. 46.
[146] Ibid,, p. 65.
[147] Bourne, *Preface to the Large Hymn Book,* Article XII.
[148] Ibid,,, Article XI.

chapels from the 1850s on.[149] Later in the century, an organ was essential for the Services of Song and Sunday School Anniversaries that were such a popular feature of village and small-town life from the 1870s well into the twentieth century.[150]

Primitive Methodism and Village Culture

Class Meetings, Prayer Meetings and Love-feasts were private occasions for devoted members of the Primitive Methodist Society. Sunday services for worship, however, and the accompanying Sunday Schools were open to anyone as were the – increasingly numerous – 'special' services such as Services of Song, Chapel and Sunday School Anniversaries, tea meetings and Harvest Festivals (which Nonconformist churches unashamedly copied from the Church of England). The number of hearers (non-members of the Society) who attended Primitive Methodist public services compared with the number of members was about two to three times greater.[151] These were people of a generally religious inclination who did not, however, want the commitment of membership, who 'flitted about' and might attend the Wesleyans one week and the Primitives the next depending on who was preaching. Some also continued to attend the parish church.[152] Their children regularly attended a Nonconformist Sunday School and formed the main pool for recruitment to adult membership in the later part of the century.[153]

In its early phase, Primitive Methodism had been marked by its evangelical enthusiasm and the citadel-like attitude of its members who formed a close-knit, self-supporting community of saints against the sinfulness of the world outside. After about 1850, as Obelkevich describes it in relationship to Lincolnshire, a second phase set in.[154] Members became less isolated and began to involve themselves in the world outside their Society. Primitive Methodism became 'respectable' and part of village life. The building of chapels and Sunday Schools created a need for financial contributions

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[149] Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 2*, p. 187; David and Susan Neave, *East Riding Chapels and Meeting Houses* (East Yorkshire Local History Society, 1990), p. 37.

[150] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 229; Kenneth Lysons, *A Little Primitive,* p. 196.

[151] Hempton*, Empire of the Spirit*, p. 2 ; Woodcock (who is generally accurate) suggests about the same proportion in his tally of Wolds villages: e.g. Hutton Cranswick 37 M and 70 H, Lockington 30 M and 100 H, North Dalton 36 M and 100 H, *Piety among the Peasantry* Chapter 7.

[152] Barry Reay, *Rural Englands: Labouring Lives in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 165.

[153] Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 2,* p. 63; Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society,* pp. 251-2.

[154] See Chapter 7. The process, as it took place in Lincolnshire, is described by James Obelkevich , *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 248-258.

beyond those which could be raised by members themselves. The result was an array of 'special services' designed to draw in outsiders and to boost the finances of the chapel. One was tea meetings - the 'vulgarity' of which was to draw criticism from Parkinson Milson.[155] Then there were Chapel Anniversaries with special preachers and a public tea, or Services of Song at which the chapel choir might perform 'sacred melodies' with appropriate solos. Filey Primitive Methodists were well known for their 'Fishermens' Choir' which performed across the county.[156]

The pre-eminent special service was the Sunday School Anniversary. Originally this took place around Easter, in order to provide a diversion from the 'popish' activities in the parish church; however it proved so successful an institution that different dates were chosen – in order to avoid clashes with other chapels – thus providing a more or less constant stream of anniversaries across the Wolds from April to September. Sunday School children, dressed in their best and trained by their teachers, performed songs and recitations; family and friends flocked to hear them and the chapel was packed to the roof. Contemporary photographs showing crowds of men and women, all in their Sunday best, demonstrate the popularity of these occasions. Most Anniversaries also involved a public tea and a collection which swelled the chapel's finances. Planning for the Anniversary began a good year ahead when each chapel chose the date, taking care to avoid clashes with neighbouring chapels, and attempted to secure the services of the most popular preachers. At Cranswick in 1888, the twenty-fourth year since the Sunday School's foundation,

> Sermons were preached in the morning and evening by the Rev. Calvert of Driffield. In the afternoon a children's service was held, consisting of recitations and singing and was conducted by Mr. Duke (school superintendant) who had instructed the children.[157]

At West Lutton in the same year,

> As usual there were three services. In the afternoon a short address on 'David' was given and in the evening an address to parents and children. On each occasion the children recited pieces and dialogue. The choir also sang a selection of music. On Tuesday the children and teachers processed the village and

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[155] See Chapter 9 xxx

[156] Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughers: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton Mass: Princeton University Press, 1985), Chapter 11,pp. 245-273.

[157] *Driffield Times* 9 June 1888.

visited several out-lying farms and houses singing their Anniversary hymns. At half-past-four a very nice tea was provided in the chapel of which the scholars and teachers partook. After tea the children were entertained with various sports. There was a public meeting in the evening, Mr. Kilvington of Helpeth presiding. The proceedings terminated with the National Anthem.[158]

In addition to all this the scholars had a trip to the seaside on the following Saturday whence 'Mr. Coope conveyed teachers and scholars in his conveyance'. Such celebrations cemented the bond between the Primitive Methodist chapel and the village community. The crowds who attended the Sunday School Anniversary services did not subscribe to the intense spirituality of Primitive Methodism but they did consider themselves 'religious' in that they believed in God and sent their children to Sunday School. Their religion was 'popular' in the sense described by Obelkevich: it was not an institutionalised religion but a response to the supernatural, conditioned by tradition and custom.[159] This kind of popular religion was characterised by participation in local religious festivals such as Harvests and Anniversaries and in perhaps making a material contribution – as did Mr. Coope by putting his wagon at the disposal of the Sunday School to take the children to Scarborough.

Popular belief and custom also played a large part among another village group who had a great deal in common with the Primitive Methodists – the Friendly Societies. As David Neave has pointed out, the Friendly Societies encompassed two cultures: the old, rough village culture of rowdy sports, drinking and fighting epitomised in their rituals and Club Feasts; and the new culture of self-help and respectability epitomised in their careful financial management and encouragement of thrift.[160] Primitive Methodism fell very much into the second category – it was respectable, it was sober, and it urged individual self-reliance. It was no coincidence that many responsible positions in East Riding Friendly Societies were held by Primitive Methodists.[161] This alliance between the two groups continued into the twentieth century and forged a village culture that was respectable, self-reliant and, politically, Liberal.

Conclusion

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[158] Ibid,, 11 August 1888.
[159] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 261.
[160] David Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside: Friendly Societies in the Rural East Riding 1830-1912* (Hull: University Press 1991), p. 97.
[161] Ibid,, pp. 57-65.

Conversion was the most important event in the life of a Primitive Methodist. It usually occurred when young and usually at an outdoor event such as a Camp or Missionary Meeting. Conversion narratives often described conversion as sudden and unexpected as people were 'struck down' or 'found liberty'. However, in many cases, it was foreshadowed by long periods of ill-health or uncertainty. This was certainly true of two important East Riding preachers – John Oxtoby and Parkinson Milson. A 'holy death' was also very important as it justified the convert's life and demonstrated his acceptance in heaven. Much Primitive Methodist literature dwelt on the triumphant death of its members.

Narratives about conversion and death need to be read with some degree of caution as most were written long after the events they described by people who had no personal knowledge of the subjects. The authors of these accounts were also generally more concerned with impressing their readership, and in giving a good account of the Connexion, than in a strictly accurate version of what happened. Conversion narratives, however, remain an essential piece of evidence in piecing together the local and national history of Primitive Methodism.

There were many motives for religious conversion and many ways of explaining it, none of them mutually exclusive. There was the purely religious point of view, which was taken by all nineteenth-century commentators; the socio-economic one, which was popular after the second world war and a psychological view originally put forward by Henry James. Most recently David Hempton has taken a more balanced position involving elements of all three approaches. This seems the most sensible basis for further research.

Once the convert became a member of the Primitive Methodist Society his spiritual life was sustained by Class Meetings, Prayer Meetings and Love-feasts. Several studies (Obelkevich, Gilbert, Rack) have suggested that a spiritual decline set in after about 1850 and that these 'means of grace' became less popular and less effective. There is a measure of truth in this, certainly as far as the towns are concerned, but most evidence from the East Riding suggests that Class Meetings, Prayer Meetings and Love-feasts, remained lively until the end of the nineteenth century.

The public face of Primitive Methodism, its services for worship and its special services, gained in popularity as the century wore on and the Connexion became accepted into the main stream of Victorian life. Primitive Methodists took part in village life – as neighbours, as friends, as members of Friendly Societies – and, in turn, the

village took part in the public life of Primitive Methodism, in its Sunday Schools, Preaching Services and special Anniversaries. In the East Riding, this close relationship between Primitive Methodism, village society and the self-help culture of the Friendly Societies continued until after the First World War.

Chapter 6 The Organisation and Discipline of Primitive Methodism

Introduction

The organisation of Primitive Methodism was similar to that of its parent body – the Wesleyan Methodists - with two important exceptions. First, its organisation was more representative of its membership: from its earliest beginnings it adopted the principle of two lay representatives to one ministerial at all levels.[1] Second, it was more popular: its social composition ensured that both its local and travelling preachers remained close to the people they served and the high proportion of voluntary local preachers to stipendiary travelling ones ensured that the central organisation remained sensitive to local needs, at least until the end of 'districtism' in the 1870s.[2]

This chapter will first present the organisation of Primitive Methodism, both locally and nationally, and examine the part played in it by unpaid voluntary effort and paid travelling preachers. It will then analyse how the three principles which underlay the organisation of Primitive Methodism - dynamism, flexibility and popular involvement – made possible its growth and expansion in the nineteenth century. Secondly, it will discuss the organisation's weakest point – its finances. Thirdly, it will discuss the discipline of the Connexion and how far it contributed to its stability and direction. A final section, in the form of an appendix, will describe how the five Wolds Circuits developed between 1821 and 1932.

The Organisation of Primitive Methodism

Primitive Methodism did not begin with an organisational plan. Like Wesley before them, neither Bourne nor Clowes had ever intended to set up a new religious movement

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[1] Julia Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connection: Its Background and Early History* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 136-40. Ritson, writing in 1909, described Primitive Methodism as a source of 'democratic government'. Ritson, *Romance of Primitive Methodisism* (London: Edwin Dalton, 1909), p. 279. This was not strictly true as Leaders and Stewards were not directly elected, but the Connexion was far more representitive of its members than were the Wesleyans.

[2] H. B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church, 2 Vols.* (London: Edwin Dalton, c. 1907), Vol. 2, pp. 357-8. 'Districtism' referred to the period between 1845 and 1870 when the Districts became more powerful than Conference.

but simply to reform an old one. Kendall subsequently claimed that the organisation of the Connexion was 'not the outcome of theorising but a businesslike attempt to meet practical difficulties'.[3] This was certainly true but, as both Bourne and Clowes were former Wesleyans, it is unsurprising that they adopted a system with which they were familiar and which had already proved itself enormously effective as practised by Wesley himself. The two basic elements of Wesley's organisation were the Class Meeting – the backbone of the worshipping community – and the Circuit, the means of its advance into new territory. Both were present in Primitive Methodism from the beginning. The first Class Tickets were printed in 1811 and bore the legend 'But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know everywhere that it is spoken against'(Acts 28. 22).[4] The first Circuit to be established was that at Tunstall, also in 1811. It incorporated seventeen Societies, two of them the result of Camp Meetings at Ramsor and Stanley, and the rest former 'Clowesite' Societies formed by William Clowes in the period between 1805 and 1810 before he joined forces with Hugh Bourne.[5] According to Julia Werner, these Societies had already established 'administrative paraphernalia' on the Wesleyan model in the shape of Class Meetings, printed preaching plans and the appointment of Society stewards and Class leaders.[6] Indeed, Kendall produced a facsimile of the first preaching plan (for June 1811) in his *History*.[7]

One of Primitive Methodism's distinguishing features was its emphasis on lay involvement. The Connexion originated in a lay initiative (by Bourne, Clowes and others) and reflected popular distaste for the perceived arrogance of some Wesleyan ministers.[8] The first secession from Wesleyan Methodism – that of the New Connexion in 1797 – had arisen as a direct result of the clerical domination of Conference.[9] It was for this reason that the founders of Primitive Methodism were anxious to safeguard the position of the laity, and it was at the first Primitive Methodist Conference at Hull in 1820 that the principle of two laypeople to one (salaried) travelling preacher was first

[3] Ibid,, Vol. 1, p. 281.
[4] Kendall, *Origins and History* Vol. 1, p. 111-2.
[5] Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 77.
[6] Ibid,
[7] Kendall, *Origin and History* Vol. 1, p.559.
[8] W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society* (London: Batsford, 1972), pp.34-9.
[9] Ibid,, pp. 34-8; Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber, 1968); pp. 58-9. ; Michael Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 2: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 33-4.

determined.[10] The principle was later extended to cover all the Connexion's activities. Later historians of the Connexion, such as Woodcock and Ritson, made much of Primitive Methodist 'democracy'.[11] However, as Michael Watts has pointed out, there was no direct election of Class leaders or of officials by the membership (as there was among the Baptists and Congregationalists). Primitive Methodist democracy was therefore indirect rather than direct.[12]

During the 1820s Bourne, who was the organiser and administrator of Primitive Methodism while Clowes led its religious mission, recorded the doctrines and religious practices of the Connexion. In 1824, in the Preface to the *Large Hymn Book,* he laid down how Primitive Methodist gatherings should be conducted.[13] This covered Prayer Meetings, Love-feasts, Camp Meetings and Preaching Services, but not, significantly, the conduct of the Communion Service.[14] He prepared the *Deed Poll*, which laid down the theological beliefs of the Connexion in 1824.[15] However, he delayed signing the document because the next few years proved difficult for the Connexion and Bourne feared that it might not survive. There were huge financial problems, often caused by rogue preachers who embarked on over-ambitious chapel projects or, worse, deceived local Societies and then disappeared with the Circuit funds.[16] By 1830 these problems had been largely overcome and Bourne signed the *Deed Poll* in that year. In 1835, probably as a reaction to the activities of John Stamp, District Building Committees were established.[17] This was the first of many attempts by the Connexion to curb excessive spending on chapel building.[18]

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[10] H. B. Kendall, 'The Primitive Methodist Church and the Independent Methodist Churches'*, A New History of Methodism* ed. W.J. Townsend et al. (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1909), Vol. I, Book 3, Chapter 2, p. 578.

[11] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 264-5; Joseph Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (London: Edwin Dalton, 1909), p. 279.

[12] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, pp. 197-8.

[13] Bourne, *Large Hymn Book for the use of Primitive Methodists* (Bemersley, Office of the PM Connexion, 1825). JRL, Methodist Printed Collections (MAB, H322. 24.2) The Preface to the Hymn Book contains directions for the conduct of services.

[14] See Chapter 5 xxx

[15] Hugh Bourne, *Deed Poll of the Primitive Methodist Connexion enrolled in Chancery*, *Dated Feb 4 1830* (Bemersley, 1837). JRL, Methodist Printed Collections (Pamphlets) Pa 1837.7.1

[16] Kendall, 'The Primitive Methodist Church and the Independent Methodist Churches'*, A New History of Methodism* ed. W.J. Townsend et al. (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1909), Vol. I, Book 3, Chapter 2, p. 581; John Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connection from its Origins to the Conference of 1859* (London: Richard Davis, 1860), pp. 201-7.

[17] John Stamp, 1808-1847, was a Primitive Methodist revivalist who, because of his financial recklessness while a preacher at Louth, was dismissed by Conference in 1841.He later formed a secessionist group in

By the 1830s too the bones of the Connexion's organisation were in place. Each Primitive Methodist Society had its own 'Leaders' Meeting', consisting of the Society Steward and Class Leaders, which was responsible for discipline within each Society. Individual Societies were grouped together into Circuits. There were three Circuits by 1819: Tunstall, Nottingham and Loughborough. It was the local jealousies that arose around the establishment of the Loughborough Circuit that caused Bourne to insist on the establishment of a Circuit Committee there in 1818 – a practice that was soon established across the Connexion.[19] As the number of Circuits grew they were grouped together into 'Districts', and District Committees were formed in 1828.[20] The Circuits sent representatives to the District in the ratio of two laymen to one (salaried) travelling preacher – a rule observed throughout the governance of the Connexion. The District Committee met quarterly – usually to settle financial affairs and pay the travelling preachers. Once a year came the 'District Meeting', the all-important gathering at which the 'stationing' (this semi-military metaphor continued until 1932) of travelling preachers was agreed.

Local and Travelling Preachers

From its very beginnings, Primitive Methodism was a poor denomination. The majority of its adherents were working people, many of whom found even the few pennies a week asked for ticket money a strain – particularly during trade depressions or in the winter when there was much seasonal unemployment in agriculture.[21] Consequently, the Connexion was heavily dependent on the voluntary efforts of its members as Class Leaders, Society Stewards, Sunday School teachers and – above all – as local preachers. These were the people who bore the brunt of preaching at Sunday services in village chapels and, as Woodcock pointed out, often had to prepare their sermons 'book in hand under a hedge' or by candlelight after a heavy day's work.[22] In the early days, no particular qualifications were required apart from intense religious fervour. The

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Leeds called 'The Christian Temperance Brethren'. Colin Dews 'Rev. John Sharp and the Christian Temperance Brethen'*, P.W. H. S.* Vol. 57 (2011) pp. 178-190.

[18] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 1, p. 323.

[19] Kendall, *Origin and History* Vol. 1, p. 281.

[20] Ibid,, Vol. I, p. 323.

[21] Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 138.

[22] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry: Being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* ((London: Joseph Toulson, 1887)*,* p. 227.

resulting sermons, as Woodcock himself admits, were variable, but all knew how to preach the three Rs: 'Ruin, Redemption and Regeneration'.[23] After 1870 (with the end of 'Districtism') local preachers were required to subscribe to Bourne's 'Articles of Belief' and undergo an oral examination by the Circuit Committee. Although it was undoubtedly hard work and unpaid, there was no shortage of local preachers – over sixty in the Driffield Circuit in 1859. [24] Quite apart from any rewards awaiting them in heaven, local preachers (and Class Leaders and Society Stewards) gained prestige in the local community, an opportunity to take responsibility and the chance of an education – a point made forcibly by Robert Wearmouth and also later historians.[25] In the East Riding, there was even a scholarship (the Lamb scholarship) to enable promising local preachers, particularly those who were agricultural labourers, to train for the ministry.[26]

The travelling preachers were the only paid employees of the Circuits. They were appointed by the District Meeting to serve for a term of one to three years, after which they had to move on somewhere else in order to guard against stagnation and familiarity. The system had begun, as usual, with Wesley, who had appointed a 'superintendant' to each Circuit and, at one time, had felt that even three years was too long a stay.[27] Bourne and Clowes, when they established Primitive Methodism in 1811, had adapted Wesley's system, as they did in most organisational matters. Julia Werner has suggested that in the early days of Primitive Methodism there was little distinction between travelling and local preachers, and financial arrangements were rudimentary.[28] However, by the 1830s a recognisable system was established. Each Circuit had two to four travelling preachers one of whom was the Superintendant. All were regularly paid by the Circuit and a house or suitable lodgings were provided. In the early days no training was considered necessary; fervour, it was felt, was more important than

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[23] Ibid,, p. 229.
[24] ERA 'Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Collection of Preaching Plans: MRD 2/6/1

[25] Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes 1850-1900* (Leicester: E. Backus, 1954), pp. 221-271; Alun Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk, 1870-1923* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul,1985), pp. 44-53.

[26] In 1893 Tom Sykes, an agricultural labourer aged 20, who had been converted at Wetwang aged 17 three years earlier, won a Lamb Scholarship. He afterwards became a well known evangelist. ERA, 'Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1890-94: MRD 2/4/4.

[27] Rupert Davies, *Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1963), p. 76.

[28] Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 181-2

education. By the 1860s however, a new generation of leaders which included Colin McKechnie and William Antliffe decided that Primitive Methodists must establish their own training college.[29] Elmfield College in York was opened in 1868 offering a one-year course, to be followed in 1892 by Hartley Victoria College in Manchester which offered a two-year course.[30]

The main role of the travelling preachers was to provide spiritual leadership within the Circuits. They were generally better educated than local preachers, although there was a considerable overlap, and they tended to preach in the larger town chapels and at special services, for example Chapel Anniversaries, leaving the smaller village chapels to local preachers. They were also responsible for the 'Quarterly Plan', a complicated document detailing which preacher would cover which chapel at which service. Some chapels had three Sunday services and there were also the weeknight Prayer Meetings to be considered. Not surprisingly, things sometimes went wrong, usually local preachers failing to fulfil their appointments because of family crises or illness. The minutes of every Circuit are peppered with complaints about brothers 'neglecting appointments'.[31] These complaints were always carefully investigated and persistent offenders were moved 'down plan' or even 'off plan'. Each year the Circuit Committee had to present a 'Station Report' to the District and later to Conference in which were detailed the number of 'increases' among members, the numbers 'fallen away', the number of families visited, and whether the travelling preachers had behaved 'according to rule': had they followed the Connexion's rules in terms of their dress, public demeanour and preaching. 'Long preaching' was particularly disapproved of. [32]

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[29] Colin Mc'Kechnie (died 1896) was born in Paisley and became a well known Primitive Methodist minister. He was a leading spirit in the foundation of the Preachers' Association in Sunderland and an enthusiast for ministerial education. William Antliffe was the first President of Elmfield College, the Primitive Methodist training establishment.

[30] F. C. Pritchard, 'Education', *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 3 ed. Rupert Davies, Raymond George and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth, 1988), pp.292-3.

[31] For example the 'Primitive Methodist Preachers' Plan of the Driffield Circuit' for the summer months of 1845 contains the admonition that 'whoever wilfully neglects his appointments…shall for each neglect or unauthorised supply, be reduced one number [on the plan]. ERA 'Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit, Collection of Preaching Plans: MRD 2/6/1

[32] See early reports of the Driffield Station. ERA,'Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1839-61: MRD 2/4/1. Bourne had been particularly disapproving of 'long preaching' in his Preface to the Large Hymnbook and elsewhere – and with good reason. He had held it largely responsible for the difficulties experienced in Camp Meetings and Class Meetings in the period between 1818 and 1825. At the Conference of 1831 he even asked that a fine (of ten shillings) be imposed on offenders. (Kendall,

It was an intimidating document and, not surprisingly, there was a high turnover among travelling preachers, certainly in the early years of the Connexion.[33]

The life of a travelling preacher was not an easy one. Huge amounts of energy, both physical and spiritual, were required. The leading of services and giving of sermons were among the less onerous tasks, although congregations, even in the rural East Riding, could be critical: 'A clever lahtle chap he [said someone of a new preacher], but ah wish he'd put a bit less sand and a bit mare salvation into his sarmons. Grace and not gravel is what we want in the pulpit.'[34] Much more onerous was the constant pressure to inspire others, to chase up backsliders, to get another chapel built, to raise numbers in the Sunday School - in short to be a constant and dynamic presence. And always in the background lurked the yearly Station Report with its records of souls saved and lost, preaching places established or let go; and then the District Meeting (at which preachers were appointed for the following year) with its intrigues and favouritism and jockeying for position. A preacher needed both an unshakeable faith and great confidence in his own spiritual powers to endure all this. A strong physical frame was also an advantage. In rural Circuits like the Wolds the preachers had to walk long distances between the villages and often had to spend nights away in the homes of members. Woodcock describes Mrs. Knaggs of Wetwang, 'a mother in Israel', who liked preachers to rise early and breakfast with the family.[35] When Parkinson Milson served in the Bridlington Circuit in 1884 he regularly walked to Flamborough: 'Preached at Bempton and Flamborough three times – blessed day – walked home [...] On Saturday I prayed with several families, preached twice at Bridlington – good day – three souls.'[36]

Things became a little easier after the railways arrived in the late 1840s. The Driffield to Malton line was built in 1846.[37] Carriers carts were also pressed into service and bicycles proved a boon after 1890. Notwithstanding these improvements, the lives

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Origin and History, Vol. 1 pp. 470-1). In the Driffield Circuit in 1845 there were complaints about the 'long preaching' of Brother Crowther. He was asked to 'attend to rule'. ERA, Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Circuit Committtee Minutes 1845-51: MRD 2/2/7.

[33] Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion*, p. 141.
[34] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 217
[35] Ibid,, p. 128.
[36] George Shaw, *The Life of Parkinson Milson* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1893), p. 358.
[37] K Hoole, *Regional History of the,Railways* Vol. 4 *The North East* (London: David & Charles, 1965), p. 56.

of travelling preachers remained hard; physical illness and 'mental strain' were frequent. In 1856 the Driffield Superintendant, Charles Parker, was absent for several months suffering from 'functional derangement' and in 1875 Edward Morton had a 'severe, nervous shock' and was unable to travel.[38] In particular, the effort of maintaining spiritual enthusiasm in a strange place on a low income was enormous, and many cracked under the strain. Robert Monkman, travelling preacher, first appears on the Driffield records in 1868, aged forty and already in poor health.[39] He stayed two years but was not asked to stay for a third. He appeared again in 1876, this time as Second Preacher, where he was involved in the arrangements for the establishment of the new Nafferton Circuit. For some reason he was not living in the Circuit house in Lockwood St., but in two back rooms in the house of a Mr. Foster. The Circuit Minutes declare that he 'must cooperate' in this.[40] Again, he was not asked to stay on for a third year. In 1880 he appeared on the Pocklington records suffering from 'mental derangement'.[41] He was eventually superannuated in 1884 and mentioned for the last time in 1890. For every successful preacher such as Milson, Woodcock or the Rev Leafe, wooed by the Circuits and invited to stay on for a third or fourth year, there were several Monkmans, moved from Circuit to Circuit with increasing desperation and constantly found wanting in the number of conversions or home visits achieved. Superannuation (paid for by an insurance scheme) must have been a relief for these people, but it was not easily obtained and the rules were strict. Most travelling preachers preferred to die 'in harness' as they put it. Parkinson Milson himself hoped to go direct 'from Hull to Heaven'.[42]

There appear to have been few fallings-out between travelling preachers and the Circuits. This was perhaps because the term of office was short, and an unsatisfactory man, like poor Mr. Monkman, could be quickly got rid of. The only example of conflict that reached the Connexion's record in the East Riding involved a Rev. Knox in the Pocklington Circuit. In 1840 he was accused of 'breach of contract' with a Miss Earle

[38] ERA, Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1839-61: MRD 2/4/1 and 1861-76: MRD 2/4/2.

[39] E.R. A., 'Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1861-76: MRD 2/4/2.
[40] ERA, 'Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1874-1888: MRD 2/2/3.
[41] ERA,'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Circuit Reports 1880-1891: MRP 4/30.

[42] Shaw, *Life of Parkinson Milson,* p. 400.

of Louth.[43] (Perhaps he had engaged to marry her and then thought better of it and decamped to Pocklington.) The matter was referred to the District Committee and there is no further mention in the records. In any case Mr. Knox probably moved on within a couple of years and the affair was forgotten.

As travelling preachers worked in groups of two, three or four, overlapping in alternate years, it was relatively easy to substitute someone else if a particular issue proved contentious. In addition, the role of the travelling preachers was well defined and there were certain tasks that only they could undertake. For instance, the travelling preacher was the only person deemed suitable to carry out the delicate negotiations with awkward landowners about the building of a chapel; and the landowners themselves probably felt more comfortable with a comparative stranger than the local blacksmith or farm-hand whom they may have known for years as a subordinate or employee. The Rev. Leafe was asked to stay on for a fourth year in Driffield in 1888 to complete the plans with Lord Hotham for the new chapel at Beswick. He had already successfully negotiated a chapel at Sledmere with the Sykes in the preceding year. At Pocklington the Rev. Dawson was asked to stay for an extra year in 1863 in order to pursue negotiations with Lord Muncaster about a proposed chapel in Warter. In this he was not successful and the Primitives had to wait until 1888, by which time Lord Muncaster had sold out to a Hull shipowner, for the long-awaited chapel.

Female Preachers

Although the Wesleyans and the Primitives deployed their preachers in similar ways, there was one important difference between them – some of the Primitive preachers were women. Women played a crucial part in early Methodism. First, the majority of converts were women.[44] Second, they were essential to the development of what was called ‘cottage religion’. In the early days, before the building of chapels, religious groups met in domestic settings such as houses or barns. The mistress of the house was therefore very much in control of what went on and, because she was responsible for the

[43]ERA,‘Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit’, Circuit Committee Minutes 1832-1854: MRP 4/5

[44] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol, 2, p.55.

care of children, controlled the bringing up of the next generation of converts.[45] It was therefore a natural step for women to become preachers. Anne Cutler and Mary Barritt were both well-known Methodist preachers in the eighteenth century.[46] Wesley, after initial misgivings about their role, eventually welcomed them, although he urged them to be 'cautious'.[47] However, after Wesley's death, the Conference of 1803 forbad female preaching on the grounds of 'impropriety'.[48] The real reason for this was not impropriety but Conference's fear – in the midst of the revolutionary wars – of appearing disloyal to the King and being branded as radicals. Conference felt that any untoward action – such as allowing female itinerancy or organising large revival meetings – would open them to such a charge. Hugh Bourne, for his part, had no such scruples; in fact he wrote a pamphlet in 1808, *Remarks on the Ministry of Women,* which supported female preaching.[49] Women therefore continued to preach within Primitive Methodism. The presence of the female preacher, Jane Brown, much enhanced Clowes's entry into Hull in 1819, and Dorothy Graham has recorded at least twelve female itinerants in Yorkshire in the 1830s including Elisabeth Allan (1803-50), who served in Hull and Pocklington, and Jane Brown, who later married George Nicolson, another East Riding preacher.[50] According to Julia Werner, women formed twenty percent of the total preaching force nationally in 1820. Eventually, however, public disapproval and the Connexion's increasing quest for respectability proved too much. Female Superintendants were banned in 1828 and, in 1842, all female itinerancy officially came to an end.[51] Unofficially, however, it continued for some time, particularly in remote rural areas such as the East Riding. The records of the Pocklington Circuit show two female preachers in 1853, Elisabeth Hill, who was transferred to Leicester, and Jane Parker.[52] Thereafter the numbers dwindled. Local women preachers were still allowed, but perhaps the loss of the itinerancy discouraged

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[45] Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters; Female Preaching in Industrial England* (Princeton N. J: Princeton University Press, 1985), Chapter 2, pp. 28-50.

[46] Anne Cutler came from a working family in Lancashire, Mary Barritt was a farmer's daughter. Both became well known preachers. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, Chapter 3, pp. 50-73.
[47]Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters,* p, 53
[48] Ibid,, pp. 92-3.
[49] W. Swift, 'Women Itinerant Preachers in Early Methodism', *P.W.H.S.* Vol. 28 (1950), pp. 89-94.
[50] Dorothy Graham, *Chosen by God: Female Travelling Preachers in Early Primitive Methodism* (Bankhead Press, Wesley Historical Society, 1989).
[51] Robert Colls, 'Primitive Methodism in the Northern Coal-fields', *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy,* ed. Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper and Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1987), p. 330.
[52] E.RA. 'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Circuit Committee Minutes 1832-1854: MRP 4/5.

them or social disapproval intensified in the later 1850s. In any case none are mentioned in the Driffield or Pocklington Circuits after 1853. Horace Mann, author of the report on the 1851 Religious Census, observed in his report that 'Females are permitted by the laws of the Connexion, to preach if qualified, but the number of such is now much fewer than some years ago'.[53] The last word can be left to Henry Woodcock, expressing the 'modern' view in 1909, by which time the Primitives were no longer sensitive about their past.[54]

> Female Travelling Preachers have had their day and ceased to be among us, but would it not be a great blessing if a large number of our piously trained and well educated women would become public speakers upon our plans.[55]

Conference

Conference, comprised of laymen and ministers in the proportion of two laymen to each minister, was the final authority in Primitive Methodism. The first Conference was held at Hull in 1820 and the last, at Union, in 1932. For a period between the 1840s and the 1860s Conference lost authority to the District Meetings but re-asserted itself in the 1870s. Thereafter it became increasingly powerful and took upon itself a public role – as interpreter of the 'Nonconformist Conscience' as it affected Primitive Methodism.[56]

Conferences, under the leadership of Bourne and Clowes, were lively affairs. In 1821 at Tunstall, Bourne famously threw out a 'speeching radical', not because he disagreed with political radicalism but because he considered the saving of souls far more important.[57] The Conferences of 1824 (at Halifax) and 1825 (at Sunderland) both took place during the difficult years between the preparation of the *Deed Poll* and its final publication. At both Conferences Bourne was outvoted by lay delegates who

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[53] Horace Mann, *Report on the Religious Census of 1851* (London: H.M.S.O., 1852), p. 82.
[54] It had not always been so. John Petty, in his *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion from its Origins to the Conference of 1859* (London, 1860), referred to preachers only by their initials in order to conceal the fact that some were women. Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism* (London: Epworth, 2002), p. 16.
[55] Henry Woodcock, *The Romance of Reality: Being sketches of Homespun Heroes and Heroines and the Part they Played in the Making of Primitive Methodism* (London: E. Dalton, 1910), p.40.
[56] The term 'nonconformist conscience' dates from the year 1890 when 'the conscience' in the shape of Hugh Price Hughes, a prominent Wesleyan and Editor of the *Methodist Times,* allegedly forced Gladstone to end negotiations with Parnell on the subject of Home Rule, because Parnell was involved in a divorce case. David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914* (London: George Allan & Unwin, 1982), pp. 100-101.
[57] Kendall, *Origin and History* Vol. 1, p. 339. See Chapter 8.

thought his judgements on chapel debt and rogue preachers overly harsh. Bourne was, says Kendall, 'the stern, pitiless prophet of the time'. The Conference of 1829 (at Scotter in Lincolnshire) was held in a better spirit and saw the final acceptance of the *Deed Poll* and the first of many resolutions to send missionaries to the United States.[58] In 1832 Conference agreed to a resolution close to Bourne's heart – to support the cause of temperance throughout the Connexion. From this time onwards the 'temperance star' rose higher and higher in the annals of Primitive Methodism. The Conference of 1841 went as far as to 'recommend the prudent advocacy' of total abstinence (teetotalism). Clowes, although he approved of temperance, was always uneasy with teetotalism; this difference of opinion was one of the causes of the widening gulf between him and Bourne.[59] At the Conference of 1842 both Bourne and Clowes were superannuated. Clowes, aged sixty-two, was already largely retired, but to Bourne, then aged seventy 'superannuation came as a painful surprise'. It says a good deal for the independence of Conference and the good sense of Bourne that the step was taken without too much acrimony. Kendall is discreet on the subject, but it seems clear from his account that Bourne's tendency to criticism of Clowes and others had only increased with age.[60]

After the retirement of Bourne and Clowes, and probably because of it, Primitive Methodist Conferences became less contentious and, ultimately, less important. In 1845 rules were introduced which meant that ministers must have travelled at least eighteen years before becoming eligible to attend Conference and laypeople must have been members of a Society for at least twelve years. The result, says Kendall, was a 'gerousia' – a senate of old men, who were resistant to change.[61] As the importance of Conference declined, that of the District Meetings rose. They were attended by a younger, less cautious generation and they had the important power of appointing ministers to Circuits. As Kendall explained:

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[58] Ibid, Vol.1, pp. 434-5.
[59] Tim Woolley, 'A Community of Selective Memory: Hugh Bourne, William Clowes and Primitive Methodist Historiography', *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, Vol. 2 (2010), pp. 67-90. Woolley argues that Bourne suffered some degree of mental derangement after 1835, but that this was disguised by later historians.
[60] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol.2, pp. 359-361.
[61] Ibid,, Vol. 2, pp. 366-8.

Conference presented a marked contrast to the District Meetings, which were elected on a much broader suffrage and which, consequently, grew in popularity and influence, while the Conference was little known and guarded itself from publicity, and did its best to wrap itself up in obscurity and mystery.[62]

Districts

The importance of the Districts led to the phenomenon of the 'District Man'. To quote Kendall again: 'Each district being more or less like a garden enclosed, naturally tended, within limits, to develop itself in its own way under the influence of its dominant minds – the typical 'District-men' of the fifties and sixties'.[63] This had its advantages, as Kendall explains. Each District had its particular forte: in the Hull District it was chapel building; in Norwich, African missions; in Sunderland ministerial education; and all contributed to the whole. But there were also disadvantages: provincialism, powerful cliques within Districts and a failure to share financial resources properly. In particular, Districts were very jealous of their powers in appointing travelling preachers and any attempts by preachers or Societies to appoint from outside were firmly discouraged. This kind of attitude was, of course, a reversal of the whole idea of itinerancy as developed by Bourne and Clowes; nor were a number of the younger and more thoughtful preachers unaware of the fact.

'Districtism' finally died in the 1870s when a younger, less conservative generation gained a majority at Conference. Foremost among them were Colin McKechnie, who became Connexional Editor from 1876 until 1887, and William Antliffe, first principal of the Elmfield Connexional Training College at York and twice President of Conference. McKechnie had had to travel for no less than twenty-seven years before he was finally able to get a foothold at Conference in 1853.[64] Both he and Antliffe had an interest in education and saw the need for a well-educated ministry - a concept still opposed by many members who felt that fervour was all that was required.[65] Under the powerful influence of the two men Conference finally acted to end the power of the Districts. In 1872 the rules on stationing were relaxed and the year

[62] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 2, p. 366; Watts, *The Dissenters,* Vol. 2, pp. 197-8.
[63] Kendall , *Origin and History*, Vol. 2, p. 358.
[64] Ibid,, Vol. 2, p. 368
[65] Watts, *The Dissenters,* Vol. 2, p. 145.

1878 saw the final 'levelling of district barriers' as they were called.[66] This was not popular in many Circuits as it reduced the power of local officials. However it was probably necessary if Primitive Methodism was to become the national religious movement which it aspired to be.

After 1870 the power of Conference and its permanent Central Committees (on missions, finance, and so on) increased considerably. Circuits were urged, through their travelling preachers, to establish Sunday Schools, branches of the Band of Hope and Catechumen classes, all enterprises which Conference deemed would enhance the public face of Primitive Methodism and ensure its survival in the modern world.[67] Railways and an efficient postal service made it far easier for the central organisation of Primitive Methodism to communicate with its periphery and – to a certain extent – control it. Alan Howkins, in his study of Norfolk trade unionism and its roots in Primitive Methodism, suggests that there was a degree of conflict between Conference and the local chapels in the 1870s.[68] Similarly, in the early years of the twentieth century, the Primitive Methodist Conference, although it promoted peace, temperance and the eradication of poverty, rarely discussed industrial questions in spite of the fact that a large proportion of its membership were miners.[69]

'Conflict', however, would be too strong a word to describe what happened in the East Riding; 'divergence' might be a better description. Strenuous attempts were made to establish Sunday Schools in even the smallest villages, and all the larger settlements boasted a branch of the Band of Hope. Catechumen classes, however, failed to thrive and were largely gone by the 1890s.[70] Similarly, although Conference and

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[66] Kendall, *Origin and History* Vol. 2, p. 358; Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2002), p. 23.

[67] Catechumen classes were an attempt by Conference to educate the membership in the beliefs and doctrines of the Connexion – something previously neglected. (See Chapter 4). The classes began in the Driffield Circuit in 1877. ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Circuit Records 1861-1877, Record for 1877: MRD 2/4/2.

[68] Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, p. 48.

[69] Robert Moore, *Pit-men, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Cambridge: University Press, 1974), p. 159.

[70] They were eventually abandoned in 1893. ERA, Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1890-94: MRD 2/4/4

ministers (who largely lived in towns) were virtually all teetotal by 1900,[71] the same was not true of local preachers and members in East Riding villages, where beer was a much safer drink than water, at least until 1914. The high number of Primitive Methodists involved in Friendly Societies (who usually met in pubs) also suggests that many were prepared to take the odd social drink, despite the strictures of Conference.[72]

After 1870, Conference became increasingly political. Ritson claimed that Primitive Methodism 'has rendered immense service of a social and political kind' and gained its place in national life.[73] It was now fitting that the Connexion should play its part in decisions affecting the life of the nation. Conference demonstrated its devotion to Gladstone and the politics of moral reform by organising a special visit to Hawarden Castle during their 1894 session. 'On hearing that Mr. G's library did not include of a copy of the Primitive Methodist Hymnal […] the local committee thereupon presented Mr. G. with an elegantly bound copy.'[74] Conference strongly opposed the Boer War, arguing that large nations should not attack smaller ones, and actively resisted the 1902 Education Act. In 1914, although the denomination had previously adopted a pacifist position, it swung behind Lloyd George, along with other Nonconformist groups and the nascent Labour Party, to support the First World War.[75]

It was a far cry from Bourne's expulsion of the 'speeching radical' almost one hundred years earlier. By the 1920s, the Weberian cycle was complete.[76] Primitive Methodism had become institutionalised, had joined the mainstream of denominational religions and, like them, was suffering from the falling numbers and failing enthusiasm consequent on the experience of World War One.

The Organisational Success of Primitive Methodism

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[71] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters Volume 3, The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015), p. 151.
[72] David Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside: Friendly Societies in the Rural East Riding 1830-1914* (Hull: University Press, 1991), Chapter 4, pp. 45-65.
[73] Joseph Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (London: Edwin Dalton, 1919), p.287.

[74] *The Times*, 10 Sept. 1894, p. 8.
[75] See Chapters 8 and 9 for a fuller discussion of Primitive Methodist political attitudes after 1870.
[76] Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: University Press, 1982), pp. 98-9. Wilson's analysis of sects which represented 'intense reaffirmations of an older religious tradition' almost exactly parallels the growth and decay of Primitive Methodism.

Primitive Methodism was an enormously successful organisation. It transformed itself from a marginal group of revivalists in an obscure corner of Staffordshire into a religious denomination of more than two hundred thousand members by 1906.[77] Its growth rates were phenomenal, far higher than those of the Wesleyans and, unlike the Wesleyans, the Primitives suffered no major secessions.[78] The reasons for their success lay in the three principles which underlay their organisation: dynamism, flexibility and popular involvement.

Dynamism

Within Primitive (and Wesleyan) Methodism, paid preachers of the Connexion (usually referred to as travelling preachers) moved to a different Circuit at least every three years. Most Circuits had between two and four travelling preachers, one of whom was the Superintendant, and the years of service were overlapping, not coterminous. The result was a system in which, in most years, there was a change of travelling preacher bringing with them new ideas, different preaching styles and – occasionally – contention.[79] At the very least a new preacher bought novelty and a full chapel. Each year Primitive Methodist Societies eagerly awaited the local District Meeting to find out who would be 'stationed' and where. The contrast with the local parish church, where the same incumbent officiated week after week, was striking. Moreover there was no redress from an incompetent or lazy clergyman. In the East Riding the vicar of Driffield and the vicar of Hutton Cranswick, both of them pastorally inadequate, continued to hold their livings for over fifty years.[80] In Primitive Methodism an unsatisfactory travelling preacher was always moved on after three years, or, more likely, resigned or collapsed under the strain.

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[77]Alan Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (London: Longman,1976), p. 31.

[78]According to Wearmouth, Primitive Methodist rate of growth was 109% between 1830 and 1840, 32% between 1840 and 1850. Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes 1850-1900* ((Leicester: E. Backus, 1954), p. 105.

[79] For instance, in the Pocklington Circuit in 1840 two Travelling Preachers (Bros Dawson and Cooper) upset the societies by their advocacy of Teetotalism. ERA 'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Circuit Committee Minutes 1832-1854, record for April 1840, MRP 4/5.

[80] See Chapter 3.

According to Dennis Campbell, 'Itinerancy is a theological concept'.[81] It implies a dynamic organisation which is always moving on – to the winning of more souls for God in the wider world and the achievement of 'Christian perfection' for every individual believer. Of course this was the ideal, and not every travelling preacher managed the feats achieved by Clowes or Oxtoby, nor every believer the heights of Christian perfection, but the way was always open and the means of grace ever available.[82] A new preacher, a new field of missionary activity might awaken the souls of the unconverted or renew the zeal of those whose spiritual energy was flagging – the preacher would see the 'fruit' of his ministry and be inspired to further efforts; Societies would grow in grace.

Missionary activity, or 'outreach' as it might now be called, was built into the system. Travelling preachers were expected to 'open' new areas for evangelism. The Driffield Circuit, led by the female preacher Eleanor Brown, missioned several villages in the northern Wolds in the 1840s. Meetings were held in cottages and blacksmiths' shops, and a chapel built at Weaverthorpe.[83] In 1845, even more ambitiously, the Circuit established a mission in far-away Glasgow.[84] The Hull Circuit was famous for its far-flung efforts. At one point in the 1820s it stretched from Carlisle to Spurn Point and, in the 1840s, had a mission in Southampton.[85] As chapels were established and the Connexion settled down into the routines of village life, mission became less vigorous but it did not cease altogether. Ismael Fish, railway missionary, was sent out to evangelise the navvies on the Driffield to Malton line in 1851 and 'Kilnwick Railway Gate', a navvy encampment on the Selby line, appears as a 'preaching place' in the 1890s.[86] In the 1880s the Driffield Circuit embarked on a mission to 'Middleton Wold',

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[81] Dennis Campbell, 'Ministry and Itineracy in Methodism', *Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* ed. William J Abraham. and J.E. Kirby (Oxford: University Press, 2009), pp. 263-279.

[82] 'Praying Johnny' Oxtoby was one of the pioneers of Primitive Methodism in the East Riding. Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry,* pp. 37-41; George Shaw, *Life of John Oxtoby* (Hull: William Andrews & Co, 1894); Leigh, Harvey, '*Praying Johnny' or, the Life and Labours of John Oxtoby Primitive Methodist Preacher* (London: R. Fenwick, 1882).

[83] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit Records', Station Reports 1839-61, Record for 1840 MRD 2/4/1.

[84] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit Records', Circuit Committee 1845-51, Record for 1845 MRD 2/2/7

[85] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 2, p. 139.

[86] ERA,' Driffield PM Circuit Records', Minutes of Circuit Committee 1851-9: MRD 2/2/8. Fish eventually became a Church of England clergyman and was in charge of the Castle Howard Reformatory. Information from a collection started by the late Philip Brown and collated by Keith Allison .ERA, DDX 1409 7/10

a collection of farms which then employed a large number of people just west of the modern village.[87]

The quarterly 'preaching plan', drawn up by the travelling preachers, was also designed to sustain the dynamic of revival. Preachers' names were ranked in the middle of the plan in order of seniority – if they failed to keep appointments they moved down the list – and rotated around the village chapels Sunday by Sunday or weeknight Prayer Meeting. The whole intention was to provide stimulation and change, and to prevent familiarity and boredom. There was a great variety among Wolds preachers according to Woodcock. One would startle people by hitting the pulpit rail as if it was an anvil, another would give 'a mimetic personification of David and Goliath', another, an ex-navvy, would give his Bible a whack 'as if driving a spade into the ground'. It was men such as these who sustained the power and the growth of Primitive Methodism on the Wolds.[88]

Flexibility

Because Primitive Methodist organisation was dependent on local voluntary help and employed only a small number of people it was extremely flexible. If there was a new 'opening' in the local area, missionaries moved in, Camp Meetings were held and a Society set up. Local preachers came forward, were included on the plan and an embryo Circuit was set up served by the existing travelling preachers. The embryo Circuit then became a 'branch' of the existing 'home' Circuit and eventually an independent Circuit in its own right. In this way Driffield became independent of Hull in 1837 and Bridlington independent of Driffield in 1845.[89] The travelling preachers, only stationed for short periods in a particular locality and anyway owning no domestic properties, were quickly able to adapt to the new arrangements. The speed with which all this could

[87] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit Records', Station Reports 1877- 1889, MRD 2/4/3
[88] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, Chapter 25, pp. 222-234.
[89] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 2, p. 96. Kendall implies that the reason it took so long for the Driffield Circuit to gain independence was that Clowes had become 'somewhat timorous in chapel building''. After the retirement of Clowes, the independence of the Bridlington Circuit was achieved much more rapidly. ERA'Bridlington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1849-79: MRQ 2/25.

be achieved is in stark contrast to the Church of England's struggle to provide pastoral care, for example in the huge parish of Halifax in the early nineteenth century.[90]

In a similar way it was easy for the Primitive Methodists to withdraw from an area if a particular mission did not succeed, or, as frequently happened, a local leader or the owner of the barn or blacksmith's shop which had been used for meetings left the place. In the Pocklington area the cottage meeting at Fangfoss had to be given up in 1850, and the one at Nunburnholme in 1869.[91] The Society at Newton had to be abandoned in 1870 because its leader – who also owned the barn in which it held its meetings – moved away.[92] In such circumstances the Connexion could withdraw quickly and without embarrassment leaving behind no empty chapels or abandoned property.

Popular Involvement

Popular involvement was the forte of Primitive Methodism and one of the main reasons for its success. The important role played by local preachers has already been mentioned. 'We maintain the spiritual power of our church by the labours of 16,000 Local Preachers' wrote Woodcock in 1887; 'Every twentieth member of the Connexion is a Local Preacher'.[93] This was not an exaggeration. In the Driffield Circuit in 1880 there were fifty-seven local preachers serving a membership of about one thousand, plus about two thousand additional 'hearers'. That number included, according to Woodcock, twenty-four farm labourers, three railway servants, five farmers and six shoemakers plus a variety of other trades, and one 'gentleman'.[94] Not only was Primitive Methodism able to recruit enthusiastic volunteers; it was also able to recruit them from among the people they were to serve – so there was none of the social division between preachers and congregations that existed in the Church of England.

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[90] Mark Smith, 'Anglicanism in Saddleworth 1700-1830', *The Church of England 1689-1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism,* ed. John Walsh, Colin Hayden and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), Chapter 4.

[91] ERA,'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Quarter Day Minute Book 1845-57: MRP 4/10. Fangfoss was missioned again in 1851 and 1862 and a chapel was eventually built in 1865. There never was a Primitive chapel in Nunburnholme, only a Wesleyan one.

[92] ERA,'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1870-79: MRP 4/29

[93] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 222.

[94] ERA, Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1877-1889: MRD 2/4/3.

Local preachers were not the only ones who freely laboured for the Connexion. They were supported by a veritable army of Class Leaders and Sunday School teachers. In 1875 the Driffield Circuit, besides sixty-five local preachers, had sixty-eight Class Leaders and twelve Sunday Schools involving over a thousand scholars – which must have called for at least fifty teachers. This was an extraordinary communal effort and it was reflected in the warmth and conviviality of chapel life. Both Watts and Obelkevich remark on the popular nature of Primitive Methodist gatherings: they were noisy and sometimes boisterous, people would interrupt the speaker to add some remark of their own or shout out in agreement.[95] The hymns, often set to well-known popular tunes, were sung with conviction and gusto.[96] Woodcock's descriptions of cottage meetings in the Wolds might best be described as 'homely':

> Young wives would bring their first-born 'bairns' warmly packed in red shawls, and sometimes nature and art combined failed to silence their little tongues […] Sometimes […] a warm hearted brother would shout 'Glory!' with a voice that awoke a sick or ill-tempered child in its cradle.[97]

A travelling preacher (Mr. Scruton) recalled village missionary meetings: 'I remember well what rare times we had: singing, laughing, festive joyous times they were. I always had a day's holiday, for six years, on the missionary-meeting day'.[98]

Primitive Methodist public worship was popular and convivial. People felt at home; they heard preachers who spoke as they did and who lived lives similar to theirs. They were able to express themselves in their own way and sing hymns to lively popular tunes. It was very different from the parish church where the incumbent, however sympathetic, belonged to an alien class and where public worship, however sincerely conducted, was expressed in formal, unfamiliar language. Moreover there was virtually no opportunity for lay involvement, apart from the churchwardens who were usually chosen from among the local bourgeoisie. Choirs did not appear in rural churches until late in the nineteenth century, and then mainly as a result of the Methodist challenge. As David Hempton has pointed out, popular involvement in Methodism, both Wesleyan and Primitive, helped to sustain local communities, particularly those threatened by economic change, whether it were commercial

[95] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, p. 173; James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: University Press, 1976), p. 233.
[96] See Chapter 5.

[97] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry,* p. 181.
[98] Ibid,, p. 237.

agriculture or large-scale mining. 'Choirs, classes, chapels and Sunday schools, were not simply imposed from above but were appropriated from below by people searching for cohesion, security and a lively alternative to local tavern culture.'[99]

The Finances of Primitive Methodism

Primitive Methodism was, in most ways, a highly successful organisation but it had one very weak point – its finances. Most of its adherents were poor people and it had few wealthy donors – none at all until the late nineteenth century when William Hartley (the jam manufacturer) and the Hodges of Hull (employers of labour on the docks) gave generous donations to the Connexion. The Hodges built several chapels in Hull and Hartley funded the Primitive Methodist training institution in Manchester.

The Societies had three sources of income: Class monies paid each week to the Class Leader, pew rents and weekly collections. Every Class Member paid one penny a week to the Leader and one shilling and sixpence a quarter on the issue of Class Tickets. According to Woodcock the penny was always paid but the quarterly fee was often difficult to extract because of 'the backwardness of some of the leaders to enforce Connexional rule'.[100] Once a Society had erected a chapel – in the larger Wolds villages this had usually been achieved by 1845 – pew rents were introduced as a means of paying for it and servicing the inevitable debt. Pew rents were not exclusive to Methodism but were common in other Nonconformist churches and in the Church of England. It has been said that they discouraged the poor from practising religion and created a social hierarchy within the chapel.[101] However, in the Driffield Circuit at least half the seats in chapels were free and the rest paid for on a graduated scale – the cheapest were in the gallery. At Flamborough chapel in 1894 gallery seats were sixpence a quarter and the total yearly income from pew rents was ten pounds per year. [102] As in the case of Ticket money it seems likely, as Woodcock implies, that wealthier members were expected to subsidise the less fortunate. A third source of income, which became more important as the century progressed and chapels became larger and more

[99] David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion 1750-1900* (London: Routledge, 1996), p 58.
[100] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 151-2.
[101] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, pp. 228-232.
[102] ERA , Records of Flamborough PM Chapel 1872-1914: M.R.Q 15/1

ostentatious, was weekly collections and 'special efforts' such as bazaars and Anniversaries.[103] In 1894 the Sunday collection at Flamborough chapel averaged only one pound and thirteen shillings a quarter but a special 'Martinmas effort' and the bazaar fund raised over thirty pounds between them.[104]

The main outgoings of each Society were their contribution to the salaries of the travelling preachers (the only paid employees of the Circuit), the upkeep of the chapel and, increasingly as the century progressed, the repayment of debts incurred by new chapel-building schemes. In the early days travelling preachers 'lodged with the people' and were supported by individual contributions.[105] After the financial crises of the 1820s Bourne attempted to regularise the finances of the Connexion and establish regular rates of payment.[106] By 1845 the average payment for travelling preachers was, according to Michael Watts, £49 8s. per year. In Hull in 1847 Parkinson Milson received £49 6s; Horace Mann declared in 1851 that every married preacher was paid nineteen shillings a week with two shillings extra for each child under sixteen. These were not princely sums and compared unfavourably with the salaries of Wesleyan and Congregational ministers.[107] Later in the century things improved a little. A minimum rate of £84 per annum was agreed in 1892, and in 1876 the Rev. Woodcock (who had a very large family) was paid £27 a quarter, over one hundred pounds a year.[108] In comparison most Church of England clergy received in excess of £300 a year, many of them considerably more, while the average wage of an East Yorkshire farm labourer in 1892 was seventeen shillings a week (about forty-four pounds a year).[109]

The cost of chapel upkeep varied considerably according to the size of the congregation and the physical state of the chapel. Most chapels employed a 'chapel keeper' who kept the place clean and lit the stove and lamps. The one in Flamborough was paid one pound and ten shillings a quarter in 1894, and coals for heating cost one

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[103] See Chapter 9
[104] ERA , Records of Flamborough PM Chapel 1872-1914: M.R.Q 15/1
[105] Woodcock, *Romance of Reality*, p. 162.
[106] Werner, *Primitive Methodist Connection*, pp. 138-9.
[107] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, pp. 252-3; Shaw, *Life of Milson*, p. 281; Horace Mann, *Report on the Religious Census of 1851* (London:H.M.S.O. 1853) p. 132.
[108] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 3, p. 208; ERA' Driffield PM Circuit', Quarterly Minutes 1874-88: MRD 2/2/3.
[109] E.J.T. Collins ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, Vol. 7 Part 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), p. 2003.

pound and ten shillings a year.[110] The job of chapel keeper was often given to a poverty-stricken member of the congregation – a widow or someone with a disability - and was thus more of a subsidy than a necessary outlay. Much more onerous than the upkeep of an existing chapel was the building of a new one. In the Wolds, as we have seen, fourteen new chapels were built between 1860 and 1879 and another sixteen refurbished or extended. Most of these building projects were over-ambitious and most of them were paid for by loans.[111] With the onset of the agricultural depression after 1880 the burden of debt became insupportable. At Flamborough the new chapel, built in 1874, had cost £1,500. Twenty years later in 1894, repayments on the loan, at ten pounds a year, equalled the amount raised by pew rents. In Bridlington, where the new chapel built in 1877 cost £3,040, the heavy burden of debt 'much oppressed' Parkinson Milson.[112] Conference was not unaware of the difficulties which were being stored up for the future and in 1835, 1843 and 1882 attempted to check the enthusiasm of local Societies. The measures of 1882 insisted that a third of the money be raised before building commenced, but by then it was already too late and most of the damage had been done.[113] By 1900 the outgoings of most Circuits had outstripped their incomes, as evidenced in the Driffield Circuit by the number of bazaars, 'special efforts' and public teas recorded in the columns of the local paper.[114] According to Woodcock, the collective Connexional debt in 1907 stood at over one million, one hundred and twenty thousand pounds, or about eight hundred pounds a week in repayments. He claimed that it was being reduced and 'if this rate of reduction continues it will be cleared in twenty-five years'.[115] Twenty-five years after 1907 was 1932 – the year of Methodist Union.

The Discipline of Primitive Methodism

For the devout Primitive Methodist conversion brought new birth and a new life. The convert turned his back on the ways of the world and henceforth devoted his life to God. He prayed that the Lord would direct his (the convert's) actions to the greater glory of the Kingdom of Heaven and the furtherance of His church here on earth. The convert

[110] ERA , Records of Flamborough PM Chapel 1872-1914: M.R.Q 15/1
[111] See Chapter 3
[112] ERA , Records of Flamborough PM Chapel: MRQ 15/1; Shaw, *Life of Milson*, p. 370.
[113] Kendall, *Origin and History* Vol. 2. pp. 457-8.
[114] See Chapter 9,
[115] Woodcock, *Romance of Reality*, p. 129.

became part of the community of the saved, whose purpose was to rescue the damned and bring them to Christ. It therefore followed that members of Primitive Methodist Societies should subject themselves to a strict discipline of life in order to protect their own souls and – by their example - influence others. Anything that distracted the believer from his relationship with God was the work of the devil (a very real presence in nineteenth-century Primitive Methodism) and was to be condemned. This included drunkenness, sexual incontinence, breaking the Sabbath, embezzlement and getting into debt (because this showed moral weakness and a failure to put God first). Frivolities such as dancing and sport were also condemned because they distracted the believer from his pursuit of holiness and were associated with sexual immorality and, in the case of sport, gambling.

Wesley had seen Methodist discipline simply as a rule of life - a positive concept which helped the individual to achieve holiness.[116] After his death, as the organisation of Methodism hardened and it had to defend itself against critics who accused it of hypocrisy and worse, the concept of discipline became more negative. It became an instrument to ensure that believers kept to the rules and did not damage the good name of the Connexion by getting drunk, committing adultery or embezzling chapel funds. John Petty, an early historian of the Connexion, summarised Primitive Methodist discipline thus:

> […] persons earnestly desirous of fleeing from the wrath to come […] may be admitted to meet in class on trial, but their earnest desires, penitential emotions and proofs of sound conversion must be consistently manifested for three months at least before they can be received into full membership. No person must remain a member of the Connexion if he attends vain or worldly amusements, wastes his time in public houses, buys unaccustomed goods, is dishonest in his dealings or is guilty of some other act of immorality.[117]

Internal discipline within each Primitive Methodist Society was initially the responsibility of the Leaders' Meeting – comprising the Class Leaders and the Society Steward – all of whom knew the members personally.[118] Contentious or difficult cases were referred to the Circuit or District Committees. Travelling preachers might be

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[116] Thomas Edward Frank, 'Discipline'. *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William Abraham and James Kirby (Oxford: University Press, 2009), p. 246.
[117] John Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion from its Origin to the Conference of 1859* (London, 1860), p. 437.

[118] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, p. 198.

represented, but it was local officials who took the lead in disciplinary matters. This meant that misdemeanours were considered by the member's social equals rather than their superiors, as might be the case in the Church of England. The decisions of the Leaders' Meetings were therefore accepted within the Society and proved a unifying rather than a dividing force.

Primitive Methodist discipline was, from the first, strict. In the Wolds Circuits the main reason for expulsion from the Societies was sexual impropriety closely followed by drunkenness. In 1852 a Mrs. Dales was found 'waiting at a scene of vain and worldly amusement' and was expelled from the Pocklington Society.[119] In Driffield William Dawson was found to have 'improperly interfered with a woman not his wife' in 1875 and was compelled to leave.[120] In 1887 Thomas Sandhill was accused of 'immorality' and had to resign from the Society, also in Driffield.[121] Public drunkenness brought shame on the individual and on the Society; those guilty were always asked to leave. In 1851 two unnamed Bridlington members were expelled for drunkenness.[122] John Simpson, a local preacher, was expelled from the Pocklington Society in 1869 and, in the same year, Thomas Maddison from Bridlington, both because of 'intemperance'.[123]

In financial matters, debt and mismanagement showed moral weakness and a failure to put God first. In 1874 George Snowden decamped with money belonging to the Flamborough Society and left the village in disgrace; in 1875 Matthew Smith had to leave the Driffield Society because of his 'dishonesty'.[124] In 1903 Mark Williams was expelled from the Bridlington Society because of his bankruptcy.[125]

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[119] ERA,'Pocklington PM Circuit', Circuit Committee Minutes: MRP 4/5.

[120] ERA, Driffield P M. Circuit'', Station Reports 1861-1876: MRD 2/4/2.

[121] ERA, Driffield PM. Circuit', Station Reports 1877-1889: MRD 2/4/3

[122] ERA 'Bridlington P M. Circuit', Circuit Committee Reports 1849-79: MRQ 2/25.

[123] ERA,'Pocklington P M. Circuit'', Circuit Records 1860-69: MRP 4/28.
ERA 'Bridlington P M. Circuit', Circuit Records 1849-1879: MRQ 2/25.

[124] ERA 'Bridlington PM Circuit', Circuit Records 1849-79: MRQ 2/25; ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Reports 1861-1876:MRD 2/4/2

[125] ERA 'Bridlington PM Circuit', Circuit Records 1893-1905: MRQ 2/27.

Aberrant behaviour, as opposed to immoral deeds, was also frowned on in the Circuits, although a certain amount was tolerated if it was merely internal and did not give the Connexion a bad name. In the early days excessive devotions and loud 'cryings out' were an issue. People complained about the noise emanating from the chapels, and the Circuit authorities, in an attempt to stifle local concerns and to prove the respectability of the Connexion, tried to rein in some of their more exuberant devotees. In 1833 Elizabeth Ritson was asked not to pray in public, presumably because she became too fervent and excited and upset people. In the previous year (1832) Thomas Johnson had to 'make his mark' on a paper pledging to 'conduct myself peaceably in the society', probably for the same reason.[126] These sorts of complaint disappeared after 1850 as the flames of missionary zeal began to die down.

Although strict in dealing with lapses, Primitive Methodism was never vindictive or harsh. God Himself had welcomed back sinners and so must His people. Those who had 'fallen' were accepted back into the Society if they confessed their sins and were repentant. In 1840 Frances Rudd was expelled from the Driffield Society for 'immorality'. She later married William Bielby, a Baptist, and both of them were readmitted in 1841.[127] In 1858, Joseph King was asked to leave the Pocklington Society because of his love of strong drink, but having overcome this, he was welcomed back the following year, 1859.[128] Finally Mark Williams was received back into the Bridlington Society in 1908, a letter having been received from his solicitor to the effect that his bankruptcy had involved 'no moral lapse'.[129]

Both Michael Watts and Thomas Frank suggest that Methodist discipline became less stringent at the end of the nineteenth century.[130] It was certainly true that conditions of membership became less demanding. The Wesleyans ceased to demand membership of a Class as a prerequisite for membership of a Society in 1888 and the Primitives followed suit five years later in 1893.[131] However, the evidence of the Wolds

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[126] ERA,'Pocklington PM Circuit' Leaders' Meeting Minutes 1832-45: MRP 4/5 (At opposite end of Book to the Circuit Committee)
[127] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Reports 1837-61: MRD 2/4/1.

[128] ERA,'Pocklington PM Circuit', Circuit Records 1850-59: MRP 4/27.

[129] ERA 'Bridlington PM Circuit', Circuit Committee Report for 1908: MRQ 2/29.

[130] Watts, The *Dissenters* Vol. 3, p. 146; Frank, op. cit. p. 246.
[131] Watts, ibid,, p. 146.

Primitive Methodist Circuits suggest that moral discipline among members remained strict – particularly about drinking – and that 'decay', if that is the right word, did not set in until after World War 1. This reflects, as Howkins suggested, a certain disconnection between the dictates of a central authority and their application in remote rural Circuits.[132]

Primitive Methodism was a well-disciplined and close-knit organisation with a strictly defined ethos from which deviations were not allowed. The discipline came, not from without in the form of the travelling preachers, but from within, from local Class Leaders and preachers who knew the individuals concerned and the circumstances of their lives. This strong internal discipline, a community of believers in the face of the world, was one of the great strengths of the Connexion.

Conclusion

The organisation of Primitive Methodism evolved over time, largely on the Wesleyan pattern with two important exceptions – it was more representative of the membershiop and it was more popularly based. The principle of two lay representatives to one paid itinerant applied throughout its organisation right up to Conference itself, which, unlike its Wesleyan counterpart, was dominated by lay opinion. Primitive Methodism depended, more heavily than the Wesleyans did, on an army of unpaid, local volunteers who gave the Connexion its distinctive popular and proletarian flavour. Its religious life was sustained by relatively few paid travelling preachers and a huge number of unpaid local preachers – as was the case among the Wesleyans. However the Wesleyans, being more conservative and clerically dominated, banned women from preaching in 1803 whereas the Primitives continued to allow female preaching into the 1850s. Conference was the central authority in all branches of Methodism but, within Primitive Methodism, it lost power to the Districts for a period between 1845 and the late 1860s. After 1870 it once again became dominant and took the lead in declaring the Primitives' position on national issues such as education, temperance and foreign policy. Its demands, however, were not universally followed in the rural East Riding, as is clear

[132] Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, p. 48.

from the record on Catechumen classes, Sunday Schools and – above all – on temperance.

Appendix: Five Wolds Circuits 1819-1932

Pocklington Circuit 1821-1932

'Praying Johnny' Oxtoby visited North and South Cave along with William Clowes in the autumn of 1819. The first plan of the Hull Circuit, dated 1819 and reproduced by Kendall, shows Clowes "planned" not only in the Caves but also in Newbold and the small town of Market Weighton .[133] Clowes's Diary, also quoted by Kendall, recalls his preaching at Bishop Wilton, Seaton and Melbourne on the same day, 3 October 1819, and then, on the next day, proceeding to Pocklington where he

> preached in the Market Place to a great multitude; in the evening I spoke in a barn, the property of Mr. John Moore: here the prospect of success was very promising. In the neighbourhood of Pocklington I spoke frequently, and the stir among the people was considerable.[134]

Progress was rapid. A chapel was opened at North Cave in 1819, at Pocklington in 1820 and at Acklam, high on the Wolds, the native village of Robert Coultas, in 1821.[135] Success at Acklam was perhaps partly attributable to the liberal attitude of the local clergyman, the saintly Rev. Simpson, who welcomed the missionaries and even attended a Camp Meeting himself.[136] In this he was unusual. According to Kendall he was later berated by the Diocesan authorities.[137]

Pocklington became a Circuit town in 1821, the first of the Hull branches to achieve independent status. By 1830, it had nine chapels, by 1860 seventeen.[138] Four more were to follow: Millington and Fangfoss, in 1866; Warter, where there had been considerable landlord opposition, in 1888; and, finally, Goodmanham in 1890.[139] The last, significantly, had to be built in brick and corrugated iron, all that the local society could afford, witness to the increasing grip of the agricultural depression on the fortunes of the Pocklington Circuit. In addition the chapels in Market Weighton and Pocklington

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[133] Kendall., *Origin and History,* Vol.1, p 371.

[134] Ibid,,, Vol.1, p. 400.

[135] David and Susan Neave, *East Riding Chapels and Meeting Houses* (East Yorkshire Local History Society, 1990), pp. 45-60.

[136] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 2, p. 88.

[137] Ibid,,

[138] ERA,'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1860-69: MRP 4/28

[139] ERA,'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1880-91: MRP 4/30

were both rebuilt in the 1860s in grand Nonconformist classical style and separate Sunday Schools built in the latter. A manse was purchased in Pocklington in 1908.[140]

In addition to its chapels, the Circuit also operated a number of 'preaching places', all advertised on the quarterly preaching plan and serviced by local preachers. These were barns, stables, rooms in cottages or blacksmiths' shops - anywhere where the Word, in true evangelical style, could be received. Newton, Yapham, Thornton, Givendale, Meltonby to name a few, were all small farming settlements where large numbers of farmhands and live-in servants were employed. Such people were the focus of Primitive missionary effort. A few leading spirits, often upper farm servants such as the hind (foreman), the wagoner or the shepherd, would 'get converted', form a Society and attempt to 'bring in' their fellows. A barn or stable was rented from a friendly local farmer and preachers engaged. Sometimes the venture would succeed, as at Scagglethorpe, and a chapel would be raised; sometimes not, often because those same leading spirits, the most intelligent and venturesome in the community, were the most likely to move away under the pressure of economic circumstances. In 1870 the mission to Newton had to be given up because the owner of the barn in which services were held had emigrated to the United States. In 1875 Yapham and Thornton had to go "off plan" because all the active members of the Society had left the area.[141]

At its most numerous in the 1860s, the Pocklington Circuit had six hundred and thirty members, and a larger number of hearers (those who might attend chapel regularly and whose children might attend Sunday School, but who were not actual members and did not pay seat rents). It had forty-five local preachers and forty-two Class Leaders, an impressive number in a scattered rural area, although it could not compare with the eighty or so in the Driffield Circuit, which was always more numerous and successful.[142] The number of Sunday Schools varied between two in 1850 and ten in 1900. The two towns, Pocklington and Market Weighton, always managed to run a Sunday School, but in the villages Sunday Schools came and went. One was opened in Acklam but then disappears from the records. In Huggate the

[140] ERA,'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1907-1916: MRP 4/33.

[141] ERA,'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1870-79: MRP 4/29

[142] ERA,'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1860-69: MRP 4/28.

Sunday school flourished until a new Church of England day school was established in 1872 and pressure was put on parents to send their children to the Church of England Sunday School.[143] (This was a frequent complaint and lay behind much Nonconformist opposition to the 1870 Education Act.)

It is clear from the Station Reports that there was heavy pressure from Conference on local Societies to open Sunday Schools. The reason for this pressure was the fact, increasingly evident from the 1880s onwards, that Sunday Schools rather than the conversion of adults were the main source of recruitment to the Connexion. From the 1860s on the returns ask 'in which stations have you not yet established Sabbath Schools?'; the replies are full of apologies about the poor attendance of scholars or teachers or the baleful 'influence of the clergy.'[144]

The Pocklington Circuit survived, more or less intact, until 1932. There were minor boundary changes in 1885 when Acklam and Leavening were moved into the Malton Circuit, probably a sensible move given the distances involved. Although the change seems to have been uncontroversial, it was probably connected with the increasingly precarious finances of the Circuit caused by the agricultural depression, from which, despite some relief in the early 1900s, it never really recovered. By the early 1920s the financial position was dire and was one of the main factors behind the 1932 union with the Wesleyans and United Methodists.

There were no secessions or attempts to establish new Circuits within the Pocklington branch, but there was considerable trouble with the chapel at Huggate. One 'brother Monks' seems to have become over-powerful within the Society and was chapel Steward, Treasurer and cleaner. He boasted he could 'sell the Chapel' and his monopoly 'caused much resentment'.[145] He even refused to show the books to the

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[143] ERA,'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1870-1879: MRP 4/29.

[144] Nonconformists frequently complained that, once a Church of England school was established, pressure was put on parents to send their children to the Church of England Sunday Schools rather than the Nonconformist one. This happened in the Driffield Circuit in 1868 where it was claimed that Sunday Schools had lost members in Frodingham and Langtoft because of the influence of the clergy. ERA, Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1861-1879: MRD 2/4/2. There were similar complaints about the Sunday Schools in Nafferton and Wansford in 1879, ERA, Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1877-1889: MRD 2/4/3.

[145] ERA,'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1880-1891: MRP 4/30.

Circuit Superintendant. In the end the seat holders at Huggate refused to pay up and the Circuit authorities had to move in, confiscate the books and negotiate a new chapel loan. Sadly the record ends there and the eventual result is unclear – we do not know if Monks was expelled from the Society or not. However the upheavals had a long-term and depressing effect on the Huggate chapel as it was one of the first to close for lack of members in the 1920s and was put up for sale in 1928.[146]

The Huggate episode demonstrated both the dangers and the strengths of the Primitive Methodist Circuit system. In a voluntarily controlled body it was very easy for one powerful individual to assert himself over the rest, particularly in so isolated a village as Huggate. But eventually the centre proved strong enough: Brother Monks was contained and his ambition brought low. His co-religionists complained. He had no powerful allies among the travelling preachers (who were employed by the Circuit, not the chapel), and democracy prevailed. There were similar, but less glaring, contretemps in other Circuits, but all were resolved within the discipline of the Connexion.

The Malton Circuit 1822-1932

At the Hull Circuit Quarterly Meeting in September 1820 it was decided to send out eight 'evangels' to mission the area around Malton and Pickering. The 'Journal' of one of them, William Evans, again quoted by Kendall, describes how, not having any planned appointments, but learning that the people of Hayton were desirous of hearing him, he 'travelled fourteen miles and preached to them, and the Word did not fall to the ground: three were brought to the Lord, and one drunkard went off with the solemn enquiry, "What must I do to be saved"'.[147] Nathaniel West and John Lawton, fellow evangels, preached in Malton market place and by 1821 the Society had 400 members. It became a Circuit town in 1822 and, says Kendall, has had a steady existence ever since. The Circuit included several chapels on the northern Wolds including Hayton, Heslington, Hotham, Leavening, Riccall and Sherburn. Unfortunately the records of the Circuit have all been lost except those describing the opening of the chapel at Norton, or 'New Malton', in 1865. These are an interesting comment on contemporary Primitive

[146] ERA,'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1917-32: MRP 4/34.

[147] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 2, p. 86

Methodism. Norton was typical Primitive territory: the non-fashionable and semi-industrial suburb of Malton on the southern bank of the Derwent beyond the control of the Fitzwilliams, who owned most things on the north side. Those working in the new maltings, tanneries and cake mills of Norton, many of whom would have been immigrants from the rural area around the town, were obvious targets for Primitive Methodist evangelism. A chapel was established in 1865, which is late for a town chapel, but industry came late to Malton as it did to the Deerness Valley.[148] The Fitzwilliams, although Anglican themselves, welcomed the Primitive Methodists, much as the Sykes did, because they encouraged respectability and hard work and kept their employees out of the public houses.[149] Earl Fitzwilliam contributed a handsome twenty-pound cheque and wished the Primitive Methodists well.[150]

Driffield Circuit 1837-1932

Clowes came to Driffield in January 1821 and preached in the Old Theatre. As at Hull, there was already a revivalist group in the town and a Primitive Methodist Society was soon formed. The first chapel was built in Mill St. in 1822 and one of the first members of the Society was Tommy Wood, a shoemaker who had been converted, with his friend George Sanderson, by Johnny Oxtoby at Warter in the western Wolds.[151] Wood was a Driffield man and returned to his home town to help build up the infant Society. He remained an active member and local preacher until his death in 1881. Financial aid for the building of the chapel came from a Mr. Byas, a wealthy retired farmer who had once employed Oxtoby and was so impressed by the spiritual powers of his former employee that he was prepared to support the infant Society.[152]

George Bullock of Wetwang was an early convert. He took his faith to his native village where a chapel was built in 1824 and to neighbouring Garton whose chapel was

[148] Collieries were opened in the Deerness Valley, Durham in the 1860s and most employees were immigrants from Weardale (where Primitive Methodism was already strong). Conversions followed the same trajectory in the Deerness Valley in the 1870s as they did in Weardale in the 1820s and 30s. Robert Moore *Pit-men, Preachers and Politics*: *The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Comunity* (Cambridge: University Press, 1974), p. 66. Did a similar trajectory occur between conversions in the rural East Riding in the 1820s and industrial Norton in the 1860s ?

[149] Sir Tatton Sykes, 4th Baronet 1826 – 1913 was sympathetic to the Primitives.

[150] North Riding Record Office, Northallerton, 'Malton Primitive Methodist Circuit', Records of New Malton Chapel: R M ML 2/8/1

[151] Kendall, *Origins and History*, Vol. 2 p. 93; Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 43.

[152] Woodcock, op. cit. p. 85.

erected in the same year. Meanwhile missionaries from the Pocklington Circuit reached Duggleby, a large, open village on the High Wolds (significantly without a church), and established a Society there. A chapel was eventually built in 1835. From Duggleby the faith spread down the Great Wolds Valley to Weaverthorpe 1841, Luttons 1848, Kirby 1886 (where the Sykes initially opposed a chapel) and Helperthorpe (where a Society existed into the 1880s but a chapel was never built).[153] It was not until 1837 that Driffield, with upwards of a dozen chapels, became a Circuit in its own right. Both Woodcock and Kendall questioned why this was so. Kendall suggested that

> under the influence of impaired health and increasing infirmities W. Clowes became somewhat timorous of chapel building, and showed little or no willingness to convert branches or missions into independent stations.[154]

Whatever the reason for the delay, Driffield became a Circuit town in 1837 with branches at Bridlington and Hornsea. In 1839, the first year for which records exist, it had nineteen chapels, nine hundred members, sixty-two local preachers and four travelling ones.[155] In 1841-42 there was a great revival in the Circuit, led by the Revs Campbell, Gledhow, Ducker and Newsome. Over five hundred people were converted and a mission was undertaken to the northern Wolds, where chapels were soon built in Wold Newton and Thwing.[156] A mission was also sent, under Brother Richardson, to faraway Glasgow to take the good news to the Scots. Glasgow, however, proved a tougher challenge than Thwing and things clearly went awry. The Minutes of the Circuit Committee record that Brother Richardson had 'fallen', more missionaries were sent out to retrieve the situation and more money was collected.[157] Eventually the Driffield Circuit withdrew their Glasgow mission but their enthusiasm remained strong. In the same year, 1845, money was raised to send a travelling preacher, Brother Handley, to the United States.[158]

In 1849, by which time Clowes had been superannuated, the Bridlington and Hornsea branches became Circuits in their own right. Numbers in the Driffield Circuit were consequently reduced but, by 1857, had recovered to their pre-1850 level at one

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[153] See Chapter 3.
[154] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 2 p 96
[155] ERA, Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1839-61: MRD 2/4/1.

[156] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 87.
[157] ERA, Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Circuit Committee Minutes 1845-51: MRD 2/2/7.
[158] ERA, Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports, 1839-61: MRD 2/4/1.

thousand members, fifteen chapels and sixty-nine local preachers.[159] There were four travelling preachers, one a Superintendent. Driffield was a very successful Circuit - successful in the sense that its chapels were well attended, its members active and its finances sound. It was able to recruit leading ministers such as Woodcock, Charles Leafe and Milson.[160] George Bullock, stalwart of the Wetwang chapel and popular local preacher, was elected a Deed-Poll member by the Conference of 1875.[161] H. B. Kendall wrote in 1907: 'Today, Driffield is one of the widest and, numerically, the strongest county circuit in the Connexion'.[162] In 1882, it had fourteen hundred members, over seventy local preachers and twenty-two chapels plus a varying number of 'preaching places'. These included 'Kilnwick Railway Gate' (a navvy settlement on the recently built Driffield-Market Weighton line) and 'Pry Cottages' (a hamlet on the periphery of Sledmere where the Sykes were still refusing to allow a chapel; they finally relented in 1889 after the enfranchisement of rural labourers in 1886).[163]

By the 1890s, growth was beginning to stall in the Driffield Circuit and financial pressures to bite. In 1893 membership fell below thirteen hundred and several chapels were heavily in debt. Things declined again in the new century but the position in Driffield was never as severe as in Pocklington which had been more severely affected by the agricultural depression. At the 1932 Union, Driffield still had over seven hundred members and two travelling preachers.

There was one, unsuccessful, attempt to split the Driffield Circuit in 1876. It was decided, for reasons that are unclear but probably in order to make travelling more manageable, to establish a separate Circuit based on Nafferton. Nafferton was a large village between Driffield and Bridlington with an embryo industrial economy in the shape of a brick-works and several maltings. It had nine chapels, three hundred and forty members and one travelling preacher.[164] The new Circuit Committee, in an initial burst of enthusiasm, decided to engage a second preacher. This was clearly a big mistake, if only from a financial point of view. Things went wrong almost at once. A

[159] Ihid, Station Reports, 1839-61: MRD 2/4/1
[160] Charles Leafe was the minister who managed to persuade the Sykes to allow a chapel at Sledmere. Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 136-7.
[161] Kendall , *Origin and History*,Vol. 2, p. 94.
[162] Ibid,, Vol. 2, p. 97.
[163] ERA,' Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1874-88: MRD 2/4/3.

[164] ERA, Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1874-88: MRD 2/4/3.

note of 1877 attributes the decrease in Sunday Scholars at Wansford to the opening of a new Wesleyan school in Nafferton, and a further decrease in 1879 is attributed to 'the influence of the clergy'.[165] It was also said that several of the Sunday School teachers had grown 'weary in well-doing'. In 1879 the Treasurer of the Nafferton Society, Newton Barker, was declared insolvent, which seems to have had financial implications for the chapel itself. Finally, in 1880, a decline in the adult membership was attributed to the influence of the 'Hallelujah lasses' (the Salvation Army).[166]

Things were clearly not going well and a letter to the Driffield Circuit Committee dated 5 March 1880 requests that the Circuits be re–combined. The letter records the financial problems of the Circuit and says that 'one fourth (of members) are on parish relief and not more than a score earn more than one pound a week, the majority being agricultural labourers', a reflection of the agricultural depression and the working-class nature of rural Primitive Methodism. [167] The letter also records that, although the nine chapels had seating for twelve hundred, only seven hundred and fifty regularly attended. (A 'well attended' chapel needed to be three-quarters full, which would have meant nine hundred attendances.) This was a problem common to all Victorian church building in all denominations.'Victorian Nonconformity made chapel-building its basic strategy for the recruitment and retention of members'.[168] It was assumed, because church accommodation had been short in the recent past, that new seating would automatically be filled; however this was not to be the case. The Nafferton Circuit letter ends, rather pathetically: 'We confess our fault in calling out a second preacher, but through ignorance we did it'. A final problem of the short-lived Nafferton Circuit only becomes clear in the records for 1881 when Thomas Haw, aged 31, the senior travelling preacher, left the Connexion because of 'disaffection'. He had been absorbed into the Driffield Circuit and was lodged in their, very pleasant, manse in Lockwood St. Why did he leave? The records give no clue but it seems likely that the troubles of the Nafferton Circuit, the reductions in numbers and failure of the Sunday Schools, were bound up with his increasing unease about his situation.

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[165] Another reference to the problems caused by clergymen who attempted to stop National (i.e Church of England) School day pupils from attending Methodist Sunday Schools

[166] ERA, Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1874-88: MRD 2/4/3.

[167] Ibid,, The letter is attached to the Circuit Report for 1880.

[168] Alan Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (London: Longman, 1976), p. 170.

Bridlington Circuit 1849-1932

The Bridlington Circuit started life, as did Driffield, as a branch of Hull. The town was missioned by Robert Coultas who walked there from Driffield on a Saturday afternoon and 'preached to the people at the close of the Market'.[169] A Society was formed and Clowes visited in the following year, 1821. There was considerable opposition, including the turning of a donkey into the services, described at some length by Woodcock; but a chapel was eventually built in 1835.[170] When Driffield became a Circuit in 1837, Bridlington became a branch of Driffield until it eventually achieved independent status in 1849.

By the 1890s, Bridlington was beginning to assume its twentieth-century identity as a seaside town, but it was as a fishing village that it embraced Primitive Methodism. According to the Rev. Shaw it was the uncertainty and danger of the fishermen's lives that led them to repent and seek safety in the assurance of religion.[171] The Bridlington Circuit also included another strongly Primitive fishing village, namely Flamborough. The village stands high on the cliffs north of Bridlington where the Wolds reach the sea. Clowes preached here in 1821 and a chapel was built almost immediately and, according to Woodcock,

> […] the place has been a hot-bed of our society ever since […] [The people] possess an intensely religious nature as evidenced from the large proportion of the population (1,700) who attend religious services and especially from the position and influence of Methodism among them.[172]

A splendid new chapel was erected at Flamborough in 1874 with the usual huge public tea and visits from local dignitaries and officers of the Connexion.[173] In 1876 it was agreed that the chapel could be used for meetings of the Liberation Society without charge.[174] Any suggestion, however, that the Flamborough chapel was managed by a

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[169] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 49.
[170] Ibid,, p 50
[171] Rev George Shaw, *Our Filey Fishermen with Sketches of Their Manners and Customs, Social Habits and Religious Condition* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co. 1867), Chapter 5. .

[172] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 63.
[173] ERA ', Flamborough PM Chapel Trustees Meetings 1872-1892: MRQ 15/1. Record for 1876
[174] The Liberation Society, founded by Edward Miall in 1844, campaigned for the disestablishment of the Church of England. It was largely supported by 'old Dissent' – the Congregationalists and the Quakers,

group of politically active outsiders should be dispelled by a note in the trustees' minutes asking people not to hang fishing-nets on the chapel railings. By 1887 the financial position of some Society members was becoming difficult. Seat rents were reduced in that year and again in 1890. Seats in the gallery were now only six pence per quarter but the stewards were to stand there 'to keep the boys off'.[175]

In 1849 the Bridlington Circuit had three hundred and fifteen members, two travelling preachers, thirty local preachers, seven chapels and five preaching places. There were two Sunday Schools, one at Bridlington Quay (the fishing village) and one at Bridlington Priory (the embryo watering place).[176] By 1880, at its most vigorous, the Circuit had six hundred and twenty members, forty-one local preachers, thirty-five Class Leaders and five Sunday Schools, the two previously mentioned plus others at Wold Newton, North Burton and Flamborough.[177] As in other Circuits the Sunday Schools came and went, although the pressure from Conference to establish new ones was relentless. The number of travelling preachers remained the same at two, as did the number of chapels at seven, although, as in Pocklington and Driffield, there was to be a late flowering in the addition of two more. One was built in 1889 at Haisthorpe, where there had long been a Society, and the other, less than two miles away, at Thornholme in 1891.[178] This was the final triumph of the Primitives over the long-dead (and popish) Archdeacon Wilberforce of Burton Agnes, who had tried, in 1844, to force the people to attend 'Episcopal services' by paying the farmers to ferry them there in wagons.[179]

As in Pocklington and Driffield, signs of decline appear in the Bridlington Circuit in the late 1880s: fewer and older members, lower chapel attendance and less spiritual, as opposed to social, activity. There were the inevitable problems of debt. In 1897 the Rev. Spivey was asked to stay on for a fourth year 'to undertake a debt reduction process', and in the same year worship ceased at Wold Newton (an isolated

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which is why it seems surprising to find it in Flamborough. I have not found any other references to the Society in the records of Wolds Primitive Methodism..

[175] ERA : Records of Flamborough PM chapel, MRQ 15/1. Record for 1887 and 1890.

[176] ERA 'Bridlington Primitive Methodist Circuit': Circuit Reports 1849-1879: MRQ 2/25

[177] ERA 'Bridlington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1880-1892: MRQ 2/26

[178] Neave, *East Riding Chapels*, pp. 45-60.

[179] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry,* p. 81.

High Wold village) for lack of a congregation.[180] The two travelling preachers, however, stayed on until Union.

Filey Circuit 1865-1932

Filey was the last of the Wold Circuits to achieve independent status. It was a branch of the Scarborough station until 1865. The town itself was famously missioned by Johnny Oxtoby and the stirring tale of his triumphs are described by both Woodcock and George Shaw.[181] The first chapel was built in 1823 to be replaced, in 1871, by an imposing Neoclassical structure designed by Joseph Wright, a pupil of Brodrick and architect of many prominent Primitive chapels.[182] The Filey Society was known as one of the most vigorous and active in the Connexion. It had a large Sunday School and, according to Woodcock, the great majority of Filey fishermen belonged to the Connexion. The Haxby and Jenkinson families were particularly well represented and served as local preachers and chapel stewards in the Society for many years. They were also prominent in the well-known and popular Filey Fishermen's Choir. No Filey boats went out on Sundays and all had pious names such as 'Ebenezer', 'William Clowes', or 'Eye of Providence'. It was said in Filey that 'If there were twea herrings in the sea, Ranter Jack would be seaa to git yan o' 'em'.[183]

In 1890 the Circuit had seven chapels, two travelling preachers, twenty local preachers and three hundred and fifty-seven members, making it the smallest of the Wolds Circuits.[184] Most of its strength seems to have been in Filey itself and the adjacent fishing villages. Financially it seems to have survived better than its inland rivals, perhaps because it was not so directly affected by the decline in agriculture.

[180] ERA 'Bridlington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1893-1905: MRQ 2/27
[181] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry,* p. 35; Shaw*, Life of John Oxtoby* (Hull: William Andrews & co, 1894) p. 19
[182], Neave, *East Riding Chapels,* p. 68. Wright was a pupil of Cuthbert Brodick who built Leeds Town Hall.
[183] Shaw, *Our Filey Fishermen*, p. 47
[184] North Yorkshire Archives, Northallerton. 'Filey Primitive Methodist Circuit', Chapel Schedules 1861-1890.

Similarly in Staithes, another fishing village to the north of Scarborough, the Primitive Methodist chapel remained popular and financially sound until 1932 and beyond.[185]

[185] David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge: University Press,1982).

Chapter 7 The Public Face of Primitive Methodism 1820-1869

Introduction

Primitive Methodism was full of contradictions. In its early years it was an intense and inward-looking faith which nevertheless indulged in noisy and exuberant religious evangelism. It was an apparently apolitical and disciplined organisation, certainly as far as its central officials were concerned, which however had links with political radicalism and was involved in early nineteenth-century radical activity. Finally, in spite of its avowed aversion to the world, it concerned itself in one of the most public of Victorian causes – temperance – for reasons which were, however, almost entirely religious. These contradictions have, to quote Robert Colls, 'confused historians ever since'.

> On the one hand they [the Primitives] were blamed for their zeal in producing a particular kind of working class confidence, on the other they were praised for their order, producing a kind of control other agencies could not achieve. Both judgements were essentially correct – an apparent paradox which has confused historians ever since.[1]

This chapter will attempt to assess how these three issues affected the public face of Primitive Methodism in the years before 1870. First, it will consider the effects of Primitive Methodist evangelism and the reactions to it both nationally and locally in the East Riding. Second, it will look at the issue of political radicalism. How extensive was it within Primitive Methodism, and how was it perceived? In particular, how far has the historiography of the subject distorted our present perceptions of Primitive Methodism? Third, it will consider the temperance campaign and its national and local effects. A final section will assess the general impact of Primitive Methodism on contemporaries in the East Riding.

Evangelicalism and 'Ranterism'

In their early years, Primitive Methodists were known as 'Ranters'. According to Kendall, historian of the Connexion, they first acquired the name in the course of their

[1] Robert Colls, 'Primitive Methodism in the Northern Coal Field', *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, ed. Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper and Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 326.

mission to Belper, Derbyshire, in 1819.[2] One Richard Turner compared them to 'the Ranters I have read about somewhere' and the name stuck. Whether it was a conscious referral to the Puritan sect of the same name is not clear.[3] In any case both were loud, exuberant and convinced of the rightness of their cause. Kendall, although he objected to the sound of the word and thought it 'ugly and raucous', admitted that 'the name positively helped on the evangelistic labours of the Connexion – was indeed a factor in its success'.[4] People were unsure what to expect when they heard that 'the Ranters' were coming to their town or village, and so ventured forth out of curiosity. Although the leadership of the Connexion was anxious to leave the name behind, its use persisted in Durham and Northumberland into the twentieth century.[5]

The arrival of the Ranters provoked mixed reactions. Some fell under their spell and having come to mock stayed to pray, other reacted with stone throwing, verbal abuse or distractions such as bells or drums. In Hampshire in 1832 the preacher Thomas Russell was attacked by a hostile mob who threw mud and stones, but he carried on singing:

Wicked men I'm not to fear

Though they persecute me here;

Though they may my body kill'

Yet my King's on Zion Hill.[6]

In Belper in 1819 John Benton, an early missionary, was pelted with 'blood and the excrements of a beast that has been slain'; in Nottingham with 'rotten eggs, filth from the channel and stones'.[7] Atkinson Smith, a travelling preacher who later served in

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[2] Kendall, *Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, 2 Vols. (London: Edwin Dalton, 1907), Vol. 1, pp. 185-7; Julia Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion*: *Its Background and Early History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 79; Hugh Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists, Giving an Account of their Rise and Progress up to the Year 1823* (Bemersley: Printed for the author, 1823), p. 48.

[3] A.L.Morton, *The World of the Ranters: Religious Radicalism in the English Revolution* (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1970), Chapter 4, pp. 70-111; Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1972) pp. 163-168.

[4] Kendall, *Origin and History*, p. 187

[5] Chester Armstrong, *Pilgrimage From Nenthead* (London: Methuen, 1933). The author remembers the name Ranters was commonly used in Weardale in the 1920s.

[6] Thomas Russell, *Record of Events in Primitive Methodism* (London: William Lister, 1869) p. 87.

[7] George Herod, *Biographical Accounts of some of those Preachers whose Labour contributed to the Origin and Early Extension of the Primitive Methodist Connection* (London: n. p., 1855) pp.282 and 291.

the Driffield Circuit, was addressing a meeting in Hunslet (Leeds) in 1831 when 'a mob of six to seven men broke in among us and swore in the most dreadful manner'.[8]

Many accounts emphasise the part played by local gentry and clergy, who were alarmed to see ordinary working people take the lead in preaching services or Camp Meetings. They suggest that the upper classes orchestrated, or at least condoned, outbreaks of mob violence directed against the Primitives. Robert Key, a converted coal porter who led the Primitive Methodist advance into Norfolk, recalled that 'a large proportion of the labouring classes were in favour of the preacher and the opposition was largely confined to the middle and upper classes of society'. [9] Later historiography has followed Key's lead. Robert Colls, writing in 1985, claimed that 'Much of the early opposition to popular Methodism came from people in high places who wanted the poor to keep their mouths shut and their heads bowed'. Michael Watts made much the same point in 1995.[10] Both imply that persecution was to some extent class-based. However, Keith Snell, writing in 2003, put forward an alternative explanation: 'the culture of local xenophobia'.[11] Local suspicion of outsiders was as old as village culture itself and expressed itself in traditional ways – name calling, stone throwing and the 'setting on' of dogs or rodents. Snell's article recalls an earlier one by John Walsh in which the latter attributes much of the antagonism towards eighteenth-century Methodists to mob culture and the 'xenophobia of the lower classes', although he also mentions the influence of landowners and the clergy.[12] These alternative explanations of persecution – the class-based and those based on local xenophobia – are not of course mutually exclusive and both may have been present at the same time.

Ranterism in the East Riding

Camp Meetings were the prime example of Ranter activity in the East Riding. They became extremely popular and, as M.C.F. Morris observed, Primitive Methodism was

[8] Charles Kendall, *The Christian Minister in Earnest: Or the Life of Atkinson Smith* (London: Ward & Co., 1854), p. 29.
[9] Robert Key, *The Gospel among the Masses* (London: R.Davies, 1872), p. 16.
[10] Robert Colls, *Pitmen of the Northern Coal Field*: *Work, Culture and Protest 1790-1850* (Manchester: University Press, 1987), p. 171; Michael Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2: *The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: University Press, 1995), p. 154.
[11] K.D.M. Snell, 'The Culture of Local Xenophobia', *Social History* Vol. 28, (2003), 1-30.
[12] John Walsh, 'Methodism and the Mob in the Eighteenth Century', *Studies in Church History 9* (1972) ed. G.J. Cumming and Eric Baker (Cambridge, University Press, 1972), pp. 213-229.

'the particular denomination which gained the chief influence over the people of the village'.[13] However, there was another side to the story. Not everyone was converted and some disliked the noise and inconvenience of a visit from the Ranters. Some must also have resented the exclusiveness and the moral superiority of their converts.

Noise, for Primitive Methodists, was simply the expression of vital religion. Their singing, praying and general exuberance reflected the joys of conversion and of a life devoted to God. Even Woodcock, however, had to admit that it sometimes went too far. At a revival in Cranswick '[…] shouting became a mania among the young farm labourers; one would sing every few minutes […] No sooner had he [the preacher] knelt down to pray than half a dozen began to shout, "Send the glory", "Give him power", "Scatter darkness"'. [14] Eventually the preachers had to be asked to gently rebuke the more vocal members at Cranswick. Similar attempts had to be made at Pocklington in 1832 where Elizabeth Rispin and others like her caused havoc at Love-feasts and Class Meetings.[15] Robert Sharp of South Cave remarked in his Diary for 1834 that 'A Methodist Preacher and his hearers rushed into the Cross this Evening like soldiers entering a besieged fortress'. Sharp told the man to preach on the street – which he did. '[…] they shall not have that as a right which ought to be granted as a favour', added Sharp, who was generally sympathetic to Methodists, but felt they should be kept in their place.[16] The vicar of Driffield, Richard Allan, whose Diary rarely rises above the humdrum, roused himself to remark in September 1828 on the 'distractions of a Love-feast at Garton' and 'the novelty of a woman preacher'.[17] In May 1830, and again in June 1832, his congregation at church was much reduced because of 'an irregular

[13] M.C.F Morris ed., *Yorkshire Reminiscences* (Oxford: University Press, 1922), p. 192. Morris was the son of Francis Orpen Morris (1810-1893), the vicar of Nunburnholme. The book recalls the younger Morris's boyhood in the Wolds in the 1840s.
[14] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 106.
[15] See Chapter 5. ERA 'Pocklington PM Circuit', Leaders' Minutes 1832-1854: MRP 4/5.
[16] Robert Sharp, *The Diaries of Robert Sharp: Life in a Yorkshire Village* 1812-1837 eds. Janice and J. A. Crowther (Oxford: University Press, 1997), p. 460, entry for 8 June 1834. Robert Sharp, 1773-1843, was the schoolmaster of South Cave, a village near the foot of the Wolds. Although of humble origin he was one of the best educated people in the village and acted as village tax collector and clerk to the Friendly Society. Although a member of the Church of England he had a low opinion of the local clergyman and was sympathetic to Methodism.
[17] The Diaries of Richard Allan, Vicar of Driffield 1798-1833. ERA DDX 904/ 1/1. Entry for 21 September 1828. Allan was a pluralist and drew an income from Little Driffield and Kirkburn as well as Driffield. He was succeeded by his nephew, George, who served as vicar of Driffield from 1833 to 1877. George died in 1881 aged 90. Both men are described in the V.C. H., East Riding of Yorkshire Vol. 9 (ed. David and Susan Neave, O.U.P., 2012) as 'of limited ability'. The Diary consists almost entirely of remarks about the weather or prices in the local market.

assembly of Ranters'.[18] As late as 1881 the *Driffield Times* remarked disapprovingly on the activities of 'Isaac and Tom', two Primitive Methodist evangelists engaged in a 'mission' at Middleton on the Wolds. After observing that the services had been well attended the paper added: '[…] but it is doubtful whether the cause of Truth can really be permanently benefited by such bawling and shouting through the streets on the Sabbath'.[19]

Clearly Primitive Methodists made their presence felt and, quite likely, provoked their neighbours by the noise they made and their pretensions to religious perfection. Robert Sharp, rather laconically, records the history of one Billy Kirby, whose 'ranting' (according to himself) secured a double victory over the Devil:

> Billy Kirby, who is a Ranter, provokes his wife at times with his talking and shouting, which makes her sometimes none too mild, she was calling Billy one day, when he says the Devil came to his Elbow and whispered in his ear 'Knock her down she deserves it, there will not be a bit of Sin in it', but Billy would not agree to the tempter but turned around and ordered him not to interfere, so he got fairly quit of him and rejoiced in his Victory.[20]

Disapproval of noisy praying and singing was one thing but active persecution was quite another. Woodcock mentions various episodes on the Wolds. At Bridlington, 'Persecution raged against our earliest members; they were hooted, pelted with rotten eggs and subjected to abuse and slander'. At one point a donkey was released into the chapel. At Helmsley a preacher was attacked by three roughs and at Burton Pidsea:

> Our people suffered severe persecution [...] They [ill wishers] took the pulpit out of the chapel and weeks after it was found on top of a straw sack. One Sunday morning an ass was found in the chapel, and on another occasion two calves.[21]

The events described by Woodcock – attacks by roughs, pranks involving animals – are more suggestive of local bad feeling than the kind of class-based opposition remarked on by Colls. Public disapproval in village society was often expressed by 'rough music' – tins, drums and so on - or the release of animals, donkeys in particular, at inappropriate moments. Primitive Methodists often referred to themselves in ways suggesting that they saw themselves as somehow apart. Woodcock

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[18] Ibid,, 30 May 1830, 10 June 1832.
[19] *Driffield Times*, 8 October 1881.
[20] Sharp, *Diary*, p 243, 22 January, 1830.
[21] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 50 and p. 173; Joseph Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Mehodism* (London: Edwin Dalton, 1909), Chapter 8, pp.161-172.

talks of 'our people' and describes how 'the saints of God' opposed a 'common show' at Hutton Cranswick.[22] This kind of moral superiority and self-conscious disapproval of the rowdy pleasures of village life – drinking, fighting, dancing – could not have endeared the Primitives to their more robust neighbours.

Primitive Methodism and Radical Politics

In its early years Primitive Methodism was an intensely spiritual and inward-looking faith. It did not much engage with the world outside which it regarded as sinful and corrupt. Salvation came through the reformation of the individual not through the reformation of society, so the task of Primitive Methodism was to rescue the damned and ensure their place in a future life. 'You have nothing to do but save souls', said Wesley, 'therefore spend and be spent in this work'. The prime duty of Primitive Methodist Societies was evangelism and writers such as George Shaw and Woodcock concentrate on this aspect of their work with all its noisy preaching and shouting. Once converts became members of the local Primitive Methodist Society, they entered a world of intense religiosity and spiritual emotion which, effectively, erected a barrier between the outside world and themselves. Alan Howkins described 'the citadel' nature of early Primitive Methodism – the sense of being a bastion against the outside world.[23] And Wayne Johnson talked of the 'Atmosphere of Souls' that enveloped Primitive Methodist converts in the North Midlands in the 1830s.[24] In the East Riding Matthew Denton, a preacher in Beverley, described the state of mind of a 'poor woman', and early convert: 'I have Christ in my heart and heaven in my eye. I have the unfailing word of promise that bread shall be given to me and water shall be found.'[25]

Primitive Methodism in its early days was an intense, spiritual faith whose only interest in a fallen world was to convert people away from it. It therefore showed no

[22] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 108. Woodcock describes how the Primitives marched in front of the showmen singing 'We'll lift the banner on high, the glorious banner of love.' The showmen of course were vanquished and fourteen people later converted in the chapel. However the reaction of the rest of the village is not recorded.

[23] Alun Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 46.

[24] Wayne Johnson, 'In Triumph of Faith; Primitive Methodism and the Labouring People of the North Midlands 1812-1862' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Keele, 1989), Chapter 5, p. 131.

[25] Matthew Denton, *Book of Anecdotes, Religious, Interesting and Practical* (Beverley: John Kemp, 1842), p. 97.

concern for earthly affairs and certainly none for politics. Bourne excluded the 'speeching radical' from the 1821 Conference, not because he rejected political radicalism, but because he regarded it as a distraction from the main object of Primitive Methodism – the saving of souls.[26] The same point was made by Thomas Church, a travelling preacher and early apologist of the Connexion in 1847: 'As Primitive Methodist preachers are employed exclusively for the salvation of sinners, it is thought that interference with politics is beyond their province'.[27] Bourne was also, as John Kent has pointed out, anxious to prevent political discussion within Primitive Methodism for fear of causing internal dissension.[28]

Yet Primitive Methodism was a potentially radical organisation. It was, if not completely democratic, at least far more representative of its membership than were the Wesleyans or the Church of England; it was egalitarian in that anyone with sufficient religious fervour could and did become a Class Leader or local preacher. It also believed that all should be able to study the Bible and interpret it in the light of their own life – which many did. Howkins remarks how many Norfolk Primitive Methodists were converted to trade unionism by 'reading that most radical of texts, the Authorised Version'.[29] Most importantly, the membership of Primitive Methodism was largely working-class. It therefore represented, by its very existence, a threat to the established order. Although the leadership of the Connexion remained solidly apolitical, the political turmoil of the early nineteenth century inevitably drew in some of the Connexion's members – particularly those at the receiving end of rampant industrialisation such as miners and factory operatives, or agricultural labourers displaced by capitalist farming practices, as in Norfolk.[30] It was also the case that those who became Methodist preachers, or Chartist organisers, or miners' leaders, were the most intelligent and the most venturesome in their communities. It was inevitable that there would be some overlap – 'that sparks would jump over' as David Hempton has put it.[31]

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[26] Kendall, *Origin and History,* Vol. 1, p. 474.

[27] Thomas Church , *Sketches of Primitive Methodism* (London: T. Ward & Co., 1847), p. 53.
[28] John Kent, *The Age of Disunity* (London: Epworth, 1966) p. 131.
[29] Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, p. 48.
[30] Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, Chapter 3; Robert Lee, *Rural Society and the Anglican Clergy: Encountering and Managing the Poor 1814-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006) pp. 58-66.
[31] David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1914* (Stanford Ca., Stanford University Press, 1984), p. 214.

Historians have attempted to unravel the different threads which linked 'church and king' mobs with parsons and gentry, Captain Swing with republican plots, and religious radicalism with political radicalism.[32] What follows is a brief survey of what has been said and the questions that still need to be asked.

The Historiography of Methodism and Radical Politics

Robert Wearmouth, writing in the 1930s, emphasised the apolitical nature of Methodism: 'It [Methodism] has always been a loyalist movement and opposed to all forms of violence'.[33] He insists that the early nineteenth-century disturbances involving working men – Luddism, the Swing Riots, Chartism – arose from economic, not political, motives.

> The real cause of all these troubles was evidently economic and not political. Political theory, philosophical teaching, utilitarian ideas and revolutionary thought had less to do with the disturbances than the distress under which so many people continually suffered.[34]

Wearmouth's main point, which he re-iterated in all of his books on Methodism, was that Methodism gave working people the education and the tools with which to challenge the establishment through democratic institutions such as the trade unions and the Labour Party. The more democratic sects of Methodism were never hostile to reform movements, but equally they never went 'beyond the bounds of political neutrality'.[35]

E.P. Thompson, writing in 1963, took a more politicised view of Methodism.[36] He allowed that Primitive Methodism was not tarred with the same brush as its Wesleyan counterpart, which he denounced as a counter-revolutionary force and the agent of industrial despotism. Primitive Methodism, said Thompson, was preached 'by, not at' the people and had genuine working-class roots.[37] Moreover he acknowledged

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[32] 'Captain Swing' was the name appended to several threatening letters sent to landowners and magistrates in the course of the 'Swing Riots' – a revolt by labourers, mainly in the south of England, made destitute by the introduction of threshing machines. E.J. Hobsbawm and George Rude, *Captain Swing* (London: Peregrine, 1985). First published 1969.
[33] Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England, 1800-1850* (London: Epworth Press, 1937), p. 54.
[34] Ibid,, p. 47.
[35] Ibid,, p. 191.
[36] E.P.Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, rev. ed. (London: Pelican, 1968), Chapter 11, pp.384-440.
[37] Ibid, p. 436.

that there was a close connection between religious revivalism and political radicalism which came closest, he claimed, during the Luddite disturbances in Leicester and Nottingham in 1816-17. These are the same disturbances described by George Herod (an early Primitive Methodist apologist), who was anxious to show how the Connexion, far from encouraging such riots, acted as a stabilising and deterrent force: 'The Primitive Methodist missionaries brought a counter acting influence to bear upon the masses, and in multitudes of instances destroyed the baleful virus of infidelity and insubordination'.[38] We see here the same event described in radically different ways, one by a nineteenth-century religious apologist anxious to sanitise the Connexion's radical past and the other by a twentieth-century Marxist anxious to uncover the roots of working-class solidarity.

Eric Hobsbawm, although like Thompson a Marxist, took a more nuanced view, by suggesting that religious revivalism and political radicalism were two sides of the same coin. Both arose in similar economic circumstances – trade depressions, falling wages, agricultural depression – as in the West Riding in the 1820s and Norfolk in the 1830s.[39] Both appealed to those suffering poverty and social dislocation but, generally speaking, they appealed to different constituencies of the deprived: religious revivalism to those who were already more spiritually inclined, particularly women, and who looked for a better life in the world to come; political radicalism to those of a more active disposition, particularly men, who looked to improve the world as it is. Howbawm also made the point that Primitive Methodism was primarily a village religion.[40] It was most successful in small, isolated communities where it became part of the local culture and was not in opposition to it – for instance in mining areas. It was no accident that a high proportion of the leaders of the mining unions were Primitive Methodists.[41] Hobsbawm observes that 'the direct connection between Primitive Methodism and the labour movement was small', meaning that the theology of Methodism did not encourage a collectivist ideology. [42] This was indeed the case and

[38] George Herod, *Biographical Sketches,* p. 12.
[39] Eric Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1964) p. 29; Eric Hobsbawm and George Rude*, Captain Swing* (London: Penguin, 1973) p. 156. Hobsbawm suggests that 'Swing' had its strongest presence in areas where Primitive Methodism was well established, but he never found any direct connection.
[40] Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester: University Press, 1963), p. 137.
[41] Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England*, pp. 229-231.
[42] Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, p. 139.

reinforces the point made in Chapter 4, that Primitive Methodism was a religion of emotion and experience, not of theology. Trade unionism was the miners' response to the experience of their own situation, supported by strong local communities bound together by a religious ideal. It was not inspired by ideology.

Later historians, writing from a sociological standpoint, have emphasised the links between Primitive Methodism and political radicalism - Obelkevich and Ambler in Lincolnshire, Colls and Moore in Durham, Scotland and Howkins in Norfolk.[43] Robert Lee, also writing about Norfolk, found no links between Primitive Methodism and anti-clericalism in the period before 1850 but noted that 'surges of Nonconformist licenses coincide with peaks of unrest in 1816, 1822, 1830 and 1843'.[44] W.R. Ward has taken a more straightforward historical view by setting the Connexion's development within the context of contemporary events.[45] And in 1996 David Hempton argued in favour of considering religious behaviour within its contemporary culture rather than according to a preconceived ideology.[46] The approach of Ward and Hempton seems more satisfactory. Both avoid seeing 'decline' behind every tea meeting and 'planned' revival in a Circuit's quarterly plan and assuming, in accordance with Weberian theory, that spiritual energy had given way to social and political objectives.[47] To contemporaries it simply seemed that the Connexion was expanding in unforeseen directions and gaining a new constituency among local institutions such as Friendly Societies and charitable groups.

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[43] R.W.Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reform: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire 1817-1875* (Hull: University Press, 1989); James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: University Press, 1976); Robert Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest 1790-1850* (Manchester: University Press, 1987); Robert Moore, *Preachers, Pitmen and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Oxford: University Press, 1974); Nigel Scotland, *The Revolt of the Field: A Study of the Methodist Contribution to Agrarian Trade Unionism in East Anglia 1872-96* (Gloucester: Sutton,1981); Alan Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870-1923* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul,1985).

[44] Lee, *Rural Society and the Anglican Clergy*, p.58.
[45] W.R. Ward, *Religion and Society 1790-1850* (London: Batsford, 1972).
[46]David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850* (Stanford Ca: Stanford University Press, 1985); David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion 1750-1900* (London: Routledge, 1996).
[47] Weberian theory predicted that, once the early phase was over in the development of a charismatic sect and the leader dead (or superannuated as in the case of Bourne or Clowes), 'routinization' would set in. Practices would become codified and routine, and bureaucracy (organisation/chapels) would replace spontaneous religion. Max Weber, 'Charisma and Institution Building', *Selected Papers of Max Weber,* ed. with an introduction by S.N.Eisenstadt (London: University of Chicago, 1963).

Primitive Methodism and the Strikes in the Durham Coalfield

In 1832 and again in 1844 there were strikes in the Durham coalfield because of poor working conditions.[48] In both cases the strikes were led by Primitive Methodists and chapels were used to pray for the success of the strike and God's blessing upon it. Lord Londonderry's agent complained that the men were led to strike by 'Ranter preachers'.[49] Both strikes were eventually defeated by the mine-owners, supported by the government, and the strikers were denied further employment. Tommy Hepburn, leader of the 1832 strike, spent nearly ten years as an itinerant tea seller in Weardale. He was eventually re-employed at Felling Pit, but only on condition that he took no further part in union activity.[50] Mark Dent, who led the prayers at the beginning of the 1844 strike on Shadon Hill, was a broken man by 1847.[51] In spite of the huge sacrifices made by such men, official Primitive Methodism gave them no support.[52] Like the leaders of the Wesleyans in the revolutionary years between 1790 and 1815 the Primitive Methodist leadership were desperate to avoid charges of political radicalism and anxious to secure social approval. John Petty, who had served in the Sunderland Circuit in the 1820s and must therefore have had some idea of the difficulties of the pitmen, described the events of 1844 in his *History of the Primitive Methodist Connection.* He made the same point as Bourne – that politics impedes the work of God:

> Now followed an unhappy difference between the pitmen and their employers. Thousands were thrown out of work and were ejected from their dwellings which were the property of their employers […] It is not within the scope of our design to discuss the merits of this unhappy contest […] We state the painful facts merely to show how they militated against the work of God and the welfare of religious societies.[53]

Kendall, writing fifty years later, passes over the episode with only a brief mention of Tommy Hepburn, preferring to concentrate on the 'enormous moral improvement' wrought on the miners' lives by Primitive Methodism.[54]

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[48] Colls, *Pitmen of the Northern Coal Field:* Chapter 12, pp.189-204.
[49] Wearmouth, *Methodism and Working Class Movements*, Chapter 6.
[50] Colls, *Pitmen of the Northern Coal Field*, p. 99.
[51] Ibid,, p. 200.
[52] Ibid,, p. 196.
[53] John Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, From its Origin to the Conference of 1859* (London: Richard Davies, 1860), p. 342
[54] In a footnote, Kendall records that, during a confrontation on Shilden Hill in 1831 with the forces of the Marquis of Londonderry, the miners raised their muskets, but Tommy Hepburn cried out 'Make way for her Majesty's troops.' Kendall adds 'We mistrust the reference to the miners' muskets and the threatened massacre. There is however no reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of the story', Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 2, p. 187.

Chartism

Primitive Methodists were also involved in the Chartist agitation – again with no official support. It was not until the late nineteenth century, when the fear of a revolt by the working classes had finally passed, that official Primitive Methodism felt able to give approval to strike action. Nevertheless, as in the case of the Durham miners, individual Primitive Methodists were prepared to make a stand. At the great meeting at Peep Green near Halifax in 1839, William Thornton, a local preacher, opened the proceedings with a hymn and a prayer.[55] John Skevington, another local preacher in Loughborough, was an active Chartist, as was Joseph Capper, a Tunstall blacksmith who had been present at Mow Cop in 1807. Thomas Cooper, previously a Primitive Methodist preacher, led Leicester Chartists through the streets in 1842.[56] Chartism also adopted the Methodist system of Classes, Camp Meetings and travelling lecturers (instead of preachers) into its organisation in the 1840s.[57]

Neither Skevington, Capper nor Cooper received any support from official Primitive Methodism and all three later left the Connexion, having broken the 'no politics' rule. Kendall, in a more direct comment than the one on the Durham miners, expresses regret about this. He says of Skevington and Capper that they

> […] may Connexionally have been a little before their time, but were only carrying out explicitly those principles of Christian Democracy which, from the beginning, had been implicit in Primitive Methodism.[58]

But this was a later (1907) apologetic. At the time, Skevington, Capper and Cooper were seen by the Primitive Methodist leadership as embarrassments to the cause and the official Connexion lost no time in disowning them.

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[55] John Hargreaves, "Hats Off!' Methodism and Popular Protest in the West Riding', *P.W.H.S.* Vol. 57, (2010), pp. 161-178.
[56] Thomas Cooper, 1805-92. He started off as a Primitive Methodist then became a Wesleyan. After a period of doubt – a result of his Chartist experiences – he ended up as a popular Christian lecturer. Thomas Cooper, *Autobiography* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1872.
[57] Julia Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connection*, p. 168; Michael Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 2,* p. 515; R. F. Wearmouth, *The Social and Political Influence of Methodism in theTwentieth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), p. 244; Kendall, *Origin and History,* Vol. 1 pp. 335-8.
[58] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. I, p. 338.

Primitive Methodism expressed itself in radical political activity in particular places and at particular times – in the North Midlands during the troubles of 1816, in Durham during the strikes of 1831 and 1844 and, over a wider geographical area, during the Chartist years 1837-1848. The emphasis of recent historiography on the links between Primitive Methodism and radicalism has somewhat overshadowed its religious development, leaving the impression that, once Weberian 'decline' set in, its spiritual development was over and the gap was filled by political Nonconformity. This was just not the case. The question which now needs to be asked is: How did Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds (where it was undoubtedly strong) find public expression and how 'radical' was it, if it was radical at all?

Radical Politics and the East Riding 1820-1860

There was little political radicalism among Primitive Methodists on the Wolds in the early nineteenth century – in fact there was little political radicalism there at all. The years between 1826 and 1831 saw a good deal of social distress caused by the use of threshing machines (which lowered wages). However the Swing Riots were largely confined to counties south of Lincolnshire and manifested themselves further north only in occasional rick-burning.[59] In the East Riding two threshing machines were destroyed at Beverley in 1830 and the constables called out at Malton.[60] 'In comparison with the southern and eastern counties, the amount of arson was small and, since the condition of labour was relatively good, conflict between farmers and labourers was slight.'[61]

Nor did Chartism arouse much fervour among Primitive Methodists in the East Riding. Although the Swedenborgian minister in Hull, William Hill, was a founder editor of the Chartist newspaper *The Northern Star*, Stephen Hatcher found no links between Hull Primitive Methodism and Chartism during his researches into the development of the Connexion in the city in the 1830s or 40s.[62] Chartist activity was reported in Driffield and Beverley in 1848.[63] However, it seems unlikely that the

[59] Hobsbawm and Rude, *Captain Swing*, pp. 136 and 170.
[60] R.P. Hastings, *Essays in North Riding History 1780-1850* (Northallerton: North Riding County Council, 1981) p. 98
[61] Ibid,, p. 101
[62] Stephen Hatcher, 'Origin and Expansion of Primitive Methodism in the Hull Circuit', (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Manchester Dept. of Theology, 1993).
[63] Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester, University Press, 2007) p. 315.

agitation affected their rural hinterland to any great extent. Chartism was more an urban phenomenon than a rural one.[64]

What radical activity there was within East Riding Primitive Methodism was mainly expressed in its robust reaction to the (relatively few) attempts by the Church of England to curtail its activities. Archdeacon Wilberforce's attempt to prevent Mark Normandale from holding Prayer Meetings in his cottage has already been mentioned.[65] Two other examples concern, significantly, the activities of Tractarian clergy later in the century. Tractarians were particularly disliked by Primitive Methodists – and the rest of Nonconformity – because they were seen as promoting Roman Catholicism and subverting the principles of the Reformation. The Rev. Woodcock had himself published a written attack on the Church of Rome, published in 1862.[66] In 1880, during the mission run by 'Isaac and Tom' in Middleton, there was opposition from the local curate, 'a tiny man who walked about the village as if he were Peer and Pope combined'.[67] The encounter ended, according to Woodcock, with the rector of Middleton (who had been absent at the time) dismissing the curate and giving Isaac three shillings toward the purchase of the 'Seaside Gospel Tent Tabernacle opened at Cleethorpes to-day, June 10th 1887'. In a second incident, in 1889, the Rev. Leafe overcame the objections of the vicar of Sledmere to the building of a chapel in the village (which had already been promised by the Sykes).[68] In both incidents Woodcock is at pains to make out that it is not the Church of England which he disapproves of but perversions of its doctrines by those who should know better. The implication is, although he certainly does not state it explicitly, that the vicar of Middleton and Sir Tatton Sykes have been somehow misled by clergy with Tractarian sympathies.

The Temperance Star

By the late nineteenth century temperance (moderate use of alcohol) had come to be seen as almost synonymous with evangelical Dissent, but it had not always been so.

[64] Richard Brown, *Chartism* (Cambridge : University Press, 1998), p. 24
[65] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 81-3
[66] *Popery Unmasked: being thirty conversations between Mr. Daylight and Mr. Twilight, in which the peculiar doctrines, morals, government, and uses of the Romish Church are truthfully stated from her own duly authorised works, and impartially tried by God's word etc*. Henry Woodcock, Methodist Minister. London: Driffield [printed, 1862].
[67] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 122-5.
[68] Ibid,, pp. 135-7.

Temperance had in fact originated among working-class communities in industrial Lancashire and Cheshire as a response to poverty and ignorance.[69] Later it came to be associated with radical politics and Chartism - a demonstration of the self-control and will-power of working men as opposed to the drunken and debased aristocracy.[70] It was a largely urban movement, strong in the industrial north and weak in the rural south, which saw itself as representing provincial innocence against 'the corrupt metropolis and its Babylonian decadence'.[71]

Brian Harrison makes clear the distinction between temperance (moderation in drinking) and teetotalism (abstention from all alcohol). The latter was associated with working-class radicalism and Chartism; the former with middle-class evangelical opinion. The two groups eventually formed an uneasy alliance in the National Temperance Society (later League) in 1842 which campaigned on a platform of 'moral persuasion' i.e. persuading individuals to give up drink in the years leading up to the Licensing Act of 1870.[72] Meanwhile the United Kingdom Alliance, a society founded under American influence and open to both those advocating temperance and those advocating teetotalism, was founded by Samuel Bowly, a Quaker, in 1853.[73] The Alliance believed in a legislative solution to the drink problem and advocated the total prohibition of all alcohol. Neither the League nor the Alliance were religious organisations, but they drew in many religious supporters – most of them Nonconformists.[74]

Temperance and Nonconformity

The Beer Act of 1830, which liberalised the laws concerning the sale of beer, allowed almost anyone to set up a brewhouse. Accordingly outlets for the sale of beer multiplied exponentially, particularly in industrial towns. It was this, according to Michael Watts,

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[69] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, p. 214.
[70] Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), p.388
[71] Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians,* p. 32.
[72] Ibid,, pp. 127-146.
[73] Ibid,, pp. 196-218.
[74] Thomas Burt, local preacher, miners' leader and the first Primitive Methodist ever to be elected to Parliament in 1874 was, at one time, Vice President of the United Kingdom Alliance. Brian Harrison 'State Intervention and Moral Reform', *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England*, ed. Patricial Hollis (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), pp. 289-317, p. 298.

which 'brought home to Dissenters the fact that drinking places were their competitors for the leisure time and money of the working classes and, ultimately, for their souls'.[75]

Kendall claimed that the connection between temperance and Primitive Methodism began with Lorenzo Dow. It was through his influence on Thomas Eaton, a local manager of the Bridgewater Canal and member of the Independent Methodist Church at Warrington, that the first Total Abstinence Society was founded there in 1830.[76] Whatever its origin, the connection was well established by 1831 when Hugh Bourne, already a convinced teetotaller, proposed a motion to Conference approving a section on temperance in the Connexional magazine.[77] The motion was enthusiastically supported. Kendall made it clear that temperance for Primitive Methodists was primarily a religious, not a social, issue.

Temperance was nothing if not altruistic. While as yet Science delayed her decision on the question, men lent a readier ear to the high teaching of Paul – that men should be considerate of the weak and abstain for their sake if not their own. This was not only Temperance but 'religious Temperance'.

In the following year (1832) Conference passed a motion in favour of the temperance principle and the 'seven men of Preston' founded the Preston Temperance Society on the basis of a 'moderation pledge'. Three of the seven were Primitive Methodists but their leader, Thomas Livesey, was a self-made cheesemonger and a member of the anti-Corn-Law League who was to become a prominent opponent of the New Poor Law in Preston in 1835. [78] Here is another example of the close links between Primitive Methodism and radical politics. Livesey was not a Primitive (in fact he was agnostic), but his links with the temperance society must have raised concerns among the more conservative leaders of the Connexion. Similarly the career of Thomas Stamp, ardent temperance campaigner, radical and – for a time - Primitive Methodist minister, illustrates the suspicions of a conservative central authority towards its more radical fringes.[79] Stamp, having caused trouble in the Hull Circuit over the temperance issue,

[75] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, p. 217.
[76] Kendall, *Origin and History*, p. 475. Dow's last visit to England was in 1818 so the connection was tenuous. Kendall was probably anxious to disassociate temperance from its radical origins.
[77] Ibid,, p. 471; Watts, *The Dissenters*, Vol. 2 p. 217.
[78] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, p. 215; Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 126.
[79] Colin Dews, 'Rev. John Stamp, Primitive Methodist Secessionist and the Christian Temperance Brethren', *P.W.H.S.* Vol. 57 (2010) pp, 178-190. Stamp claimed he was dismissed because of his teetotalism and radicalism but Dews, along with Kendall, comes to the conclusion that his financial recklessness was probably the more imperative reason. It was to counter the activities of Stamp and others like him that Conference established District Building Committees in 1835. See Chapter 6.

was dismissed as a minister by the Conference of 1841. He later formed a short-lived breakaway group in Leeds called the 'Teetotal Methodist Society'.[80]

After the establishment of the Preston society the 'Temperance Star' began its rise over the whole Connexion. Temperance societies were established in Hull, Sunderland and Leeds, and several leading ministers committed themselves to the cause including Thomas Anliffe who was to become first principal of the Primitive training college at Elmfield and George Lamb, in whose memory was endowed a scholarship there for aspirant ministers.[81] In 1835 the Connexion was involved in the foundation of the Independent Order of Rechabites, a temperance Friendly Society which eventually had several branches in the East Riding. The Conference of 1841 went further in approving teetotalism (as opposed to temperance) and in recommending its 'prudent advocacy' to Primitive Methodist Societies.[82] From then on temperance became more or less compulsory among the central officers of the Connexion and among ministers, although it proved more difficult to impose the idea on ordinary members in remote local Societies – as will be demonstrated in the case of the East Riding.

Other religious denominations did not follow where Primitive Methodism had led. Only the smaller evangelical groups, such as the Bible Christians and the Cowherdites, fully embraced teetotalism.[83] The Wesleyans were actively hostile and passed a motion against it at their Conference of 1841.[84] The reasons for this lay in the continuing association of teetotalism with political radicalism. It was only after 1860, with the increasing appetite for reform manifested by Victorian governments and the beginning of Gladstone's moral crusades, that the Wesleyans and others saw teetotalism in a new light. Much later than 1850, says John Kent, 'middle-class leaders finally tamed teetotalism and made it the servant of Political Nonconformity'.[85] Meanwhile the Church of England established a Temperance Society in 1862 and the Roman Catholics in England in 1873.[86]

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[80] Kendall, *Origin and History* Vol. 1, pp. 254-258, Obelkewich*, Religion and Rural Society (*Oxford: University Press, 1976), p. 250..

[81] This was the scholarship which allowed Tom Sykes, a Wetwang agricultural labourer to train to become a Minister. See Chapter 6.

[82] Kendall, *Origin and History,* Vol. 1, p. 472.

[83] Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 180.

[84] John Kent, 'Wesleyan Methodists to 1849', *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* Vol. 2, ed. Rupert Davis, Raymond George and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth, 1978), p. 223.

[85] John Kent, op. cit. p. 224.

[86] Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, pp. 182-3.

Temperance in the East Riding

Although eagerly accepted by Conference in the 1830s the temperance campaign had a slow start among Wolds Primitive Methodists. This may well have had something to do with William Clowes. Clowes was a powerful voice within the Hull and East Riding Circuits and, although he agreed with a temperate approach to alcohol, he disliked Bourne's wholesale embrace of teetotalism. Indeed the teetotal issue was the main cause – along with the two men's increasing intransigence – which led to the growing alienation between them and their superannuation at the Conference of 1842.[87] It was also in Hull that the secessionist John Stamp was active in the 1840s, causing division in the Societies between those supporting temperance and those supporting teetotalism.[88] At Patrington (in Holderness) Atkinson Smith was worried by a decline in numbers which he attributed to the disputes about teetotalism:

> […] the societies had become agitated by the total abstinence question. The Connexion has always been friendly to this cause […] yet, because it does not give up preaching the gospel and devote all its energies to teetotalism, interested, ill-natured and aggrieved men abuse it.[89]

In the Pocklington Circuit in 1840 two travelling preachers, Brothers Dawson and Cooper, attempted to persuade the societies to embrace teetotalism but were firmly resisted and not re-appointed to the Circuit. 'It will not be to the Circuit's advantage to re-station Bros Dawson and Cooper' the Circuit Committee Minutes state firmly.[90] There is no evidence to suggest that the dispute had anything to do with events in Hull but it cannot be unlikely. In Driffield a (secular) Temperance Society was first established in 1839 and a branch of the Independent Order of Rechabites in the same year.[91] There is no mention of either in the records of the Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit (which only exist, however, from 1837), but disputes about teetotalism and its relationship to the Societies carried on into the 1850s. For instance in 1852 the Circuit

[87] See Chapter 6
[88] Colin Dews, op. cit. p. 185.
[89] Kendall, *The Christian Minister in Earnest*, p. 62.

[90] ERA 'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Circuit Committtee Minutes 1832-1845: MRP 4/5.
[91] Victoria County History, Yorkshire East Riding Vol. 9 *Driffield and Its Townships* ed. David and Susan Neave (Oxford: University Press, 2012), p. 130.

Committee allowed the 'teetotallers' to use the Driffield School Room for meetings 'provided they pay', but apparently they failed to do so and were consequently deprived of its use the following year. Again, in 1856, the Circuit Committee refused the Temperance Society at Weaverthorpe the use of Weaverthorpe chapel.[92] It clearly took some time for the 'Temperance Star' to rise over the Driffield Circuit.

According to the *Victoria County History* temperance, as a secular cause, was popular in Driffield in the 1840s and 50s. There was a series of lectures in 1841 and, in 1846, a 'temperance festival'.[93] By the 1860s Primitive Methodists were beginning to associate themselves with a popular local cause and we see the start of a long series of public temperance events taking place in the Primitive Methodist chapel. In January 1870, David Railton, Superintendant of the Driffield Sunday School, addressed a meeting of the local Temperance Society and in 1874, when the new Primitive Chapel was built in George St., its predecessor, a much simpler building in Mill St., became the new Temperance Hall.[94] The word 'temperance' is generally used in the Circuit records after 1870 (and in reports in the *Driffield Times*) to include both temperance and teetotalism – no clear distinction is made. The controversies of the 1850s seem to have been subsumed into a general acceptance of temperance as both a social and a religious ideal in the Driffield Circuit. By the 1880s, as the next chapter will show, this acceptance had grown into a commitment to prohibition (as opposed to moral persuasion) through the agency of the Liberal Party.

Sunday Schools

Contemporaries in the East Riding experienced more of Primitive Methodism through their Sunday Schools than through their temperance or political activities, at least before 1860. Sunday Schools, a product of the evangelical revival, began under the leadership of Robert Raikes and Hannah Moore in the mid-eighteenth century.[95] In their early days they were non-denominational, but the pressures of inter-denominational rivalry in the

[92] ERA 'Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Circuit Committee Minutes 1851-1859: MRD 2/2/8; Preparations for Quarterly Meetings 1852-73: MRD 2/2/2.
[93] VCH East Riding Vol. 9, p. 130.
[94] *Driffield Times*, 1 Jan 1870; VCH East Yorkshire Vol. 9, p. 131.
[95] Thomas Lacquer, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working-Class Structure* 1780-1850 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976), Chapter 2.

nineteenth century led to the denominalisation of all Sunday Schools by 1820, including the great Sunday School at Stockport which educated six thousand working-class children. W. R. Ward described Sunday Schools as 'the only religious institution which the nineteenth-century public in the mass had any intention of using'; and Edward Royle has estimated that in 1851 over 200,000 children, 13% of the population, attended Sunday Schools. [96]

In 1980 Malcolm Dick challenged Lacquer's contention that Sunday Schools were largely run by and for the working classes.[97] He asserted, as was the fashion at the time, that Sunday Schools were a form of 'social control'.[98] Their teaching was largely controlled by middle-class interests who wanted to ensure obedience and respectability among their employees. There may have been some truth in this observation applied to Methodism in the towns and their industrial suburbs, but it was certainly not true of the Wolds where both the leadership and the membership of Primitive Methodism was almost entirely working-class. More recently Keith Snell has observed that, although local employers and landowners may have played a part in founding Sunday Schools, their day-to-day running was largely in the hands of their main users – working people. Snell also remarked that Primitive Methodism, after a slow start in Sunday School provision, had caught up with the Church of England by 1851 and, in the later nineteenth century, achieved a high growth rate of Sunday Scholars.[99]

A Sunday School was established at Driffield as early as 1827 under a Mrs. Mary Pulman.[100] It was followed by Sunday Schools at Frodingham (1839), Bridlington (1840), and Gembling, Langtoft and Weaverthorpe in 1845. By 1865 the Driffield Circuit had ten Sunday Schools involving over nine hundred children.[101] The Pocklington Circuit (always less prosperous than Driffield) had three Sunday Schools

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[96] Ward, *Religion and Society*, p. 13; Edward Royle, 'Evangelicals and Education', *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal*, ed. John Wolffe (London: S.P.C.K., 1995), p. 121.
[97] Malcolm Dick,'The myth of the Working Class Sunday School', *History of Education* Vol. 9 (1980) 27-41.
[98] F.M.L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 34 (1981), pp. 189-208. Thompson attacked the 'social control' argument. He pointed out that it assumed working people were 'mere putty' in the hands of their superiors, whereas they in fact took many initiative to improve their lot e.g. Friendly societies and Temperance organisations.
[99] Keith Snell, 'Sunday School Movements in England and Wales', *Past and Present*, Vol. 164, (1999), pp. 123-168.
[100] Recorded in the 'Centenary Booklet for Driffield Primitive Methodist Sunday School', 1927.
[101] ERA 'Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1839-1861: MRD 2/4/1

involving one hundred and eighty children in 1861.[102] Parents sent children to Sunday Schools for various reasons – not all of them religious - but, through their children's experience, a fair proportion of the village population experienced Primitive Methodist enthusiasm and biblical devotion. Primitive Methodist Sunday Schools, unlike those of the Wesleyans, also taught writing, which may have given them an added appeal to parents.[103] At the Driffield Sunday School procession to celebrate Victoria's jubilee in 1889, Woodcock proudly remarked that the Primitive Methodist Sunday School was the largest in the town:

> When, at the Queen's Jubilee Festival, 1887, our school was found to number a hundred more scholars than any other in the town, a gentleman said 'What a splendid school you have, 440 scholars and 50 teachers!' – a remarkable fact […] in this little town of 6,000 inhabitants.[104]

Missionary Meetings

'Missionary Meetings' were another source of popular Primitive Methodist experience in the years before 1870. Not missionary in the sense of overseas missions to Fernando Po or the Zulus (which took place a good deal later), but to far-away places in the United Kingdom which East Riding missionaries had undertaken to 'open' – the Channel Islands, the Isle of Wight, Glasgow. [105] These missions took place in the 1840s and 50s and, according to Woodcock, were hugely popular. The missionary delegations preached three sermons and gave ten speeches in six days, large sums of money were collected and 'the village was all alive with anticipation'. At Bridlington in 1842 descriptions of the mission to Alderney drew Dissenters and churchmen together 'in brotherly love', and at Sledmere in 1863 'Mr. Hardy's barn was crowded with two hundred people' for a missionary event.[106] Even allowing for some exaggeration by Woodcock writing of events forty year before, the record of Wolds Missionary Meetings was impressive.

The Chapels

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[102] ERA 'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1860-69: MRP 4/28
[103] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, p. 296.
[104] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 90.
[105] Ibid,, Chapter 16, pp. 235-254.
[106] Ibid, p. 250.

Perhaps the most obvious impact of Primitive Methodism on the outside world was a visual and a topographical one – the chapels. In the early days the Connexion had met in barns or cottages because numbers were small and money hard to come by. Some chapels were built surprisingly early - North Cave in 1819, Acklam, Melbourne and Drifield in 1821 – the last with help from Mr. Byas, a wealthy retired farmer who had previously employed Johnny Oxtoby.[107] Most Societies had to wait until the 1830s or 40s before raising a chapel, some even longer. The Fridaythorpe chapel was not built until 1851. These early buildings were unpretentious affairs, 'preaching boxes' they were often called. Square and barn-like they were usually on a side street (for instance in Mill St. in Driffield) and were rarely placed on the main street - that was to come later. They were usually built with local materials by a local builder with the help of the congregation – architect designs with Greek or Gothic flourishes lay in the future. By 1851 there were fifty Primitive Methodist chapels on the Wolds.[108] These early chapels demonstrated that Primitive Methodism had arrived in a town or village and that its doors were open to all who wished 'to flee from the wrath to come'. They also demonstrated that Primitive Methodism was still a society of the poor and dispossessed that aimed its sights not on progress in this world but in the world to come.

Conclusion

Primitive Methodism had associations with political radicalism, and individual members of its Societies were involved in both Chartism and trade unionism. However, the leadership of the Connexion was never political, indeed it insisted that its religious mission would be damaged by any political involvements and disowned those who stepped across its self-imposed boundaries.

In the East Riding in the years before 1870, Primitive Methodism was largely untouched by radical politics; it remained a purely religious association whose main object was to spread the word of God and to save souls. Its public face therefore was characterised by its noisy evangelism and popular preaching, not by any obvious

[107] David and Susan Neave, *East Riding Chapels and Meeting Houses* (East Yorkshire Local History Society, 1990), pp. 4-17.
[108] Ibid,, p. 4.

'political' activity such as opposing Church Rates or attending Chartist meetings. There was some 'persecution' of Primitive Methodist preachers, most of it of a somewhat boorish and rowdy variety. It was more likely based on local xenophobia towards the new and unusual rather than on a fear of free, working-class expression, although there may have been elements of both. The exclusivity and self-proclaimed holiness of some early Society members must also have irritated their neighbours and led to participation in some of the 'persecution', or at least to its toleration. Later, once the sect had established itself in the 1840s, its Sunday Schools and Missionary Meetings became a part of village life and it was through those that a fair proportion of the village population experienced –at least at second hand – Primitive Methodist enthusiasm and biblical devotion.

The temperance issue was a special case – a public issue that was adopted for religious reasons, in spite of its close association with radical causes. Although the temperance principle was warmly embraced by official Primitive Methodism, it does not appear to have been so warmly received by local Societies – certainly not in the East Riding, although local factors (the John Stamp secession) may have played some part here. In any case the conflict between the centre and the periphery of Primitive Methodism – in the case of both Chartism and temperance - is interesting and is reflected in Alan Howkins's work in Norfolk.[109] The subject will be further explored in later chapters.

[109] Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, pp. 47-8.

Chapter 8 The Public Face of Primitive Methodism 1870-1914

Introduction

By the late 1860s Primitive Methodism had emerged from what Kendall described as its 'heroic' phase. Weber would have described it as its 'sect' phase.[1] It ceased to be an exclusive and inward-looking devotional group and moved into the main stream of Nonconformity. The term 'Nonconformity' included all the old Dissenting sects formed during the religious upheavals of the seventeenth century – the Quakers, the Baptists, the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians and the Unitarians – plus all the Methodist groups, the most numerous being the Wesleyans, the Primitives and the New Connexion. By the mid-century the term 'political Nonconformity' had come to mean Nonconformists acting together – mainly through Parliament but also through other bodies – in order to bring to an end to the so-called 'Dissenting grievances': exclusion from civic life, exclusion from the ancient universities and from certain professions; and the barring of Dissenting ministers from holding marriage, baptism and burial services. It also came to include Dissenting views about public education, temperance and morality in public life – the much-vaunted 'Nonconformist conscience'.[2]

Primitive Methodists were drawn into political Nonconformity through the temperance campaign, the Friendly Societies, and – most of all – through the education issue. Education was enormously important. It affected all classes directly and was, for many people, their first experience of direct state intervention in their lives. The first Primitive Methodist MP, Thomas Burt, a miner, was elected for Morpeth in 1874.[3] He

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[1] H.B.Kendall, *Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (London: Dalton, c. 1907) Vol. 1, p. 160; Sam Whinster ed. *The Essential Weber: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004) p. 412. Weber proposed that religious sects went through three phases. In the first they were intensely pietistic and inward looking, in the second they turned outwards, became involved in the world outside and developed institutions such as chapels and Sunday schools, in the third institutionalism overwhelmed them, their spirituality became diluted and they joined the religious mainstream.

[2] The term was first coined during the Parnell divorce case in 1892. Nonconformist opinion, led by Hugh Price-Hughes the Wesleyan leader and John Clifford, a prominent Baptist minister, forced Gladstone to insist that Parnell, champion of the Irish Nationalists in Parliament, should step down as their leader because of his involvement in a divorce case. James, Munson, *The Nonconformists: In search of a lost culture* (London: SPCK,1991), p. 204; David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914* (London: Allan & Unwin, 1982), pp. 11-17; Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: Vol. 3 The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity* (Oxford: University Press, 2015) p. 301.

[3] Thomas Burt 1837-1922 became Secretary of the Northumberland Miners' Union in 1863 and M.P. for Morpeth 1874-1918. He served in Gladstone's fourth ministry and remained true to the Liberal tradition. He never joined the Labour Party.

was followed by several others including Joseph Arch, founder of the Agricultural Workers Union, and George Edwards, another agricultural unionist and MP for North-West Norfolk.[4] The East Riding never produced a Primitive Methodist MP. Here politics, although certainly sectarian, remained largely local and pragmatic.

This chapter will first consider the historiographical treatment of Nonconformity and politics in the later nineteenth century and ask what questions it raises in the context of Primitive Methodism in the East Riding. Secondly it will consider the issues involved – education; the promotion of temperance; membership of the Friendly Societies, and the Gladstonian Liberal Party. Finally it will discuss the phenomenon of 'the conscience' itself and its manifestations in the East Riding.

The Historiographical Treatment of Methodism and Politics after 1870

Ian Sellars in his brief history of *Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity* concludes by saying that, although Nonconformists were responsible for considerable social progress, '[…] in the present historiographical climate no aspect of Victorianism lies under a more disapproving cloud than its zeal for well-doing'. [5] Forty year later judgements are perhaps less harsh, and since that date a large number of studies have expanded our knowledge of that once despised phenomenon, the Nonconformist conscience. In 1982 David Bebbington produced the first of his many studies of 'the conscience' from its beginnings in the quest for religious equality in the mid-century to the challenges of the First World War, while George Machin, in 1987, covered the same period but from a different point of view, describing religious reaction to all political events from 1869 to 1921.[6] James Munson, in a more general appraisal published in 1991, traces Nonconformity's place in Victorian life and devotes considerable space to the workings of the Nonconformist conscience.[7]

The problem with all the publications mentioned so far is that they consider political Nonconformity from a very limited viewpoint – that of educated middle-class opinion – and give very little idea of how the issues appeared at the other end of the

[4] George Edwards 1850-1933, founded the Eastern Counties Agricultural Union in 1906 and was briefly an M.P. 1918-20. Like Burt he remained a Liberal and never supported the Labour Pary. Joseph Arch, 1826-1919, founded the Warwickshire Agricultural Trade Union in 1872 and became a Liberal M.P. in 1885.

[5] Ian Sellers, *Nineteenth Century Nonconformity* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p, 92.

[6] David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914* (London: George Allan and Unwin, 1982); G.I. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain Vol. 2 1869-1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

[7] James, Munson, *The Nonconformists: In search of a lost culture* (London: SPCK,1991).

social spectrum in scattered rural circuits beyond the influence of large town chapels. More relevant here is Kenneth Lysons's memoir of his youth as a young Lancashire Primitive Methodist.[8] He recalls his father, whose great hero was Oliver Cromwell, regaling him with tales of Anglican iniquities and the sufferings of Nonconformists. The sufferings, however, were long over and Lysons's point, which is very much in accord with that made by Bebbington and Munson, is that Nonconformists tended to dwell too much on past grievances. A different approach was that of Clyde Binfield in 1977, who considered Nonconformity and politics in relation to specific congregations (mostly suburban and middle-class) between 1780 and 1920.[9] His book is a sympathetic account of the dilemmas and difficulties faced by those of comfortable means in a socially uncomfortable environment. As such, it is more of a memoir than a work of history but is nevertheless valuable as a portrait of the milieu in which the leaders of political Nonconformity – Hugh Price Hughes, Joseph Chamberlain, Dr. Clifford and others – moved in the concluding years of the nineteenth century.

Several local studies – Moore in County Durham, Ambler in Lincolnshire, and Howkins in Norfolk – have considered the interaction between local politics and Nonconformity but none was concerned with the local impact of national political issues.[10] David Hempton in his study of Methodism published in 1996 noted that local Methodism had stronger roots in local culture and experience than in the directives and theology of its central committees.[11] This chapter will show how national issues of concern to Nonconformist politicians were actually received locally by rural and small-town Nonconformists - particularly Primitive Methodists - in the East Riding in the years between the late 1860s and 1914.

The Background to Nonconformist Political Involvement

It was middle-class Nonconformity, largely led by the Quakers, Unitarians and Congregationalists, which took an active part in politics in the early nineteenth century.

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[8] Kenneth Lysons, *A Little Primitive: Primitive Methodism from Macro and Micro Perspectives* (Buxton: Church in the Market Place Publications, 2001), pp. 238-265.

[9] Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity 1780-1920* (London: Dent, 1977).

[10] Robert Moore, *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics, The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community (*Cambridge: University Press, 1974); Rodney Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society: South Lincolnshire 1817-1878* (Hull: University Press, 1989); Alun Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1985.

[11] David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religon* 1750-1900 (London: Routledge, 1996), Chapter 2, pp. 3-28.

Primitive Methodism was, as we have seen, largely quiescent and absorbed with its own pieties. In the wider world, the Reform Bill of 1832, although it left the majority of the middle classes and the entire working class without voting rights, did see the enfranchisement of many wealthy Nonconformists and the establishment of a Nonconformist vote in Parliament. Prominent MPs such as John Bright, a Quaker and MP for both Manchester and Birmingham between 1843 and 1889, Edward Miall, a Congregationalist and MP for Bradford from 1852 to 1874, and Edward Baines, another Congregationalist, MP for Leeds from 1859 to 1873, all championed the cause of 'religious liberty'.[12] This meant an end to the privileges of the Church of England, the removal of civil disabilities against Dissenters and the abolition of Church Rates.[13] In 1844 Miall founded the Liberation Society which campaigned for the disestablishment of the Church of England. He continued to lead the society through all its successes and vicissitudes, including three failed Parliamentary bills in the 1870s, until his death in 1881. Nonconformity was also heavily involved in the campaign against the slave trade, led by the evangelical Anglican, William Wilberforce. The campaign's success, in 1833, unleashed a new enthusiasm. Jonathan Parry says of the anti-slavery campaign:

> Now was revealed the immense latent power of religious fervour and utopian idealism in the English middle classes and especially among Protestant Dissenters. For most of the latter it was their first involvement with national politics, their first attempt actively to fight the sinfulness of the depraved, effete, materialist high political world which they had traditionally shunned.[14]

More was to follow. Graham's Factory Bill of 1843 (which allowed the Church of England a primary role in the education of factory children) was roundly defeated in the House of Commons by an alliance of Whigs and Protestant Dissenters.[15] The debates over the Maynooth Grant in 1845 increased Dissenting political concern over the

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[12] John Bright 1811-1889, was a promoter of free trade, electoral reform and religious freedom. He sat in the House of Commons from 1843-1889 and played a large part in the abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846. Edward Miall, 1809-81, was a Congregationalist minister who founded the Liberation Society in 1844.He served as M.P for Bradford 1852-74. Edward Baines, 1800-1890, proprietor of the *Leeds Mercury* was an advocate of working class education and helped found the Yorkshire Mechanics Institute and the Leeds Literary and Philosophical Society. He was M P for Leeds from 1859-1874

[13] Church rates were levied by Church of England vestries for the upkeep of each parish church. Everyone liable to rates (which meant only the relatively wealthy) had to pay, including Dissenters even though they did not attend the church. This became a huge grievance,

[14] Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian England* (Yale N. H.: University Press, 1993). p.61

[15] Sellers, *Nineteenth Century Nonconformity*, pp. 71-2; Machin, *Politics and the Churches* Vol. 1, pp. 158-160.

perceived 'Catholic threat'.[16] The success in 1846 of the Anti-Corn-Law League, which Dissenters had widely supported, greatly increased their political confidence and commitment As a result of these advances, according to Clyde Binfield, 'A new generation of politically orientated do-gooders was blooded'.[17] These 'do-gooders' were overwhelmingly middle-class and urban, perhaps represented by the 'Quaker gentleman' who approached Driffield Primitive Methodists in 1853. The records for that year contain a request from 'a Quaker gentleman' that the Primitives support a local petition to abolish the Church Rate.[18] Whether local Primitive Methodists ever took part in this move is unclear, but the request was the first sign of a nascent political interest within the Society which previously had been quite apolitical.

By the late 1860s 'political Nonconformity', as it came to be called, had ceased to be exclusively middle-class and involved many quite humble Dissenters such as East Riding Primitive Methodists. How had this come about? The answer lay in Primitive Methodism's increasing engagement with the world outside the chapels through its links with the Friendly Societies and temperance organisations and most of all through its involvement in the education issue.

The Education Issue

It was the education question, more than any other issue of the nineteenth century, which galvanised Nonconformist politics.[19] Since 1833 grants of public money had been made to day schools run by voluntary religious groups, of which the Church of England's 'National Society' was by far the largest and best endowed. 'British' schools run by the non-denominational British and Foreign Bible Society came a very poor second.[20] Nonconformists resented this, particularly in rural areas where the Church of England had an almost total monopoly of educational provision supported by grants from general taxation. Wealthy Nonconformists complained that they were subsidising an Anglican system in which they had no confidence. In the East Riding nearly every village had a National School, many of them built at the expense of local landowners;

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[16] In 1845 Peel proposed, as part of his Irish policy, that public money should be used to support the Roman Catholic training college at Maynooth. The Dissenters, and many evangelical Anglicans, were strongly opposed to the grant. G.I.T. Machin 'The Maynooth Grant, the Dissenters and Disestablishment', *English Historical Review* 82 (1967) pp. 61-85.
[17] Binfield, *So Down to Prayers*, p. 84.
[18] ERA 'Driffield P, M. Circuit', Preparations for Quarter Day 1852-1873: MRD 2/2/2.
[19] Machin, *Politics and the Churches, Vol.1,* pp. 183-185.
[20] W.B. Stephens, *Education in Britain 1750-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1998) pp. 5-7.

the Sykes alone were responsible for seven.[21] The only exceptions were the Wesleyan schools at Nafferton, Pocklington and Filey, and the Roman Catholic schools at Driffield and Pocklington.[22]

Nonconformists alleged that the clergy (who played a leading role in the National Schools) forced children attending those schools to also attend a Church of England Sunday School. If parents insisted on their child attending a Nonconformist Sunday School, the child was not given a place at the National School. This certainly occurred in the East Riding. In 1868 decreases in Sunday School attendance at Langtoft, Lund, Frodingham and Weaverthorpe were blamed on 'unfair competition to which we are subject from the church schools'.[23] In 1879, a similar decrease at Nafferton was attributed to 'the influence of the church schools and that of the clergy'.[24] Similarly at Huggate in 1872 a decline in the number of Sunday School teachers and scholars was blamed on 'the new church day and Sunday School there'.[25] Even allowing for a little hyperbole by those responsible for the Primitive Methodist Sunday Schools, these were substantial allegations and carried a good deal of truth. They also reflect the higher and more assertive profile adopted by the established church after the appointment of the reforming Archbishop Thomson to York in 1868.[26]

Sunday Schools were particularly dear to the Nonconformist heart.[27] They were proud of the fact that they had educated large numbers of the children of the poor, far more than the Church of England, and that several working-class leaders, such as Henry Broadhurst and Joseph Arch, owed their education to a Methodist Sunday School.[28] Moreover, by the 1860s Sunday Schools were overtaking conversions as the main means of recruitment to the chapels.[29] An attack on their Sunday Schools was therefore an attack on the power of Nonconformity itself.

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[21] John Lawson, *Primary Education in East Yorkshire 1560-1902* (East Yorks. Local History Society, 1959) p. 17.
[22] Ibid,, p 18-19.
[23] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Reports 1861-1875: MRD 2/4/2
[24] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit',Station Reports 1877-1888: MRD 2/4/3
[25] ERA 'Pocklington PM Circuit', Station Reports 1870-1879: MRP 4/29.
[26] Thompson was a Liberal and a moderate evangelical, but most of all a church reformer. He swept away the last pluralism and non residence that had damaged the reputation of the Church in the early nineteenth century and set about re-asserting its authority against the encroachments of Methodism. Edward Royle and Ruth Larsen, *Archbishop Thomson's Visitation Returns for the Diocese of York*, 1865 (York: Borthwick Institute, 2006), p vii.
[27] K.D.M. Snell, 'The Sunday School Movement in England and Wales', *Past and Present* Vol. 164 (1999), 123-168.
[28]Joseph Arch, *The Story of My Life* ed. the Countess of Warwick (London: Hutchinson, 1898).
[29] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 3, p. 98.

Fear for the future of their Sunday Schools was one of the main reasons why Nonconformists so firmly opposed any extension of the power of the established church in the sphere of public education, for instance Graham's Bill. Throughout the 1850s and 60s Nonconformists continued to champion a 'voluntary' solution to the education question, i.e. each denomination to run their own schools with public support. The campaign was led by Edward Baines. His great fear was that a state-controlled system would reduce 'Ministers of Religion of every sect into the condition of State Pensioners' and would represent 'a monstrous violation of the constitution'.[30]

However, an entirely voluntary system proved an impossible objective, particularly for smaller, poorer groups such as the Primitive Methodists. By the late 1860s it was clear that a different solution would have to be found, and Baines himself changed his mind and reluctantly accepted the necessity for state intervention in 1868. The following year Gladstone introduced the first National Education Bill into the House of Commons. It provided for the setting-up of elected School Boards in areas where educational provision was inadequate. The Boards would commission and build new schools, set a local rate to provide funding and employ teachers and staff. Baines broadly supported the 1870 Act, provided that religious education in Board Schools remained 'non-denominational'; while the secularists, led by Joseph Chamberlain, favoured a system of publicly funded and totally secular elementary schools.[31] In the debate that followed, the Wesleyans tended towards the Baines view while the more extreme Nonconformists sided with Chamberlain. Primitive Methodists, never having aspired towards a national network of their own schools but believing profoundly in the value of religious education, agreed with the Wesleyans. In a letter to the Driffield Society, the Rev. Charles Kendall, president of the Hull District, commended the attention of brethren to 'the proposal for public education' on the grounds that 'It does not contravene the truth of the Bible and may promote the best interests of truth'.[32]

The 1870 Education Bill had a rough passage through the House of Commons. It was said that W.E. Forster, worsted manufacturer, Bradford MP and erstwhile Quaker-turned-Anglican, who had drafted the Bill, had succumbed to pressure from the

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[30] Edward Baines, *An Alarm to the Nation on the Unjust, Unconstitutional and Dangerous measure of State Education proposed by the Government* (London: Ward, 1847), pp. 3 and 9.
[31] Joseph Chamberlain, 1836-1914, Congregationalist and Liberal politician who eventually split with Gladstone over Home Rule. He led the National Education League which favoured a totally secular school system. Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers* (London: Dent, 1977) pp. 80-91.
[32] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Reports 1861-1876: MRD 2/4/2.

bishops.[33] They were allowed to insist on Church of England teaching in National Schools, where the majority of rural children were educated, while teaching in Board Schools, mainly established in the towns, was to be 'non-denominational'. This was seen as unfair, particularly by Primitive Methodists, whose particular strength was in rural areas. They felt that the Anglican Church had been given free licence to dominate schools in rural areas such as the East Riding. Galvanised by the issues at stake Primitive Methodists began to organise themselves in defence of their Sunday Schools and what they saw as their religious freedoms.

The School Boards in Driffield and Cranswick

In Driffield brothers Maughan and Railton (the latter the Sunday School Superintendant) organised a petition on behalf of local Nonconformists against the Bill's provisions on religious education in March 1870.[34] Once the Act was passed they turned their attention to the formation of a School Board in the town. The Rev. Oates, Primitive Methodist travelling p reacher, along with two other Nonconformist ministers and the prominent Baptist layman, T.D. Whitaker, proposed that a School Board be formed, because provision at the National School (founded in 1816) was inadequate for the number of children in the area. [35] A public meeting was held in November 1870 and the first School Board elected in March 1871. It consisted of: George Wrangham, wholesale grocer and Wesleyan, James Jennings, solicitor and Anglican, T.D. Whitaker, stamp dealer and Baptist (the Primitive Methodist nominee), William Bradshaw, gardener and Congregationalist, and William Jarrett, bank agent, Anglican and manager of the National School.[36] The first three years of the Board's existence were taken up with unseemly wrangling as Jarrett attempted to persuade the rest of the Board to extend the National School at public expense instead of building a new Board School. This was fiercely resisted by the Nonconformist faction, which was accused by Jarrett, justifiably, of 'sectarianism'.[37] Eventually he lost the fight and absented himself from the Board. After further difficulties with the rate-payers and the contractors the new school was eventually opened in September 1874.[38] Jarrett's delaying tactics were not uncommon. There was a similar dispute at Hutton Cranswick a large, open village to the south of

[33] Machin, *Politics and the Churches, Vol. 2, 1869-1921*, pp. 31-40.
[34] E.R. A. 'Driffield PM Circuit', Circuit Committee Minutes 1866-74: MRD 2/2/10.
[35] *Driffield Times* 5 November 1870.
[36] *Driffield Times* 11 March 1871.
[37] *Driffield Times* 17 June 1871.
[38] *Driffield Times* 20 September 1874.

Driffield where a local landowner – Reynard – attempted to procure public funding for a small girls' school run by his wife.[39] In three other villages, Wharram-le-Street, Birdsall and Burton Agnes, local landowners, in collusion with the clergy, hastily built extensions to National Schools in order to avoid the imposition of a School Board.[40] It was a similar story in Norfolk where Anglican elites 'raced to consolidate their autonomy' by building or extending National Schools.[41]

At the 1874 School Board elections in Driffield, Whitaker (Baptist, and Primitive Methodist nominee) was voted off the Board to be replaced by the much more radical and divisive George Whiting, sometime schoolmaster and journalist, who was later to edit the short-lived radical paper *The Driffield Freeman* from 1879 to 1882.[42] Although he quarrelled with the other members of the Board and accused them of 'plotting behind his back',[43] Whiting was in fact the only member of the Board who seems to have been aware of the serious problems at the school which were to lead to a poor report in 1875 and the dismissal of the mistress of the infants' school.[44]

In 1876 Whitaker returned to the Board (on the death of Wrangham) and from then until its demise in 1902 Primitive Methodists were well represented, first by two travelling preachers, Rev. Whitehead 1877-80 and Rev. Harrison 1883-86, and then by two laymen David Railton (coal merchant and Sunday School Superintendant)1886-1902 and Joel Dosser (local preacher and wholesale grocer) 1895-1902. The only other minister to hold office was the Rev. Tranter, a Baptist, in the 1890s.[45]

The stipulation in the 1870 Act forbidding denominational teaching in Board Schools caused particular difficulty. In some of the larger Boards (e.g. the London School Board) a sensible compromise was reached whereby 'the Bible shall be read and there shall be given such explanations and instructions as are suited to the capacities of the children'.[46] But, in smaller authorities – mainly rural ones - no such agreement was made and it was left to whatever faction was in control of the Board to impose their own

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[39] ERA Hutton Cranswick School.Board, Minutes 1871-79: S.B. 20/1
[40] Lawson, *Elementary Education in East Yorkshire,* p. 27.
[41] Robert Lee, *Rural Society and the Anglican Clergy 1815-1914: Encountering and Managing the Poor* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), p. 140.

[42] Victoria County History, East Yorkshire Vol. 9 *Great Driffield and its Townships*, eds. Susan and David Neal with Graham Kent (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), p. 127.
[43] *Driffield Times* 3 April 1875
[44] ERA Driffield School Board, Minutes 1871-1880: S.B. 14/1
[45] ERA Driffield School Board, Minutes 1893-98: SB 14/4.
[46] Edward Baines, *Paper on Education*, read at the Social Science Congress held at Leeds, October 7 1871, p. 9.

solution. So anxious were some Nonconformists to prevent a supposed Anglican gloss on readings of the Bible that they insisted it should be read in school 'without comment', thus putting sectarian feeling ahead of any educational consideration about children's understanding of the text. This is precisely what happened in Driffield. Almost immediately after the resignation of Jarrett in October 1871, the rest of the Board agreed that religious instruction in the new school should consist of 'readings from the New Testament without comment'.[47] In Hutton Cranswick, where a School Board was elected in 1871, there was similar controversy. During the 1880s, when the Board was controlled by the Nonconformist faction, the Bible was read in school 'without comment'. In April 1895 after the Church party, led by the formidable Rev. O'Callaghan, had gained control, the previous ruling was immediately overturned and 'the Bible was to be read and commented on in school for fifteen minutes each morning'.[48]

Appendices 1 and 2 detail the various factions on the Driffield School Board, and that at Hutton Cranswick where events followed a similar trajectory: an attempt by the managers of a local private school, the Reynards, to obtain public money for its expansion (which was thwarted) was followed by twenty years of management by factions, namely the Primitive Methodists, the rate-payers and the Church party led by O'Callaghan.

All Primitive Methodist representatives on both School Boards pressed for Bible reading without comment and all consistently pressed for temperance texts to be adopted in Board Schools. In 1883 the Rev. Harrison, Primitive Methodist minister and Chairman of the Driffield Board, asked that copies of *Dr. Richardson's Temperance Manual* be kept in school. In 1888 in Cranswick Robert Dossor, local preacher and grocer, initiated a petition against the sale of liquor on Sundays which was signed by the entire Board.[49] However, when it came to the question of Attendance Officers, staff salaries or of agricultural work for children, their reaction was much more mixed. It might have been assumed that, as believers in the worth of education and in social progress, Primitive Methodists would have supported the employment of Attendance

[47] *Driffield Times* 11 November 1871.
[48] ERA, Cranswick School Board, Minutes 1893-1901: SB 20/3. O'Callaghan, an Irishman educated at Trinity College Dublin, became vicar of Hutton Cranswick in 1882. He immediately set about restoring the position of the established church in this predominantly Methodist village. He had several confrontations with the Primitives of which the School Board episode was only the most prominent.
[49] ERA Driffield School Board, Minutes 1880-1886: S.B. 14/2; Cranswick School Board Minutes 1872-1889: S.B. 20/1

Officers and the curtailment of agricultural work by school-age children. But this was far from the case (see Appendices I and 2). They were either unprepared to challenge fellow rate-payers or, more likely, agreed with them. In Cranswick, Messrs. Dossor, Bowes and Duke, Primitive Methodists all three, were prepared to allow the school to be shut for an entire week during the Friendly Society festivities in the village (which involved a good deal of public drinking and unseemly behaviour), and raised not the slightest objection when half the school was absent for 'ketlock pulling'.[50]

Perhaps it is not surprising that Dosser, Bowes and Duke behaved as they did. They were active Primitive Methodists but also well-known members of the local community whose mores they generally upheld. As David Hempton has pointed out, Methodism, of all persuasions, adapted itself to local cultural norms and rarely over-rode them. At its most successful it drew in existing secular institutions (community singing, harvest gatherings) and gave them a religious purpose (hymn singing, Love-feasts).[51] One reason for Methodist success must surely lie in its close identification with local mores via local preachers who were largely responsible for most rural services. Such local preachers mirrored the local community; they were working men, spoke in local accents and were well known to their listeners. Dossor (a grocer) and Bowes (a shoemaker) were both local preachers and Duke (another shoemaker) was prominent in the Cranswick Society.

Other School Boards

There were three other School Boards within the area of the Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit: Skerne, Thwing and Fridaythorpe. The first was a small village in the Hull valley where there was a Wesleyan chapel but no church; the other two were larger High Wold villages with both Wesleyan and Primitive chapels and an Anglican church. In all three the Board was dominated by local landowners, farmers and clergymen who were nominated rather than elected – the Barughs, the Burdass family and the Rev. Ford Fenn in Thwing; the Baxters, Beswicks and the Rev. Speck in Fridaythorpe.[52] This rather bears out W. B. Stephens's judgement that

[50] ERA., Hutton Cranswick School Board Minutes, 1889-1893: S.B. 20/2.
[51] Hempton, *The Religion of the People*, Chapter 1, pp. 3-28.
[52] ERA, Thwing School Board: SB 35/1; Fridaythorpe School Board: SB 13/1.

In rural districts where Anglican influence was strong but sufficient school places so lacking that Boards had to be compulsorily imposed, the Boards consisted largely of local farmers and Anglican laymen and clergy, antipathetic to the education of those they regarded as future agricultural labourers.[53]

There was no sign of Nonconformist involvement in these three villages, or of any public controversy to speak of apart from difficulties with the transfer of land at Thwing 'because the Archdeacon is abroad and the vicar non-resident'.[54] Certainly rural Nonconformity never attained the level of political activity evident in small towns such as Driffield or large open villages such as Hutton Cranswick.

The attitude of Anglican managers in National Schools (i.e. where there was no School Board) could certainly be overbearing. The National School at Fimber, on the western edge of the Wolds, was strictly, if benignly, controlled by the Rev. Maude Cole. He seems to have been an almost constant presence, holding services for the children and giving scripture lessons. He even, in 1877, attempted to teach some arithmetic (in the wake of a poor school report); but his intervention does not seem to have resulted in much improvement.[55] In 1887 the schoolmistress reported that some local farmers (including Megginson who was one of the school managers) had been employing older boys in school hours, but nothing seems to have been done about it.[56] In Fridaythorpe, however, where there was a Board School under Anglican control, the employment of children seems to have been more strictly dealt with. In 1884 a letter was sent to Mr. Witty forbidding him from employing children in weed pulling, and in 1895, under a new chairman (the Rev. Bathe), the Board took legal proceedings against farmers who continued to employ children – including the land-agent of Sir. Tatton Sykes.[57]

Temperance

The Nonconformist drift towards a public rather than a private solution to the moral ills of the nation was also reflected in the temperance debate.[58] In spite of the apparent success of the temperance movement in terms of membership, numbers and money raised, it could only scratch the surface of the problem, particularly in the big cities. As Brian Harrison pointed out of the 1860s,

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[53] Stephens, *Education in Britain*, p. 93.
[54] ERA, Thwing School Board, Correspondance: SB 35/10.
[55] ERA, Fimber School, Log book 1874-1903: SL 39/1.
[56] Ibid,, record for 1887
[57] ERA Fridaythorpe School Board, Minutes 1880-1903: SB 13/1
[58] Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 47; Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), pp. 294 and 349.

> […] drunkenness was still rampant after thirty years of teetotal advocacy, still a flagrant social evil; teetotal membership was geographically patchy and was more common among dissenters than other religious groups, more common among religious groups than those who were apathetic towards religion. The movement had insulated an elite from temptation: It had produced no nation-wide 'reformation'.[59]

In the 1860s the United Kingdom Alliance, an organisation that included both teetotallers and those supporting only temperance, began to consider the possibility of anti-drink legislation in Parliament.[60] Nonconformists, whose desire for moral progress was by now 'an essential feature of the nineteenth-century campaign to extend state intervention', rallied in support.[61] The campaign in Parliament was led by Wilfred Lawson, Anglican, radical Liberal and a life-long teetotaller.[62] Lawson introduced two bills to limit the drink trade by what was called 'local option'. Particular areas could enforce restrictions on public drinking if two thirds of the local Magistrates' Bench agreed. Both bills, one introduced in 1864 and one in 1869, failed. Lawson's efforts however, had not been in vain. In 1872 Gladstone, aware of the strength of Nonconformist feeling and anxious to secure its support, decided to introduce a government-sponsored Licensing Bill .[63]

The 1872 Licensing Act restricted the opening hours of public houses and, like its predecessor bills in the 1860s, allowed for a 'local option' on stricter provisions should local magistrates agree. The Act also made illegal the adulteration of beer with water or other substances. Although it did not satisfy the more extreme Prohibitionists (the name given to those who favoured a legal ban on all forms of alcohol), the Act found favour with the majority of Nonconformists.[64] The working classes were less pleased. There were riots in Stalybridge and Ashton in Lancashire, but on nothing like the scale of the Hyde Park riots in 1855, which had followed a previous attempt by an

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[59] Harrison*, Drink and the Victorians*, p. 318.

[60] Ibid,, Chapter 9, pp. 196-218.
[61] Ibid,, p. 207,
[62] Wilfred Lawson 1829-1906. M P for Carlisle 1859-1906. He was a 'radical' Liberal, a member of the Peace Society and the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade, who, in the 1890s, was to oppose Roseberry's imperialism and stand out against the Boer War.
[63] Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 260.
[64] Ibid, pp. 262-279

alliance of Evangelicals and Nonconformists to limit beer drinking on Sunday – the only day of the week on which most working people had time to enjoy themselves.[65]

Gladstone lost the election of 1874 largely – according to himself – because of the Licensing Act. He claimed to have been driven from office 'in a torrent of gin and beer' and shortly afterwards resigned as Liberal leader, although he was to return to the leadership after the 1880 election.[66] Disraeli meanwhile had attacked Liberal policies on drink and, in a speech at Manchester in 1872, spoke up for 'the people's recreation'. The popular conception that Liberals favoured temperance and that Tories were in league with the drink trade is reflected in the remarks of Parkinson Milson, a popular East Riding travelling preacher, during the election of 1880.

> Tonight I spoke with a yellow favour in my coat (at Malton) never did I do such a thing before. At first I felt I must take it off, but I considered that our Connexion owes many of its privileges to Liberalism, and also how Toryism, tyranny and beer work together.[67]

In the East Riding the Primitive Methodists, after a slow start, were active in the temperance cause. David Railton's address to the Driffield Temperance Society was mentioned in the previous chapter. It was the first of many such addresses. In January 1870 the Rev. Newsome, Primitive Methodist travelling preacher, addressed another meeting in the town declaring that he had been a teetotaller for thirty years. He then gave 'a harrowing and heart-rending picture of the effects of strong drink […] forcefully illustrated by incidents from the speaker's own observation'.[68] In the course of the next twenty years the *Driffield Times* recorded numerous links between Primitive Methodism and the temperance cause: in 1874, in the wake of the Licensing Act, a meeting in Driffield Primitive Methodist chapel tried to raise interest in pursuing the 'local option'; in 1876 a Temperance Festival was held, addressed, once again, by David Railton; in April 1879 a 'Temperance Meat Tea' was held at Bainton Primitive Methodist Chapel; and in April 1881 a temperance meeting at Wetwang was addressed by the Rev. Charles

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[65] Roland Quinault, 'Democracy and the Mid-Victorians', *An Age of Equipose?, Re- assessing Victorian Britain,* ed. Martin Hewitt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp, 108-20, p. 112

[66] Gladstone mentioned 'the torrent of gin and beer' in a letter to his brother. Quoted in Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 3, p. 251. For a discussion of his return to politics on the back of popular support for his attack on Disraeli's foreign policy during the Midlothian campaign see Eugenio Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), pp. 412-416; Richard Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, 1876* (London: Nelson, 1963), passim.

[67] George Shaw, *Life of Parkinson Milson* (London: Simpkin Marshall & Co., 1893), p. 321.

[68] *Driffield Times* 29 January 1870.

Kendall, prominent Primitive Methodist and soon to be President of Conference.[69] In 1874, on the opening of the new Primitive Methodist chapel in George St., the old one in Mill Street became a 'Temperance Hall' managed by a committee. The first chairman was Thomas D. Whitaker, Baptist deacon, member of the Liberation Society and Primitive Methodist nominee on the School Board. [70]

All these efforts were however directed primarily at temperance, not teetotalism. As Michael Watts has pointed out, 'the campaign to convert Nonconformists to the cause of total abstinence was never a complete success'.[71] Although ninety per cent of Primitive Methodist ministers were teetotal by 1881, the same was not true of the membership and certainly not true in the East Riding where many Primitive Methodists were also members of Friendly Societies. These societies generally met in public houses and, although their rules forbade drunkenness, they were certainly not averse to drinking.[72] Once again we see a contrast between the strictly teetotal views of the Primitive Methodist leadership and the more tolerant views of ordinary members. It might also be added that beer was a much safer drink than water in the Victorian countryside and, in Driffield itself, the state of the water supply in the 1870s was nothing short of scandalous.[73]

By 1880 other denominations, besides the Congregationalists, Baptists and Primitive Methodists, had joined the temperance movement. The Church of England had founded its own Temperance Society in 1862.[74] In 1876 the Rev. Newton, convinced teetotaller and energetic evangelical clergyman, became vicar of Driffield, the unsatisfactory Rev. Allan having finally retired aged eighty-five. Newton opened a cocoa house in the town and generally co-operated with the temperance effort. He even served tea and coffee himself in the Corn Exchange during the 'statties' (Hiring Fairs) in 1878 in an effort to distract farm servants from the public houses.[75] Only the Wesleyan leadership continued to resist total commitment to the temperance cause, although local Wesleyans in the East Riding co-operated with other groups in its

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[69] *Driffield Times*, 31 January 1870; 9 December 1876; 22 April 1879; July 16, 1881.
[70] VCH East Riding of Yorkshire Vol. 9, p. 129
[71] Watts, *The Dissenters Vol. 3*, p. 151.
[72] See section on Friendly Societies below.
[73] The Driffield Local Board proposed a drainage system for the town which was rejected by the ratepayers. There were sporadic outbreaks of typhoid locally and at one point the death rate in Driffield was alleged to be higher than that in Liverpool (*Driffield Times*, 2 November 1878). The saga continued through successive editions of the paper. It was not properly resolved until the Local Government Act of 1895.
[74] Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, pp. 182-3.
[75] *Driffield Times*, 30 November 1878.

promotion. In 1899 the Primitives expressed huge disappointment that the Wesleyans had failed to carry a Conference motion forbidding anyone engaged in the drink traffic from becoming a church official:

> In nothing however will Primitive Methodism be more disappointed than in the position taken by the Wesleyan Conference on the drink traffic. On this, the greatest evil of our times, they have always been laggards, but at this time of day the conscience of the Nation is awake regarding this issue and Wesleyan Methodism must tarry no longer.[76]

The Primitive leadership, anxious to reinforce the temperance message among the young, were heavily involved with the Band of Hope, a junior temperance society founded in Leeds in 1847.[77] The Band had links with many other organisations, but the Primitives were among its main religious supporters. In 1892 a letter was sent out from the Hull district urging local Societies to establish Bands of Hope.[78] It had limited success. Within the Driffield Circuit five Bands were established by 1893 – in the town itself, and in Nafferton, Kilham, Wetwang and Lund.[79] Rather like the Sunday Schools these groups came and went. They were established in one village in one year, disappeared and then appeared somewhere else the following year. There were two in Pocklington in 1903, four by 1907; but only one survived until 1910.[80] It was clearly difficult to find enough people to lead and manage these groups and, although they flourished until 1914, most had collapsed – along with the temperance campaign itself - by the 1920s.

The Friendly Societies

Another aspect of Primitive Methodists' increasing public engagement was their association with the Friendly Societies.[81] Friendly Societies flourished in the East Riding during the 'golden years' of agriculture in the 1850s and 60s.[82] They survived

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[76] *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1899, p. 178.
[77] The Band encouraged children to 'sign the pledge', promising that they would never touch alcohol. It also aimed to provide social activities to engage working class children, to keep them away from public houses and counter the influence of alcohol within their families.
[78] ERA, 'Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1890-94: MRD 2/4/4.
[79] Ibid,
[80] ERA 'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Station Reports 1900-1908: MRP 4/32.
[81] For a fuller discussion of the Friendly Societies see Chapter 2.
[82] Simon Cordery, *British Friendly Societies 1750-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Chapter 1; David Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside: Friendly Societies in the Rural East Riding 1830-1914* (Hull: University Press, 1991), pp. 1-9.

the onset of the agricultural depression in the late 1870s and were one of the main bulwarks against social distress in the difficult years that followed. There were over two hundred and fifty branches in the East Riding in 1913 and their usefulness really only came to an end when Lloyd George introduced state pensions in 1909.

Every year the Friendly Society organised a 'Feast Day' in the local village (it was often on the same day as the patronal festival). The school would shut, essential agricultural tasks would be completed as soon as possible and the whole village would settle down to enjoy the day. There were processions and a religious service – usually in the church but sometimes in the chapel. In 1875 the Cranswick Foresters held their service in the Primitive Methodist chapel – perhaps a comment on the poor standing of the Anglican church in this particular village.[83] In the evening there would be drinking, dancing and children's entertainments. In the larger villages travelling showmen often turned up with games, rides and peep shows.

In their feasts and processions, their meetings in pubs and association with drinking during village holidays, the Friendly Societies remained part of an older, rougher village culture. But they also represented the 'new' culture of respectability, self-help and sobriety. The rules of most Societies forbade drunkenness although not of course drink. 'By the end of the period 1845-75, the affiliated orders had successfully forged an image of respectability for themselves […]', observed Simon Cordery.[84] It was this respectability and sobriety that attracted Primitive Methodists. Indeed Friendly Societies might be described as a kind of secular Nonconformity extolling the virtues of thrift, continence and hard work.

Many Primitive Methodists joined Friendly Societies and some rose to become officers. In Hutton Cranswick, Robert Dossor, Singleton Bowes and William Duke, all Primitive Methodist local preachers and, at different times, members of the School Board, held office in the Oddfellows or the Foresters, (Cranswick, a large village, had two lodges). In Lund, William Petch, another Primitive local preacher who was responsible for the erection of several chapels, was Secretary of the Oddfellows. Petch, Dossor and the others were clearly prepared to meet in public houses where, presumably, they drank a moderate amount of beer while transacting society business. As suggested earlier, strict teetotalism was more a characteristic of Primitive Methodist

[83] Neave, *Mutual Aid*, p. 93.
[84] Corderey, *British Friendly Societies*, p. 99.

ministers and the leadership of the Connexion than of ordinary rural members, who continued to drink in moderation.

Political Involvement with the Gladstonian Liberal Party

Through their involvement with the education issue and with the temperance campaign Primitive Methodists became natural allies of the Liberal Party.[85] The Tories were seen as upholders of the privileges of the Anglican church and the promoters of the drink interest, Liberals as being sympathetic to Nonconformity and the eradication of class interest through political reform.[86] In 1868 the Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone, had abolished Church Rates, a long-standing Nonconformist grievance, and in 1869 had disestablished the Irish church – an act which won Nonconformist plaudits and which some saw as a prelude to the disestablishment of the Church of England (which it emphatically was not). In the personality of Gladstone himself Nonconformists saw, or chose to see, a moral and upright Christian; a champion of the rights of the working classes, the 'People's William'; and a man not afraid to apply the moral principle to government.[87] At the Primitive Methodist Conference at Derby in 1886, in the midst of the agitation over Irish Home Rule, a meeting was held in support of Gladstone who, it was said, 'has liberated the Irish from the domination of an alien church'.[88]

Nonconformist support for Gladstone ran high even in the normally quiescent East Riding. In July 1885 a Liberal meeting was held in the Temperance Hall to confirm the selection of a Mr. Cousins as candidate for the 1885 election. He spoke in favour of Gladstone, 'land reform, allotments and the sales of land to Dissenters', to shouts of 'Hear, hear'. The platform party contained two Primitive Methodist ministers, Revs. Leafe and Spivey, and David Railton, the Superintendant of the Sunday School.[89] Subsequently, Liberal political meetings were held in the Primitive Methodist chapels at Rudston and Beeford, where the Revs. Spivey and Leafe were again in attendance.[90] In

[85] Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, pp. 1-17; Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1998), p.260
[86] Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 31-41; Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886*, p. 608.
[87] Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 379-385.
[88] Graham Goodlad, 'Gladstone and his Rivals: Popular Liberal Perceptions of the Party Leadership 1885-6', *Currents of Radicalism* ed. E. Biagini and Alistair Reid (Cambridge: University Press, 1991), p. 179; Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 3, p. 265.
[89] *Driffield Times*, 25 July 1885.
[90] *Driffield Times*, 17 October and 28 November, 1885.

October of the same year the Rev. O' Callaghan, a Tory supporter, gave a lecture 'against the principle of Disestablishment' at Hutton Cranswick.[91] This was followed by rival Liberal meetings in Beeford (addressed by Spivey), at Wansford in the Primitive Methodist chapel (addressed by Leafe) and at Lund (again addressed by Spivey). After the election (narrowly won by the Tories), O'Callaghan returned to the defence of the Church of England with an entire series on the subject in February 1886.[92] The defeat of the Home Rule Bill later that year and the announcement of another election produced a second flurry of political activity among Primitive Methodists - particularly as the election was held on the new electoral register, the result of the 1885 Reform Act, which enfranchised rural working men. This was therefore the first election at which most East Riding Primitive Methodists were able to vote. The Liberal candidate, William McArthur, was the son of the prominent Nonconformist MP, Robert McArthur, who had strongly opposed the Home Rule Bill.[93] Joel Dossor (son of Robert) and the ubiquitous David Railton appeared on the platform at the Liberal Association in May. In July, Paul Peacock, Primitive Methodist minister, appeared with McArthur 'on the steps of the Wesleyan chapel' in Flamborough.[94] Flamborough was always a strongly Methodist village.

The 1886 election resulted in a very narrow win for the sitting Tory MP Christopher Sykes, brother of Sir Tatton Sykes of Sledmere, the largest landowner in the East Riding. It was a somewhat pyrrhic victory. The Sykes were clearly worried by the Liberal Nonconformist vote. In 1887 they eventually allowed both Wesleyan and Primitive chapels to be built at Sledmere, something they had long resisted, and they agreed to provide allotments at Garton.[95] On the latter occasion the *Driffield Times* reported that 'In homely language, Mr.Southall (the Sykes agent), and with an earnest conviction that brought relief to the hearts of the peasantry, spoke for upwards of an hour on the present-day agricultural depression'. It may well have been the same sentiment which prompted the fifth baronet's sympathetic attitude to the Primitives:

> Sir Tatton has always treated our people with more than kindly toleration [...] Indeed, he has been unstinted in his praise of the work done by the Methodists, Wesleyan and Primitive, on his estate. He

[91] Driffield Times, 31 October 1885.
[92] Driffield Times, Feb 6 1886,
[93] Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 92.
[94] *Drifield Times*, 10 July 1886.
[95] The provision of allotments had been one of the planks of the 1886 Liberal election campaign.

said to one of our officials, 'If it had not been for the Dissenters, the English people would have been heathens [...] Most of the religion between Driffield and Malton is to be found among the Methodists'.[96]

Primitive Methodism and Radical Politics in the later Nineteenth Century

Primitive Methodism was sympathetic to Liberal policies and mildly accepting of more radical initiatives such as the Liberation Society. The latter held several meetings in Flamborough in the 1870s, but one organised in Driffield by the Baptist layman T.D. Whitaker (who was also the first Chairman of the School Board) was said to be 'poorly attended'.[97] In the case of trade unionism the East Riding was similarly lacking in radical initiatives. Joseph Arch, the founder of the original Agricultural Trade Union in 1872, was a Primitive Methodist, as was a large proportion of its leadership in Warwickshire.[98] Robert Colls has detailed how the chapels were involved in the rise of the mining unions in Durham in the mid-nineteenth century, and Alan Howkins has done the same for Norfolk in the 1870s.[99] George Edwards, Primitive Methodist local preacher, founder of the Agricultural Labourers' Union in Norfolk and later an MP, described his conversion to radical politics as follows:

With my study of theology I soon came to realise that the social conditions of the people were not as God intended they should be. The gross injustices meted out to my parents and the terrible sufferings I had undergone in my boyhood burnt themselves into my soul like a hot iron.[100]

Official Primitive Methodism maintained its opposition to any kind of 'political' activity, as laid down by Bourne in 1821. Conference in 1873 had noted 'that trade and agricultural agitations during the past year had led to a decrease in membership in some Circuits'.[101] Primitive Methodists in Norfolk and South Lincolnshire had ignored these strictures and gone ahead to hold union meetings in their chapels; however, this did not happen in the East Riding.[102] Even though the proportion of people attending Primitive

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[96] Henry Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry: Being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* (London: Joseph Toulson, 1889), p. 135.
[97] ERA , Flamborough PM Chapel Trustees Meetings: MRQ 15/1; *Driffield Times*, 1 February 1879.
[98] Joseph Arch 1826-1919 founded the first Agricultural Trade Union in Warwickshire in 1872. Subsequently the union foundered –to be revived in the 1890s – but Arch went on to be Liberal M.P. for North West Norfolk in 1885. Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, pp. 274-5; Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, pp. 8 and 81-5.
[99] Robert Colls, *Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest 1790-1850* (Manchester: University Press, 1987), pp. 189-214; Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, Chapter 3, pp. 39-57.
[100] George Edwards, *From Crow Scaring to Westminster* (London, Labour Publishing Co., 1922), p. 36.
[101] Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers*, p. 82.
[102] Ibid,, pp. 82-3; Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, p. 47.

Methodist services in the Driffield and Holderness Circuits in 1851 was as high as that in West Norfolk, there is little evidence of union activity among them. [103]

Indeed there was little union activity among East Riding farm labourers at all. The *Driffield Times*, which was generally sympathetic to their plight, described them as 'tardy'. 'The great demand for labour on certain new railway lines and in the iron districts has at last moved the tardy farm labourers to stand out or strike for increased wages', it reported in February 1872.[104] On February 24 there were meetings of labourers at 'The Tiger' in Beeford, and at Driffield in the 'Black Swan'. More meetings followed in Kilham, Malton and Foxholes, but none resulted in any action, apart from a minor strike in the Driffield cattle-cake mill which was swiftly settled. In August, at Malton market, an 'agitator, said to be from Warwickshire and wearing a hat saying 'Strike boys Strike', was, according to the *Driffield Times*, largely ignored.[105] In February of the following year, 1873, there was another labourers' meeting which voted to join the 'Lincolnshire Labourers' League', and a final flurry in November 1874 when, at a meeting in Cranswick Oddfellows Hall, a Mr. Welbourn asked God's blessing on the meeting and urged labourers to support the union. Only one Primitive Methodist seems to have been involved - Joseph Warrington, railway plate-layer and one of the trustees of the Primitive Methodist chapel at Fimber in 1860.[106] He chaired the Labourers' meeting at the Black Swan in 1872 and, in 1874, a meeting of the Labour League invited him to question candidates for the School Board elections. The *Driffield Times* described him as 'well known among the Labouring classes', and, as a good Primitive Methodist, he asked God's blessing on the proceedings.[107] However there is no further reference to him, and Agricultural Union activities in the East Riding seem to have petered out by 1875. They were not to be revived until the new century under the aegis – significantly perhaps – of the National Union of Railwaymen.

The reason why agricultural trade unionism was more active in West Norfolk than in the East Riding lay in the very different economic circumstances of the two areas. Wages were considerably higher in the East Riding, where the average annual agricultural wage between 1867 and 1870 was seventeen pounds and fifty shillings; in

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[103] Michael Watts calculated that over 10% of attendances at places of religious worship in the Driffield Circuit in 1851 were at Primitive Methodist chapels, the same proportion as in the Downham and Walsingham Circuits in West Norfolk. Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 2, pp. 856 and 816.
[104] *Driffield Times*, 17 February 1872.
[105] *Driffeild Times*, 24 August 1872.
[106] ERA, 'Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit', Records of Fimber chapel: MRD 10/1.
[107] *Driffield Times*, 28 February 1874.

Norfolk it was fourteen pounds, seventeen shillings and sixpence.[108] There were three reasons for this discrepancy. The first was a higher demand for labour in the East Riding because the High Wold farms were labour-intensive and the population was low. Norfolk was a much more densely populated area and there had been a labour surplus there since the early nineteenth century. Secondly, the proximity of the West Riding and its thriving industrial economy had the effect of keeping East Riding wages up. Disaffected farm servants in Fimber or Thwing could leave a tight-fisted employer in the morning and be in Halifax or Huddersfield in the evening – and many did. Norfolk labourers did not have the same choice. Norwich was not a manufacturing centre and London was a long way off. Lastly, and probably most importantly, hiring fairs still thrived in the East Riding but had nearly disappeared in Norfolk because of the end of the 'live in' system, itself the result of an oversupply of labour.[109]

The East Riding Hiring Fairs

These were briefly described in Chapter 2. They were held every year at the end of November (Martinmas) in the towns that lay around the foot of the Wolds – Driffield, Pocklington, Market Weighton and Malton. Unmarried farm servants came to the fairs looking for work and farmers came looking for employees. According to the *Victoria County History* over half the workforce on Wolds farms was recruited in this way in the 1850s.[110] The 'moral party', as the *Driffield Times* referred to them, disapproved of the hiring fairs because of excessive drinking and the dangers to which young servant girls (some were barely into their teens) were exposed. This 'moral party', led by the Church of England, attempted to end the fairs and replace them with a registration system but were not successful – largely because the farm servants themselves did not co-operate.[111] The fact was, as Stephen Caunce has pointed out, that the fairs were a form of free-market bargaining that worked to the servants' advantage: '[...] the yearly bond preserved the servants' independence rather than reducing it. Lads left jobs freely at the

[108] E.J.T Collins ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, Vol. 8 Part 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), p. 2003

[109] Susanna Wade Martins, *A History of Norfolk* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1997), p. 67; Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men,* p. 40.

[110] Victoria County History, The East Riding of Yorkshire Vol .*8 East Buckrose and the Northern Wolds* ed. David and Susan Neave (Oxford: University Press, 2008), p..33.

[111] Gary Moses, *Rural Moral Reform in Nineteenth Century England: The Crusade against Adolescent Farm Servants and Hiring Fairs* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), passim.

end of a term because they knew they could find others.'[112] Hiring fairs therefore continued to flourish in the East Riding until 1914 and were a major factor in keeping wages up. It is significant perhaps that Primitive Methodists do not seem to have played any part in the 'moral crusade'. As agricultural employees themselves, they were probably well aware of the important role played by the hiring fairs in the local economy, in spite of their supposed immorality.

East Riding Primitive Methodism was never politically radical. Individuals – for instance Mr.Warrington, the Fimber plate-layer – may have been briefly involved, but there is no evidence of widespread protest as distinct from occasional examples of disaffection such as lads breaking contracts with farmers who kept a 'poor meat house' or labourers attacking employers who, they claimed, had reduced their wages.[113] The hiring fairs acted as a reasonably efficient wage regulator – the farmers did not always have it their own way – and there is no evidence that local Primitive Methodists were part of the campaign to abolish them. In fact the temper of East Riding Primitive Methodism by the 1860s was socially, if not religiously, conservative. Travelling preachers, such as Woodcock and Milson, although they might challenge the Anglican hegemony, never questioned that of the landlords. The chapel Station Reports show a religious group playing its part as a respected member of the local community, in whose continuity and progress it had a substantial stake. Its interests were now in favour of continuity not change.

Social Conservatism

By 1850 Primitive Methodism was – like its Wesleyan counterpart – and in all its areas of strength, socially extremely conservative. Families were the most important social unit, children should be brought up in the faith and should follow the direction of their parents – except where the latter were 'strong in drink' or socially deviant. Women's place was in the home, caring for the family. Although female preaching had made an acknowledged contribution to Primitive Methodism earlier in the century, it had become, like outdoor field work for women, socially unacceptable by its end: '[…] the

[112]Stephen Caunce, *Amongst Farm Horses: The Horselads of East Yorkshire* (Stroud: Allan Sutton, 1991), p.43

[113] For instance, in February 1873 some lads 'broke their contract' and 'skipped off' to work at the Ironstone mines in Rosedale. In July 1877, John Whitehead disputed his wages with a farmer at Frodingham. Driffield Times, 22 February 1873, 7 July 1877.

hardening of denominational structures re-established more conventional gender roles in the second half of the nineteenth century'.[114] Salvation, wrote Robert Parks (Primitive Methodist minister in Chesterfield), creates peace and happiness in the family. It places the husband on the throne ('this is God's ordinance') and the wife in her rightful position of submission unlike that in 'other nations'.[115] In Durham Robert Moore found that an almost universal adherence to the principles of trade unionism and the Labour Party also involved intense social conservatism, a concentration on the family and a disapproval of sexual freedom and divorce. In the East Riding Henry Woodcock's deferential attitude towards the Sykes, the landlord interest and Queen Victoria is evident throughout his literary output. In common with Parkinson Milson and Ritson his concern is to re-inforce the Victorian moral code, not to lay it open to question.

The Nonconformist Conscience

The expression 'Nonconformist Conscience' was coined during the debate over the Parnell divorce case in 1892.[116] The episode was hailed at the time as a demonstration of the political power of Nonconformity – of the principles of morality as applied to politics. 'What is morally wrong can never be politically right', declared Hughes in the wake of the affair in 1892.[117] The term 'Nonconformist Conscience' rapidly gained currency and was employed both by Nonconformists themselves to illustrate their new-found political muscle and also by outsiders, often in a rather depreciatory sense, to remark on its self-righteousness and narrow outlook. The Rev. Morris, for instance, looking back on his experience as a Schools Inspector in the East Riding in the 1880s, remarked that 'The Nonconformist conscience was almost wholly a manufactured article; it existed only in the minds of its agitators and was a most valuable instrument in Parliamentary elections'.[118]

According to Bebbington 'the conscience' had three salient features: a belief that there was no strict boundary between religion and politics; a belief that politicians

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[114] David Hempton, 'Evangelicalism in English and Irish Society 1780-1840', *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North Americ, the British Isles and Beyond 1700-1990* eds. Mark Noll, David Bebbington and George Rawlyk (Oxford: University Press, 1994), p. 156

[115] Robert Parks, *The Philosophy of Salvation: A Lecture delivered to the Y.M.C.A. by Robert Parks, Primitive Methodist Minister in Chesterfield* (London: Whittaker, 1851).

[116] See note 2 above.

[117] Henry Rack, 'Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902', *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* Vol. 3, ed. Rupert Davies, Raymond George and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth, 1983) p. 146

[118] M.C.F. Morris, *Yorkshire Reminiscences* (Oxford: University Press, 1922), p. 102.

should be people of 'high moral character'; and a belief that government should promote the moral welfare of its citizens.[119] It saw itself as opposed to the opulence and decadence of late nineteenth-century wealthy elites represented by - for instance – the group surrounding the Prince of Wales, or politicians such as Charles Dilke, Lord Rosebury and Randolph Churchill. The crusade to improve public morality marked a clear departure from earlier attitudes before 1860, when the key to moral regeneration was seen to be individual salvation through evangelism and conversion, not through collective action by governments or local authorities. The change in favour of a more collectivist solution has been shown earlier in this chapter: first in the progress of the temperance debate from a belief in individual restraint to publicly imposed prohibition; and second in the education debate from a 'voluntary' solution to a publicly funded system.

The 'conscience' engaged East Riding Primitive Methodists in various campaigns in the late nineteenth century – the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Act, the campaign against the Bulgarian atrocities, the campaign against the Boer War - and, most importantly, the campaign against the 1902 Education Act.[120] The Contagious Diseases Act, originally passed in 1864, was meant to control venereal diseases in garrison towns, but was interpreted by Nonconformists as state-sponsored prostitution. Two meetings to demand its repeal were held in Malton and Driffield in 1875.[121] In 1876, at a meeting in the Wesleyan school, a Mr. Naylor (a Primitive Methodist) declared that 'When the Liberal Government returns to office (as he hoped it would soon), these abominable acts would most certainly be repealed'. The campaign against the Bulgarian atrocities preoccupied the national press in 1876-77.[122] It had a more limited impact in the East Riding – two meetings were held in the Wesleyan schools in Driffield but none in the villages. The campaign against the Boer war aroused even less local interest and there is no mention of it at all in the Primitive Methodist records. The issue was complicated by the Roseberry / Campbell Bannerman split in the Liberal Party and the nationalist mood which swept the country. South Africa and

[119] Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 11.
[120] Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, Chapters 6,7 and 8.
[121] *Driffield Times* 9 and 16 January 1875.
[122] 'The Bulgarian atrocities' referred to Turkish discrimination again Christian minorities in eastern Europe. The affair was used by Gladstone to arouse public interest in the Midlothian Campaign and fuelled his subsequent return as leader of the Liberal Party. Richard Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Atrocities* (London: Nelson, 1963).

indeed Bulgaria were far-away places of little concern to agricultural labourers who had more pressing needs of their own.[123]

The Education Act of 1902

The debate over the 1902 Education Act was a different matter, as it affected Primitive Methodists directly. The Act, passed by a Conservative government, was intended to bring all publicly funded schools under local-authority control. It proposed an end to the anomalies caused by multiple School Boards of widely differing sizes and efficiency, and aimed to allow the development of public secondary education.[124] The difficulties, as with the 1870 Act, arose over its denominational provisions. Denominational schools, almost entirely Anglican or Roman Catholic, would receive a substantial public subsidy – in most cases the denominational authorities were responsible for the buildings while local authorities paid for staffing and equipment. Once again Nonconformists were up in arms, not just over the subsidy ('Rome on the rates'), but also over the ending of direct political control of schools via the School Boards.[125] After a series of meetings in London in the spring of 1903 the Free Church Council (representing the combined leadership of the Nonconformist churches) decided on a campaign of 'passive disobedience' in opposition to the Act. Its leader was John Clifford, a Baptist and pastor of Westbourne Rd. chapel in Paddington.

'Passive disobedience' meant refusing to pay local rates on the grounds that those same rates subsidised religious teaching of which Nonconformists disapproved. Continued refusal to pay rates led to 'distraint of goods', where bailiffs seized the possessions of the offender and put them up for sale at auction, whereupon other Nonconformists 'bought' them back and they were returned to their owner. These proceedings provided good publicity for the Nonconformist cause and the removal and subsequent return of two silver trowels belonging to Dr. Clifford became a regular ritual.[126] Refusal to allow distraint of goods could lead to a prison sentence. Although the Wesleyans were lukewarm about passive disobedience, the Primitives embraced it

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[123] Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War 1899-1902* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), argues that the majority of the working class were in fact opposed to the war. However their opposition was never really articulated as the pro-Boer party lacked a strong public voice (as Gladstone's had been in 1879). There were certainly no public protests against the war in the Driffield area, whether led by Primitive Methodists or not.

[124] G.R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War 1886-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp. 329-334.

[125] Watts, *The Nonconformists* Vol. 3, pp. 353-4.

[126] Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 144.

with enthusiasm.[127] Of all the Nonconformist denominations they had the most to lose. They had the highest proportion of rural members who were therefore the most likely to have no choice of school for their children other than one controlled by the Anglican Church. In the years between 1903 and 1907 sixty Primitives received a prison sentence for refusing to allow their goods to be seized, as also did forty-eight Baptists, forty Congregationalists, twenty-seven others and fifteen Wesleyans.[128]

In the East Riding Primitive Methodists were active in the passive-resistance campaign. In May 1903 the Pocklington Circuit urged all members not to pay the local rate. In June they refused to pay rates on their second preacher's house and 'commended all our people in the Circuit who feel constrained to act as passive resisters'.[129] The local paper continued the story. In June the Rev. Ellis and eight others had their goods confiscated: 'Booty was conveyed in a heavy cart and contained suits of clothes, buckets of lard, boxes of chocolates and a grass mower'.[130] In September there was a passive-resistance meeting in Driffield addressed by the Rev. Oliver, President of Conference, and in October a Mr. Walker of Gristhorpe, leader of passive resistance in the Filey Circuit, suffered the first of many distraints of his household goods.[131] In December Luke White, Liberal MP for the Buckrose Division and a Congregationalist, opened the Primitive Methodist Christmas Bazaar at Filey and 'wished them well in their passive-resistance campaign.'[132] The New Year opened with another twenty-one 'distraints' at Beverley and six at Driffield, three of them ministers.[133] Finally Mr. Walker made his fifth appearance in court at Filey in April and the Rev. Stanwell, Primitive Methodist minister at Pocklington, was sent to gaol in October.[134]

Protests continued, although with diminishing intensity, throughout 1905. The press was beginning to tire of the endless court dramatics, and the protesters to lose enthusiasm when the huge Liberal victory of January 1906 – caused in part by the education issue – gave the passive resisters new hope. One hundred and eighty-three Nonconformist MPs were elected (one hundred and fifty-seven as Liberals, twenty as Labour and six as Unionists).[135] But Nonconformist optimism proved to be misplaced.

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[127] Ibid,,
[128] Ibid,, p. 147.
[129] ERA 'Pocklington Primitive Methodist Circuit', Quarterly Meetings 1901-10: MRP 4/16.
[130] *Driffield Times*, 11July 1903
[131] *Driffield Times*, 12 September and 17 October 1903.
[132] *Driffield Times*, 5 December 1903.
[133] *Driffield Times*, 16 January and 27 February 1904.
[134] *Driffield Times*, 16 April and 18 October 1904.
[135] Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 3, p. 362.

Two new Education Bills, both aimed at redressing Nonconformist grievances, foundered in the Houses of Parliament – the first introduced by Augustine Birrell in 1906 and the second by Reginald Mc'Kenna in 1908. Opposition came from the Church of England and the House of Lords, but the main reason for the failure of the Bills lay within Nonconformity itself. Its leadership was divided between those who were prepared to compromise and those who were not, between those who wanted to hold out for a totally satisfactory solution and those who were prepared to settle for something less than perfect, between its passionate supporters among rural passive resisters and its rather more urbane representatives at Westminster. In the end the Liberal Government chose to challenge the House of Lords, not over the education issue, but over the people's budget of 1910.[136] In June 1914 Asquith told the Nonconformists that he would not proceed with a new Education Bill.[137] The Act of 1902 remained substantially in force for another forty years

In the East Riding and elsewhere local protest continued, but with flagging intensity and less success. The Rev. Woodcock published *A Pamphlet for the People: or reasons why A Primitive Methodist offers passive resistance to the Education Act of 1902*, and duly had his goods distrained on several occasions.[138] However, press interest waned and, by the elections of 1910, education was no longer an issue. As both David Bebbington and Noel Richards have pointed out, the campaign against the 1902 Act marked both the high point and the end of the Nonconformist Conscience. [139] Earlier campaigns against the Bulgarian atrocities and the Contagious Diseases Act had attracted wider support across the political and religious spectrum and, crucially, the support of Gladstone. The education campaign of 1902 was a more sectarian affair which did not engage outsiders and was seen to be self-interested and intolerant of other religious groups. Moreover, by 1910, the high tide of Nonconformist political influence was past. Nonconformist growth had failed to keep pace with population growth since the 1880s, and after 1906 went into absolute decline. The energy which had sustained its rise and political power in the 1880s was flagging, and many Nonconformist Liberal

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[136] Hugh Mc'Leod, *Religion and Society in England 1850-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 218.
[137] Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 152
[138] Henry Woodcock, *A Pamphlet for the People: or reasons why A Primitive Methodist offers passive resistance to the Education Act of 1902,* (Henry Woodcock, Bridlington, n.d.)
[139] Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, pp. 152-160; Noel Richards, 'The Education Bill of 1906 and the Decline of Political Nonconformity', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* Vol 23 (1972), pp. 49-63.

MPs, including the MP for Buckrose, Luke White, turned out to be Liberals first and Nonconformists second.[140]

Conclusion

In the 1860s Primitive Methodism emerged from its pietistic phase into the mainstream of Victorian religious life. It became involved in the debates over the 1870 Education Act, in the temperance campaign and in the Liberal Party of Gladstone. It had representatives in Parliament from 1874 onwards. The 'Nonconformist Conscience' manifested itself in the Primitive Methodist leadership and in middle-class members of town Societies; it did not much engage rural, working-class, members of the Connexion. The exception was the passive-resistence campaign against the Education Act of 1902, which was widely supported among rural Primitive Methodists because of the direct impact it had on the education of their children.

In the East Riding Primitive Methodists joined the School Boards, temperance campaigns and the Friendly Societies. They were never politically radical and there was little involvement with trade unionism or the nascent Labour Party. Their Liberalism was essentially that of Thomas Burt and George Edwards and Gladstone himself: that social improvement must be achieved through individual action and the role of the state was to make such progress possible through, for instance, better housing, a clean water supply and controls on alcohol; not through interference in the free market or the championing of special interest groups, be they trade unions or landowners.

So what was the significance of political Nonconformity? Alan Gilbert, in 1976, claimed that the church /chapel divide and the rise of political Nonconformity 'delayed by more than half a century the most obvious manifestations of secularisation'.[141] Similarly Obelkevich, in the same year, in a more sociological interpretation of the same theme, suggested that the 'vertical' community divide between the saved and the unsaved, rather than a 'horizontal' divide between the rich and poor, relegated class-consciousness in Lincolnshire villages for a generation.[142] Was this true of the rural East Riding? The answer is: probably not.

In the first place the social divisions between employer and employed in the East Riding were never as bitter or exploitative as those in Norfolk, or in the one-employer

[140] The constituency of Buckrose, comprising Driffield and the northern Wolds, was created in 1885.Luke White, a self-made solicitor with a Nonconformist background, first won the seat in 1900. See Chapter 9.
[141] Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 205.
[142] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society,* pp. 313-331.

mining villages described by Moore in County Durham – hence the absence of any union activity. There were also a substantial number of independent artisans – boot-makers, tailors, blacksmiths and wheelwrights – who both mitigated such divisions and were the mainstay of religious life, both Anglican and Nonconformist. Every village also had a 'rough' element, those who did not aspire to respectability and lay outside the influence of church, chapel and Friendly Society. Such people were the mainstay of the public houses and tended to intermittent employment; they were therefore unwelcome in tied housing and often lived in the larger open villages such as Weaverthorpe or Hutton Cranswick. They were looked down on but tolerated by the rest of the community.

Secondly the church /chapel divisions described by Obelkevich and Thompson and caricatured by Trollope in *The Vicar of Bulhampton* have been much exaggerated.[143] In the East Riding there was a nucleus of committed members of Methodist Societies, but also twice that number of 'hearers' who flitted between different religious groups. There were also a significant number of Methodists who continued to attend the parish church.[144] They diluted the church /chapel conflict and, like everyone else, enjoyed the Anniversaries, Feast Days, Lantern Lectures and Harvest Festivals which were the mainstays of community life in the days before public transport or mass entertainment. As described in Chapter 3, there was a good deal of co-operation between Wesleyans and Primitives in the East Riding, and relations with the Church of England were generally good except where Anglo-Catholic clergy, such as the curate at Middleton, disturbed the religious peace. Nonconformity, rather than dividing rural society on religious lines, was a cohesive force, providing villages with a local working-class leadership as opposed to that offered by the clergy, community groups such as choirs, the Band of Hope and Christian Endeavour, and public entertainment in the form of concerts, solo recitals and the ever popular Anniversary Services.

It was not the decline of religious feeling which ended the social cohesion of East Riding villages but the end of rural isolation. The railways and, when they came, bus services enabled people to get away from the land and the agricultural depression

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[143] Anthony Trollope, *The Vicar of Bulhampton* (London: Bradbury, Evans and Co., 1870). The novel describes the antagonisms created when a Methodist chapel is established in a rural village.

[144] Edward Royle, 'When did Methodists Stop attending their Parish Churches?', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Vol. 56, (2008), pp. 275-297; Barry Reay, *Rural Englands: Labouring Lives in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 165.

forced many of them to do so. At the same time the mass manufacture of footwear, of clothing, and of metal goods destroyed the livelihood of the boot-makers, tailors and blacksmiths who had been the mainstay of rural Methodism. Left behind were the remaining agricultural labourers, the 'roughs' and a growing number of middle-class incomers from the towns.

Appendix 1 Driffield School Board 1877-1902

Below are the names and status of prominent members of the Driffield School Board between 1877 and 1902 and the stand they took on three important issues:

1 The appointment of Attendance Officers (AOs) and the payment of teachers' salaries. After attendance became compulsory in 1876, most Boards needed to employ an AO, but they cost money and ratepayers objected. Ratepayers also wanted teachers' salaries to be kept low and there was a constant tension between the demands of staff and the demands of ratepayers, between economy and the quality of education and the progress of the working classes.

2 The question of school-age children working was a thorny one for School Boards. There was constant pressure from parents and employers to allow it, and many people, including Primitive Methodists, thought it quite acceptable.

3 The 1870 Act forbade all 'doctrinal' teaching, but this was in fact difficult to define. It often came down to the question of whether the Bible should be read 'without comment' or expounded by staff.

Primitive Methodists

Rev Whitehead 1877-1880	Abstained on staff salaries
	Voted for appointment of AO
	Temperance books to be read in school
Rev Harrison 1883-1886	Abstained on question of AO and salaries
	Instigated petition on Sale of Liquor

	Introduced 'Dr. Richard's Temperance Lessons' into Driffield school
David Railton 1886-1902	Supported employment of AO
Joel Dossor 1895-1902	Supported employment of AO

Ratepayers Representatives

George Whiting (builder), Octamus Young (butcher), William Bradshaw (seedsman), William Foster (mill foreman), Robert Purdon (shoemaker) and others: All wanted reductions in staff salaries, opposed the appointment of an AO and even, in the case of Young, objected to the giving of school prizes. Most supported children doing field work in school hours but Whiting was the only one to vote, in 1881, for the parents' right to have their son working in a brickyard.

Luke White 1877-1891 Opportunist

Solicitor, Dissenter, future MP: Voted both for and against AOs and for / against reductions in staff salaries. He was generally in favour of children engaging in field work.

Idealistic Representatives

Dr. Wood (local physician and Congregationalist), Thomas Whitaker (public official, Baptist, member of the Liberation Society): Both supported the employment of an AO, both opposed field work for children. Whitaker suggested prizes for the children.

Appendix 2 Hutton Cranswick School Board 1874-1902

Hutton Cranswick was a large, open village a few miles south of Driffield where a quarter of the entire population were said to attend the Primitive Methodist chapel.[145] There were in fact two Primitive chapels, one in Hutton and one in Cranswick, plus one Wesleyan chapel, one Independent and the ancient parish church of St. Peter's in Hutton. The early years of the Board paralleled those in Driffield. Prominent local landowners (the Reynards) attempted to secure public funding for a small girls' school

[145] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry* p.98

run by Mrs. Reynard. When the Board failed to agree, Mr. Reynard resigned and played no further part in its affairs.[146] Primitive Methodist involvement began in 1875 with the election to the Board of Robert Dossor, grocer, local preacher and father of Joel Dossor of the Driffield Board. He was later joined by two co-religionists, William Duke and Singleton Bowes. In 1883 the Primitive Methodist hegemony was challenged by the arrival of a new vicar at St. Peter's: the Rev R.H.G. O'Callaghan, a man of a very different stamp from his mild predecessor the Rev. Purdon. By 1885 O'Callaghan was Chairman of the Board and proved a powerful opponent of the Nonconformist faction.[147]

Primitive Methodists

Robert Dossor (tradesman and PM local preacher)
Opposed appointment of AO
Insisted that Holy Scripture be read 'without comment'
Initiated Petition against sale of Liquor on Sundays

Singleton Bowes (blacksmith and PM local preacher)
In favour of appointment of AO

Robert Duke (shoemaker and PM local preacher)
Opposed appointment of AO

Ratepayers Representatives

William Jackson (farmer), John Harvey (grocer), John Hobson (farmer), Barmby Jordan (joiner): All were opposed to the employment of Aos and were in favour of reductions in teachers' salaries.

Rev R.H.G. O'Callaghan (Irishman, graduate of Trinity College Dublin and, since 1880, successor to the much milder Rev. Purdon, vicar of Cranswick): He strongly opposed a move by the Board to combine the posts of Clerk and AO in 1890 and called a public meeting in the village critical of the Board. This is an extract from the letter they sent him in reply: 'The members are strongly of the opinion that you went very far out of your way in presiding over a meeting called by a party of agitators for no other purpose

[146] ERA, Hutton Cranswick School Board, Minutes 1872-1889: SB 20/1.
[147] ERA Hutton Cranswick School Board, Minutes 1889-1903: SB 20/2

than to create strife and bad feeling in the parish'.[148] Duke lost his seat in 1893, perhaps as a result of the incident, leaving only two Primitives on the Board. In 1895 O'Callaghan, now Chairman of the Board, lost no time in proposing that 'the Bible be read and commented on in school for fifteen minutes daily'.[149]

[148] ERA Cranswick School Board Records 1889-1893: SB 20/2 January 1891
[149] ERA Cranswick School Board Records 1893-1900: SB 20/3 April 1895

Chapter 9 The Decline of Primitive Methodism

Introduction

The Liberal victory of 1906, at which one hundred and fifty-seven Nonconformist MPs were elected, nine of them serving in the government, marked the high point of the social and political impact of Nonconformity.[1] Asquith himself, prime minister after the resignation of Campbell Bannerman in 1908, came from a Yorkshire Nonconformist background. His father was a Morley wool merchant and the family were Congregationalists. Although he strayed from his Nonconformist roots by virtue of his marriage to Margot Tennant (the daughter of a wealthy brewing family) in 1894, the principles of political Nonconformity underlay Asquith's early career and he never entirely forgot them.[2] To the man in the pew, wrote James Munson, 'it seemed as if the election, and behind it, the identification of Nonconformity with the forces of Liberalism and Progress had been truly "an answer from God"'.[3] In 1907, the Rev. H. B. Kendall published his monumental *Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church,* showing how the Primitives, from their beginnings as a small revivalist sect, had grown to become a denomination and now a Church.[4] He proudly described how 'church sentiment' had grown among the Societies:

> […] while every digest of the laws of the denomination up to and including 1892 had been content to use the word 'Connexion', the latest consolidated minutes – those of 1902 – ousted the word wherever possible in favour of the word Church.[5]

Kendall, probably unconsciously, was describing the institutionalisation of Primitive Methodism, or, as Weber would have put it, 'the routinisation of charisma': the process whereby a sect gradually loses its spiritual intensity and instead becomes

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[1] James Munson, *The Nonconformists: In search of a lost culture* (London: SPCK, 1991), pp. 281-189; Ian G. Machin, *Politics* and the Churches in Great Britain 1869-1921 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 275; David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914* (London: Allan & Unwin, 1982), p. 153; Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History 1750-1985* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), p. 321.

[2] Stephen Koss, *Asquith* (London: Allan Lane, 1976), pp. 59-60.

[3] Munson, *The Nonconformists*, p. 283.

[4] H.B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church,* 2 vols, (London: Edwin Dalton, c. 1907).

[5] Ibid,, Vol. 2, p. 358.

focused on institutions.[6] According to Weber, religious sects underwent specific phases of development. First came the primary or 'heroic' phase, where they set themselves apart from the world and were absorbed by their own pieties, next came a transitional phase where they began to engage with the world outside and develop institutions; in the final phase the institutions became more important than mission and the sect lost its spiritual edge. According to the Weberian view, Kendall's emphasis on Primitive Methodist institutions in the second volume of his *History* – on the development of the Connexion's Central Halls, orphanages, evangelists' home and 'improved methods of finance' – demonstrated the sect's arrival at the final stage of its development. [7] Another indication was the content of the widely distributed 'centenary plate' of 1907 – on the front pious inscriptions and engravings of Bourne and Clowes; on the back a list of the numbers of chapels, members and Sunday Schools and, finally, 'value of property £ 4,958,978'.

It was no coincidence that the Liberal Party's greatest political victory and the elevation of Primitive Methodism into a Church occurred at almost the same time. Primitive Methodism – and Nonconformity in general – had invested a good deal of capital in the Liberal Party, hoping to achieve through political action the realisation of societal ideals such as public temperance, non-denominational education and 'moral' leadership in government. In the process the Primitives had become, as Kendall emphasised, a national Church with a national outlook and national responsibilities. They were no longer a pietistic sect which held itself apart from the ways of the world but were part of the moral progress of the nation. With the failure of the Liberal government to fulfil Nonconformist hopes came the gradual decline of political Nonconformity and of Nonconformity itself.[8] Some foresaw this even at the time. Amid the celebrations of the hundredth anniversary of the first Camp Meeting on Mow Cop in 1907 one local preacher (born 1887) recalled that

> Train loads came from Wales, Lancashire, London and elsewhere and it was estimated that 60,000 people stood on the hill. And yet, looking back, I was seeing the beginning of the end. […] there was a

[6] Max Weber, *Selected Papers by Max Weber*, ed. with an introduction by S.N. Eisenstadt (London: University of Chicago, 1963), pp. 54-5.
[7] Kendall, *Origin and History* Vol. 2, pp. 507-542. The Central Hall movement, begun by the Wesleyan 'forward movement' in the 1890s, attempted to draw the unskilled and the indigent, so far untouched even by Primitive Methodism, into the life of the churches.
[8] Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, pp. 153-60.

slackening of activity and membership seemed to become static. I gradually felt a vague, indefinable almost unreasonable feeling that we were losing ground. Primitive Methodism had lost the name 'Ranter' and was perceptibly becoming respectable. The spirit of evangelicalism was fading, its hold on the people less strong.[9]

Many would have said that the 'slackening' occurred a good deal earlier. The rest of this chapter will attempt to explain how it occurred and why.

The Historiography of the Decline of Religion

All Christian denominations have experienced fundamental changes in the period since the Industrial Revolution. Most significantly there has been an overall decline in attendance at church services since the early twentieth century. There have been variations - Anglican attendance has held up better than Nonconformist, and Roman Catholic better than Anglican – and there have been brief reversals of the trend, notably after both World Wars, but the general trend has been inexorably downwards.[10]

For most historians this fact has been interpreted as 'decline' and has led to the so-called 'theory of secularisation'. Max Weber, 1858-1917, was the first great prophet of secularisation. He held that religion was the product of societies in an early stage of their development. With material and scientific progress came a more rational approach to religion. 'The disenchantment of the world' set in and magic and miracle ceased to convince. Old ideas about God and his place in the universe were rejected. Eventually religion would die away and societies would become thoroughly rationalist and secular. Weber's ideas were reflected in those of two contemporary sociologists Emile Durkheim 1858-1917 and Ferdinand Tonnies 1855-1936. Durkheim attributed the most basic aspects of social behaviour to religion, but, like Weber, believed that it would eventually be superseded by science and the cult of the individual. Tonnies is significant mainly for his distinction between the idea of 'Gemeinschaft', the organic, inter-

[9] W. H. Simcock, 'Primitive Methodism: Its Rise and Decline', JRL, Methodist Printed Collections, MARC 1913, p.7 .This is an unpublished memoir, compiled in 1970, which W. H. Simcock bequeathed to the Rylands Library in 1995. (He had previously written a history of Primitive Methodism in Leek). In the memoir he describes his own experience of Primitive Methodism (he was born in 1919) and his interviews with the older generation – of which the (unnamed) local preacher quoted above was one.

[10] Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), passim.

dependant community of the pre-capitalist era, and that of 'Gesellschaft', the more individualistic, and formal society of the capitalist era.[11]

In 1976 Alan Gilbert applied Weber's ideas to a general study of the effects of industrialisation on religion in Great Britain.[12] Gilbert held that the observed decline in institutional religion in Britain was the direct result of socio-economic factors over which the churches had no control: the Industrial Revolution and the growth of a predominantly urban society. The Industrial Revolution swept away the old order of society in which religion played a central part and replaced it with a class-based system which, in the end, banished religion to the periphery. Gilbert claimed that evangelical Nonconformity grew in the first part of the nineteenth century because of the pace of social change. Individuals, pitched into the social upheaval of burgeoning industrial towns, looked for something to replace the old pre-industrial communities which had been lost and found it in the warmth and conviviality of Methodist chapels.[13] However, once the worst excesses of the Industrial Revolution were over and the working classes were at last beginning to enjoy some of its advantages, the power of religion waned. Life was less precarious; the conviviality of the public house and, after 1880, of organised mass activities such as football matches and music halls challenged the power of church and chapel. Friendly Societies and trade unions offered the prospect of a better life on earth rather than in the world to come. Organised religion, claimed Gilbert, had lost the support of working people by the end of the nineteenth century and became increasingly irrelevant in the twentieth. 'For the long-term concomitant of industrialisation was secularisation, and modern English society is a context in which significant religious commitment is a subcultural phenomenon.'[14]

James Obelkevich, following Tonnies rather than Weber, applied the former's theories to the development of religion in a rural area – Lindsey in Lincolnshire – in the mid-nineteenth century.[15] Obelkevich described how the change from an older, organic

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[11] S.D.H. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), pp. 1-30; Robert Moore, *Pit-Men, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Cambridge: University Press, 1974), pp. 14-27.
[12] Alan Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (London: Longman, 1976), pp.174-207.
[13] Ibid,, pp. 87-93.
[14] Ibid,, p. 207.
[15] James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford: University Press, 1976).

society (Gemeinschaft) to one based on capitalist agriculture and social class (Gesellschaft) affected relationships between churches and their congregations and between the churches themselves. In particular he described the coming of Primitive Methodism and its development as a sect.[16] First came the heroic evangelistic phase with a message that was 'plain, impressive and powerful'; then the second phase when 'missioning' became less vigorous and was gradually superseded by revivalism; and finally, around 1860, the denominational phase:

> The advent after 1860 of the stage of denominationalism is marked most clearly by the declining interest in revivalism. Missioning all but ceased as the outward missionary thrust weakened, was encapsulated and turned inward. Children, in family and Sunday School, were now the chief missionary field […] Camp meetings survived, but contributed more to nostalgia than revivalism.[17]

Gilbert's and Obelkevich's view of a strictly socially determined decline was challenged in 1982 by Jeffrey Cox. Cox, in a detailed study of the churches in Lambeth between 1870 and 1930, suggested that the actual numbers attending services were misleading statistics of the power of religion; more revealing was its 'associative' power.[18] People may not have attended services, but they sent their children to Sunday School, took part in 'the rites of passage' – baptism, marriage, and funerals – were involved in church sports clubs, social and charitable events, and generally considered themselves 'religious'. On these criteria the Lambeth churches remained successful and lively up to 1914. It was through its associational activities, claimed Cox, that religion survived in a secular society - as an internal attitude rather than a publicly proclaimed duty. This was the triumph, as he described it, of 'passive, diffusive Christianity'.[19] Cox rejected the 'inevitability' of decline and claimed that social changes do not necessarily lead to the decay of religious ideas.[20] His assertion is, to some extent, supported by the experience of religious institutions in South America and the Middle East.[21]

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[16] Ibid,, pp. 248-256.
[17] Ibid,, p. 253.
[18] Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society; Lambeth 1870-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1982), pp.90-105.

[19] Ibid,, p. 276.
[20] Ibid,, p. 266.
[21] David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: the Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), passim.

S.J.D. Green, writing in 1996 about the churches and chapels in three industrial areas in the West Riding, also challenged the 'inevitability of decline'.[22] However, his thesis suggested that it was the very proliferation of 'associative' agencies of religion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which actually spelled out the decline of institutional religion. He also pointed to the financial problems faced by the churches – particularly the poorer Nonconformist denominations – largely caused by over-enthusiastic building schemes.[23] This did not in itself lead to a loss of members, but made it more difficult for churches to service their ambitious associative activities. Green listed the great variety of clubs and societies offered by the Northgate End Unitarian church in Halifax in 1894 including a Band of Hope, a Penny Bank, a Rambling Society and an orchestra.[24] The problem for the churches was that individuals joined these societies but never became full members of the parent body itself. They remained nominal Christians, practising the same kind of diffusive Christianity that Cox found in Lambeth. Later, in the years after 1918, when central government and local authorities began to take over the charitable and educational role previously held by the churches, the latter found themselves shorn of what had become their primary function. At the same time, the political issues which had defined Nonconformity before 1914 – temperance and disestablishment – lost their resonance, to be replaced by more pressing issues – the international situation and the labour question - in the wake of World War One.[25] Decline was not inevitable; it arose because the churches chose to dilute their religious message, which was then lost in a host of peripheral activities. Whether they had any other choice at the time is of course a different question.

Hugh McLeod, in a more general study also published in 1996, summarised the work of earlier historians and came to conclusions similar to those suggested by the analyses of Cox and Green – that 'decline' was not an inevitable process but was partly the result of choices made by the churches themselves.[26] McLeod also challenged Gilbert's assertion that the working classes were largely lost to religion by 1900. Gilbert was clearly incorrect, as the researches of both Cox and Green have shown. The Lambeth churches had a strong working-class element, and even Northgate End Unitarian church in Halifax – the Unitarians tended to be the most middle-class of the

[22] Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline,* pp. 5-21.
[23] Ibid, pp. 87-94.
[24] Ibid,, p. 194.
[25] S.J.D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England* (Cambridge: University Press, 2011), pp. 41-44.
[26] Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England 1850-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

Dissenting sects – numbered many working people in its Mutual Improvement Society.[27] McLeod places the beginnings of decline in the years between 1880 and 1914, as do Cox and Green. Gilbert and Obelkevich, however, placed it earlier, in the period between 1850 and 1880. A more recent study, Callum Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain* published in 2001, places major religious decline even later than that posited by previous writers, claiming that it only began in earnest after 1950. Brown acknowledges that gradual secularisation took place from the early twentieth century onwards, but claims that the really significant factor in the decline of religion was the youth culture of the 1960s and the impact of feminism.[28] His book is interesting and provocative but ultimately unconvincing. The evidence he produces in support of his thesis (largely personal testimonies) seems no more objective than the nineteenth-century statistics which he criticises others for using.[29]

The Spiritual Decline in Primitive Methodism in the East Riding

In Primitive Methodist Circuits in the East Riding numbers continued to rise into the late nineteenth century. The Pocklington Circuit recorded its highest number of members (580) in the 1870s, the Driffield Circuit (1,387) in 1888.[30] There were twenty-seven Love-feasts there in 1893 and the number of local preachers stood at seventy-two – one for every eighteen members.[31] Camp Meetings, far from becoming exercises in nostalgia, continued to serve new purposes into the 1890s.[32]

Yet all was not entirely well. One of the most important consequences of an enlarged membership, as with the building of chapels and the attainment of a public position in village life, was the appearance of 'hearers' – people who might attend services but were not members of the Society and whose commitment was therefore

[27] Cox, *English Churches*, pp.131-2, 267-70; Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, pp. 238-239.
[28] Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation* 1800-2000 (London: Routledge, 2001).

[29] Ibid,, pp. 30-34.
[30] ERA, 'Pocklington PM Circuit', Circuit Records 1870-9: MRP 4/29; 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Reports 1877-1889: MRD 2/4/3.
[31] ERA, ' Driffield PM Circuit', Collection of Circuit Plans: 2/6/1.
[32] See Chapter 4

more questionable.[33] In the 1830s and 40s such lukewarm behaviour would not have been tolerated. But in the more relaxed atmosphere of the 50s and 60s it became acceptable: '[…] from the middle decades of the century all Nonconformist denominations began to make it easier to join their churches and became increasingly reluctant to enforce discipline […].'[34] These new adherents had to be induced to stay – their presence was important if only for financial reasons – and, in consequence, the pattern of services changed. 'Tea meetings' were introduced, which served a social as well as a religious function and it was from around this time that Chapel and Sunday School Anniversaries became popular local functions. Prayer Meetings and Love-feasts continued – in fact the number increased in the Driffield Circuit.[35] However, there had been a change in the balance between the spiritual and the social as Obelkevich pointed out in Lincolnshire.

> Primitive Methodists now sought to entertain their fellow villagers rather than to convert them […] Demanding less of themselves, they also demanded less of others and the sect accommodated itself to the ways of the world.[36]

The change did not go unnoticed. Parkinson Milson, one of the ablest of the travelling preachers in the East Riding and North Lincolnshire, recorded his reaction to a tea meeting in Hull in the 1856: 'He was much annoyed at the anti-spiritual character of the service. The tea was publicly called by an official "brown stout" and the same person on the platform, spoke of "hitting the bull's eye". "What pot-house expressions" he added.'[37] The popular Chapel and Sunday School Anniversary services always included singing and recitations by the children and sometimes by adults as well, with accompanying choirs and organ music. Gradually these crept into regular Sunday services and the old, loud evangelistic hymn singing was challenged, particularly in

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[33]'Hearers' formed a significant part of all Primitive Methodist congregations after 1850. Woodcock lists their number for every village on the Wolds in his 1889 publication *Piety among the Peasantry*. David Hempton has estimated their number at 2/3 for each actual member of the local Society – a figure which tallies with Woodcock's. David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 2.

[34] Michael Watts, *The Disssenters* ,Vol. 3 *The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015), p 142; Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 199.

[35] There were six Love Feasts in the Circuit in 1845, fourteen in 1868 and twenty-seven in 1893. E.R.A 'Driffield PM Circuit', Collection of Circuit Plans: 2/6/1

[36] Obelkevich*, Religion and Rural Society*, p. 254.

[37] Rev. George Shaw, *The Life of Rev. Parkinson. Milson,* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1893), p. 171.

town chapels, by trained choirs and solo performances. The Rev. Woodcock, in 1889, remarked proudly of the new chapel in Driffield: 'There is a good organ, an excellent organist with a sense of taste Mr. R. Dossor (son of Mr. Dossor of Cranswick) a good choir and an utter absence of drawl and drag'.[38] What did Woodcock mean by 'drawl and drag'? Did he mean the old, vulgar banging-out of hymn tunes accompanied by heartfelt but uncouth singing? There was certainly a move, among all denominations in the late nineteenth century, towards greater decorum and reverence in services, towards, as S.J.D. Green put it, the eclipse of experience and the exaltation of worship.[39] Again, not everyone approved of this concentration on taste and beauty; some yearned for the old, more direct expressions of religious fervour. In 1873 Parkinson Milson heard the well-known Wesleyan preacher, Romilly Hall, speak in the Kingston Chapel in Hull a sermon full of 'sound faithful advice'. 'He spoke strongly against immoral persons being allowed to sing for pay at sacred concerts, neglect of class meetings, and conformity to the world. His sermon was full of implied fear for Methodism.'[40] Milson himself did not compromise with the world. He continued to live an austere life and to preach entire sanctification until his dying day. But it seems clear from his remarks that the same could not be said of all his co-religionists.

Along with tea meetings and Anniversary Services, Driffield Primitive Methodism – in line with the 'diffusion theories' of Cox and Green – further diluted their religious message with a host of other associative activities. There was a branch of Christian Endeavour, a Band of Hope, a choir and a Cycling Club.[41] The Band of Hope has already been mentioned in the previous chapter. Christian Endeavour was another inter-denominational group which aimed to bridge the gap between Sunday School and full church membership.[42] It organised debates, discussion groups, and social events for young people, and was moderately successful in the Driffield Circuit between 1890 and 1914. As with the Sunday Schools and the Band of Hope, there was considerable pressure from the centre on individual Circuits to organise such groups. 'In how many

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[38] Henry Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry: Being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* (London: Joseph Toulson, 1889), p. 89.

[39] Green*, Religion in the Age of Decline*, pp. 293-297.
[40] Shaw, *Life of Milson*, p. 277.
[41] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Reports 1890-94: 2/4/4; *Driffield Times*, 30 May 1903.
[42] Christian Endeavour was founded in the U.S. in 1881 as a Nondenominational, evangelical society for young people. By 1910 it had spread across the English-speaking world. Its object was to 'promote the Christian life' and it had close links with Temperance.

stations have you bands of Christian Endeavour' demanded the Circuit Returns in 1910.[43] Christian Endeavour groups came and went in the East Riding and a few briefly flourished, but they were not successful in their primary purpose - to boost permanently adult membership.

Historians of religious decline have suggested that, in tandem with the rise of associative activities, there was a decline in the popularity of Class Meetings and the number of Love-feasts.[44] This did not happen in the Driffield Circuit until much later. Quite small villages were still maintaining healthy numbers of Classes into the 1890s and there were twenty-three Love-feasts in the Circuit in 1893, more than there had been in 1868.[45] There were also 72 local preachers – one for every eighteen members – a very healthy statistic which hardly changed up to the late 1920s.

Debt and Depopulation

Spiritual decline was exacerbated by financial problems within the Connexion. Primitive Methodism was never a wealthy denomination. Certainly it had few wealthy donors apart from William Hartley (the jam manufacturer) and the Hodges of Hull (suppliers of labour on the docks). Most chapels were built with the aid of small donations by members and by raising loans. Debt had always been a problem – one of the reasons for the expulsion of John Stamp in 1842 had been his reckless chapel building.[46] Conference had several times attempted to control the urge by Societies to build ever bigger and more ornate chapels, the first as early as 1835.[47] The situation in the Wolds was particularly difficult. The agricultural boom of the mid-Victorian years had led to a positive building frenzy. As we have seen, fourteen new chapels were built and another sixteen extended in the years between 1860 and 1879 – when the

[43] ERA, 'Driffield PMCircuit', Station Report for 1910: MRD: 2/4/5

[44] Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 347; Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 3, p. 126; Henry Rack, 'The Decline of the Class Meeting', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 39 (1973), 12-21.

[45] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Collection of Circuit Plans: M.R. D. 2/6/1.

[46] Colin Dews,'Rev. John Stamp, Primitive Methodist Secessionist and the Christian Temperance Brethren', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*,Vol. 57, pp.178-190.

[47] Kendall, *Origin and History*, Vol. 1, p. 323.

agricultural depression first began to bite.[48] Nor was all this new building strictly necessary. Most new chapels were far too big for the existing congregations and reflected wishful thinking about the future rather than a realistic financial assessment. Victorian church building was a phenomenon which continued

> […] in excess of the rate of growth of the national population […] and by an all too conspicuous lack of proof that such efforts produced any significant increase in the absolute or relative number of persons who attended regular services as a result.[49]

A 'new galleried chapel' was built at Luttons in 1863 with a capacity for three hundred people at a cost of £600, this in a village with a population (in 1851) of 426 and a chapel attendance (in 1875) of one hundred. Similarly, a new chapel was built in Fimber, also in 1863, with a capacity of one hundred and fifty at a cost of £198, in a village with a population (in 1851) of 179 and a chapel attendance (in 1875) of ninety.[50] Sustaining this level of debt for a poor congregation would have been difficult enough in normal times, but with the onset of the agricultural depression in the late 1870s it was disastrous. Money which could have been spent on raising the miserable salaries of travelling preachers, reducing pew rents or buying books for Sunday Schools had to be spent on servicing chapel debt. Energies which might have been better spent in leading Camp Meetings or Love-feasts were dissipated in fund-raising efforts to prop up chapel finances. The *Driffield Times* reported a huge variety of these efforts: men's efforts, ladies' efforts, special efforts, teas and bazaars over the next twenty years. The following is a representative selection: in 1880, a special organ recital was given at Cranswick (organist J.Dossor); in 1881 there was a 'soirée and fruit banquet' at Driffield; in 1887 a 'special effort' to reduce the Circuit debt (standing at £100 p.a.) was held and attracted a 'handsome donation' from the prospective Liberal parliamentary candidate for the Buckrose seat, Angus Holden.[51] Finally, in 1888, the Cranswick

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[48] David and Susan Neave, *East Riding Chapels and Meeting Houses* (East Yorkshire Local History Society, 1990), pp. 45-60; Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 170.

[49] Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 90.

[50] Figures derived from: ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Reports for 1875: MRD 2/4/2; Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, pp. 137-8; Victoria County History of Yorkshire, *Vol. 8: The Northern Wolds* ed. by David and Susan Neave (Oxford: University Press, 2008), p.38.

[51] After his pyrrhic victory in 1886 (see Chapter 8) Sykes retired from Conservative politics. Angus Holden (a Bradford industrialist) was chosen as Liberal candidate in 1887 and finally won the seat (created in 1885) in 1890. He represented Buckrose for ten years and was succeeded by Luke White in 1900.

Primitive Methodists re-opened the chapel after a spring clean – which was a good excuse for what was described as 'a sumptuous public tea' (at one shilling a head), trays provided by, among others, Mrs. Dossor and Mrs. Bowes.[52] Although these efforts may have reduced debt and cemented local community life, they did nothing to revive a flagging spirituality among Primitive Methodists. Parkinson Milson, never slow to criticise any sign of deviation from the path of true Godliness, remarked, after a tea and public meeting in aid of a new chapel in Grimsby: 'It is painful that we are so much occupied with schemes and operations to obtain money. Relgious zeal and Principle ought to furnish it at once, or at least without a tithe of the trouble we have to obtain it.'[53]

There was another extraneous factor exacerbating the problems of Wolds Primitive Methodism. That was rural depopulation. Of all the Nonconformist denominations, the Primitives were the most rural.[54] Their strength lay among agricultural workers, fishermen and miners and, in geographical terms, their strongholds were in Durham, Northumberland, Norfolk, Lincolnshire and the East Riding.[55] In 1895 the Connexion conducted a survey of its rural stations and was alarmed to discover that 'during the last twenty-five years we have abandoned 516 places and only succeeded in opening up another 236 new ones, thus showing a decline of 280 in our country societies'.[56] The decline of 280 stations did not mean an actual decline in numbers of members – this did not become apparent until after 1900 – but what it did reveal was a drift of members to the towns and their desertion of rural chapels. The failure of Primitive Methodists in Thwing, Skerne and Fridaythorpe to make any impact on the School Boards was mentioned in the last chapter.[57] In Holderness, a Mr. Harrison, local preacher, was also aware of the declining strength of rural chapels. He told his son Philip (born 1912) that some of the village meetings were so sparse and dull that everyone appeared to be asleep. On one occasion an elderly man, suddenly waking up, jumped out of his seat and shouted 'Praise the Lord'. Then he sat down and

[52] *Driffield Times*, 30 October 1880; 26 March 1881; 11 August 1887; 29 December 1888. The custom of donating a 'tray' of cakes or sandwiches seems to have been something of a feature of voluntary events in the East Riding.
[53] Shaw, *Life of Milson*, p. 283.
[54] Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 171; Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 147.
[55] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol 2 *The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), See Tables pp. 694-710.

[56] Remarks at Conference 1896, quoted by Gilbert, *Religion and Society,* p. 171.
[57] See Chapter 8.

immediately went to sleep again. Meanwhile the town chapel in Withernsea accommodated five hundred people and was always packed. There was a choir, an organ and lots of social activity.[58]

The reasons for the decline of rural religion mirrored those of rural life itself. The coming of the railways and, after 1918, of bus services, signalled the end of rural isolation. For the young in particular, the lure of town life in the form of higher wages, entertainment and a wider social life was irresistible. More importantly the number of jobs in agriculture declined, from 1,447,000 in 1871 to 983,000 in 1901.[59] The end of labour-intensive agriculture, so-called 'high farming', in the late 1870s meant that fewer workers, women and children in particular, were needed for field work. Increasing mechanisation entailed the same for adult men. The reaper - binder, invented in the United States in the 1850s, was in general use in England by the 1880s. Fewer people were needed for harvest and there was less casual labour for women, children and the itinerant bands of Irishmen who wandered the Wolds before 1914.[60]

In a dwindling rural labour market it was the ambitious, the intelligent and above all the young who were the most likely to move to the local market town; or to manufacturing areas where wages were higher; or to emigrate to Canada, the United States or New Zealand. The population of Driffield rose from 6,000 in 1880 to 15,000 in 1920, but the villages declined: Weaverthorpe, from 640 inhabitants in 1851 to 380 in 1911, Luttons from 426 to 317; Wetwang from 571 to 540 and Fridaythorpe from 330 to 252. Only Sledmere managed to maintain its population, mainly because of the presence of the Sykes and the number of people they directly employed in the house, in the wood-yard and in Sir Tatton's constant improvements to his estate. [61] During these years (the 1870s until the 90s) the *Driffield Times* regularly carried advertisements from steamship lines offering cheap or even free passages overseas: 'Assisted passages to New Zealand for ploughmen, navvies, and shepherds, female servants free'; 'Assisted

[58] Interview conducted by the author with Mr. Philip Harrison in Jan. 2012. (Mr. Harrison died, aged one hundred in 2013).
[59] E.J.T. Collins ed., *The Agrarian History of England. Vol. 7 1850-1914* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), Part II p 1970.
[60] E.J.T. Collins 'Migrant Labour in British Agriculture' *Economic History Review* 29 (1976), 38-59.
[61] Victoria County History of England, East Yorkshire *Vol. 8: The Northern Wolds* ed. by David and Susan Neave (Oxford: University Press, 2008), p. 38.

passages to Canada'; 'A lecture tour by Queensland emigration agents offering free passages for specified trades'.[62]

This drain of the young and ambitious affected voluntary associations, such as rural Methodists, particularly hard as it was precisely on such people that their future vitality depended. In 1888, the Secretary of the Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit recorded that 'Many families have left for Queensland', and in the following year, Woodcock remarked of Frodingham, 'a dull, dispirited village whose population has been decreasing for years', that 'many of our friends have had to seek their bread elsewhere'.[63] It was the elderly and the passive who were left behind - hence Mr. Harrison's experiences in the rural chapels of Holderness.

Organisational and Financial Problems 1880-1914

The Driffield Primitive Methodist Circuit reached its numerical zenith in 1888; thereafter numbers began to decline.[64] It was the periphery rather than the core membership which fell away – as demonstrated by the fact that the number of local preachers remained the same. There were still seventy-two in 1922, the same figure as in 1880. The loss of 'hearers' and the less committed membership was exacerbated by removals, emigration and the financial difficulties of rural chapels. Sunday School numbers held up better. In Driffield they did decline, but at nothing like the same rate as members; in Pocklington the number of Sunday Schools actually increased from seven in 1880 to fifteen in 1910.[65] As suggested by Cox and Green, this demonstrated a move away from institutional religion to 'associative' religion. People did not actually attend chapel themselves but felt it part of the family religious outlook that their children should attend Sunday School (which also of course gave their parents a free afternoon – a not inconsiderable incentive).

In 1891 David Railton, Steward of the Driffield Circuit, complained that some Societies, among them Fimber and Nafferton, were failing to fulfil their financial

[62] *Driffield Times*, 4 January 1873; 5 April 1882; 2 November 1889.
[63] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Quarterly Meeting Reports 1888-1900: M.R.D 2/2/4; Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p.145.
[64] In that year it had 1,387 members, in 1893, 1068, in 1914, 936; ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Reports, 1877-1889: MRD 2/4/3: 1890-1894: M.R.D, 2/4/3; 1910: 2/4/5.
[65] ERA, 'Pocklington PM Circuit', Circuit Records 1880-90: MRP 4/30; 1907-1916: MRP 4/33.

obligations to the Circuit.[66] The former had made no contribution at all and the latter was in arrears – probably because of their ill-advised move in attempting to run their own Circuit twelve years earlier. Worse was to follow. In 1894 the Circuit asked to be relieved of their fourth travelling preacher as they could not afford to pay him and 'the twenty-five-pound yearly deficit cannot be allowed to continue'.[67] From this point on the Circuit had to make do with three travelling preachers instead of four – with consequences for the number of Stations it could maintain. By 1910 services at Butterwick, Helperthorpe and Kilnwick, all small peripheral 'preaching places', had been given up.[68] The first two were High Wold villages where the Society had never managed to build a chapel. Kilnwick was perhaps the Primitives' last real attempt at evangelism. It lay on the route of the Driffield to Market Weighton railway line built in 1885 (one of the last railway lines in the East Riding). A 'preaching place' was established at 'Kilnwick Railway Gate' to mission the navvies and briefly appeared on the plan. However attempts to establish a permanent presence in the adjoining village had clearly come to nothing.

In the Pocklington Circuit, always less prosperous than that in Driffield, financial difficulties began earlier. In 1880, it was decided that the Circuit could no longer afford a third married preacher and the search began for a young, unmarried man; by 1885 Pocklington had only two travelling preachers.[69] In 1909 the Circuit had to ask for a 'probationary minister' because it was unable to afford a full salary, and in the same year the chapel at Shipton was reported to be struggling to pay a debt of seventy pounds. However their financial problems did not, for the time being at least, depress the spirits of Wolds Primitive Methodists. Individuals, such as Parkinson Milson, may have been pessimistic, but, for the majority, financial difficulties were surmountable, given God's help and the commitment of the faithful. The reduction in numbers was attributed, reasonably enough, to the agricultural depression and the 'adverse terms of trade'. Membership of the Sunday Schools and other auxiliary organisations held up, and the Driffield Circuit, as we have seen, made enormous efforts to boost its finances. Three new chapels were opened – Beswick in 1889, Sledmere also in 1889 and Thornholme in 1891. All three were in villages where the landlord had

[66] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Reports 1890-94: MRD 2/4/4.
[67] Ibid,
[68] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Report 1910: MRD 2/4/5.
[69] ERA, 'Pocklington PM Circuit', Circuit Reports 1880-90: MRP 4/30.

previously refused permission and where there was therefore a genuine need. In the case of Beswick, the place was opened without debt and celebrated with the usual monster tea for six hundred people.[70] In 1893, the Circuit hosted a 'Great Gathering' of Primitive Methodists with special excursion trains arriving in Driffield from all over the East Riding.[71]

In Pocklington a similar optimism prevailed. A chapel was opened at Goodmanham in 1891. Money was so short that it was built of corrugated iron and known as a 'tin tabernacle'.[72] In 1908, the Circuit even acquired a new house in the town for their (recently reduced) team of travelling preachers – possibly it was already owned by a member or was offered at a low rent; it seems unlikely that the Circuit could have afforded the whole cost.[73] The number of Sunday Schools, as we have seen, actually increased and, as in Driffield, there was no decline in associational activities. The Driffield Station Report of 1911 mentioned a decline in numbers – attributed to 'falls' and removals - but maintained that 'there is less gold but more silver' among members and much 'spiritual effort' in the Sunday School.[74] There was hope that things might improve, that there were better times ahead.

Primitive Methodists in The New Century

The Liberal victory of 1906 was greeted with delight by East Riding Nonconformists, particularly as the local MP Luke White, first elected in 1900, was one of their own. White, born of humble parents in the village of Nayburn in 1845, was a poor boy made good. He received his first education in the Sunday School of Monk Bar Chapel in York and was first employed as an office lad at Hodgeson's Solicitors in Driffield. There he gradually worked his way up, took law exams and became a partner on Hodgeson's death in 1874. He was elected to the School Board in 1877, to the East Riding County Council in 1889, became agent to the Liberal candidate at the 1885 election and, when

[70] Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry*, p.110. Primitive Methodists were, by the 1880s, much more professional in their attitudes to finance. The building of new chapels had to be authorised by the Central Committees. Kendall, *Origin and History* Vol. 2, pp. 532-538.
[71] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Reports 1890-94: MRD 2/4/4.
[72] Neave, *East Riding Chapels*, p.33.

[73] ERA, 'Pocklington PM Circuit', Circuit Report 1907-16: M.R. P. 4/33.
[74] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Report 1911: MRD 2/4/15

Sir Angus Holden stood down as MP in 1899, was adopted as candidate.[75] White was intelligent, personable and popular. Although he had started life as a Methodist, by the time of his election as an MP he had become a Congregationalist and had a regular seat in the Congregational church in Driffield.[76]

White remained sympathetic to Methodism and was much in demand to open chapel bazaars, attend teas and deliver public lectures. In 1901 he opened a bazaar at Flamborough; spoke at a Liberal rally in Driffield, where the platform party included the Steward of the Primitive Methodist Circuit David Railton, and opened another bazaar at Filey, where he flattered his audience by praising the great contribution of Primitive Methodists to national life.[77] In 1913 he attended the Chapel Anniversary at Kilburn and gave a lecture on Mr. Gladstone.[78] White was a pragmatist; he was committed to the ideals of political Nonconformity when it suited him. He was never an enthusiast for temperance but, along with most Liberals, criticised the conduct of the Boer war as 'a disgrace to the Empire' and was sympathetic to the Primitives' strictures on the 1902 Education Act.[79] In October of that year, he met representatives from the local School Boards, including David Railton and Joel Dossor, to discuss how it might best be opposed.[80]

Driffield Primitive Methodists therefore had high hopes of the 1906 Liberal government and of Augustine Birrell's new Education Act of the same year. As we have seen, they were to be sadly disappointed. It was this disappointment followed by the disastrous experience of World War One which was to undermine finally and fatally their spirits and confidence.

The First World War changed everything. Nearly three quarters of a million men were killed, the majority of them under thirty, and an equivalent number were severely wounded. Over five million men passed through the army in the course of the war, 22%

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[75] Peter Howorth, *From White House to Workhouse: Luke White 1824-1920* (Driffield: Lowndes Publications,1998), pp. 9-25; 54-5.
[76] This was a not uncommon move by upwardly mobile Methodists. The Congregational church in Driffield was a social step up; its congregation included local doctors and lawyers. Woodcock referred disparagingly to those who 'prefer association with the rich and powerful to the company of shop keepers and labouring men', *Piety among the Peasantry*, p. 258
[77] *Driffield Times*, 5 January; 27 April and 7 December 1901.
[78] *Driffield Times*, 25 October 1913.
[79] *Driffield Times,* 19 January 1901; 5 April 1902.
[80] *Driffield Times*, 18 October 1902.

of the entire male population.[81] The position of women in society radically changed and in 1918 they were finally allowed the vote.[82] The limits of state power were pushed outwards and expanded, to include docks and railways in 1914, conscription in 1916, control of wages and prices in key industries throughout the war, and eventually, in 1918, food rationing.[83] The Labour Party and the trade unions became part of the political world.[84] At home the real state of affairs in the trenches – the mud, the squalor, the rats – was kept from the public by the censors, but many knew, through men home on leave, what was really going on. There was a common sense of being part of something pivotal: 'A sense that the old world was dead, that a new world was about to begin'.[85]

At the beginning of the war in 1914 the attitude of official Primitive Methodism was equivocal. The Connexion had never been pacifist, but opposed all violence as an attack on the laws of God and attacks on small nations as a breach of the moral law. The Connexion had largely opposed the Boer War in 1899, unlike the Wesleyans who had supported it under the leadership of the Liberal imperialist Hugh Price Hughes.[86] The issues in 1914 were less clear-cut. Germany was the aggressor and the country was in a state of patriotic fervour. It was Lloyd George who skilfully swung Nonconformist opinion in favour of the war at a speech in the Queen's Hall in September 1914.

> There is something infinitely greater and more enduring which is emerging already from this great conflict – a new patriotism, richer, nobler, more exalted than the old. I see amongst all classes, high and low, shedding themselves of selfishness, a new recognition that the honour of the country does not depend merely on the maintenance of its glory in the stricken field, but also in protecting its homes from distress.[87]

This mixture of the martial and the moral was calculated to appeal to Nonconformity and it succeeded. Prominent Nonconformists who had opposed the war

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[81] J.M.Winter,, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985) p 75.
[82] G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War 1886-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp 777-793, Norman Davies, The Isles: A History (London: Macmillan, 1999) p.774; A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (London: Pelican, 1970) pp. 132-3.
[83] Henry Pelling , *Modern Britain 1885-1955* (London: Nelson, 1960), pp.78-84; Searle, *A New England?* pp. 806-823.
[84] Andrew Thorpe*, A History of the British Labour Party* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 32-54; Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unions* (London: Macmillan, 1963) pp. 149-182.
[85] Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge* (London: Norton, 1970), p. 135.
[86] G. Cuthbertson, 'Pricking the Nonconformist Conscience' in Donal Lowry ed., *The South African War* (Manchester: University Press, 2000), pp. 169-187.
[87] Quoted in Marwick, *The Deluge,* p. 49.

were won over, among them Dr.Clifford, Seebohm Rowntree and Robert Nicoll.[88] Primitive Methodists were also persuaded. At the Conference of 1915 it was declared that 'This hideous calamity has been forced on us by the brutal arrogance and lawless ambition of a military caste, a materialistic philosophy, which would, if triumphant, fling the world back into the most piteous savagery'.[89] In rural Norfolk, George Edwards, Primitive Methodist, radical Liberal and future MP, chaired a recruitment meeting, although the General Secretary of the Agricultural Union (which Edwards had revived in 1906) was opposed.[90] In Driffield Luke White MP pledged support for the local War Committee and denounced German atrocities.[91]

And so Primitive Methodists joined the war effort – 150,000 of them during the course of hostilities, including forty-three chaplains.[92] The Connexion did oppose conscription in 1916 and defended the rights of conscientious objectors – largely at the instigation of A. S. Peake (Principal of the Primitive Methodist training college).[93] Only one hundred Primitive Methodists, however, declared themselves conscientious objectors.[94] At the end of hostilities, in 1919, H.B. Kendall justified Primitive Methodist involvement in the war in a new, and much shorter, version of his *Origin and History*.[95] He claimed that before the war 'Primitive Methodism had come to be probably the most pronounced Pacifist denomination in the land save for the Society of Friends', but, '[...] We have been called to resistance by sacred claims to honour, by the impulse of fidelity to international relations and by the urgent need of small nations'.[96]

In Driffield, as in most towns, there was excitement at the start of the war with the town band escorting volunteers to the station and heady editorials in the local paper.

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[88] Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform: War, Peace and the English Churches 1900-1945* (London: SCM Press 1986), pp. 27-8. Dr. Clifford was the leading Baptist responsible for the passive resistance campaign against the Education Acts of 1902. Seebohm Rowntree was a Quaker, a member of the prominent chocolate manufacturing family and an active social reformer. Robert Nicoll was the editor of *The British Weekly*, an influential Nonconformist newspaper.

[89] 'Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference 1915', quoted by Alan Wilkinson*, Dissent or Conform,* p. 48.
[90] Nick Mansfield, 'Class Conflict and Village War Memorials 1914-24', *Rural History,* Vol. 6 (1995), pp. 67-87.
[91] *Driffield Times*, 15 August 1914.
[92] Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism* (London: Epworth, 2002), p.87.
[93] J.M. Turner, 'Methodism in England 1900-1932'*, A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* Vol. 3 eds. Rupert Davis, Raymond George and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth, 1983), pp..356-7.
[94] Mel Johnson,'Primitive Methodists and World War One', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society,* Vol. 59 ((2013-14) pp. 125-135.
[95] Rev H.B. Kendall*, The History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1919).
[96] Ibid,, p. 168.

The call to arms resonated particularly strongly on the Wolds where Mark Sykes, anticipating the outbreak of war, had raised a volunteer force - 'the Wolds Waggoners', who had been training since 1912.[97] They were deployed immediately to France, some of them leaving the fields in the middle of harvest.[98] Things soon changed, however, when the casualty lists began to arrive. The first to be killed was Joseph Nailton of Eastgate in Driffield, a private soldier aged 21 and 'a member of the young men's society at the Primitive Methodists'; the second was A.B. Sherwood aged 19, another Primitive Methodist.[99] After this the rate of casualties increased, five in November, eight in December and, the first in the new year, William Halson of Middle St. North in Driffield on 7 January 1915. In April 1916 Lieutenant Staveley, son of a well-known East Riding family, was killed; in September Col. Mortimer, a prominent corn merchant in the town; in November the son of Canon Trevor of Beeford.[100] Driffield was a small place and bad news travelled fast. By late 1916 the mood was dark, all longed for an end to the war and the killing, and there was much criticism of the political leadership.[101]

The local paper began to carry reports of 'shrines' being unveiled in Driffield – usually a simple plaque in a quiet place surrounded by flowers and mementos.[102] The object of these shrines was to commemorate the dead and ask God's blessing on the living. The first, in October 1916, was in Victoria Rd. from where thirty-two men had left on active service. Another was at 'Beckside' in September 1917: '[…] for the men who have gone from the vicinity of Beckside, Queen St. and Providence Place. The roll contained forty-eight names of which six have made the supreme sacrifice.' The Rev. Foord officiated and the company sang 'Oh God our Help in Ages Past'.[103] On news of the Armistice in 1918 'the streets were alive until a late hour of the night' and servicemen marched from the newly established aerodrome into the town.[104] One

[97] Mark Sykes was the heir to the Sledmere estate and a military man who had served in the South African war. Ian Sumner, *The Wolds Waggoners* (Sledmere: Sledmere Estates, 2000); VCH Vol. 8 S*ledmere and the Northern Wolds*, p. 46.
[98] The Wagoners' Memorial in Sledmere village portrays the call up letters arriving as men worked in the fields.

[99] *Driffield Times*, 24 October 1914; 2 November 1914.
[100] Driffield Times, 3 April 1916; 30 September 1916; 25 November 1916.
[101] Searle*, A New England?* pp. 696-702; Pelling, *Modern Britain*, pp. 74-5; A.J.P Taylor, *The First World War* (London: Penguin, 1966), pp. 158-9.
[102] Such shrines were a general feature of the times. Searle, *A New England,* p.744.
[103] *Driffield Times*, 28 September 1917.
[104] *Driffield Times*, 16 November 1918

hundred and thirteen Driffield men had died in the conflict and many more from the surrounding villages – sixteen in Frodingham, thirty-three in Humnaby and twenty-six from Nafferton.[105] Among Primitive Methodists one hundred and twenty-nine members of the Driffield Society served and twenty were killed in action.[106]

The impact of the war on Primitive Methodism was made clear by the Station Reports between 1914 and 1918. They are brief, scrawled in different hands and perfunctory. 'General unrest and the demands of war' is written across the section asking about the spiritual health of the station and is followed by lists of those who have moved, 'fallen', or died.[107] There was no mention of military losses or of the progress of those left behind. In fact there is very little about anything and most of the story has to be pieced together from reports in the *Driffield Times*. By March 1916 membership was down to 823. One travelling preacher, Mr. Anderson, had joined up, so the Circuit decided to make do with two rather than three ministers. In April, David Railton revealed a deficit of £80 and called for a more 'spiritual interest' and 'regular financial contributions from friends'.[108] Things had clearly not improved by the following year when, on the induction of a new minister, he was reported as saying: 'In the matter of attendance at God's house there was great need of an awakening, and he trusted that all would do their best to bring about a revival in the matter'.[109] There was clearly a feeling among the Societies that the Connexion had strayed from its roots. At another meeting to welcome a new minister in 1916, Mr. Verity of Driffield declared that 'He might tell the new man that they wanted no fanciful doctrines, but the old ones which lifted some of the worst men in the town to be the best'. Perhaps in response to such remarks 'An Old Time Love Feast', with a procession, was held at Nafferton the following month.[110] It must have been one of the last Love-feasts to be celebrated in the East Riding. In 1916 there were just three and none at all during the 1920s, although, interestingly, the code for them 'L' was still printed in the plan – presumably because people did not want to lose the memory although the actuality had become untenable.[111]

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[105] *Driffield Times*, 18 Dec. 1920; 25 February 1921; 19 March 1921.
[106] *Driffield Times* , 28 August 1920. A proportion of 1 in 6 which is higher than the average (1 in 8) but this is too small a sample from which to draw conclusions.
[107] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Report 1915: MRD 2/4/19.
[108] *Driffield Times*, 11 March and 29 April 1916.
[109] *Driffield Times*, 10 August 1917.
[110] *Driffield Times*, 29 July 1916; 26 August 1916.
[111] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Circuit Plans 1920-1932: 2/6/2

In 1915, the Pocklington Circuit had to apply for financial relief from Primitive Methodist church funds. The struggling chapel at Shipton finally closed its doors in the same year, to be followed by the one at Goodmanham which had only been opened in 1891.[112] By 1917, with membership down to 310, the Primitives had given up services at Warter. They now had fifteen preaching stations (down from eighteen in 1890) but were still managing to run ten Sunday Schools.

The Aftermath of the War – the Fall of Luke White

The *Driffield Times* continued to report on the activities of the local MP throughout the war. Luke White voted in favour of the Agricultural Tenants' Compensation Bill, frequently returned to Driffield to attend public meetings or Chapel Anniversaries, and voted in favour of conscription in 1916. At the end of 1916 his wife died and in January 1917 he thanked, via the *Driffield Times*, all those who had sent him letters of sympathy. In May the Buckrose Liberal Association, meeting for the first time since 1914, passed a vote of confidence in him and invited him to serve the constituency again.[113] He spoke on the 'Beef Prices Order' in the House of Commons in September and opened a bazaar in Driffield on 27 October. Then there was silence. In July 1918 it was announced that he was ill and would not be fighting the next election. Mr. Austin Taylor 'son of an evangelical clergyman' would be the Liberal (Asquith) candidate.[114]

Gradually the truth leaked out. White was bankrupt and owed £21,000, much of it in election expenses. Never a rich man, he had systematically been helping himself to clients' money since 1908, as he found it impossible to live in the style to which he had become accustomed on a diminishing income.[115] Several elderly clients had been left almost penniless as a result. He was charged with embezzlement, but the case never came to court as he was deemed unfit to plead. Within two years he was dead, dying in Driffield workhouse in August 1920. The *Driffield Times* was generous in its assessment: 'In the face of death we have no intention of recalling the painful incidents

[112] ERA, ' Pocklington PM Circuit', Circuit Reports 1907-16: MRP 4/33; Circuit Reports 1917- 1932: 4/34.
[113] *Driffield Times* 19 May 1918
[114] *Driffield Times*, 20 July 1918
[115] Howorth, *From White House to Workhouse,* pp. 56-63; 73-9.

which closed a useful life'.[116] The public was less forgiving. The news, coming as it did right at the end of the war, only a week or two before the Armistice, shocked Driffield, and Nonconformist Driffield in particular. The scandal rocked the town and was still talked of in the 1950s. It was said that 'no one ever voted Liberal in Driffield again'.[117]

At the General Election, held in great haste on 14 December 1918, the Liberals lost badly. The Coalition candidate, in effect a Conservative, Captain Moreing (who had a distinguished war record) polled 9,310 votes. The Labour Party candidate, G.H. Dawson, leader of the newly formed Agricultural Workers' Union and a local man, polled 3,176 votes and the Liberal candidate, Austin Taylor, a mere 2,793. Dawson declared himself happy with the vote and said 'it was a good start', but Austin Taylor left town and was never heard of again. The turnout was extremely low, 56% (because of the flu epidemic), which probably had an effect on the result. *The Driffield Times* remarked that 'Interest in the election was very slight with none of the enthusiasm which has marked previous contests'.[118]

The succeeding history of the Buckrose Constituency is interesting. The Conservatives won again in 1922, 1923, 1924 and 1929 with turnouts of over 80%; in fact they have won every election there to the present day except for a brief lapse in 1945 (a Liberal gain). Labour failed to press home their advantage in 1918. They did not put up a candidate in 1922, 1923 or 1924. In 1926 (a by-election) they lost their deposit, and the same thing happened in 1929. They have never succeeded in gaining more than 25% of the vote in any election since 1918.[119] In a rural area with a strong Methodist tradition this is odd. In the North Riding, rural Lincolnshire and in Norfolk the 'Lib-Lab' vote was always considerable. It led to the election of Labour MPs in the Cleveland Division in 1929-31, and from 1945 until 1959; in Brigg (North Lincolnshire) in 1929-31 and from 1935 until 1970; in rural South West Norfolk from 1929-31 and from 1945 until 1964 (with a Conservative lapse between 1951 and 55).

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[116] *Driffield Times*, 21 August 1920.
[117] Remarks recalled by the author from conversations with her family..
[118] *Driffield Times* 21 Dec 1918.
[119] F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Results 1918-1949* (Glasgow: Political Reference Publications, 1969), p. 504.

North Norfolk too had Labour MPs between 1922 and 1930 and from 1945 until 1966.[120]

The Final Years 1918-1932

Primitive Methodism never recovered from the shock of the First World War. There was the physical loss of men and ministry, but more debilitating was the spiritual loss - of hope and of evangelistic purpose – after four years of war. According to Koss: 'The war dealt a shattering blow to organised religion […] the churches never recovered from the ordeal, either in terms of communicants or self-possession'.[121] Robert Currie and others claimed that the Protestant churches in Great Britain experienced a rise in numbers during the 1920s, which included all the major Nonconformist denominations.[122] However, this was just not true of rural Primitive Methodism, as J.M. Turner acknowledged in the *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*:

> By the end of the [nineteenth] century much of the economic, social and even religious impetus of Primitive Methodism had begun to wane, though in the areas of its strength it represented a style of dissent […] quite different from Wesleyanism.[123]

In the Driffield Circuit numbers declined again from 861 members in 1918 to 702 in 1932. Sunday School figures held up better, for reasons discussed earlier, and stood at 701 in 1928.[124] Contemporaneously a series of deaths deprived the Driffield Circuit of some of its best-known and most powerful voices. The Rev. Leafe, who had persuaded the Sykes to allow a chapel in Sledmere, died in 1918. He was followed by William Petch, local preacher and builder of chapels, and John Scruton, last in a long line of travelling preachers. David Railton died in 1920 and the following year the Rev. James Shaw, 'a giant of God', was buried next to his old friend Scruton.[125] Both the Dossors, father and son, of the Cranswick School Board had died before 1914. The timing of these deaths was not of course a coincidence; all were men who had grown up in the days of Primitive Methodist expansion in the 1860s and 70s and there was no one

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[120] F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949* (Glasgow: Political Reference Publications, 1969*); British Parliamentary Election Results 1950-1970* (Chichester: Policitical Reference Publications, 1971).
[121] Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (London: Batsford, 1975), p. 31.
[122] Currie et al., *Churches and Churchgoers*, p. 30.
[123] Turner, 'Methodism 1900-1932', *History of the Methodist Church* Vol. 3, p. 329.
[124] ERA, 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Report 1918: MRD 2/4/18; 1932: 2/4/14.
[125] *Driffield Times*, 5 February 1921.

to replace them. By 1927 any pretence that all was well had been given up. 'The Circuit has some good churches, others are very weak' acknowledged the Station Report of 1927; that of 1931 talks of 'spiritual indifference' and the failure of some local preachers to fulfil their appointments.[126]

In Pocklington, numbers did not decline as fast and the town chapel seems to have held its own, but there was clearly a problem with rural chapels and the state of the ministry. The report of 1921 records that congregations consisted of 'the very old and the very young' and that young, probationary ministers required too much supervision.[127] The chapel at Huggate was closed in 1925 and the Circuit's temperance organisations were said to be unsustainable. Finally in 1928 the probationary ministers were replaced by a 'lay agent' aged 23 and the chapel at Huggate was put up for sale.[128]

The surprising thing about the final records of both the Driffield and the Pocklington Circuits is that neither made any mention of the impending scheme for Methodist Union. The smaller Methodist denominations – the Bible Christians, the New Connexion and the Free Methodists - had already joined forces in 1907 to form the United Methodist Church.[129] Negotiations between the Primitives, the Wesleyans and the United Methodists began almost immediately after the end of the war in the idealistic atmosphere created by the foundation of the League of Nations. However, they soon ran into difficulties - over the role of the pastoral office and the role of Conference - and it was not until 1928 that final agreement was achieved.[130] The negotiations were led, for the Primitive Methodists, by A. S. Peake who firmly believed that Union was God's will and put all his energies into achieving a settlement. An 'enabling Bill' went before Parliament in 1929 and a Uniting Conference assembled in London in September 1932.[131]

Union was clearly the only sensible way forward for rural Primitive Methodism given its falling numbers and difficult financial situation. It was irrational that every

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[126] E. R. A., 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Report 1927: MRD 2/4/27; 1932: 2/4/14
[127] ERA, 'Pockllington PM Circuit', Station Reports 1917-1932: MRP 4/34.
[128] Ibid,,
[129] Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 155.
[130] Currie, *Methodism Divided*, pp. 252-289; Turner, 'Methodism 1900-32', *History of Methodist Church* Vol. 3, pp. 333-340.
[131] Turner, 'Methodism 1900-32', *History of Methodist Church* Vol. 3, p. 339; Rupert Davies, *Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1963), pp. 160-1.

village should contain a multiplicity of struggling chapels. But this was not how it appeared at the time to small, aging and, by 1930, increasingly isolated groups of rural Primitive Methodists. Societies feared that their particular brand of simple and emotional worship would be swamped by the more muted Wesleyan version, and that they would lose local leadership – fears which indeed proved to be well justified. Union was opposed in all the East Riding rural Circuits as well as by some in the West Riding and several Societies within the city of Hull.[132] As mentioned earlier, the records at Driffield and Pocklington gave no hint of any arguments or discussions; perhaps there were none, perhaps no one thought them worth recording. The overall impression is that Methodist Union was something 'done' to Societies rather than 'by' them and that it was resented.

This resentment in Hull and the East Riding found expression in the foundation of the 'Continuing Primitive Methodist Church' in Hull in 1932. Its leading spirit was Derry Brabbs, a local preacher, who wanted to continue the Primitive tradition. The group had to buy their own premises in Redmond St. Hull, in Driffield, and in Patrington as the new Methodist Church refused to co-operate with them. There were similar groups in Durham, Cornwall and East Lancashire, but they never managed to link up with the Hull group and eventually disappeared. The 'Continuing Primitive Methodist Church', however, lives on to this day with chapels in Hull and Driffield. In its early days it could fill the Redmond St. chapel (300 seats) but these days (2012) numbers are in single figures.[133]

Union and After

Although the three Methodist groups which united in 1932 had reached agreement on matters of theology and polity, there was one huge flaw in the scheme: no arrangements were made for the Union of chapels locally and Conference had no powers to force such Union. It was simply assumed that reasonable local arrangements would be made. Nationally the Conferences were combined and staff worked from a central office with new notepaper headed 'The Methodist Church'; however, locally very little happened.

[132] Currie, *Methodism Divided*, p 203.
[133] Derry Brabbs, 'The Primitive Methodist (Continuing) Church in Hull and District following the Methodist Union Scheme of 1932', unpublished and undated pamphlet in author's possession. Brabbs died in 1980.

Chapels might occasionally exchange preachers, as they always had, or go to some distant spot for a 'United Service'. But, in the end they wanted to preserve their own traditions, methods and above all their tight social groups. They did not *want* to combine and there was no one to make them do so. In Whitby, an extreme example, the former Primitive chapel (down by the harbour) and the Wesleyan (up on the cliff) did not combine until 1983, and only then after much arm-twisting by District officials. [134] In Staithes, as recounted by David Clark, the different chapels also insisted on preserving their separate identities into the 1980s.[135] It was the same story in many other rural North Riding Circuits.

In the Driffield Circuit things were only a little better. The first approach towards Union came from the Wesleyans, whose Minister remarked that 'He had always been against it but now Conference has decided we must accept the situation and strive to do our best […] etc'.[136] A tentative 'tea meeting' was held with the Primitives in December 1930 and a putative title of the 'Trinity United Methodist Circuit' was agreed. There matters were left until 1934 when arm-twisting by the Chairman of the District led to a further series of meetings.[137] These eventually produced an agreement in 1936 whereby the number of ministers in the Circuit would eventually be cut from four to two, one Primitive, one Wesleyan, and there would be a joint 'Plan'. The Quarterly Meeting of both Circuits sanctioned this and 'Unity Day' was finally celebrated in Driffield in October 1936, four years after the official merger in London. The first Quarterly Meeting of the newly united Circuit, however, soon made clear the limits of their unity by declaring that 'There will be no reduction of places of worship or services except where mutual agreement is reached'. So there was to be no reduction in the number of chapels at all.[138]

Only in the villages of Lund and Middleton was agreement reached to close one chapel and hold joint services in the other. Everywhere else the separate chapels staggered on to their demise with ever-decreasing congregations and ever-increasing

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[134] Chris Metcalfe, 'The Long Courtship: Methodist Union in the Whitby Area'. unpublished Ph. D Oxford Brooks University, 2011

[135] David Clarke, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge: University Press,1982).

[136] ERA, 'Driffield Wesleyan Methodist Circuit',Circuit Records for 1930: MRD 1/2/4

[137] Ibid,, Records for 1934.

[138] ERA, 'Driffield Trinity Methodist Circuit ', Quarterley Meetings for 1937:MRD 3/2/1

repair and heating bills. The Primitive chapel at Kirkburn finally closed its doors in 1974 with an income of £64 a year and a repair bill in four figures.[139] Elsewhere the story was the same. Hutton Cranswick shut in 1963, Fimber in 1975, Garton in 1939, North Dalton in 1945, and Flamborough in 1968.[140] In Driffield the gaunt George St. chapel stubbornly held on to its separate existence. In 1948, it refused to join in a united service with the Wesleyans saying that 'we do not at the moment see that united services would best serve the cause of Methodism in Driffield'.[141] In 1952 it declined to join another joint service in the Victoria theatre. The chapel soldiered on with ever declining congregations until 1964 when it finally closed its doors and was sold as a tractor showroom. It was a sad end.

Conclusions

The final chapter of Wolds Primitive Methodism says more about human inflexibility and social insularity than it does about spirituality or the decline of religion. In its time, Primitive Methodism was a powerful faith and a great force for social improvement, but by the 1920s its spirit and confidence were gone and the only possible way forward lay in Union with the other Methodist churches. What light does the end of Primitive Methodism in the Wolds throw on the theories of religious decline outlined in the first section of this chapter?

First, it demonstrates that a wholly socio-economic explanation of decline, such as that put forward by Gilbert, is not sustainable. He suggested that, by 1900, most working people were lost to institutional religion; they had turned to football matches, mass entertainment and public houses for solace and, instead of looking forward to a reward in heaven, a minority were seeking rewards on earth via the trade unions or the nascent Labour Party. This may have been true of the cities but it was certainly not true of the rural East Riding, where Primitive Methodism had a large proportion of working-class adherents. Nor was there much appetite among them for involvement in radical politics or trade unions.[142] They were far more likely to seek social and material

[139] ERA Kirkburn PM Chapel, Trustees Minutes 1900-72: MRD 23/1.
[140] Neave, *East Riding Chapels*, pp. 45-60.
[141] ERA 'Driffield Trinity Methodist Circuit,' Report for 1948: MRD 16/2/5
[142] See Chapter 8.

advancement through the self-help espoused by the Friendly Societies and the Mechanics Institute.[143]

Although socio-economic factors such as the agricultural depression and rural depopulation contributed to the decline of Primitive Methodism, they did not cause it. The underlying cause of decline was a spiritual failure that was perhaps inevitable given the intensity of chapel life in the 1830s and 40s. The level of commitment demanded from the individual was simply unsustainable. Once the rules were relaxed and 'hearers' and the rest of the community became involved in chapel life, the demands for social activities, for money and for political involvement began to grow and become paramount. The financial problems of Wolds Primitive Methodism were largely caused by the chapel-building urge, itself the result of a declining spirituality and a desire to impress the outside world.

Secondly, evidence from the Wolds bears out the contention of Cox and Green that 'associative' activities actually increased the threat of secularisation. Christian Endeavour groups, cycling clubs and 'Bright Hours' were intended to draw outsiders into the chapel. Instead they diverted the energies of ministers and chapel officials and failed to bring in new members. Temperance groups proved a particular difficulty - there was insistent pressure from the centre to set them up, but finding people to run them was a constant problem. Sunday Schools had always been a poor source of recruitment, but they were popular with Conference (and with parents) and so they continued to drain the energies of the chapel. In Driffield in 1922 there were over 800 scholars but only 790 members of the society.[144]

Thirdly, experience of spiritual decline in the East Riding clearly lagged behind that in Lindsey (and the assumptions of most historians). How can this be explained? Not, it seems, in terms of geographical location, as both were equally isolated. One explanation would include the fact that Primitive Methodism was well embedded in the Wolds and, in a few open villages, was the majority culture, whereas in Lincolnshire it was very much in a minority, as Obelkevich himself acknowledged.[145] Primitive

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[143] David Neave, Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside: Friendly Societies in the Rural East Riding 1830-1912 (Hull: University Press 1991), Chapter 4, pp. 45-66 and Chapter 6, pp. 86-97; Peter Gosden, Self-Help: Voluntary Associations in Nineteenth Century Britain (London: Batsford, 1973), pp.

[144] ERA 'Driffield PM Circuit', Station Report 1922:MRD 2/4/22

[145] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 220.

Methodism was also generally supported by the landowners, and Driffield in particular had the reputation of a highly successful Circuit. Kendall described it as 'one of the widest, and numerically the strongest, country circuits in the Connexion'.[146]

And was Obelkevich perhaps a little too eager to fit the facts in South Lindsey into a Weberian framework? Wayne Johnson suggests as much in his 1989 thesis on Primitive Methodism in the North Midlands, accusing Obelkevich of taking a very 'teleological' view in claiming that the movement 'lost fire' in Lindsey as early as the 1850s. The experience of East Riding Primitive Methodism supports Johnson's opinion that Obelkevich took a very 'external' view of the situation and did not consider how it appeared to Primitive Methodists in Lindsey at the time. [147]

Finally, a negative point: McLeod, Gilbert and Michael Watts (in the third volume of *The Dissenters*) all devote substantial sections to what is variously described as the 'crisis of Victorian faith', 'the crisis of Dissent' or simply 'Doubt'.[148] The debates over *The Origin of Species*, over biblical criticism, over the fate of the contributors to *Essays and Reviews* and its milder successor *Lux Mundi,* have all been widely aired; the dilemmas of Victorian intellectuals such as George Eliot, Matthew Arnold and Lesley Stephen have been analysed in detail.[149] Timothy Larsen, however, in his recent study *Crisis of Doubt*, makes the important point that these religious questionings reflected the strength rather than the weakness of Victorian religion - religious experience was central to life in a way quite alien to modern sensibilities – and that many of the doubters, such as Joseph Barker and Thomas Cooper, eventually returned to the fold.[150] Nor is there any evidence that the inner struggles experienced by the intellectual and the articulate had any great influence on the mass of church- and chapel-goers, and Gilbert specifically admits as much.[151] There were exceptions – for instance Canon Atkinson's

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[146] Kendall, *Origin and History* Vol. 2, p. 96.

[147] Wayne Johnson, 'In Triumph of Faith; Primitive Methodism and the Labouring People of the North Midlands 1812-1862' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Keele, 1989), Chapter 2.

[148] Mc'Leod*, Religion and Society*, pp. 179-184; Gilbert, *Religion and Society* pp. 176-8: Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: Vol.3*, pp. 10-19.

[149] *Essays and Reviews* (1860) contained a series of essays by liberal Anglican clergy which attempted to redefine doctrine in the light of Biblical criticism and scientific discovery. It produced a storm of protest from traditionalists and the evangelical wing of the church. *Lux Mundi* (1889) was a similar venture mounted from Cambridge. Reaction was more muted – demonstrating the general acceptance, among intellectuals at least, of Biblical criticism and biological evolution in the intervening thirty years.

[150] Timothy Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford: University Press, 2006), pp. 1-18.

[151] Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 179.

parishioner who had read Colenso on the Pentateuch – but they were not common.[152] Neither Cox nor Green found much evidence of religious 'doubt' among the congregations of Lambeth or the West Riding, and both suggested that social change and the growth of 'associative religion' was a much stronger influence on religious belief than were intellectual misgivings. In the case of Primitive Methodism it was not until 1915, under the influence of A.S. Peake, biblical scholar and head of the ministers' training institution in Manchester, that Conference finally came to accept the reality of higher criticism and scientific advance.[153] For ordinary members the struggle took far longer.

It was not religious doubt or any dispute about theology which lay behind the decline of Primitive Methodism on the Wolds. The main reason was an 'endogenous' one - the failure of the spirituality which had driven their evangelism almost to the end of the nineteenth century.[154] That failure was exacerbated by financial difficulties and the effects of the late nineteenth-century agricultural depression. It was the Primitives' own choice to accommodate 'hearers' and expand their social activities through clubs and temperance societies – which must have seemed a good idea at the time but eventually proved a mistake.

The main 'exogenous' reason for decline was the catastrophe of the First World War, which had a devastating effect on all religious groups, but most of all on Nonconformity. Its idealism and sense of moral purpose buckled under the experience of war and was never regained. Nonconformity also suffered from the failure of the Liberal Party in which it had invested many of its most cherished political hopes – non-sectarian education, temperance and disestablishment. The last two simply disappeared from the political landscape after 1918, never to return. The failure of the Liberal Party in Driffield and the demise of Luke White added to the general sense of disenchantment among local Primitive Methodists.

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[152] See Chapter 4
[153] See Chapter 5
[154] The use of the term 'endogenous' to describe internal causes and 'exogenous' to describe external ones I have borrowed from Currie, Gilbert and Horsey, *Churches and Churchgoers* (Oxford: University Press, 1977).

Chapter 10: Conclusion

The first and most important conclusion of this study is that East Riding rural Primitive Methodism was never politically radical, as it was in Norfolk, Durham and - to a lesser extent - in Lincolnshire. Any involvement with Chartism was confined to the towns and links with trade unionism and the Labour Party were virtually non-existent. There are two reasons for this. The first is the relative prosperity of the East Riding. Wages were generally higher and landlords generally paternalist; there was not the sense of grievance and exploitation that existed in Norfolk or the level of physical suffering and distress of the Durham pit-villages. The second is the fact that East Riding Primitive Methodism never produced religious or secular leaders of the calibre of George Edwards in Norfolk or Thomas Burt in Durham. Milson, Ritson and Woodcock, although well-known and respected locally, never reached the national stage – or even aspired to it. They remained mindful of Bourne's attitude to the 'speaking radical' in 1820. Primitive Methodism was about the salvation of souls and the life of the world to come, not about reforming the world as it is. The exception to this was the education question – in which Woodcock, by then retired, immersed himself in 1903-06. From his point of view the issue was a properly spiritual one because it affected the future salvation of the young and the vulnerable. Why East Riding Primitive Methodism did not produce national leaders is another question not to be answered here.

So where does this leave the Halévy thesis? Are we in a better position to judge its validity than was Moore forty years ago? Probably yes. A plethora of localstudies,including this one, have revealed Methodism to be both socially conservative and capable of radical political initiative. This is a combination which, as Robert Colls pointed out, has always confused historians.[155] Overall the social conservatism described in Chapter 8 has proved a more potent influence on Methodism than the ideas behind Chartism and Socialism. Family stability, hard work and the desire to do the best for one's children – in short to 'get on' in life - inevitably proved more attractive than challenging the status quo and earning the opprobrium of

[155] Robert Colls, 'Primitive Methodism in the Northern Coal Fields', *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy* ed. James Obelkevich, Raphael Samuel and Lyndal Roper (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 323-335, p. 326.

neighbours and employers. Halévy was not of course referring only to Methodism in his thesis but to the influence of the evangelical revival in general, of which Methodism was only one – but perhaps the most significant – result. Within the established church the evangelical revival also produced an intense religious mood and a desire for reform: the campaign against the slave trade (Wilberforce) and the agitation for factory reform (Ashley) are obvious examples of this. Halévy argued that this intense religious impulse among the middle and working classes – never a majority of either but containing the most spirited and enterprising of both – absorbed the energies of the population and steered them away from revolutionary thought.

The second question posed at the beginning of this thesis concerned the links between Primitive Methodism and the culture surrounding it. Was it a counter-cultural influence, as Obelkevich has suggested, or did it eventually succumb to the culture of the town or village in which it had taken root. Sheridan Gilley observed that

> Churches made the most impact on the labouring classes when they either provided the facilities of agreed social utility or enjoyed the kind of relationship in which religion helped express a particular culture rather than wage war against it.[156]

Gilley's remarks are generally true of the East Riding. The record of the Church of England in the area was not high in the early nineteenth century – witness the popular support for Jeremiah Dodsworth - and the appearance of the Primitives probably tapped into an already existing strain of popular anti-clericalism. Apart from the encounter with Archdeacon Wilberforce (in which the Primitives, according to themselves, were triumphant), most opposition they encountered came from the local roughs rather than any figures in authority. By 1850 Primitive Methodism had become part of the local village culture. It welcomed 'hearers', opened Sunday Schools and soon became involved in the local village round of Sunday School treats, Anniversaries and tea meetings. Later in the century it took a leading part in the Friendly Societies and the School Boards. In Filey it absorbed, and developed to its own advantage, the traditional role of women within the fishing community.[157] Similarly one of the great strengths of

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[156] Sheridan Gilley and W.J. Sheils eds., *A History of Religion in Britain*: *Practice and Belief from pre-Roman times to the Present* (London: Blackwell, 1994), p. 311.

[157] Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton: University Press, 1985), Chapter 11, pp. 245-273.

Primitive Methodism in County Durham was the strong connection, almost identification, of Methodism (of all varieties) with life in the pit-villages, where it formed the majority culture.[158] Obelkevich and Howkins, however, both stressed the 'counter-cultural' implications of Primitive Methodism in South Lindsey and in Norfolk. In South Lindsey its counter-cultural nature was displayed in its attitude to the Church of England, in Norfolk in its espousal of trade unionism. These conclusions reflect the minority position of Primitive Methodism, but also the focus of the respective studies. Obelkevich was mainly concerned with the social framework of sect development and Howkins with the history of trade unions.

The third question posed concerned popular control of Primitive Methodism in the East Riding. Was it a genuine 'people's church', as Ritson and Kendall portrayed it, or had it been taken over by its middle-class leadership as a vehicle for Political Nonconformity and the Liberal Party? The 'social control' argument - that Sunday Schools and Friendly Societies were controlled by the middle classes as a means of keeping the poor in their place – has long been exploded.[159] However, the question as to whether, as Howkins suggested, the leadership of Primitive Methodism had a different agenda from its membership remains open. Howkins gives as an example the decision by the Dereham chapel to defy the national leadership and allow the chapel to be used for union meetings.[160] Similar decisions were made in Lincolnshire. In the East Riding there was little union activity but it seems clear that the agenda of Political Nonconformity reflected the priorities of the leadership rather than the members. Local interest in issues such as the Boer War, pacifism and disestablishment was limited and meetings, outside the towns, sparsely attended. The exception, as ever, was education. It was an issue which affected everyone, had clear religious implications and was therefore espoused energetically by East Riding Primitive Methodists.

Local Societies did not always comply readily with instructions from Conference. The central control of 'stationing' as opposed to control by individual Districts was much criticised in the Driffield Circuit, as we have seen. It limited the Societies' power to appoint their own travelling preachers and was unpopular. In that

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[158] Robert Colls, *The Pit-Men of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest 1790*-1850 (Manchester: University Press, 1987), pp. 162-176.

[159] F.M.L. Thompson, Social Control in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series 34 (1981), pp. 189-208.

[160] Chapter 4, p. 25

particular case local Societies had no means of redress against the decisions of Conference, but in the case of temperance and teetotalism their freedom from central control was much greater. Insobriety was always condemned – it was one of the most frequent reasons for expulsion from a Primitive Methodist Society – but social drinking was a different matter. Evidence from their involvement in Friendly Societies – and from the state of the local water supply – suggests that a fair proportion of East Riding Primitive Methodists drank alcohol. The ministry may have been ninety-per-cent teetotal but this did not apply to the membership. Again, there was constant pressure from Conference to open branches of temperance organisations such as the Band of Hope and Christian Endeavour. This was complied with to a certain extent, but the records show that the experience of such organisations was patchy, and it was clearly difficult to recruit enough people to lead them. Although the number of Class Leaders, Sunday School teachers and local preachers held up well when the number of members of Primitive Methodist Societies began to decline in the twentieth century, temperance organisations were among the first to collapse.

The most telling evidence that the leadership was out of touch with local Societies lies in the whole sorry history of Methodist Union. This was a scheme imposed from above with minimal local engagement. The records of the Driffield and Pocklington Circuits – or rather the lack of records – suggest that the membership viewed the negotiations taking place in London in a totally passive fashion as something beyond their control or even interest. The result was a feeling of resentment against the ministers – who had all voted in favour of Union – and the breakaway 'Continuing Primitive Methodist Church'. It was a bad start for the United Methodist Church in Driffield which never really recovered from the schism.

After 1850, as the sharp edge of its evangelism faded, Primitive Methodism became respectable and an accepted part of village life. In the East Riding it was involved with the Friendly Societies and the School Boards, rather less with the manifestations of Political Nonconformity. In Durham and Norfolk, where social divisions were far more acute, it was heavily involved in the leadership of the unions and came to have a much more radical reputation than it did in Yorkshire, the North Midlands or in Hampshire (where the evangelist Thomas Russell had established a sizeable Circuit around Brinksworth).

Although the membership of Primitive Methodism remained largely working-class, its leadership in the late nineteenth century became rather less so. Conference

tried to impose on local Societies a series of initiatives which were not entirely welcome: Catechumen classes, teetotalism as opposed to temperance, the Bands of Hope, Christian Endeavour among others; some flourished and some did not. Teetotalism, as we have seen, was certainly not universally practised in the Driffield Circuit. The result of these initiatives was to widen the gap between the leadership and local Societies which eventually led to the impasse of the 1932 Union.

Obelkevich dated the beginnings of spiritual decline in Lincolnshire Primitive Methodism to the 1840s; this seems premature. Class Meetings, Love-feasts and Camp Meetings continued in the East Riding into the late nineteenth century and beyond, in spite of depopulation and the effects of the agricultural depression. It was not until after 1906 (when membership numbers started to decline) that the future began to look uncertain. It was the First World War which dealt the death blow to Primitive Methodism in the East Riding. Its adherents ceased to believe in its message of hope and salvation, and gradually drifted away. There was in Driffield no transfer of allegiance to the Labour Party, as happened in Durham and Norfolk, or refuge in the Liberal Party, another casualty of the war.

Primitive Methodism was first and foremost an exuberant religious movement which gave hope and spirit to thousands of people in the early nineteenth century, many of them the victims of industrialism and the effects of enclosure. The fact that it was largely supported and led by working-class people has perhaps led historians to concentrate on those aspects of its past – its connections with trade unions and the Labour Party – which appeal to a more secular age. But this is a distortion. Most Primitive Methodists were not members of trade unions and, in the East Riding, hardly any were. They joined a religious movement which gave them warm conviviality, hope and 'that exploration of the inner world of mind and spirit which New Dissent opened for so many ordinary people'.[161]

[161] Alan Everitt, *The Pattern of Rural Dissent: The Nineteenth Century,* Occasional Papers University of Leicester Dept. Of English Local History (Leicester: University Press, 1972), p. 66.

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