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The Causes and Effects of the Divisions
within Methodism in Bradford 1796-1857

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Submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Huddersfield

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The Causes and effects of the divisions within Methodism
in Bradford 1796-1857

Abstract of Thesis

Some years ago I completed an M.A. degree at Huddersfield University on 'The Fly Sheet Controversy and the Wesleyan Reform movement in Birstall and the Spen Valley 1849-1857'. The present study is wider in scope and includes all the divisions within Methodism and is centred on Bradford, but includes the Bingley and Shipley circuits and the Birstall and Cleckheaton circuits, the whole being referred to as 'the Bradford area'.

Between 1796 and 1857 several groups of Methodists left their Wesleyan chapels to create new societies, still Methodist in doctrine and tradition, but with different styles of church government. The Independent Methodists, Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians were looking for greater freedom to organise their worship and evangelical outreach without the restrictions imposed by Conference and the ministers. In other cases secessions followed disputes over specific issues - the Methodist New Connexion sought greater democracy and more lay involvement, the Protestant Methodists resented the approval by Conference of an organ at Brunswick Chapel, the Wesleyan Methodist Association objected to arrangements for ministerial training and the Wesleyan Reformers complained of ministerial domination of Methodism.

Each division was different, but behind them all lay a pattern of continuing conflict between ministers and lay members. This obliged many Methodists to make difficult and far-reaching choices between remaining within Wesleyan Methodism and making a new commitment to an uncertain future. In every dispute both sides claimed the moral high ground, and both were certain that they were right. Wesleyan ministers claimed authority in accordance with the principle of the Pastoral Office, but found themselves in a difficult situation, being obliged by Conference to rule as well as to lead. Lay members felt in a strong position among family and friends within their chapels, but many were unwilling to give unquestioning obedience to men who were little different in background from themselves, preferring instead a more open and more democratic style of Methodism. The national background of each dispute is outlined before its impact on the Methodists in the Bradford area is considered in detail, and the outcome of each confrontation is then examined.

An attempt is then made to assess the significance of membership of the different Methodist denominations in terms of political activities and relationships with other churches, although it is suggested that little evidence is available to distinguish between members of the various Methodist groups.

In summary, conflict between ministers supported by Conference and the lay members weakened local Methodism. The hardening of attitudes by both sides and their refusal to compromise, which led to the creation of new Methodist groups, destroyed the unity of Methodism in the Bradford area.

Contents

Contents	1
Tables	5
Maps	9
Illustrations	10
Abbreviations	11
Methodist organisation and terminology	12
Acknowledgements	14
Preface	16
<u>1. Introduction</u>	21
<u>SECTION A. BRADFORD AND THE WESLEYAN METHODISTS</u>	38
<u>2. The background and progress of Methodism in Bradford to 1791</u>	
Introduction	39
Anglicanism and Dissent in Bradford	41
The Evangelical Revival, Moravians and Methodists	44
Archbishop Herring's 1743 Visitation Returns	52
John Wesley and the leaders of Bradford Methodism	57
The Development of Methodism in the Bradford area	71
Conclusion	81
<u>3. The Wesleyan Methodists, 1791 to 1857</u>	
Introduction	95
Authority within Methodism and separation from the Church of England	96
Wesleyans and Revivalism	101
Rev. Jabez Bunting and the principle of the Pastoral Office	106
Wesleyan Methodism in the Bradford area	115

Conclusion	124
<u>SECTION B. THE EARLY DIVISIONS WITHIN BRADFORD METHODISM</u>	134
<u>4. The Methodist New Connexion</u>	
Introduction	135
The origins of the New Connexion	135
Joseph Barker and the Barkerite Controversy	141
The Methodist New Connexion in the Bradford area	146
Conclusion	157
<u>5. The Independent Methodists</u>	
Introduction	168
The origins of Independent Methodism	170
Independent Methodists in the Bradford area	175
Conclusion	192
<u>6. Nineteenth Century Methodist Evangelicals in Bradford - the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians</u>	
Introduction	201
Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians	207
Primitive Methodists in the Bradford area	216
Bible Christians in the Bradford area	228
Conclusion	230
<u>SECTION C. CONFLICT AND SECESSION IN BRADFORD METHODISM 1827-1857.</u>	242
<u>7. Movements opposed to the Wesleyan hierarchy - the Secessions of the Protestant Methodists, the Wesleyan Methodist Association and the Wesleyan Reformers</u>	
Introduction	243
The Protestant Methodists	245
Protestant Methodists in the Bradford area	251
The Wesleyan Methodist Association	253

Wesleyan Methodist Associationists in the Bradford area	256
The Wesleyan Reform movement	258
Conclusion	268
<u>8. The Wesleyan Reformers in Bingley and Shipley</u>	
Introduction	277
Bingley circuit	279
Shipley circuit	286
Conclusion	295
<u>9. The Wesleyan Reformers in Bradford</u>	
Introduction	303
Woodhouse Grove circuit	306
Bradford West circuit	313
Bradford East circuit	322
Great Horton circuit	334
Conclusion	344
<u>10. The Wesleyan Reformers in Birstall and Cleckheaton</u>	
Introduction	358
Birstall circuit	362
Cleckheaton circuit	375
Conclusion	391
The Reform movement - an overview	393
<u>SECTION D. BRADFORD METHODISM, POLITICS AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER CHURCHES</u>	404
<u>11. Methodist involvement in political activities in the Bradford area</u>	
Introduction	405
Methodists and the social and political life of the Bradford area	409
Conclusion	420

<u>12. Methodists and the other religious organisations</u>	
Introduction	426
Methodism and the other Churches	429
Relationships between the Churches in the Bradford area	433
Conclusion	442
<u>13. Conclusion</u>	449
<u>14. Bibliography</u>	453

Tables

2/1. The first meetings of Dissenting groups in the Bradford area	45
2/2. Dates of formation of early classes and societies in Bingley and Shipley	75
2/3. Dates of formation of early classes and societies in Bradford	77
2/4. Dates of formation of early classes and societies in Birstall and the Spen Valley	80
3/1. Wesleyan chapels in Bingley & Shipley	116
3/2. Wesleyan chapels in Bradford opened 1750-1849	120
3/3. Wesleyan chapels in Bradford opened 1850-1932	121
3/4. Wesleyan chapels in Birstall and Cleckheaton	123
4. Methodist New Connexion chapels	148
5. Independent Methodist Chapels	189
6/1. Primitive Methodist Chapels in Bingley and Shipley	218
6/2. Primitive Methodist chapels in Bradford	221
6/3. Primitive Methodist Chapels in Birstall & Cleckheaton	225
6/4. Bible Christian chapels	228
7. Wesleyan Methodist Association chapels	257

8/1 Wesleyan Chapels in 1848 and years of opening (Bingley circuit)	279
8/2 Membership changes in the Reform period (Bingley circuit)	280
8/3 Membership losses and destinations (Bingley circuit)	284
8/4 Circuit Summary (Bingley circuit)	286
8/5 Wesleyan Chapels in 1848 and years of opening (Shipley circuit)	287
8/6 Membership losses and destinations (Shipley circuit)	288
8/7 Circuit Summary (Shipley circuit)	290
8/8 Reform chapels in Bingley and Shipley which joined the Wesleyan Reform Union	297
9/1 Wesleyan Chapels in 1848 and years of opening (Woodhouse Grove circuit)	306
9/2 Membership changes in the Reform period (Woodhouse Grove circuit)	308
9/3 Membership losses and destinations (Woodhouse Grove circuit)	311
9/4 Circuit Summary (Woodhouse Grove circuit)	312
9/5 Wesleyan Chapels in 1848 and years of opening (Bradford West circuit)	313
9/6 Membership changes in the Reform period (Bradford West circuit)	316
9/7 Membership losses and destinations	

(Bradford West circuit)	320
9/8 Circuit Summary (Bradford West circuit)	321
9/9 Wesleyan Chapels in 1848 and years of opening (Bradford East circuit)	322
9/10 Membership changes in the Reform period (Bradford East circuit)	327
9/11 Membership losses and destinations (Bradford East circuit)	331
9/12 Circuit Summary (Bradford East circuit)	333
9/13 Wesleyan Chapels in 1848 and years of opening (Great Horton circuit)	335
9/14 Membership changes in the Reform period (Great Horton circuit)	336
9/15 Membership losses and destinations (Great Horton circuit)	341
9/16 Circuit Summary (Great Horton circuit)	343
9/17 Wesleyan Reform chapels in Bradford which joined the Wesleyan Reform Union	347
9/18 Wesleyan Reform chapels in Bradford which joined the United Methodist Free Churches	349
10/1 Wesleyan Chapels in 1848 and years of opening (Birstall circuit)	363
10/2 Membership changes in the Reform period (Birstall circuit)	366
10/3 Membership losses and destinations (Birstall circuit)	367

10/4 Circuit Summary (Birstall circuit)	374
10/5 Wesleyan Chapels in 1848 and years of opening (Cleckheaton circuit)	376
10/6 Membership changes in the Reform period (Cleckheaton circuit)	378
10/7 Membership losses and destinations (Cleckheaton circuit)	382
10/8 Circuit Summary (Cleckheaton circuit)	391
10/9 Wesleyan Reform chapels in Birstall and Cleckheaton which joined the United Methodist Free Churches	393
10/10 Membership changes due to the Reform movement in local circuits 1848-1852	394
10/11 The number of Wesleyan and Wesleyan Reform chapels (W.R.U and U.M.F.C.) at the end of the Reform period	397

Maps

1. Map showing the area under consideration.	32
2. Methodist societies in 1750	72
3. Wesleyan Methodist chapels	125
4. Methodist New Connexion chapels	139
5. Independent Methodist chapels	177
6. Primitive Methodist chapels	205
7. Wesleyan/Wesleyan Reform; Bingley and Shipley	298
8. Wesleyan; Woodhouse Grove	309
9. Wesleyan/Wesleyan Reform; Bradford West	317
10. Wesleyan/Wesleyan Reform; Bradford East	325
11. Wesleyan/Wesleyan Reform; Great Horton	337
12. Wesleyan/Wesleyan Reform; Birstall	369
13. Wesleyan/Wesleyan Reform; Cleckheaton	386
14. Chapels in the Wesleyan Reform Union	395
15. Chapels in the United Methodist Free Churches	398

Illustrations

1.	John Nelson and Birstall Chapel 1751	60
2.	The Bradford Octagon Chapel 1766	94
3.	William Bramwell	104
4.	Westgate Hill Wesleyan Methodist Church	112
5.	Methodist New Connexion Chapels	155
6.	Nook Independent Methodist Church, Cleckheaton	181
7.	Primitive Methodist chapels in Bradford	213

Abbreviations

B.C.	Bible Christian
B.P.U.	Bradford Political Union
C.B.	Christian Brethren
G.P.	Gospel Pilgrim
I.M.	Independent Methodist
M.N.C.	Methodist New Connexion
P.M.	Primitive Methodist
Prot.M.	Protestant Methodist
S.V.	Spem Valley
U.F.G.C.	Union of Free Gospel Churches
U.M.	United Methodist
U.M.F.C.	United Methodist Free Churches
W.M.	Wesleyan Methodist
W.M.A.	Wesleyan Methodist Association
W.R.	Wesleyan Reform
W.R.U.	Wesleyan Reform Union

Methodist organisation and terminology

It may be useful to outline certain characteristics of Methodism, a number of which originated in the eighteenth century. They were retained by members of most of the Methodist divisions, and many remain part of current practice.

Methodist congregations have always included both members and adherents, as well as occasional visitors. Members agree to be subject to certain rules; at first they were obliged to meet regularly, usually one evening a week, in a class. After a period 'on trial' they received quarterly (now often annually) a class ticket with their name on, signed by their minister. Failure to attend class meetings resulted in the withdrawal of the ticket and the end of membership. Each class was restricted in theory to about a dozen members, but some exceeded this. The Class Leaders or Leaders met together regularly.

Every class was part of a society which met on Sundays for worship at a Preaching House, later called a chapel, and now a church. Members of congregations who chose not to accept the obligations of membership were adherents, who were often two or three times as numerous as members. The building, financial and maintenance aspects of chapels were undertaken by trustees. The wording of trust deeds sometimes caused difficulties before they were standardised in Model Deeds.

During the twentieth century the classes have no longer met, but the ticket is still evidence of church membership and is withdrawn if a member ceases to meet. Every Methodist society is part of a circuit under a superintendent minister,

and there are usually several other men or women ministers in each circuit, successors to the original lay itinerant preachers. Their stay in each circuit was originally for one or two years, but now usually varies between five and seven years. The superintendent minister determines who will preach at every service, and this information is published in a circuit plan listing all the churches and services for a three-month period. About two-thirds of all Methodist services are taken not by ordained ministers but by lay men and women who receive training at circuit level before being accepted by the Connexion as local preachers.

Methodist circuits are linked in a district under a District Chairman, and the whole Connexion is governed by an annual Conference, the President of which is always a minister and the Vice-President a lay person.

During the twentieth century there have been two unions within Methodism; in 1907 the United Methodist Free Churches, the Methodist New Connexion and the Bible Christians joined to form the United Methodist Church. Twenty-five years later in 1932 the Wesleyans, Primitive Methodists and United Methodists amalgamated to become the Methodist Church. Two small Methodist denominations remain separate - the Independent Methodist Connexion and the Wesleyan Reform Union.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Keith Laybourn of the History Department of Huddersfield University, who has been my tutor throughout the time I have been engaged in this research. His wide knowledge of the local area and its nineteenth-century background have enabled him to direct my research into appropriate areas, and to guide me through the practicalities of being a student again in my retirement. His thought-provoking comments have enabled me to approach the subject of the dissertation with greater objectivity and more debate on issues than might otherwise have been the case.

Considerable help has been provided by the staff at the West Yorkshire Archives Service at their headquarters at Wakefield and their branches at Bradford and Huddersfield. I am grateful also for the support and practical help provided by the staff of many libraries, including the University of Huddersfield Library, the Local Studies Section of Bradford Central Library, Spenborough Library at Cleckheaton, and libraries at Batley and Dewsbury.

I am particularly grateful for help received from staff at the Methodist Archives at the John Rylands University Library at Manchester, and the archives of the Wesley Historical Society at Westminster College at Oxford. John Dolan, archivist at the Independent Methodist Resources Centre at Wigan has made the records of that organisation available

to me, and Colin Dews, secretary and archivist of the Yorkshire branch of the Wesley Historical Society has enabled me to use the material held by the branch at Claremont in Leeds.

A number of my friends have discussed with me informally various aspects of this reseach, and I visited many of the Methodist buildings in the area with the late Peter Schofield. I must also acknowledge the help provided, often unwittingly, by friends in Birstall and Spen Circuit whose reminiscences have broadened my understanding of Methodism as seen from the pew, providing a valuable antidote to a surfeit of academic research.

Last, but by no means least, I must again thank my wife for her unfailing patience, support and encouragement during this research, undertaken in what are usually envisaged as the relaxed years of retirement.

Preface

In 1993 I completed a dissertation for the degree of M.A. at Huddersfield University with the title 'Methodist Secessionism - the Fly Sheet Controversy and the Wesleyan Reform Movement in Birstall and the Spen Valley 1849-1857'. The intention of the present study is to widen both the time period and the geographical area of my research in order to examine the causes of all the divisions within Methodism between 1796 and 1857 and their effects on the Methodist circuits within and adjacent to Bradford. The divisions within Methodism during the nineteenth century have been well documented at national level, but this study will seek to examine the ways in which the national movements impinged on the Methodist men and women in their chapels in the Bradford area. This is, I believe, a topic which has eluded previous research, although the period is a vital one both in terms of the history of Bradford and the development of Methodism.

As a Methodist local preacher undertaking research into Methodist history, I am aware that events and personalities may be seen through rose-tinted spectacles, but I hope that an awareness of the hazard will help to maintain my objectivity. I have been actively involved at different times in three local circuits and I have a general awareness of the whole of the area since the late 1940s, when virtually all the chapels were still in use. At that time, less than 20 years after Methodist union, many older members still saw themselves as Wesleyans or

Primitive Methodists, while among the United Methodists older pre-1907 allegiances were not completely forgotten. No chapel buildings remain in use in this area which were Methodist in the sense of having been built before 1796, and very few churches were built after 1932, so most places of worship are potential reminders of the different Methodist traditions.

In tracing the rise of the various movements and their impact on local Methodism the key to a full understanding of what took place would require a detailed knowledge of the personal relationships between members of the different groups in the Bradford area. Events at the beginning of each of the various secessions and during the formation of the various revivalist groups must have given rise to strong emotions, but evidence about relationships is not easy to find or quantify. Situations free of controversy were unlikely to lead to any specific evidence to that effect, and the minutes of Methodist meetings omit any reference to events which must sometimes have been uppermost in conversation before and after the meetings. It is unusual to find evidence of controversy, although when this does happen it is instantly obvious in the absence of entries for several months from the minute books, or very occasionally evidence of the physical removal of pages from chapel or circuit records. Very rarely indeed is there any surviving written evidence of personal antagonism. It is therefore not easy to assess the relationships between Methodist groups in Bradford during disagreements almost two hundred years ago from archival material, although sometimes

information gleaned from secondary sources provides a glimpse of the way in which conflicts affected ordinary members.

This study will examine the ways in which each division took place at Connexional level before examining the local outcome of each movement. While the question 'Why did this group in Bradford become separate?' often involved local personalities, the underlying cause was always to be found in the wider conflict in which the Wesleyans emphasised the need for an acceptance of the discipline of Conference to ensure the unity and continuity of Methodism, while those opposing this view saw Conference as a fallible organisation whose demands could rightly be ignored when they clashed with strongly held religious convictions.

None of the divisions in Methodism originated in Bradford. Most of the groups had a specific geographical area within which their strongest support was to be found, but virtually all the groups had some support across the country, and so what is being examined here is basically one town's reactions to a series of disputes during a period of some sixty years. Within Bradford every one of the Methodist divisions was represented, although some of the smaller movements were represented by only a single chapel. All the Methodist divisions can therefore be seen in terms of the conflicts elsewhere which led to separation, and subsequent events in the Bradford area.

No-one who has seen the changes in Methodist attitudes and practice over the last forty or fifty years needs to be

reminded that both individuals and organisations change. Methodists may sit in the same pews as their predecessors did a century ago, but both they and their churches are different. A hundred years ago attendances at churches and Sunday Schools belonging to the various Methodist denominations were larger than today, although their predecessors had been obliged to choose between Wesleyan discipline or non-Wesleyan democracy of one form or another, yet Methodists from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards would probably have found much in common with today's congregations. On the other hand today's Methodists, most of whom are over fifty, and have attended church since childhood, would find little in common with the early Methodists of the mid-eighteenth century. Many members then came from a background of ignorance and superstition, and they found in Methodism a new religious enthusiasm which they felt impelled to pass on to others. Such fundamental differences lie behind the saying that there was no single Methodism, there have been in fact many Methodisms at different times and in different places, and each of the divisions of Methodism contributed to the increasing number. Nor is it easy to assess the political significance of Methodism during the first half of the nineteenth century, but as Methodist membership has always been less than five per cent of the population it is perhaps more appropriate to think of the influence of its members rather than their political power.

To summarise, in examining the beginnings of the different Methodist divisions, the recurring theme throughout

this research is the way in which the members of these different Methodist organisations reacted against ministerial discipline exercised according to the Wesleyan principle of the pastoral office. In view of the irreconcilable differences of opinion over this issue the series of different Methodist groups which came into being between 1796 and 1857 can be seen as understandable and indeed necessary. Different issues were raised by each division, but had new denominations not been created with clearly visible Methodist characteristics as havens for those who left Wesleyan Methodism, many of those affected by the disputes would in all probability have drifted away from Methodism altogether. Within the Bradford area there was no shortage of such havens.

Chapter 1.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to trace the causes of the divisions within nineteenth-century Methodism and their effect on the Methodist people of the Bradford area. Relationships between local members of the different Methodist movements are of particular interest because very little is known of this aspect of the divisions, which took place between 1796 and 1857. The earlier date marks the beginning of the first two significant divisions in the church, the expulsion by Conference of Alexander Kilham,⁽¹⁾ who in the following year became the leader of the Methodist New Connexion, and the withdrawal from 'official' Methodism of a group in Warrington who were later to become Independent Methodists⁽²⁾. The latter date, 1857, represents the event which has been described as the first of the major unions in Methodism, when many of those members who had left the Wesleyans during the Reform agitation after 1849 amalgamated with others who had seceded after 1827 and 1835 and who then belonged to the Wesleyan Methodist Association; together they became the United Methodist Free Churches.⁽³⁾

It could be claimed that the one factor common to every division within Methodism was conflict. This often arose as a result of Wesleyan ministers claiming authority by virtue of the doctrine of the pastoral office, which they believed to

include authority over religious worship, the management of chapels and circuits, and the personal lifestyle of members, and was based on the principle that the pastoral oversight exercised by the ministers implied not only leadership but control. Comparisons were made with Wesley's own autocratic control of the movement, but after his death the reaction of the members in the Bradford area was mixed; some accepted this discipline as part of a Wesleyan Methodist lifestyle, but others reacted strongly against it, and new Methodist groups emerged in this area as a result of these conflicts within Wesleyanism.

At the same time it must be stressed that such conflicts tended to be short-lived and often involved only small numbers of people within a limited area, and were usually restricted to the formative months of each new movement. Yet in view of the firmly held convictions of Methodists on both sides of every dispute it is difficult to see how any outcome was possible other than the divisions which took place. As new forms of Methodism came into being the monopoly of Methodism was taken away from the Wesleyan Conference, although each new group claimed allegiance to the principles established by John Wesley and insisted that in their doctrine they were no different from the Wesleyans. Generally speaking this was true, although all of the breakaway groups rejected the controversial Wesleyan doctrine of the pastoral office,⁽⁴⁾ and some groups came to hold very different doctrines of the ministry.⁽⁵⁾ The ways in which the various groups moved away from their Wesleyan origins

has been examined by Robert Currie,⁽⁶⁾ who suggests that each division involved one of two possible scenarios. Sometimes the impetus came from the Wesleyan side, through disciplinary procedures in which a small nucleus of leaders, or after 1849 large numbers of ordinary members, were expelled from the Wesleyan societies or withdrew on a matter of principle. The Methodist New Connexion, the Protestant Methodists, the Wesleyan Methodist Association and the Wesleyan Reformers were movements of this 'secessionist' type. In other cases the impetus came mainly from working-class dissident leaders who decided to leave their Wesleyan roots in order to develop separately along revivalist and evangelistic lines. The Independent Methodists, Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians were among these 'offshoots' of Methodism, although in these cases too some specific disciplinary action by Wesleyan authorities precipitated each of the divisions.

This two-fold division of the sub-groups within Methodism, however, does not sufficiently emphasise the considerable differences that existed between the separating groups. In practice each was unique in its origins and characteristics, which were the result of the coming together of many different factors. The recurring search by members of both secessions and offshoots to rediscover and experience Methodism as it had been in the mid-eighteenth century was epitomised in the denominational titles chosen by all these groups.

There is no shortage of literature on Wesleyan Methodism during the period of its nineteenth-century divisions, nor on

the divisions themselves, but the emphasis has usually been on the overall national pattern, and comparatively little has been done to examine the ways in which national patterns impinged on particular localities. Moreover, to some extent Methodist historians have tended to give the rather misleading impression that Wesleyan Methodism was a self-sufficient organisation little affected by the divisions.

As early as 1864, George Smith, after describing all the divisions within Methodism, completely disregarded their significance when he wrote in the summary at the end of the third volume of his History of Wesleyan Methodism that 'The rise and progress, the character and history of (Wesleyan) Methodism, its struggles and conflicts, labours and successes, from the earliest days of Wesley to the present time, have now been detailed. We have seen it drop into the soil of English hearts, as a grain of mustard seed, there to germinate and grow until thousands in every part of the country rejoice to sit beneath its shadow, and its branches reach to the ends of the earth.'⁽⁷⁾

The next standard history of Methodism, written in 1909, similarly detailed all the divisions, but then declared that 'By the end of the nineteenth century Wesleyan Methodism had become a great national church,'⁽⁸⁾ although in the most recent denominational history, again after articles describing in some detail the movements away from Wesleyan Methodism, Henry Rack claims that after 1849 'subsequent reforms culminated in the entry of laymen into Conference in 1878, which marked a

decisive stage on the way to a Methodism which John Wesley would scarcely have recognised and probably would have disowned.'⁽⁹⁾

Rack's comment is a reminder of the extent to which the Wesleyan Reform movement led to changes in Methodism. There was considerable justification before 1849 for a view of Wesleyan Methodism which emphasised continuity rather than fissiparity, as the earlier break-away groups involved relatively small numbers. This approach, however, tends to overlook the stress on local members who were faced with very real difficulties. They had to make a difficult personal decision either to join the minority groups, or to remain within Wesleyanism. The aim of this study is to examine precisely these groups within the Bradford area, and adequate amounts of original documents of the period are available, although it is difficult to obtain a balanced view from the literature of the period due to the comparative shortage of published material written from the point of view of the supporters of the divisions.

Writing in 1885 as a Free Methodist, Joseph Kirsop attributed much of the blame for the divisions to the policies of Jabez Bunting.⁽¹⁰⁾ The most detailed early study of this period was in fact based on verbatim records of the debates in the Wesleyan Conferences, but where Benjamin Gregory⁽¹¹⁾ added his own interpretation of events it would be difficult to be certain that this work was entirely fair to those who opposed the Conference, a reminder that in view of the controversial nature of the situation even research using contemporary

records can retain a degree of bias. During the second half of the nineteenth century, when many people involved in the disputes were still alive, research into the divisions seems to have been deliberately avoided, and earlier this century the general emphasis in studies of Methodism was understandably geared towards Methodist Union, as more recently it has been towards ecumenicalism.

During the 1960s, when the union of the Church of England and the Methodist Church appeared at least possible, John Kent wrote a number of articles on aspects of Methodism during the first half of the nineteenth century which were published as The Age of Disunity⁽¹²⁾. The preface included a claim that these contained 'the first serious attempt to explain the divisions of nineteenth-century Methodism'.⁽¹³⁾ It was inevitable that the role of Rev. Jabez Bunting, the epitome of Wesleyan ministerial autocracy, should be examined as an important aspect of this research, and Kent was rather more sympathetic to the nineteenth-century Methodist leader than Robert Currie whose subsequent publication, Methodism Divided⁽¹⁴⁾ was very critical of Bunting. Currie examined Wesleyan Methodism specifically in order to trace in considerable detail the causes of the divisions and reunions within Methodism, which he described at a time of high ecumenical expectations as 'in some ways an accelerated microcosm of Christianity'.⁽¹⁵⁾ The two writers were quite different in approach and style, Kent arguing from the standpoint of the recurring theme of Wesleyan views of the

pastoral office, Currie carefully analysing the details of each conflict. But Currie's criticisms are mild in comparison to E.P. Thompson's outright attack on Bunting and the Wesleyan leadership for allegedly distorting Methodism into a political tool to produce a docile work-force in The Making of the English Working Class⁽¹⁶⁾. To what extent Thompson overstated his case in view of the relatively small number of Methodists among the working class is a matter of dispute,⁽¹⁷⁾ but one is left wondering whether it is significant that an ordained historian was less critical than a lay one, whereas it took a son of the manse to be really vitriolic on the subject of Bunting and Wesleyanism,⁽¹⁸⁾ while remaining sympathetic towards all the Methodist movements which formed the divisions.⁽¹⁹⁾

The specific aim of this study is to examine the ways in which the national pattern of conflict impinged on the Methodists of the Bradford area. Before the first Methodists arrived, Anglicans and Dissenters met for worship, among them the Independents who exercised considerable influence in parts of the area, not least in the Spen Valley to the south of Bradford.⁽²⁰⁾ The first Methodist leaders in the area were laymen such as John Nelson,⁽²¹⁾ and the movement was already well established in West Yorkshire before John Wesley visited Birstall in 1742. Anglican clergymen, including some former members of the Holy Club at Oxford, also made a contribution to the movement locally. Charles Wesley visited the area, and John Wesley was directly involved in the organisation of the

preachers, the membership, and the premises of Methodism in this part of West Yorkshire.(22)

The separation of Methodism from the Church of England led to new views of the role and status of the itinerant preachers in the years of uncertainty following the death of John Wesley in 1791. The Wesleyan view of authority within the church throughout the first half of the nineteenth century was fundamental to an understanding of the divisions, which all took place because of continuing opposition to the specifically Wesleyan attitude expressed in the principle of the pastoral office.(23)

The main body of research examines the beginnings of the non-Wesleyan strands of English Methodism between 1796 and 1857. Bradford was one of the very few towns where all the divisions were represented, so that all the groups which left Wesleyan Methodism are included. The Methodist New Connexion, the earliest of the secessionist groups, had societies in the Spennings Valley area within a few years of its formation in 1797, although it never developed in Bradford with the vigour of similar groups in neighbouring towns. The Independent Methodists, whose first moves away from Wesleyan discipline took the form of a peaceful separation rather than a bitter confrontation, became active in this area early in the nineteenth century. These two groups are of particular interest because in a number of different situations local members of these two organisations were to interact over a period of half a century.

Two other Methodist groups, the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians, who were revivalist rather than secessionist in origin, were both active in the town. The Primitive Methodists were by far the larger group, and their arrival in 1821 made a strong impression on the Bradford area, and raised difficult questions for the Wesleyans. Having been established in Bradford for some eighty years, the Wesleyans found that many of their members saw themselves as middle-class, and rejected as inappropriate the methods of evangelism used by the Primitive Methodists.⁽²⁴⁾ Some Wesleyans were suspicious of the Primitive Methodists themselves, as they often included some of the least educated and at times the more radical members of society. Nevertheless, later in the nineteenth century the Primitive Methodists became a major component of local Methodism, having eventually some fifty societies in the Bradford area when the Wesleyans had just over a hundred. The second revivalist group consisted of a small number of Bible Christians,⁽²⁵⁾ who were usually thought of as active only in Cornwall and Devon, and the reasons for their presence so far north during the 1870s will be considered.

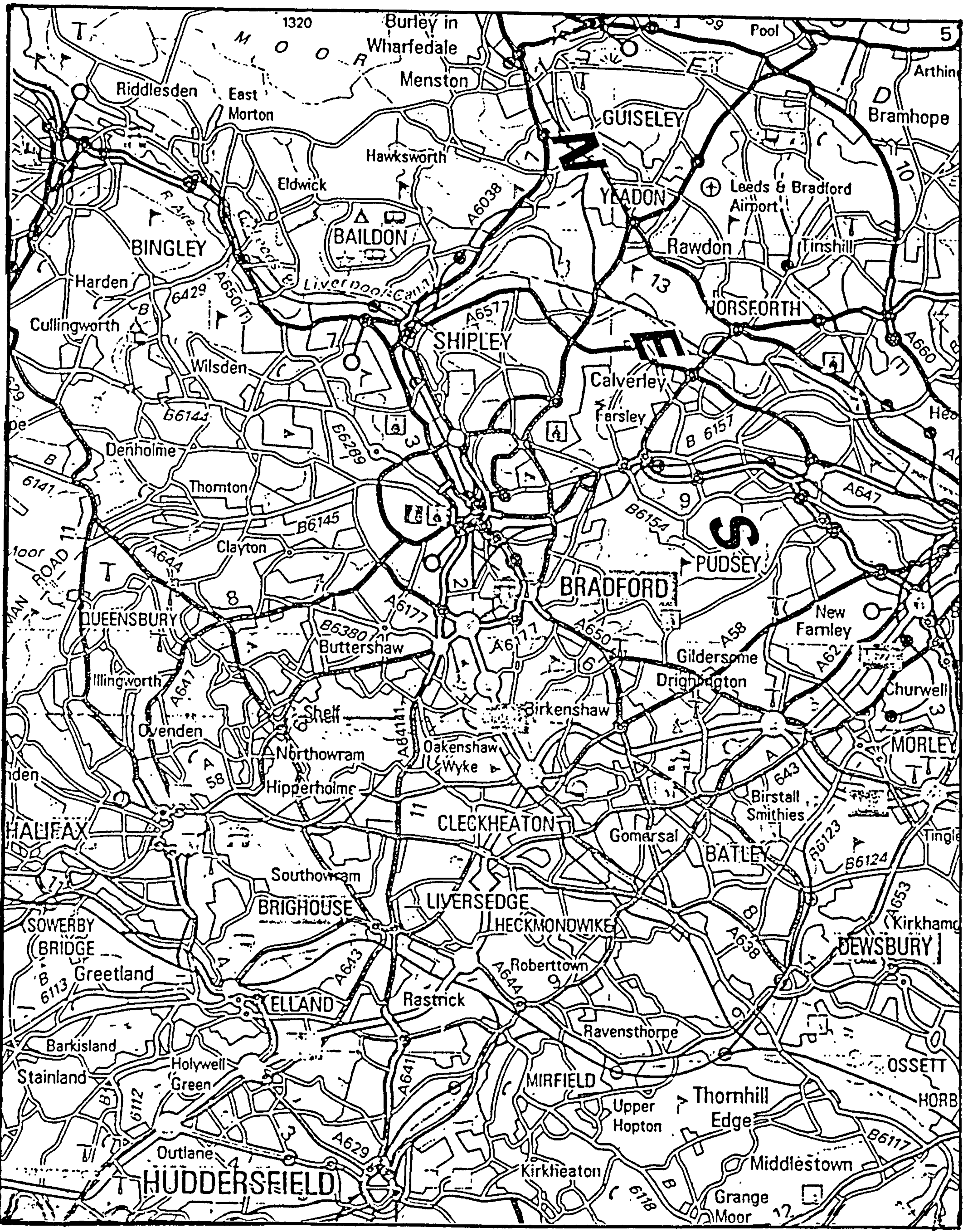
During the 1820s the close proximity of Leeds led to some incidents during the controversy over the organ at Brunswick Chapel,⁽²⁶⁾ and one Protestant Methodist society was formed in Bradford by members who felt sufficiently strongly to separate from Wesleyanism over the issue. There was only limited local support for the Warrenite secession of 1835, which again led to one chapel being built in Bradford by the Wesleyan Methodist

Association. Both these small Methodist groups eventually became linked with the Wesleyan Reformers, who came into existence following the controversy in Wesleyan Methodism over conference control and pastoral supremacy that culminated in the Fly Sheets, and the expulsion of three ministers at the conference of 1849. This led to the most dramatic and far-reaching changes in Wesleyan Methodism. Following the national pattern, something like a third of the Wesleyans in Bradford found themselves outside their chapels and their denomination in the early 1850s, and the next decade was for them one of urgent chapel building and hopeful future planning, but the Reformers in the area were split over the issue of their long-term policy. About half of the Reform societies in the city and most of those to the south around Birstall and Cleckheaton chose eventually to form circuits within the United Methodist Free Churches⁽²⁷⁾, while the remaining Reform societies in Bradford decided with those in Bingley and Shipley to join the Wesleyan Reform Union.

The involvement of members of each Methodist group within the social and political life of the Bradford area will be surveyed in order to see whether the religious differences between the various groups were reflected in their attitudes to social and political events. Again, in considering the relationships between the various Methodist groups and the Anglican and non-conformist churches in the Bradford area it may be possible to find significant differences in attitude between the various Methodist organisations.

The final chapter then draws the issues raised during the research to a conclusion, and asks - was diversity within Methodism an indication of strength or of weakness? In other words, could Methodism have remained a united church while retaining those with differing opinions, as happened within the Church of England? Could this have led to the creation of a stronger and more broadly-based Methodism incorporating all the various demands of the divisions - lay involvement in decision making, revivalism, greater democracy and greater trust between ministers and lay members? Or alternatively, did each new division add something to the overall picture of Methodism so that one or other of the groups could appeal to a wider cross-section of society? Within the diversity of chapels which constituted Bradford Methodism the relationships between the members of the different Methodist groups during the time of their separate existence will be considered, as will the long-term effects of the divisions within Methodism.

Throughout this study Methodist places of worship are referred to in line with contemporary phraseology; as preaching houses in the eighteenth century, as chapels during the nineteenth century, and as churches in the twentieth century. Buildings were never as important as the people who used them, but because most written records normally began only when a chapel was built this situation gave rise to a great deal of information about its members which had not previously been available. From the 1740s the Bradford Methodists used to meet in each other's houses or in rented rooms, then they adapted



Map 1. The Bradford area.

cottage property to create a place of worship, aware that if the cause failed the building could revert to domestic use. The eventual opening of a purpose-built chapel was an important indication of a society's strength and confidence, although it usually involved a debt which remained for many years. A detailed examination of their building policy will therefore provide a measure of the effectiveness and confidence of each group of Methodists.

Within this study the definition of boundaries is important, as Methodist circuits never fitted precisely the limits of the former city of Bradford or its constituent townships. The boundaries and titles of circuits have varied over time, and each branch of Methodism operated its own circuit system, but for the purposes of this research the phrase 'the Bradford area' refers to the circuits in the former city as well as the Bingley and Shipley circuits to the north, and the Birstall and Cleckheaton or Spen Valley circuits to the south. The selection of this part of what is now the West Yorkshire Methodist District provides a clearly defined area of about fifty square miles based on Bradford but including several smaller towns and a large number of village communities, with a reasonable claim to a corporate identity. The area under consideration is bounded on the north by Ilkley Moor, and Leeds and its suburbs form a barrier to the east. Huddersfield lies to the south, with Halifax to the west and Keighley to the north-west. The village of Birstall, significant as the starting point of Methodism in West

Yorkshire, lies within the area. To envisage these communities at the time of the early Methodists it is relevant to quote E.P. Thompson's description of the area, 'The small industrial villages were highly cohesive communities with the strongest sense of local identity, intolerant of outsiders, united internally by a dense network of kinship.'(28)

To summarise, this study sets out to examine the conflicts within Wesleyan Methodism which became the root cause behind all the divisions. These conflicts were exclusively over the question of ministerial authority and control and were based on the Wesleyan principle of the pastoral office. Having established the religious background of the Bradford area in 1740, the significance of Methodist activities in the town during John Wesley's lifetime will be assessed briefly, as will events after his death when the itinerant preachers demanded obedience by virtue of their belief in the supremacy of the pastoral office when many members wanted greater democracy.

After summarising the characteristics of Wesleyan Methodism, an assessment of each of the divisions will be made, and the extent of their activity within the Bradford area will be considered in detail. There will then be a brief assessment of their members' involvement in the social and political life of the Bradford area, and their relationships with other denominations. The conclusion will then link the issues that have been raised during the research with an assessment of the fundamental Wesleyan claims regarding the pastoral office. It will be argued that without these claims by the Wesleyan

Conference and the ministerial leadership the divisions in Methodism might never have taken place, and that while in practice every division came about as a result of a number of factors, some greater or smaller degree of conflict arising from Wesleyan demands under the principle of the pastoral office was the common factor in every division.

Notes

1. 'An account of the expulsion of Alexander Kilham by Conference', Henry Moore to Mrs Moore, London, 26 July 1796, ms at Drew University, U.S.A., quoted in R. Davies, A.R. George and G. Rupp, History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Vol. 4, 1988, p. 275.
2. A. Mounfield, A Short History of Independent Methodism, Wigan, 1905, p.5.
3. O.A. Beckerlegge, The United Methodist Free Churches, London, 1957, pp.41-48.
4. J.C. Bowmer, Pastor and People, a study in church and ministry in Wesleyan Methodism from the death of John Wesley (1791) to the death of Jabez Bunting (1858), London, 1975, pp. 163f.
5. Some groups, notably the Independent Methodists and Protestant Methodists, and most Barkerite Christian Brethren societies, rejected a separate ministry altogether and operated as completely lay organisations.
6. R. Currie, Methodism Divided, a study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism, London, 1968, p. 54.

7. G. Smith, History of Wesleyan Methodism, London, 1864, Vol. 3, p. 505.
8. W.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman, and G. Eayrs, A New History of Methodism, London, 1909, Vol. 1, P.476.
9. H. Rack, 'Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902' in R. Davies, G. Rupp and A.R. George, (ed), The History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, London, 1982, Vol.3, p. 119.
10. J. Kirsop, Historic Sketches of Free Methodism, London, 1885
11. B. Gregory, Sidelights on the Conflicts of Methodism 1827-1852, London, 1898.
12. J. Kent, The Age of Disunity, London, 1966.
13. Ibid., p. xi.
14. Currie, Methodism Divided, 1968.
15. Ibid., p. 12.
16. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, 1980, p. 411.
17. Currie, Methodism Divided, pp. x and xi.
18. Thompson, English Working Class, pp. 387f.
19. Ibid.; Independent Methodists p. 432, New Connexion p. 435, Primitive Methodists p. 429, Bible Christians p.429.
20. J.G. Miall, Congregationalism in Yorkshire, London, 1868, pp.248 and 271.
21. J. Nelson, The Journal of John Nelson, 1772, in T. Jackson (ed), Early Methodist Preachers, Vol. 1. n/d, c.1860, p.39.
22. J. Wesley, The Journal of John Wesley, ed. N. Curnock 1913, Bicentenary Edition, 1938. This contains 114 references to Wesley's visits to the Bradford area between 1742 and 1790.

23. Bowmer, Pastor and People, pp 198-228.
24. 'Primitive Methodism duly enforces the doctrine of a full, free and present salvation...Mr Wesley explicitly lay down and duly enforced the doctrine of present salvation', extract from A Broadsheet on Primitive Methodism, 1820, quoted in R. Davies et al., History of the Methodist Church, Vol. 4, 1988, p. 379.
25. 'Some Account of the Rise and Progress of the Missions belonging to the Arminian Bible Christians', 1818, reprinted in the Bible Christian Magazine, 1905, pp. 300-307.
26. M. Batty, Stages in the Development and Control of Wesleyan Lay Leadership 1791-1878, 1988, p.117.
27. J.G. Terry, 'Methodist Secessionism, the Fly Sheet Controversy and the Wesleyan Reform movement in Birstall and the Spen Valley', unpublished M.A. Dissertation, Huddersfield University, 1993, p. 75.
28. E.P. Thompson's 1968 preface to the reprint of F. Peel, The Rising of the Luddites, Chartists and Plug Drawers, Heckmondwike, 1895.

SECTION A. BRADFORD AND THE WESLEYAN METHODISTS

This first section consists of two chapters, the first of which considers the religious life of Bradford people before the arrival of the first Methodists and traces the way in which Methodism began in the Bradford area. It then considers the place of English Methodism as part of an international religious movement and examines the progress of Methodism locally, including the role played by lay and clerical leaders up to the time of Wesley's death in 1791.

The situation in which Methodism found itself when Wesley died determined the development of Wesleyan Methodism, and influenced to some extent all the groups which separated from it. The conflicts over separation from the Church of England and demands for greater lay involvement and the freedom to hold revivalist activities which led to the various divisions all began in the events of the following few years, and continued for half a century.

The second chapter, therefore, examines the strengths and weaknesses of the Wesleyan system of church government and considers the significance of revivalism and the demands for greater democracy within Methodism. It also examines the claims by ministers seeking greater authority and higher status, who justified their attitudes by reference to the pastoral office. This they saw in terms of a religious obligation placed upon them - a duty and responsibility to rule and discipline as well as to lead and encourage their members.

Chapter 2.

The Background and Progress of Methodism in Bradford to 1791

Introduction

Throughout England the pattern of religious worship after the Reformation reflected the transition from Roman Catholicism to Anglicanism, and from the middle years of the seventeenth century the various dissenting churches became established, so that when John Nelson returned to Yorkshire as a Methodist in 1740 (1) there were already a number of religious groups active in the area. In addition to worship in the parish churches and a small Roman Catholic presence there were well-attended regular weekly services held locally by Quakers, Baptists, Independents and Presbyterians. The Moravians, from whose tradition many of what became the fundamental Methodist characteristics were borrowed, began their work in West Yorkshire at about the same time as the Methodists.(2) Because worship was no longer seen in this part of West Yorkshire as a mainly Anglican activity there was a more open situation which facilitated the development of Methodism in the area.

English Methodism was one part of an international religious phenomenon known as the Evangelical Revival, and the various activities which became identified with Methodism will be examined. A considerable amount of information about the religious life of the Bradford area, including some early Methodist activity, became available in 1743 when returns of all religious activities were submitted from every northern parish to the Archbishop of York.

In examining the way in which Methodism developed in the Bradford area the part played by Wesley and other Anglican clergymen who became leaders of Methodism will be looked at, as well as the rather different responsibilities of the early Methodist itinerant preachers and local lay leaders. The establishment of the first local groups of Methodists, their worship, their preaching-houses, and the effect of their preaching were all important aspects of their progress towards becoming a church. Wesley travelled widely in West Yorkshire and anecdotes about his visits and the work of John Nelson have remained part of local Methodist folklore.

It is argued that while Methodists accepted Wesley's autocratic style of leadership during his lifetime, with its considerable demands in terms of discipline and control, the real problems within Methodism began soon after his death, when the ministers claimed to possess similar disciplinary powers over members. Even Wesley had disagreements with two groups of local chapel trustees during the 1780s over the wording of their chapel deeds, local examples of the sort of problems of management which were probably inevitable in so large an organisation. The chapter provides an account of the growth of Methodism in the Bradford area which took place against the background of firm connexional discipline in spite of such difficulties and disputes. The pattern of events during Wesley's lifetime under his personal leadership and control might have been expected to form a basis on which Methodism in the area would develop unchanged throughout the nineteenth

century, yet paradoxically this did not happen.

Anglicanism and Dissent in Bradford

Within West Yorkshire it would appear that religious activity was often based more on strongly-held personal views than on current orthodox belief. Many local land-owners supported the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536⁽³⁾, and during the Civil War there was strong support in Bradford for Parliament and for Dissent. Among the clergy from parishes in the West Riding ejected in 1662 for refusing to accept the Act of Uniformity were seventy-six non-conformists or dissenters; only sixteen priests actually conformed. Dissenting ministers led worship every Sunday at the Anglican chapel-of-ease at Whitechapel near Cleckheaton in 1669, and their congregations were as numerous as those at the parish church at Birstall.⁽⁴⁾

Following the Declaration of Indulgence, Quakers and Presbyterians began to worship openly in the Spen Valley, and the list of licences to hold services granted to Dissenters in Bradford ⁽⁵⁾ indicates the increasing religious diversity of the area;

Rev. Thomas Sharp, Horton Hall	(Presbyterian)
Michael Cargrave, Bradford	(Presbyterian)
John Long, Bradford	(Presbyterian)
John Hall, Thornton	(Congregational/Presbyterian)
Thomas Walker, Horton	(Baptist/Congregational)
George Ward, Bradford	(Congregational)
John Balme, Bradford	(Congregational)
Joshua Walker, Bingley	(Presbyterian)

John Hird, Eccleshill

(Presbyterian)

The Preaching House at Idle

(Congregational)

The Toleration Act of 1689 was to prove a valuable asset to the Methodists when they began their activities half a century later, although their legal status, arguably neither Anglican nor Dissent, was to be a matter of concern for the early Methodist preachers. The Act acknowledged that it was no longer possible to contain the existing range of religious opinions within the framework of the Church of England. In practice, however it also led to non-attendance, particularly among 'the lowest ranks...the poorer sort...the common people'.(6)

While the Anglican church was losing contact with many of its poorest parishioners, dissent was on the increase and the following premises were among those registered as meeting houses under the Act at the Wakefield Sessions; (7)

January 1689 - 'That Thomas Sharp, of Little Horton, nigh Bradford, clerk, doth make choice of his own house to assemble in for religious worship.' (Confirming the Licence of 1672)

January 1691 - 'The dwelling house of John Smithies, of Little Horton, recorded a place of religious meeting. Signed - Samuel Swayne, John Smithies, John Butterfield, Robert Parkinson.'

January 1695 - 'The house of Thomas Ferrand, of Bradford, for religious worship.'

January 1696 - 'The house of Thomas Hodgson, of Bradford, recorded.'

The Methodists did not consider themselves part of this

dissenting tradition, but saw themselves as a movement within the Church of England, required by Wesley to attend services and take communion in their parish churches, where all baptisms, marriages and funeral services took place. Methodists usually held their own services before or after worship in the parish churches so that they could attend both services.⁽⁸⁾

There were, therefore, fundamental differences at the end of the eighteenth century between the Methodists in the Bradford area and the dissenting congregations whose churches had obtained their independence during the previous century. Separated from the episcopal government of the Church of England, Dissenters met as members of independent and autonomous gathered churches, and the freedom of action which this made possible, and the possibility of quite different relationships between ministers and members, must have been obvious to the Methodists as they looked ahead to a time when their founder would no longer be available to lead and control their movement.

Table 2/1 below indicates how close together in time were the earliest meetings of the main dissenting congregations in the Bradford area, and the building of their first places of worship. The list includes for comparison the Moravians, who were not Dissenters, but does not include either the Catholics, who were legally Dissenters, and could trace their presence in West Yorkshire to the visit of Paulinus to Dewsbury in 627, or the Anglicans, who in practice took over the former Catholic places of worship after the Reformation. The Methodists are

omitted on the grounds that they always denied being Dissenters, but for purposes of comparison groups were active in Birstall from early in 1741, and their first chapel was opened there in 1750.

Table 2/1. The first meetings of the various dissenting groups in the Bradford area

Denomination	First meeting	First premises
Quakers	1652	1700 Liversedge ⁽⁹⁾
Independents	1656	1672 Kipping, Thornton ⁽¹⁰⁾
Presbyterians	1672	1717 Chapel Lane, Bfd. ⁽¹¹⁾
Baptists	1687	1755 Westgate, Bradford ⁽¹²⁾
Moravians	1739	1742 Lightcliffe ⁽¹³⁾

The Evangelical Revival, Moravians and Methodists

The conversion of John Wesley in 1738, the arrival of Moravians in Yorkshire in 1739 and the Methodist activities starting at Birstall in 1740 were all manifestations of an international religious movement known as the Evangelical Revival. Evidence of this movement can be traced back to the early decades of the eighteenth century, when new and quite unprecedented religious phenomena were reported, and numerous people claimed to have had a religious experience in which they found forgiveness of sin and a closer fellowship with God. The way in which this new movement spread as a result of close personal links between

Protestant groups in Europe influenced by Pietism and groups within the Puritan tradition in England and America has been the subject of research by Professor W.R. Ward, who has suggested that 'there were shared anxieties in the Protestant world which gave rise to shared expectations. In these shared expectations...lies the explanation of the random outbreak of religious revival all the way from Carinthia to New England.'(14)

In Germany the Lutheran Pietist tradition developed in the late seventeenth century, its leaders Spener and Francke being associated with the University of Halle in Prussia. The Pietists established many of the practices which were later thought of as typically Methodist; they opened an orphan house for 3,000 people, a dispensary, schools, teacher-training institutions and a Bible College, all of which were in fact on a far grander scale than the similar arrangements made later by Wesley,(15) and they organised class meetings.

Very similar class meetings were held by the small group of undergraduates at Oxford University who met from 1729 under the leadership first of Charles and later of John Wesley for study and devotional activities. They undertook visits to the Oxford prisons and to people in need in the local community, acquiring for the first time the epithet of Methodists.(16) Later class meetings intended to build up the faith of new converts to Methodism were usually held in private houses, and after extempore prayer and readings from the bible the leader would discuss with the members individually the spiritual

progress they had made. As each class was part of a society which worshipped together each Sunday within a local circuit, Wesley's system ensured both pastoral care for the individual and an awareness of belonging to a larger organisation. This became the normal pattern for later Methodist classes, but these activities were by no means new. As well as being part of the Pietist and Moravian traditions on the continent, they were to be found among the numerous religious societies which operated within the Church of England, beginning with Anthony Horneck's society in the 1670s⁽¹⁷⁾ where small groups of lay people met to further their personal piety and social concern.

In North America, where the converts came usually from within the membership of the churches rather than from outside, the religious phenomenon was known as the Great Awakening. It had begun in New Hampshire in 1730 during the ministry of Jonathan Edwards, with its main manifestations taking place in 1734 and 1735. ⁽¹⁸⁾ In Wales a similar reaction to revivalist preaching had occurred as early as 1714, and from the 1730s with Whitefield's help this led to the formation of what was later to become the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Connexion.

The comparable situation in England was also known as the Evangelical Revival, and according to Henry Rack, ⁽¹⁹⁾ it 'developed out of an untidy series of local revivals, eventually consolidating into several distinct bodies and influencing existing churches.' This was what happened in West Yorkshire, where the leaders of the revival had little in common beyond their faith, and their preaching attracted many

people without a meaningful church background for whom church membership became a consequence of conversion rather than a starting point.

George Whitefield, who by preaching in North America, Wales and England provided a personal link between the scattered societies, was thought of as the original leader of the revival. In England, however, Wesley took the lead in the revival after 1739, partly because Whitefield spent so much of his time in America, but also because he concentrated on evangelism at the expense of long-term planning for the needs of his converts. In this respect Wesley differed from most contemporary evangelists in his insistence on making detailed provision for those who had expressed an interest in religion, and after Methodist preaching had taken place arrangements were made for those who had experienced or were seeking conversion to meet on a weekly basis.⁽²⁰⁾

The link between the Pietists and the Methodists was made by the Moravians, who came under Pietist influence in Germany. Various Moravian leaders subsequently travelled to England and America to widen their sphere of influence, and it was the meeting of John and Charles Wesley with some of the Moravians during their voyage across the Atlantic on their way to Georgia in 1735 which led to significant Moravian influence on the Wesleys and on the style of activities in early Methodism. Among the Oxford Methodists, George Whitefield had a conversion experience in 1735, Benjamin Ingham in 1737, and both the Wesleys in 1738. Those converted during the more or less

simultaneous but separate evangelistic campaigns subsequently led by these men were all sometimes referred to as Methodists, and it was not until after Wesley had established his own organisation, and held his first conference in 1744, that the title was usually restricted to those 'in connexion with Rev. John Wesley'.

In the Bradford area the different traditions of Moravianism and Methodism were brought together by Benjamin Ingham, the first former member of the Holy Club to lead evangelistic activity in West Yorkshire. He remained a friend of Wesley while at the same time forging links with the Moravians, whose origins as a Protestant Episcopal church in Czechoslovakia pre-dated the Reformation.⁽²¹⁾ Their arrival in West Yorkshire in 1739 brought a new factor into local religious life, and although numerically the Moravians were the smallest religious group in the area, they were second only to the Church of England in terms of their personal influence on John and Charles Wesley. Aspects of Moravian practice selected by the Wesleys as being appropriate for their Methodist societies included an emphasis on a conversion experience and justification by faith, and a combination of personal religious experience with a sense of fellowship from belonging to a worshipping community. As well as the practice of meeting regularly in organised classes, the singing of hymns which reinforced their basic beliefs was also borrowed from the Moravians, whose overall concern was that their religion should be personal and meaningful.

The inter-action between the Moravians and the Methodists and the influence of the Moravians on John Wesley have been examined by Clifford Towlson.⁽²²⁾ The Moravians had a special appeal to Wesley, and several Moravian friends influenced his beliefs before his conversion experience in 1738. Because they shared similar aims and methods, it seems probable that in the first year or so after Nelson's return to Birstall in 1740 many people were unable to differentiate between the converts of the Moravians, sometimes referred to as 'the Germans',⁽²³⁾ and those converted by the Methodists

Benjamin Ingham's religious activities in West Yorkshire had started during 1734, when having completed his studies at Oxford he returned home to Ossett near Wakefield where he ran a school and held Sunday services which gave rise to a number of conversions.⁽²⁴⁾ These meetings preceded Wesley's conversion and were not under his authority, and are not considered to have been specifically Methodist. After being ordained in 1735 Ingham accompanied the Wesleys to Georgia, meeting the Moravians during the crossing, and on his return to this country preached to large congregations in the parish churches at Ossett, Wakefield, Leeds and Halifax.

Most significantly, Ingham established some thirty religious societies in West Yorkshire. This took place before he visited the Moravian headquarters at Hernhutt in Saxony with John Wesley between June and September 1738,⁽²⁵⁾ an indication of the close personal friendship between the two men at the time. Ingham was present with other leaders of the Evangelical

Revival at the watch-night service at Fetter Lane on 31 December 1738, described by Wesley as a lovefeast and sometimes referred to as the Pentecost experience.⁽²⁶⁾ Ingham then returned to Yorkshire, but from June 1739 he was banned from preaching in Anglican pulpits. He continued to preach where he could, and within months the number of his societies had risen to about forty, and by the end of 1741 he claimed to have 2,000 'hearers' in 60 societies, of which 2 were in Bingley and Shipley, 11 in Bradford, and 14 in Birstall and the Spen Valley.⁽²⁷⁾ Ingham had in fact created what amounted to his own connexion of societies in West Yorkshire which were very similar to, but apparently distinct from, the Methodist societies.

Relationships between Ingham's societies and Wesley's societies became less close after Ingham invited a number of Moravians from London to come to Yorkshire, and they established their northern centre at Smith House at Lightcliffe, before moving some years later to Fulneck near Pudsey. Pickles⁽²⁸⁾ suggests that Ingham asked the Moravians to help him because he could no longer personally oversee his members as their numbers increased.

During 1742 forty-seven of Ingham's societies came fully under Moravian control following a formal agreement he made with Spangenberg at Smith House. This was a complete take-over of Ingham's movement by the Moravians, but it would be misleading to think in terms of two thousand committed members within this organisation. J.E. Hutton in his study of the

Moravians⁽²⁹⁾ referred to the membership of Ingham's societies at the time as consisting of 2,000 'hearers', (perhaps occasional attenders at meetings), 300 'enquirers' and only 100 'converts'.

Even allowing for these figures to have been accurate at the time of the Moravian takeover, there is no evidence that all of Ingham's former followers remained under the influence of the Moravians. Nelson's description of attending Ingham's meetings suggests a very informal situation open to anyone who came along,⁽³⁰⁾ and in practice it would have been very easy for them either to stop attending the meetings or to change allegiance and join the Methodists, although disagreements arose between the Methodists and the Moravians after Benjamin Ingham left the area.⁽³¹⁾

Theological differences between the Wesleys and the Moravians were the cause of the problem.⁽³²⁾ Some but not all of the Moravians began to argue that as salvation was by grace through faith, and not by works, it was necessary to avoid all practices such as prayer, bible reading, worship and communion on the grounds that they could be regarded as works. This doctrine, known as stillness or quietism, was strongly opposed by Wesley and the Methodists. Nelson in particular had disagreed with Ingham over this issue, and was prevented from addressing any more of their meetings in West Yorkshire.⁽³³⁾

In London the leaders of the two movements had also moved apart over the Moravian doctrine of quietism, perhaps inflamed by differences of personality, and Wesley left the Moravians at

the Fetter Lane society and formed a separate Methodist society at the Foundery,⁽³⁴⁾ and from this time the Methodists and the Moravians developed separately. Friendships between individuals continued,⁽³⁵⁾ but very few of the Moravian societies in West Yorkshire continued beyond the end of the eighteenth century, although a small number of their churches are still active in the Bradford area.⁽³⁶⁾

Frank Baker has pointed out that after leaving the area in 1742 Benjamin Ingham moved to Colne in Lancashire and founded a second group of some 60 Inghamite societies in North Yorkshire, Lancashire and Westmorland.⁽³⁷⁾ From 1751 Ingham had no further dealings with the Moravians, and because he remained in Anglican orders the members of these new groups were at first considered to be part of the Church of England, but there were difficulties over their status despite their apparent similarity to the Methodists.

Pickles⁽³⁸⁾ refers to two unsuccessful attempts to merge Ingham's new societies formally with Methodism; in 1748 George Whitefield, Ingham and William Grimshaw met the Wesleys to discuss a union, but John Wesley was not willing to accept them, then in 1755 Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon tried to encourage a union, again without success, presumably because of continuing theological differences. In 1761 many members seceded⁽³⁹⁾, but five years later Grimshaw accepted a hundred of the remaining Inghamites into his Methodist societies.

Archbishop Herring's 1743 Visitation Returns

Undoubtedly the best contemporary summary of the position of

the various denominations in Bradford at the start of the Methodist movement is that supplied by Archbishop Herring's 1743 Visitation Returns for the Yorkshire parishes. Each vicar was required to submit a report on his parish, including any religious activity by dissenting churches. The reports obviously depend for their accuracy on the awareness of each vicar of what was taking place in his parish, and his willingness to complete the returns, but in spite of the possibility of omissions and the Anglican viewpoint implicit in the wording, this remains a valuable and interesting contemporary document which examines very early Methodist activity alongside that of the dissenting churches.

The returns of Roman Catholic worshippers and priests in the York diocese are a reminder of their continuing presence as a religious minority who had survived as a community since Elizabeth's reign. Out of a total of 836 parishes, 262 reported having some Catholic families, but surprisingly there were also eleven reports of Roman Catholic priests, whose presence was illegal at the time as they were not covered by the Act of Toleration. It has been suggested that in fact there were 48 Catholic priests in the diocese at the time, but that most of the vicars turned a blind eye to them when compiling their returns. (40) These priests included Fr. Edward Antoninus Hatton, O.P., D.D., who was private chaplain to Henry Tempest at Tong Hall from 1740 to 1749. Henry's father, Sir George Tempest (1672-1745), was loyal to the Church of England, and rebuilt Tong Church which stood in the Hall grounds, where an

Anglican curate took the services. Sir George Tempest disinherited Henry because of his Catholicism, but Nicholas, his second son, also became a Catholic and succeeded to the estate.⁽⁴¹⁾

The Quakers figured quite widely in these reports; 20 met every month at Bingley, and some met each year in June at Haworth. Small numbers of families were reported at Gildersome, Thornton and Wibsey, and 60 met twice a week at Bradford. In the parish of Birstall the Quaker Meeting House at Liversedge held a service every fortnight.

The Baptists were generally less active than other Dissenting groups in the area in 1743, Birstall having a licensed Anabaptist Meeting House 'not made use of at present', and there was 'an Antinomian or Anabaptist Meeting House' at Gildersome in the parish of Batley. Only at Bradford was there any record of a congregation, and there 140 Baptists met in the Westgate chapel every other Sunday.

The distinction between Presbyterianism and Independency was often unclear in the 1743 returns, but both denominations had become well established. There was an Independent or Congregational meeting house at Bingley where 150 worshippers met every week, and a congregation of 400 at Chapel Lane in Bradford as well as 100 at Idle and 100 at Wibsey and an unspecified number from 116 families at Thornton. Calverley and Pudsey had Presbyterian worship, and to the south of Bradford there were regular services at Morley Old Chapel⁽⁴²⁾, as well as at Cleckheaton and Heckmondwike.

The 22 references to Methodists in the county are made more interesting by the comment that they all refer to 'that part of the West Riding round Leeds and Bradford'.⁽⁴³⁾ At Bingley Rev. Richard Hartley reported that 'two teachers sent by Mr Ingham, Mr Occashouss and Mr Rankey' led services in the town for about thirty 'Methodists',⁽⁴⁴⁾ but in view of the names of the leaders it seems more likely to have been at that time a Moravian society. William Grimshaw, vicar of Haworth, made no reference to any Methodists in 1743, and none were reported in the parishes of Idle, Baildon, Thornton, Wibsey, Tong, Batley or Hartshead. At Bradford where one family in six were Dissenters, 'There are also teachers called Methodists who sometimes come amongst us and draw great numbers after them, but the times and places of their meetings are uncertain.'⁽⁴⁵⁾

Birstall was understandably the centre of Methodist activity in the county, and the vicar, Rev. Thomas Coleby, reported that in the parish there were 12 or 13 Meeting Houses used by the Methodists; Benjamin Sheard's, Richard Walker's barn, Samuel Mitchell's, Thomas Mortimer's and John Nelson's in Birstall; Joseph Fearnley's in Gomersal; John Booth's, Jesse Nelson's, John Collinson's in Adwalton; and Will Mitchell's, Abraham Firth's, and John Birkitts in Liversedge. 'Mr John and Mr Charles Wesley and several other strangers teach in one part, and Mr Ingham and some Germans in the other part of these Meeting Houses. John Nelson teaches at Birstall.'⁽⁴⁶⁾

The fact that Methodists and Moravians were again not

separated in this description may indicate Coleby's indifference to, or his dislike of, both these groups at the time. It was in the following year that he arranged for John Nelson to be pressed into the army. An alternative suggestion would be that in practice the followers of Wesley and Ingham were so similar in their background and activities that it was difficult to distinguish between them.

At Whitechapel near Cleckheaton the curate, Joshua Smith, also failed to distinguish between Methodists and Moravians. 'Three places where ye Methodist or German teachers do assemble once a week, viz. Michael Mortimer's, John Thornton's who now was ye Chapel warden, and I would not restrain him from keeping an unlawful assembly, and one William Scholefield's'...(and probably referring to both the Methodists, and the Presbyterians in the parish who worshipped at the Red Chapel) 'The greatest difficulty I meet with is many of ye Chapelry refuse to pay for their seats as usual, for they say they have liberty of conscience (as they call it) and they can go and hear them without fee or reward.'(47)

From this summary it is clear that in all the parishes in the Bradford area there were in 1743 some 4,800 families associated with the Church of England, but they were not necessarily in regular attendance, while 680 families were actively involved in the various Dissenting churches. The dissenters in the Bradford area therefore represented some 13 per cent of the total, while national estimates for 1718 suggested that only about 6 per cent were Dissenters. It does

not seem to be possible to calculate the actual number of Methodists from these figures, but on the flyleaf of the original document was a remark by Archbishop Herring's successor, Matthew Hutton, in 1756; 'I have not found any material variation from the answers given in these four volumes either upon my own enquiry or by the returns of the Archdeacons after ye Visitations. Complaints about the increase of Methodism have been the chief.'(48)

John Wesley and the leaders of Bradford Methodism

John Wesley's religious zeal, his organising ability and his personal authority were the foundations on which the English Methodist movement was built. His early life in his father's rectory at Epworth, the influence of his mother Susanna Wesley, his involvement in the Holy Club at Oxford, and his long search for spiritual satisfaction both before and after his ordination in 1725, all influenced his later beliefs and actions. After his unsuccessful mission to Georgia, his conversion experience at Aldersgate Street on 24 May 1738, when he 'felt his heart strangely warmed',⁽⁴⁹⁾ and the success of his evangelistic work following his open-air preaching at Kingswood near Bristol during April 1739, set him apart as the one man without whom the Methodist movement could not have developed as it did.⁽⁵⁰⁾

John Wesley became a legend during his lifetime, combining as he did a genuine loyalty to the Church of England, in which he had been brought up and ordained, with the leadership of the Methodist people. He covered thousands of miles on horseback, preaching to and organising the Methodist societies, and his

claim that Methodism was a movement within the Church of England remained basically true throughout his lifetime.⁽⁵¹⁾ Wesley's influence over the Methodists operated at two levels, through his personal appearances as a highly respected leader on a regular but by no means frequent basis at most of the societies during his travels around the country, and indirectly by the delegation of his authority through a network of leaders, many of whom had been converted as a result of his preaching.

These leaders can be divided into three groups; the first were the Methodist preachers, laymen such as John Nelson of Birstall, who were responsible for the establishment and subsequent general oversight of the Methodist societies, and it was claimed that 'Far the greater part of the societies had been formed by the labours of the preachers, and many of them Mr Wesley never visited.'⁽⁵²⁾ A second group consisted of Anglican priests from the Evangelical wing of the Church of England, such as Revd. William Grimshaw of Haworth, who saw Methodism as an evangelical movement within Anglicanism. A third group, vitally important but given little recognition, developed gradually as societies were formed, and consisted of local members who became leaders within their own societies and at circuit level. Such men became the class leaders, stewards and trustees and sometimes local preachers, and their leadership in spiritual matters and in practical and financial decision-making ensured the day to day continuation of the societies in the absence of Wesley and his preachers, and

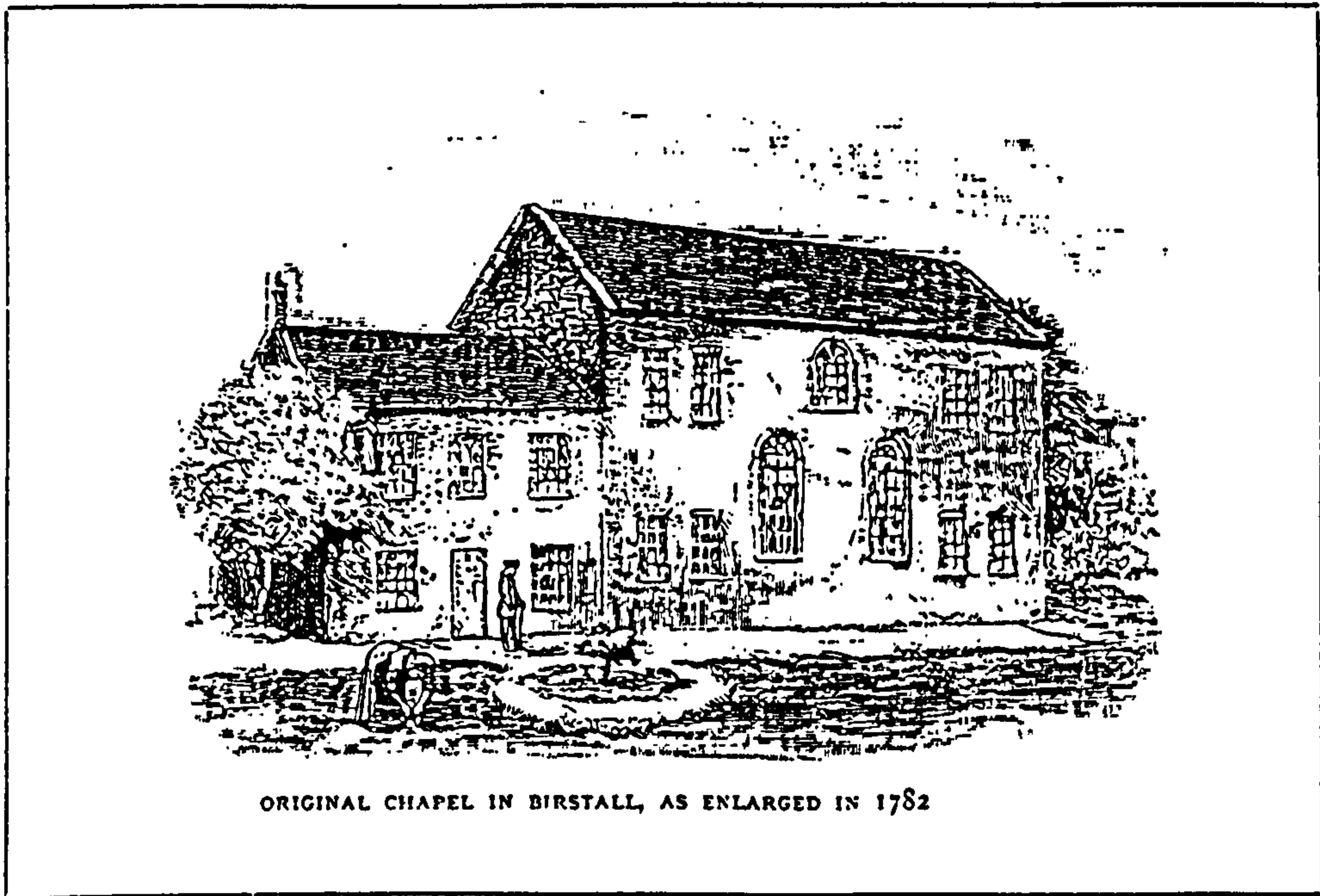
without them Methodism could not have survived. Although the most numerous group, they remain largely unknown beyond the occasional appearance of lists of names on contemporary documents.

John Nelson of Birstall, stonemason and Methodist preacher, is generally regarded as the first active Methodist in this area and indeed in Yorkshire. Converted in London after hearing John Wesley preach in the open air at Moorfields, Nelson later wrote that 'as soon as he got up on the stand, he stroked back his hair, and turned his face towards where I stood, and I thought fixed his eye upon me'.⁽⁵³⁾ As a result of Wesley's message Nelson was convinced that he was going to find salvation, and having attended other services, Nelson had a conversation with Wesley, and after some months of uncertainty he was converted and became a Methodist in September 1739.

Nelson returned to Birstall about Christmas 1740, and spoke first to his family and then to neighbours about his new faith. He preached in many of the local villages at weekends and after work, when 'he usually had his hammer stuck within the string of his leather apron on one side, and his trowel on the other'.⁽⁵⁴⁾ John Wesley's first visit to Birstall to meet Nelson took place in May 1742, when the society was already well established. Wesley preached 'at noon on the top of Birstall Hill to several hundreds of plain people, and spent the afternoon in talking severally with those who had tasted of the grace of God'.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Wesley encouraged Nelson to preach in



JOHN NELSON.



ORIGINAL CHAPEL IN BIRSTALL, AS ENLARGED IN 1782

Illustration 1. John Nelson and Birstall Chapel 1751⁽⁵⁶⁾

neighbouring towns before going further afield, sharing some parts of his mission with other leaders, going for instance with John Bennett⁽⁵⁷⁾ to Lancashire, Derbyshire and Cheshire. Then in July 1743 John Wesley summoned Nelson to London and they went together to Oxford, then on to Cornwall. Wesley suggested that Nelson should make his own way home, preaching as he travelled, and he made several such preaching tours during the following months. Despite opposition in certain towns and villages, he managed to preach in almost all of them.

From 1744 a new threat faced Methodism at the time of widespread anxiety over the possibility of a Catholic rising in Scotland led by Charles Stuart, and the threat of an invasion. These fears led to a general sense of panic, and Methodist open air services, being new and unfamiliar religious activities, were looked upon with suspicion. At the same time more men were needed for the army, and John Nelson was arrested at Adwalton and pressed as a soldier by the Commissioners at Halifax at the instigation of the vicar of Birstall, Rev. Thomas Coleby.⁽⁵⁸⁾ There is no doubt that this was because of Nelson's preaching, and although it was claimed that Nelson had no visible means of support he was known to be in regular employment as a stonemason.

Nelson and the other recruits were billeted in Bradford at the end of their first day's march north towards Newcastle, and to avoid any disturbance he was held in the town dungeon at the top of Ivegate on the evening of 5 May 1744. Here he was visited by some of his friends, and this occasion is generally

thought of as the first Methodist service in Bradford. This may not necessarily mean that there were already Methodists known to each other in the town, as those present included only one Bradford resident, Betty Firth of Great Horton, then a Presbyterian. The others present were John Nelson's brother Joseph, Hannah Scholefield and Martha Cowling, all from Birstall, and John Murgatroyd from Gildersome. (59) When Nelson's situation became known to them, these Methodists set off after work to walk the six or seven miles to Bradford, arriving at about ten o'clock and spending most of the night outside his cell, passing candles, food and water for Nelson through a hole in the door, (60) and praying and singing hymns. At four in the morning Nelson's wife and several more friends arrived to encourage him.

The following evening the regiment rested at Leeds, where Nelson was well known as a preacher, and he led an impromptu service from his prison, and at every stage of his journey north there were similar occurrences. At Durham Nelson was met by John Wesley, who then went to Birstall to tell Nelson's family of his situation. Charles Wesley meanwhile with the help of Methodist friends had collected money so that a substitute could be arranged to take Nelson's place, and at the end of July Nelson was released from the army at Newcastle. (61) Returning home to Birstall he resumed both his employment and his preaching.

Less than two weeks after the first hastily arranged meeting outside Nelson's dungeon in Ivegate, John Wesley

arrived on his first visit to Bradford on Thursday 17th May 1744. William Cudworth (62) quotes a local tradition that a small Methodist society already existed at Little Horton Hall, the home of a member of the Sharp family who had been at Oxford with Wesley. John Wesley's visits to the area became highlights for local Methodists, and as well as visiting Birstall more than forty times and Bradford on some thirty occasions between 1742 and 1790, he went a dozen times to Bingley and visited many of the village societies including Adwalton, Hightown, Baildon, Morley, Cleckheaton, Gomersal, Eccleshill and Horton.

In 1750 Nelson left his trade as a stone mason and became a full-time Methodist itinerant preacher (or minister) until his death in 1774. Connexional membership returns indicated that the circuits planted by him accounted for a quarter of the total Methodist membership in England, (63) and describing Nelson's personal influence on his home village of Birstall, Wesley wrote that,

'Many of the greatest profligates in all the country were now changed - their blasphemies were changed to praise. Many of the most abandoned drunkards were now sober, many Sabbath breakers remembered the Sabbath to keep it holy. The whole town wore a new face. Such a change did God work by the artless testimony of one plain man, and from thence his word sounded forth to Leeds, Wakefield, Halifax and all the West Riding of Yorkshire'. (64)

The inscription on Nelson's gravestone in Birstall

churchyard describes him as 'the co-adjutor with John Wesley and the pioneer of Methodism in Yorkshire'. He was the first of many men from a similar background who were active as itinerant preachers under Wesley's leadership among the local Methodists. They included John Bennet⁽⁶⁵⁾ from Derbyshire and William Darney, who had been converted in his native Scotland before he started preaching in Rossendale in 1742. Darney preached widely in the West Riding, founded a number of societies, and wrote doggerel poetry describing local reactions to Methodist preaching;⁽⁶⁶⁾

'In Birstall and the places near they've long time heard the sound

Of Thy sweet gospel, Saviour dear, Let much fruit there be found...

On Bradford like wise look Thou down, where Satan keeps his seat

Come by Thy power, Lord, him dethrone, for Thou art very great
In Windhill and in Baildon town Thy children simple be;

In Yeadon and in Menston green, some truly mourn for Thee.

In Eccleshill they're stiff and proud, and few that dwell therein

Do show they've any fear of God or hatred unto sin.

At Bradford-dale and Thornton town, and places all around

And at Ling-bob, sometimes at noon, the gospel trump we sound.'

After Wesley had preached in February 1746 to 'a quiet congregation at Bradford'⁽⁶⁷⁾ a small class was formed in the town consisting of four members, and reports of this class

provide some details of the people involved. Betty Firth, the Presbyterian who had been at the dungeon service and was a friend of John Nelson, introduced Methodism to Low Moor. John Murgatroyd of Gildersome became a Methodist in 1744, and he too was at the Dungeon service, and after his marriage he lived at Little Horton. Nathaniel Dracup, born at Idle in 1729, worked as a shuttle-maker. He became a class leader and local preacher as well as being the circuit steward in 1763, and the services at Great Horton were held in his house before the chapel was built there. Thomas Mitchell of Bingley was a stone-mason who enlisted during the Rebellion, being discharged in 1746. Having heard the preaching of Nelson, Grimshaw and Charles and John Wesley, Mitchell became a Methodist, and began to preach in the open air.⁽⁶⁸⁾

All those who led and attended early Methodist services, which were usually held in the open air, were subject at times to opposition including physical violence, but the early Methodist preachers, being laymen and often from humble backgrounds, were particularly vulnerable to such attacks.

At Yeadon a mob led by the curate attacked and injured William Darney, Jonathan Maskew from Burley-in-Wharfedale, and Thomas Mitchell as each in turn attempted to lead an open-air service.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Mitchell later deputised for Nelson at Birstall and preached at Hightown before becoming an itinerant preacher in 1748. He continued to suffer severe persecution from mobs in the various circuits in which he was stationed.⁽⁷⁰⁾ William Darney was once thrown into a village pond at Baildon, and John

Nelson was attacked frequently, and his wife was once attacked by a group of women at Wakefield and suffered a miscarriage as a result.

The second group from whom Wesley received support were a number of Evangelical Anglican clergymen who welcomed his emphasis on the importance of personal religious experience within the framework of the Church of England. They welcomed the Wesleys and other ordained Methodists into their pulpits, and sometimes also supported the laymen who became itinerant preachers in the Methodist societies. Charles Wesley understandably occupied a unique role within the movement, both as John Wesley's brother and as the writer of many characteristically Methodist hymns. At first closely involved in the leadership of Methodism, Charles Wesley was less active in the movement after the late 1750s.⁽⁷¹⁾ The brothers disagreed over several questions of policy, although Charles remained a Methodist and preached occasionally in West Yorkshire during his visits.

Other clergymen who combined Methodist activities with their Anglican vocations included Rev. John Fletcher, vicar of Madeley, expected at one time to be Wesley's successor, who was married at Batley Church to Mary Bosanquet of Cross Hall near Morley. Another was Rev William Grimshaw of Haworth,⁽⁷²⁾ who became an enthusiastic evangelist. In May 1747 John Wesley read prayers and preached in the church at Haworth, and this meeting between Grimshaw and Wesley has been seen as the turning point after which Grimshaw could be considered a Methodist,⁽⁷³⁾

although he had previously made use of typically Methodist techniques of evangelism. Grimshaw later took pastoral charge of the societies begun by William Darney and others, and led his own group of Methodist lay preachers in what became known as the Haworth Round or Grimshaw's Round, which stretched from Birstall to Whitehaven, and included much of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cumberland and Cheshire. Grimshaw held regular preaching services at Bingley, Birstall, Baildon, Horton, Manningham, Calverley and Gomersal. At Bradford his usual place was at a croft near the bottom of Church Bank. All these societies he usually visited on foot, between his Sunday services at Haworth, thus combining his responsibilities to his Anglican parish with the visitation of classes, the distribution of class tickets and all the duties of a Methodist itinerant of the period, including attending the Conference whenever it met at Leeds. In 1758 Grimshaw had a Methodist chapel built at Haworth (74) to ensure continuity of Methodist worship should his successor not be sympathetic to their cause. While Grimshaw was at Haworth the Wesleys and Whitefield preached occasionally in the parish church at services starting at five in the morning, when there could be two thousand people present. (75)

Not the least of Grimshaw's achievements was his influence on younger colleagues who later became leaders of Evangelical Anglicanism, such as Rev. Henry Venn, vicar of Huddersfield, and Grimshaw's son-in-law, Rev. John Crosse, described as 'a veritable Methodist' who was curate at Whitechapel from 1775,

and vicar of Bradford from 1784. As a young man Crosse attended Methodist services in London, where he knew Wesley, and he invited him to preach in the Bradford parish church in 1788.⁽⁷⁶⁾ His predecessor at Whitechapel in Cleckheaton from 1757 to 1772 was Rev. Jonas Eastwood, believed to have been formerly a master at Wesley's school at Kingswood. Such Evangelical Anglican clergymen, sympathetic to the Methodist movement, were able to foster good relationships between the two groups. At Birstall Rev Thomas Coleby, who had been responsible for sending Nelson into the army in 1744, later became more sympathetic to Methodism, and Wesley preached in Birstall Churchyard in 1766,⁽⁷⁷⁾ and at the chapel-of-ease at Whitechapel⁽⁷⁸⁾ in 1770.

The balance between the leadership provided by Wesley himself and his Anglican colleagues, that provided by itinerant preachers like Nelson and that involving members of local societies changed as Methodism grew. During the first few vital months of the movement as it spread outwards from Birstall, Methodism in West Yorkshire was in practice an entirely lay movement. Then after 1742 Wesley came regularly to this area, but often with an interval of twelve or eighteen months between his visits. While every visit by Wesley was therefore a major event for local Methodists, between these visits all the responsibility for making day-to-day decisions within each society remained in the hands of itinerants and local lay leaders.

Aware of the need to make arrangements for the

continuation of Methodism after his death, Wesley in 1784 made two controversial decisions. He appointed a Conference of a hundred specified itinerant preachers, the 'Legal Hundred', who were to be corporately responsible for the administration of Methodism after his death, and were to take control of all Methodist property. Secondly, he ordained a number of his preachers, mainly but not exclusively for work in America. Although Wesley always maintained his loyalty to the Church of England he clearly flouted its rules by these ordinations, which were of arguable validity, and for which neither the Conference nor his brother gave their approval.⁽⁷⁹⁾ In spite of Wesley's insistence that Methodism was still a society within the Church of England, both these actions were significant in providing a framework within which Methodism could later develop into a separate denomination with its own membership and preaching-houses, an executive body, a ministry with its own doctrine, and a connexional organisation. ⁽⁸⁰⁾

During Wesley's later visits to the Bradford area he preached regularly to large crowds from well-established societies wherever he went, but two particular incidents stand out as a reminder that Wesley never found it easy to control the growing Methodist movement, and as an indication of future problems. Both incidents concerned the wording of legal deeds under which Methodist Preaching Houses were held by local trustees.⁽⁸¹⁾ The first dispute was at Birstall in 1782, when the trustees of the Preaching House, drawing up a new deed after extending the premises, refused to use the 1763 Methodist

Model Deed and used instead the wording of their original 1751 deeds. This gave the trustees the right to remove and appoint preachers after the death of John and Charles Wesley, which posed an obvious challenge to the principle of itinerancy and to connexional discipline. Although Wesley was eventually persuaded to sign the deeds, he did so with reluctance.⁽⁸²⁾

In 1788 Wesley had a similarly frustrating meeting with the trustees at Eccleshill over the wording of their chapel deeds, which again allowed the trustees to control the appointment of preachers. Wesley wrote later 'I might as well have talked to so many posts.'⁽⁸³⁾ These disputes did not diminish Wesley's personal popularity, and when he took services at Bradford and Birstall, 'the concourse of people was greater than ever before.'⁽⁸⁴⁾ During Wesley's final visit to the area in April 1790, when he was 87 years old, he preached again at Birstall and at Bradford.

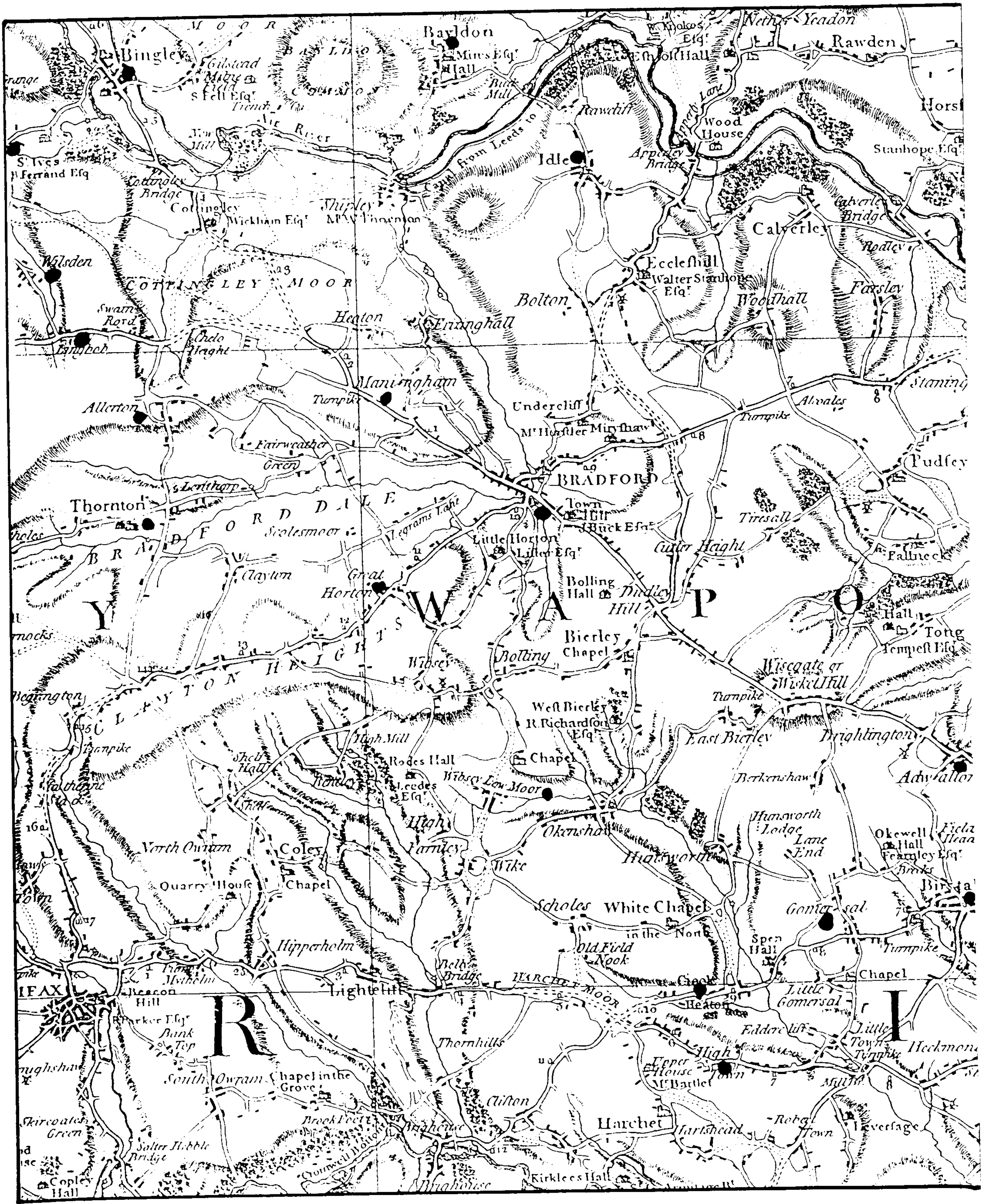
The development of Methodism in the Bradford area

The first Methodist society in West Yorkshire was formed at Birstall in 1741 under Nelson's leadership, and in 1745 a class met at Cleckheaton at the home of a Mr and Mrs Booth as part of the Birstall society,⁽⁸⁵⁾ one of several such local classes at the time. Other lay Methodists established their own societies during the 1740s, and there was a danger that in the absence of any unifying organisation these societies might be short-lived and heterodox. Wesley's main concern was to integrate them quickly within 'the united societies in connexion with Rev. John Wesley.'

Charles Wesley on his second visit to Haworth visited the local Darney societies in order to reorganise them and absorb them into the Methodist system. A similar arrangement with the societies founded locally by Thomas Lee and Thomas Mitchell meant that these groups also became formally incorporated into the Methodist system, and when Wesley arrived in Bingley 'the societies...were brought into connexion with the United Societies, as the Methodists were first called, and placed under the authority and supervision of the founder of Methodism'. In West Yorkshire, Wesley was able to bring these societies under his personal control, apparently without objections from local members or their leaders, whereas in other areas this policy gave rise to charges of 'sheep-stealing'.⁽⁸⁶⁾

The social status of the first Methodists in Bradford is difficult to determine with any precision, as the value of the limited surviving evidence is reduced by ambiguities in the way that occupations were described. However wide the range of social class in the crowds which heard Wesley, those who committed themselves to membership appear to have come mainly from a background that could be defined as skilled working class, with few of the unskilled or very poor, and many members had some previous associations with religion. J.M. Turner⁽⁸⁷⁾ claims that 'there is clear evidence that the impact on the artisan group was out of proportion to its numbers in the whole population.'

Among the eighteenth-century Methodists in the Bradford



Map 2. Methodist societies active in 1750.

area the occupations of members were rarely recorded. At Bingley the members of the three classes in 1763 were described as six weavers, five stuff-makers, four spinners, two husbandmen, two tailors, two farmers, two cordwainers, a plasterer, a yeoman, a shopkeeper, a woolcomber, a glazier, a servant, a labourer, a gentleman, and an old man.⁽⁸⁸⁾ It is unlikely that trustees were typical of the membership as a whole, but the first seven trustees at the Bradford Octagon in 1766 consisted of a grocer and draper, a shuttle-maker, and five stuff-makers, or worsted manufacturers, which could have meant they were self-employed in the trade, or that they employed other people. Such limited information suggests that if there were few wealthy Methodists, there were not many extremely poor members. However, while information about members is very sparse, information about the much larger numbers of adherents who attended services is virtually non-existent, and it is quite possible that this largely unrecorded group might have included a higher proportion of the poor.

Methodism spread across the Bradford area, helped by the willingness with which preachers and those attending worship seem to have accepted without question a walk of ten miles or more in each direction. To the north of Bradford, Methodism in Bingley had been effectively established and maintained by lay leaders prior to Wesley's first visit in 1757. Methodist laymen who had been active there included John Nelson, William Darney the Scots pedlar, Thomas Colbeck a grocer from Haworth, Jonathan Maskew from Burley-in-Wharfedale, Thomas Mitchell, and

Paul Greenwood. In 1763 the membership of this society was described as being over thirty, although the vicar in 1764 referred to the actual attendance at Methodist services as being between a hundred and a hundred and fifty, and Methodist classes met in the villages round Bingley. Wesley greatly admired Myrtle Grove, where he stayed with the Busfeild family,⁽⁸⁹⁾ and he was very impressed in 1784 by an early Sunday School associated with Bingley Parish Church.

The Baildon congregation, where some activity was reported in the early 1740s, may have been among the earliest societies in the area. The congregation wrote to Wesley complaining that he expected them to receive communion at the parish church, although they had no respect for the vicar, and Wesley tactfully wrote back, 'If it does not hurt you, hear him. If it does, refrain. Be determined by your own conscience.' There were reports of meetings at Wrose in 1751, and Darney preached at Windhill in the same year.⁽⁹⁰⁾ In Shipley the Methodists were holding meetings in 1763, when the society paid a contribution as part of the Bradford Branch of the Birstall circuit.⁽⁹¹⁾

Table 2/2 and 2/3 below suggest that the spread of Methodism was relatively rapid; in each case the first column gives the date of the earliest known reference to each society in secondary material, the second indicates in chronological order the confirmation from primary sources of the date of the formation of a class or society, and the third gives the date of the first chapel. The first list of Bradford societies in

1763 did not give the dates of the first meetings, and those described as 'pre-1764' may therefore have begun many years earlier.

Table 2/2. Dates of formation of early classes and societies in Bingley and Shipley⁽⁹²⁾

<u>Place</u>	<u>First report</u>	<u>Class/Society</u>	<u>Chapel</u>
<u>Bingley circuit</u>			
Bingley	1743	1744	1790
Harden	1747	1748	1814
Ling Bob (near Wilsden)		1748	
Denholme		1760	1793
Coat Gap (near Thornton)		1763	
Morton		1763	1828
Wilsden (W. Darney)	1750	1763	1823
Cullingworth		1766	1806
Eldwick Crag		1766	1815
<u>Shipley circuit</u>			
Baildon	1740	1744	1806
Wrose	1751		1950
Shipley		pre-1764	1800
Windhill (W. Darney)	1751	1770	1834

In Bradford the Methodists held cottage meetings until 1756, when they rented the upper room of a building described by Stamp ⁽⁹³⁾ as 'in the neighbourhood of the cockpit' and

'near the cockpit' which was at the junction of Bond Street and Aldermanbury. Later writers refer to the room as being 'in the cockpit', a building which had had a number of different owners and uses.⁽⁹⁴⁾ From Thursday, 12 May 1757, until the following Sunday John Wesley stayed in the Bradford area, and the service at 5am on the Sunday was described as held 'in the house', although at 8am the crowd had grown and 'they covered the plain adjoining it',⁽⁹⁵⁾ a reminder that Bradford at the time was in fact a village with a substantial village green.

The premises in Aldermanbury became unsafe between 1759 and 1761, and James Garnett, owner of the Paper Hall in Church Bank, allowed the Methodists the use of a barn behind his house before the Octagon chapel was opened in Horton Road, not far from Randall Well Street, in July 1766.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Wesley described the building as 'a preaching-house fifty-four feet square, and the largest octagon we have in England'. To comply with his instructions and to avoid any clash with worship in the Bradford parish church, the Methodist services were held at 9am, 2pm and 5pm at the Octagon, and no separate Methodist sacrament ever took place there. Cudworth claims that 'a school and place of worship' for the Methodists in Great Horton was erected at Old Todley, also in 1766, cottage meetings having previously been held in Nathaniel Dracup's house.⁽⁹⁷⁾ This may therefore have been the first purpose-built chapel in what were then separate townships surrounding Bradford. The second such building was the Eccleshill chapel of 1775, followed in 1785 by the Witchfield Chapel at Shelf.

Table 2/3 Dates of formation of early classes and societies in Bradford⁽⁹⁸⁾

<u>Place</u>	<u>First report</u>	<u>Class/Society</u>	<u>Chapel</u>
Thornton (Thomas Lee)	1747	1748	1825
Allerton		1749	1833
Bradford (Octagon)	1742	pre-1764	1766
Idle (B.Ingham)	1739	pre-1764	1810
Barkerend		pre-1764	
Great Horton (B.Ingham)	1747	pre-1764	1766
Wibsey		pre-1764	1821
Low Moor	1747	pre-1764	1809
Thackley	1751		1856
Greengates	1751		1834
Eccleshill		pre-1764	1775
Dudley Hill		pre-1764	1823
Little Horton		pre-1764	
Bowling		pre-1764	1823
Tong		1770	
Crossland Hall		1770	
Clayton		1770	1834
Heaton		1772	1846
Farsley		1776	1826
Lidget Green		1777	1891
Calverley	1754	1777	1832
Bankfoot		1779	
Wyke		1779	1843
Bolton	1751	1781	1853
Frizinghall		1781	1847
Clayton Heights		1781	1806
Manningham	1750	1782	1859
North Bierley		1782	
Shelf (Witchfield)			1785

Birstall retained its original position as a stronghold of local Methodism, although about the time of the opening of the first chapel in 1750 John Bennet, one of Wesley's itinerant preachers, complained about the stewards there, writing that 'Being the Quarterly Meeting at Birstall I assisted the stewards in regulating the affairs of the Society. But Alas! They all seemed confused and no regular order was observed. Oh what need of discipline!'⁽⁹⁹⁾ We are able to catch a more reassuring contemporary glimpse of worship there some years later from the diary of John Valton,⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ an itinerant preacher who served in the Birstall circuit from 1781 to 1783. He records visits to Hanging Heaton, Dewsbury, Batley, Heckmondwike, Ardsley and Morley, and it would appear that Valton's services frequently involved the religious phenomena more typical of earlier decades, with cries and groans and people falling down apparently unconscious. Associated with such activities there were many converts - indeed he appears to have expected and obtained conversions at almost every service. On one occasion there is a reference to 'several hundreds added to the different societies', although the emphasis placed on Valton's evangelistic successes by the editor of his diary suggests that he may not have been typical of the preachers at the time.

Within the Spen Valley the Hightown society welcomed Wesley to a service to open their new thatched chapel in 1774, after Thomas Wright of Lower Blacup near Cleckheaton and Joseph Jackson, a carrier of Hightown, had made a journey through

Lancashire, Wales and the midlands 'to solicit the assistance of the Methodists in different parts in defraying the expense of erecting the new Methodist Meeting-house'.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Wright's autobiography provides a very rare opportunity to examine eighteenth-century Methodism in the Spen Valley from a lay perspective, as virtually all other accounts of incidents are taken from accounts written by ministers. In two weeks during the autumn of 1773 Wright, who was an adherent but not a member of the society, and Jackson travelled through Lancashire to Liverpool and Chester, went into Wales and on to Shrewsbury, called on Rev John Fletcher at Madeley near Coalbrookdale, and returned through Macclesfield and Sheffield. The amount collected is not recorded, but two incidents make the story of their journey memorable, first a conversation in prison with a man due to be hanged for highway robbery. He argued from the Calvinist position that what had taken place could not be his fault, as it was fore-ordained to happen, quoting from Jeremiah, 'The way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps'. Wright, on the basis of Methodist doctrine, claimed that on the contrary he was free to acknowledge his wrong-doing and seek forgiveness from God, but at his execution he repeated his original views to the crowd. The second anecdote related how the two men had evaded bed-bugs while staying with the Methodist preacher at Sheffield, having been assured that 'they did not bite all persons'. How typical Thomas Wright was in his ability to explain and apply his faith in a difficult situation is uncertain, but the incident shows

that among lay Methodists of that time there could be both conviction and confidence in their religious beliefs.

Table 2/4. Dates of formation of early classes and societies in Birstall and the Spen Valley⁽¹⁰²⁾

<u>Place</u>	<u>First report</u>	<u>Class/society</u>	<u>Chapel</u>
Birstall (B.Ingham)	1739	1741	1750
Gomersal (Joseph Fearley)	1743		1828
Adwalton	1743		1837
Hightown (B.Ingham)	1747	1770	1774
Cleckheaton	1742	1745	1811

The Methodists of Cleckheaton and Heckmondwike remained members of the Birstall society, and attended Sunday services there. Samuel Chadwick wrote 'I have often heard the old Methodists tell how they went from Littleton and the villages for miles around on Sunday mornings to Birstall Preaching House, took refreshments in their pockets, and went into the vestry and houses round at noon to eat their humble meal, and after the afternoon service returned to their homes.'⁽¹⁰³⁾ They held weeknight meetings in each other's homes until the West Yorkshire revival during the 1790s increased their membership and gave both societies the confidence and incentive to build their own places of worship in 1811. Their progress in Birstall

and the Spen Valley is indicated by Table 2/4 above; after seventy years of Methodist activity the classes and societies were firmly established in virtually every community from Bingley to Batley.

Conclusion

By 1791 Methodism in the Bradford area was not quite a separate denomination in its own right but was a growing movement within the Church of England with its own distinctive membership, ministry, and organisation. While the Established Church remained the largest denomination, Methodists were by then accepted in Bradford in the same way that Catholics, Quakers, Baptists, Independents, Presbyterians and Moravians were accepted. The preaching of Wesley and his followers had attracted not only those who had retained some religious affiliations, but also many who were outside the religious bodies, and by the time of Wesley's death Methodism had spread throughout the Bradford area from its roots at Birstall.

During the lifetime of John Wesley most Methodists continued to attend the Sunday services in their parish churches, and Methodist premises served a supplementary purpose as preaching houses, where Methodist hymns were sung and sermons were preached at times before or after the services in the local church. But it is necessary to remember at the same time the difficulties between Wesley and the trustees at Birstall and Eccleshill, and the problems within the societies as pressure increased for more democratic policies. Not all the members were to maintain their allegiance to the Connexion

during the next decade, and at national level there were impending problems over the leadership of Methodism and relationships with the Church of England which were bound to erupt when Wesley was no longer present.

By 1791 the number of new Methodist places of worship was still quite small. The chapel at Bingley, opened in 1790, was the only Methodist building in Bingley or Shipley, although 12 societies had been formed there. In Bradford the main building was the Octagon, with three smaller chapels in the surrounding villages of Great Horton, Shelf, and Eccleshill. These were the only purpose-built chapels, but at the same time there were another 25 societies meeting in homes or rented rooms in the town. Only the Birstall and Hightown chapels existed in the area of Birstall and the Spen Valley, but this area also had a further ten societies. While this had not been a major period of chapel building it was one of rapid expansion in membership, with increasing numbers of men and women joining the Methodist class meetings and attending preaching services.

Behind all such growth there had to be high motivation to join the movement, and to continue within the classes and societies. Methodism provided a disciplined way of life within a fellowship of believers which attracted and usually retained its members, which suggests that the quality of leadership must have been high to maintain the local organisation, yet the actual strength of local Methodism is not easy to assess. The relevant membership figures in 1790⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ covered two areas, the old Bradford circuit with 1,085 members which more or less

represented Bingley, Shipley and the various Bradford circuits, and the old Birstall circuit, which with a membership of 1,266 covered rather more than the area later represented by the Morley, Batley, Birstall and Cleckheaton circuits. It would be easy from these figures to claim that the handful of men and women outside John Nelson's prison cell in 1744 had grown to over two thousand during Wesley's lifetime, but membership figures need to be seen against the background of unprecedented increases in the local population.

The population of Bradford in 1750 was approximately 5,000, and had it remained so a thousand Methodists within such a population would have meant that they were 20 per cent of the whole. But the population was rising quickly, and by the 1801 census there were 13,264 in the township of Bradford, giving perhaps up to 20,000 people in the area covered by the Bradford circuit. A thousand Methodists would then account for 5 per cent of the population, and it would seem reasonable to suppose that similar proportions of Methodists would be found in the adjacent Birstall circuit. These figures provide an interesting comparison with Gilbert's assessment of Methodists as a percentage of the adult population,⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ as he found the national proportion in 1801 to be 1.6 per cent. Acknowledging the lack of precision of these estimates, they suggest that due to the combined influence of Wesley, his clerical colleagues in the area, Nelson and the lay Methodist itinerant preachers and the efforts of many office-holders in local societies, the Methodists of the Bradford and Birstall circuits had by 1791

created a significant religious organisation. Few parts of the country saw Methodism develop with greater enthusiasm.

Notes

1. Nelson, Journal, 1772, p. 37.
2. C.W. Towlson, Moravian and Methodist, Relationships and Influences in the Eighteenth Century, London, 1957, p.256.
3. Local land-owners involved in the Pilgrimage of Grace included Sir Robert Neville of Liversedge, Sir Christopher Danby, Lord of Cleckheaton, Peter Mirfield, Lord of Tong, Richard Jenkinson of Birstall and Sir John Saville, Lord of Thornhill and Hunsworth. H.C. Craddock, A History of the Ancient Parish of Birstall, Yorkshire, 1933, p. 50.
4. Ibid., p.64.
5. 'Index of Premises Registered under the Toleration Acts', at WYAS, Wakefield.
6. Bishop Secker's Visitation Returns for the Diocese of Oxford, 1738, quoted in A.D. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England; Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914., London, 1984, p.10
7. Wakefield Sessions Papers 1689-1696, and 'Index of Premises Registered under the Toleration Acts', at WYAS, Wakefield.
8. Records of the Methodist Conference held at London in June 1744, Question 9, quoted in R. Davies, A.R. George, and G. Rupp, The Methodist Church, Vol. 4, 1986, p.68; Q.'Do we separate from the Church?' A. 'We conceive not. We hold communion therewith for conscience' sake, by constantly

attending both the Word preached, and the Sacraments administered therein.'

9. D. Blamires, A History of Quakerism in Liversedge and Scholes, 1975, p. 15.

10.W. Cudworth, Round about Bradford, Bradford, 1876, p.155.

11.W. Cudworth, Rambles Round Horton, 1886, p. 52.

12.W. Scruton, Pen and Pencil Pictures of Old Bradford, Bradford, 1890, p. 64.

13.Wesley, The Journal, Vol. 3, p.16, entry for 2 June 1742, (footnote).

14.W.R.Ward, 'Power and piety, the origins of religious revival in the early eighteenth century', in Faith and Faction, London, 1993, p.76.

15.Ibid., p. 79.

16.Ibid., pp.83-92. As well as the tradition that the title came from their 'methodical' practice of religious activities, two other suggestions have been made. Wesley apparently associated the term with a school of first century Greek physicians who used a particular method of exercise to promote health. Between about 1670 and 1700 some Calvinist writers referred to Arminian groups using a 'New Method' as 'New Methodists', meaning one contrary to their tradition. Heitzenrater, probably the main U.S. Wesley scholar, suggests that the statement at Oxford, 'A new set of Methodists sprung up amongst us' may have originally been 'A set of New Methodists...' R.P. Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People called Methodists, Nashville, U.S.A., 1995, pp. 18 and 45.

17.R. Davies and G. Rupp, The Methodist Church, Vol. 1, 1965, pp.215-227 considers the progression from the Religious Societies within the Church of England to Methodism. See also Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, p. 14 and p. 186.

18.C.H.Goodwin, Cries of Anguish, Shouts of Praise, the Development of Methodist Revivalism 1739-1818, Cannock, 1994, p. 2.

19.H. D. Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism, London, 1992, p.164.

20.Ibid., p. 238

21. Having come under the influence of the Lutheran Pietist movement the Moravians settled in Germany and established their headquarters at Herrnhut in Saxony. A revival there in 1727 began the movement westward of Moravian missionaries to England and to America.

22.Towlson, Moravian and Methodist.

23.The Moravians had, of course, German names and spoke German. Wesley studied German in order to speak to them, and subsequently translated into English a number of their hymns.

24.J.W. Laycock, Methodist Heroes of the Great Haworth Round, Keighley, 1909, p.4.

25.J. Wesley, The Journal, Vol. 2, p 19 , entry for 1 August 1738.

26. Ibid., Vol. 2, pp.121-3, entry for 1 January 1739.

27. H.M. Pickles, Benjamin Ingham, Preacher amongst the Dales, Forests and Fells, Coventry, 1995, p. 19. The list, (taken from W. Batty, Church History, compiled from the memoirs and

journals of Mr Ingham and the Labourers in Connexion with Him, n/d, c.1750, John Rylands University Library, Manchester, Ref. Man. 1062, MAM P11B), includes 51 of Ingham's societies, 27 of them in the area under consideration; Baildon and Bingley to the north of Bradford, 11 within Bradford at Bradford, Dudley Hill, Farnley Moor Top, Heaton, Holme, Great Horton, Little Horton, Manningham, Shelf Wibsey and Wyke, and 14 in Birstall and the Spen Valley; Birkenshaw, Birstall, Cleckheaton, Drighlington, Gildersome, Gomersal, Little Gomersal, Heckmondwike, Hightown, Littleton, Millbridge, Oakenshaw, Scholes and Spen. (The remaining 24 societies, none more than ten miles from either Bradford or Birstall, met at Armley, Atherton (Allerton?), Brighouse, Castle House Hall, Conningley, (Cononley or Cottingley?) Dewsbury, Digton (Deighton?), Earlshall (Eccleshill?), Greetland, Halifax, Hanging Heaton, Harwood Green (Norwood Green?), Hopton, Horbury, Hove Edge, Hunslet, Kirkheaton, Lightcliffe, Mirfield, Ossett, Pudsey, Rastrick, Rothwell and Wortley.)

28. F. Baker, William Grimshaw 1708-1763, London, 1963, p.235.
29. J.E. Hutton, History of the Moravian Church, Heckmondwike, 1909, p. 305.
30. Nelson, Journal, pp. 43, 46 and 50.
31. After 1743 Ingham left this part of West Yorkshire and parted from the Moravians, and went on to establish numerous Inghamite societies in North Yorkshire and north-east Lancashire. Three of these survived in 1995 in Lancashire at Wheatley, Winewall and Salterforth.

32. Towlson, Moravian and Methodist, p.89.
33. Nelson, Journal, p. 45.
34. The Foundery; Methodists retained the original spelling for this former gun foundry at Moorfields, seriously damaged by an explosion. Wesley restored the Foundery in 1739 as a Methodist Preaching House, and it was replaced in 1778 by Wesley's Chapel in City Road, one part of which contains the pews from the earlier building and is known as the Foundery Chapel.
- 35.H. McGonicle, John Wesley and the Moravians, (Wesley Fellowship Occasional Paper 8), Ilkeston, Derby, 1993, p. 17.
- 36.Moravian societies from the mid-eighteenth century remain active locally at Baildon, Little Horton, Lower Wyke, and Gomersal. The Heckmondwike Moravian Church closed in 1995, the next nearest is Wellhouse at Mirfield.
37. Baker, William Grimshaw, pp.236-8.
38. Pickles, Ingham, p. 105.
39. In 1761 James Allen led a secession from the Inghamites to the Sandemanians. Baker, Grimshaw, p. 238.
- 40.Yorkshire Archeological Society Record Series, Volumes 71, 72, 75, 77, 79. Archbishop Herring's Visitation Returns for the York Diocese in 1743, Leeds, 1927-1931, Vol 4, p.191.
- 41.Ibid., Vol 4 p.218.
- 42.Ibid., Vol 4 p.226.(Morley Old Chapel had been an Anglican chapel of Ease opened in 1709 in the parish of Batley, and was taken by the Presbyterians)
- 43.Ibid., Vol 3 p.234.
- 44.Ibid., Vol 1 p.39.

45. Ibid., Vol 1 p.58.
46. Ibid., Vol 1 p.60.
47. Ibid., Vol 1.p.129.
48. Ibid., Vol 1.p.1.
49. Wesley, The Journal, Vol. 1, p.472, entry for 24 May 1738
50. Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, pp. 43-157.
51. J.M. Turner, Conflict and Reconciliation, pp. 9-29.
52. H. Moore, A Plain Account of the Conduct of Dr. Whitehead, 1791, ms at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, U.S.A., quoted in History of the Methodist Church Vol. 4, p. 244.
53. Nelson, Journal, p. 14.
54. J.R. Robinson, Notes on early Methodism in Dewsbury and Birstall and Neighbourhood, Batley, 1900, p. 14.
55. Wesley, The Journal, Vol. 3, p. 11, entry for 26 May 1742.
56. Illustrations from A.E. Keeling, John Nelson, Mason and Missionary, London, 1892. 57. J. Nelson, Journal, United Methodist Bookroom Edition, 1870, p. 120, quoted in S.R. Valentine, John Bennett, Ye Methodist Preacher, Bradford, 1989, p. 6.
58. Nelson, Journal, p.96. Nelson was arrested at the home of John Booth, whose son, also John, 1746-1820 became a Wesleyan Methodist itinerant preacher in 1799.
59. Laycock, Methodist Heroes, Keighley, 1909, p.25.
60. The original door of the Bradford dungeon, with the hole at eye level, was sold to John Bailey of Bolton when the property was demolished in 1749. It was built into Ivy Hall in Myers

Lane at Bolton, and when this building was demolished in 1927 the door was given to Bolling Hall Museum in Bradford where it is on display. R.C. Allan, (ed.), The History of Bolton in Bradford-dale, Bradford, 1927.

61. Nelson, Journal, p.137.

62. W. Cudworth, Wesleyan Methodism in Bradford, Bradford, 1878, p.16. At the time Little Horton was a separate township and not part of Bradford.

63. J.C.Hartley, John Nelson and the Evangelical Revival in West Yorkshire, Bradford, 1988, p.14.

64. J. Wesley, A Short History of the people called Methodists, Vol. 13, p. 276, quoted in J.R. Robinson, Early Methodism in Dewsbury and Birstall, p.19.

65. The part played locally by John Bennet has been researched by Simon Valentine, who has traced visits to Birstall, Heaton, Little Gomersal, Little Horton, Manningham, Bradford, Shelf and Great Horton in 1744; to Baildon (where he divided the classes), Little Horton, Sticker Lane, Birstall and Heaton in 1747, to Baildon and Eccleshill in 1748 and to Wibsey Moor, Shelf, Great Horton, Wibsey and Bradford in 1749. John Bennet's Journal, Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library, Deansgate, Manchester, quoted in S.R. Valentine, 'Significant Inroads into Satan's Seat, Early Methodism in Bradford 1740-1760, in Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, Vol. 51, Part 5, May 1998.

66. Local references taken from a poem, The Progress of the Gospel in divers places in Great Britain, from W. Darney, A

Collection of Hymns, Leeds, 1751, quoted in W. Watson, Wesleyan Methodism in Idle, Bradford, 1910, p.44.

67. Wesley, The Journal, Vol. 3, p. 234, entry for 24 Feb 1746.

68. T. Mitchell, Journal, in T. Jackson, (ed), Early Methodist Preachers, n/d., c. 1850. p. 243.

69. Ibid., p. 244.

70. Ibid., pp. 247-254. Mitchell gives details of five attacks on him in different parts of the country, but his Journal makes it clear that these were the most serious of many unrecorded incidents.

71. Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, p.255, also F.C. Gill, Charles Wesley, the First Methodist, 1964; Gill suggests that the part played by Charles Wesley in the Methodist Revival has not been given adequate recognition. e.g. 'John was respected, feared, venerated, but Charles was loved', p. 232.

72. Baker, William Grimshaw, London, 1963, p. 96. To a limited extent a nucleus of Anglican clergy formed an unofficial Methodist leadership under Wesley's direction; chapel deeds usually quoted John and Charles Wesley as representing the Connexion, but sometimes the names included John Fletcher or William Grimshaw

73. D.C. Dews, A History of Methodism in Haworth from 1744, Keighley, 1981, p.6; Baker, William Grimshaw, p. 101.

74. Ibid., p.8.

75. Baker, William Grimshaw, p. 187.

76. Wesley, Journal, Vol. 7, p. 384, entry for 4 May 1788.

77. Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 181, entry for 10 July 1766.

78. Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 376, entry for 8 July 1770.
79. Davies and Rupp, (eds), The Methodist Church, Vol. 1, p.72.
80. Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, p. 207f.
81. There were other disputes with local trustees. At Dewsbury the chapel was taken over by secessionists led by John Atlay, the Book Steward, and held from 1788 to 1819 before being returned to the circuit. A second chapel was built for the Wesleyan society. J. Wesley, Journal, Vol. 7, p. 523, entry for 1 August 1789.
82. E.B. Perkins, Methodist Preaching Houses and the Law, London, 1952, p. 28.
83. J. Wesley, The Journal, Vol. 7, p.383, entry for 2 May 1788.
84. Ibid., Vol. 7, p.384, entry for 4 May 1788.
85. Nelson, Journal, p. 171.
86. The description of this process in Bingley, found in J. Ward, Wesleyan Methodism in Bingley, Bingley, 1879, p.18., contrasts sharply with difficulties elsewhere recorded in Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, 1992, p. 216. If there was some antipathy at the time, no evidence has survived.
87. Turner, Conflict and Reconciliation, p.33.
88. Ward, Wesleyan Methodism in Bingley, pp. 22-23.
89. Wesley, The Journal, Vol. 7, p. 3. Myrtle Grove at Bingley, described by Wesley as 'a little paradise', was then the home of the Busfeild family, and is now the Council Offices in Myrtle Park.
90. Bradford Circuit Accounts Book 1767-1785, WYAS Bradford,

Ref DB 10C 27/2

91. Bradford Circuit Book 1763-1788, WYAS Bradford, Ref DB 16 C52.
92. Bradford Circuit Accounts Book 1767-1785, WYAS Bradford, Ref DB 10C 27/2 and the Bradford Circuit Book 1763-1788, WYAS Bradford, Ref DB 16 C52
93. W.W.Stamp, Wesleyan Methodism in Bradford and its Vicinity, London, 1841, p.36.
94. W. Cudworth, Rambles Round Horton, Bradford, 1886, p.64.
95. Wesley, Journal, Vol. 4, p. 211, entry for 15 May 1757.
96. Cudworth, Rambles, p. 65.
97. Ibid., p. 211.
98. Bradford Circuit Accounts Book 1767-1785, WYAS Bradford, Ref DB 10C 27/2
99. J. Bennet, Diary of John Bennet for Thursday 1 February 1750, quoted in F. Baker, 'John Bennet and Early Methodist Polity' in Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, Vol. XXXV, 1965, p. 2.
100. J. Sutcliffe, (ed) The Life and Labours of Rev. John Valton, London, 1830, p. 25.
101. T. Wright, The Autobiography of Thomas Wright of Birkenshaw 1736-1797, London, 1864, pp. 108 - 116.
102. The figures in Table 2/4 were compiled from various sources.
103. S. Chadwick, Memoirs of my Life, m.s., n/d, c.1890, p. 6.
104. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, 1790, quoted in R. Davies et al., The Methodist Church, Vol. 4, p. 235.

105. A.D. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England,
1976, p. 32.

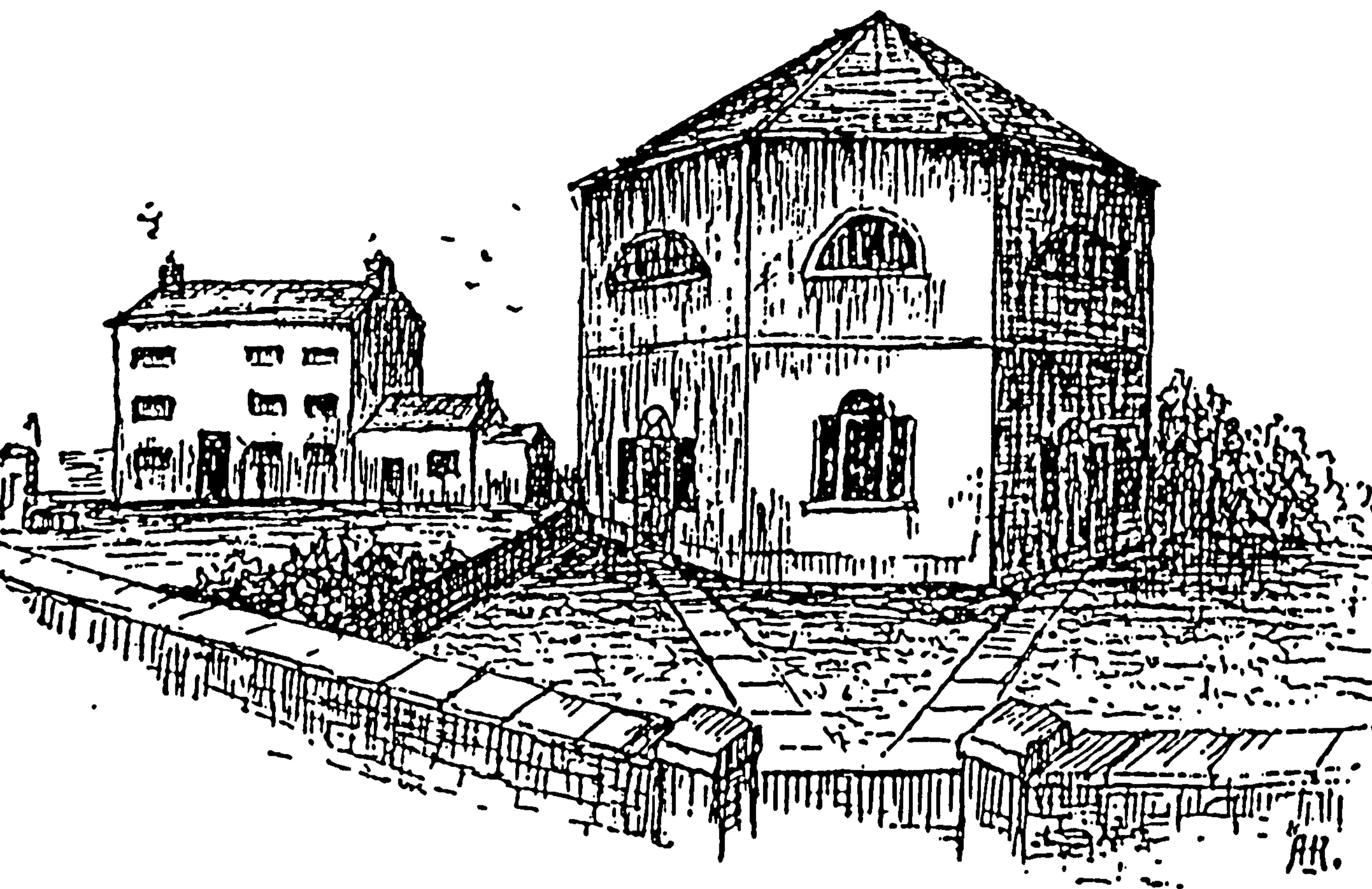


Illustration 2. The Bradford Octagon Chapel 1766

Chapter 3.

The Wesleyan Methodists, 1791 to 1857.

Introduction

After John Wesley died in 1791, the basic principle to which all the leaders of Methodism gave unswerving support was that they had a responsibility to maintain the Methodism which he had created; to the Wesleyans this meant specifically holding annual Conferences, permitting no changes in doctrine, and maintaining an itinerant ministry. Unfortunately there was no consensus over what was expected as new situations arose, and even during the first decades, when most of the preachers and many members remembered Wesley personally, there was no general agreement on what the future policy should be for Methodism. This absence of agreement opened the way for the conflicts and divisions of the next fifty years.

Wesleyan Methodism, known to its members as the 'Old Body', was to remain the largest Methodist organisation, but it changed in many ways between the death of John Wesley in 1791 and the expulsion of the three ministers by Conference in 1849. This half-century of unprecedented change in society, in industry, and in population was also in religious terms according to Professor Ward 'the golden age of secession and expulsion'.⁽¹⁾ The Tractarian movement within Anglicanism from 1834 and the Disruption in Scotland in 1843 were mirrored by events within Methodism as enthusiastic early Methodist societies changed to become settled congregations with their own places of worship. Opposing pressures placed upon the

Wesleyan Methodists by Conference and by certain of their own members precipitated four secessions and the founding of the Primitive Methodists and of the Bible Christians, and in 1841 the New Connexion was itself divided by the Barkerite controversy.

Methodists faced particularly serious disagreements over two issues; the first was the question of authority within Methodism and in particular the lay reaction to attempts by the itinerant preachers to control decision-making both at local and connexional levels. References to the doctrine of the pastoral office dominated the Wesleyan challenge to the disaffected, and conflict over this principle then became the common factor in all the subsequent divisions.

The second conflict involved the sacraments, and led to separation from the Church of England. Further controversy then arose over the way in which revivalist activity within Methodism was regarded by the hierarchy. From about 1815 the leadership of the Wesleyans was for thirty years largely in the hands of Jabez Bunting, whose autocratic attitude was vigorously criticised by those seeking greater freedom for the ordinary members. Each of these issues needs to be examined separately, but in practice every problem impinged on all the others as Wesleyan Methodism changed from a group of societies into a denomination.

Authority within Methodism and separation from
the Church of England.

During the uncertainty over Methodist policy after Wesley's

death, two questions were paramount. The first related to decision-making within the church. Originally John Wesley had himself appointed the local officials in every society, and even decided who should be allowed to join and who must be dismissed from membership, making such decisions during his regular visits as part of his personal oversight of the Connexion. Wesley's autocratic style of leadership had its roots in the Anglican tradition of his upbringing, and was accepted as appropriate by his Methodist followers. In 1766 Wesley defined his own authority within Methodism, claiming that 'It is a power of admitting into and excluding from the societies under my care; of choosing and removing stewards; of receiving or not receiving helpers (i.e. preachers); of appointing them when, where and how to help me, and of desiring any of them to meet me when I see good.'⁽²⁾ After Wesley's death there was concern in the societies when decisions over the appointment of society officials and over the admission and expulsion of members were being made exclusively by the itinerant preachers as Wesley's successors on behalf of Conference. Many members rejected this expression of the rights of the ministers, claimed by them in accordance with the principle of the pastoral office, and thought that this authority should be shared more equitably between the preachers and the membership within a more democratic regime.

Wesley's decision in 1784 to delegate his authority to the Legal Hundred by means of the Deed of Declaration⁽³⁾ had ensured the permanence of the Connexion, but at the same time

it had left all legal authority over the United Societies of Methodism in the hands of the itinerant preachers. Wesley, to whom most of his preachers were themselves laymen, (4) had made no provision for wider lay leadership, and to the preachers this ruled out any sharing of power with the members, but the consequent resentment of many members became a factor in all the subsequent divisions.

In 1791, in order to ensure that Methodism would continue more or less in its existing form but without any single leader, the Conference accepted the Halifax Circular(5), which proposed yearly elections for President and Secretary of Conference, with District Committees to oversee Methodism between Conferences.(6) This meant that the circuit under a superintendent minister became the most important unit of pastoral oversight, and locally this meant either the Birstall circuit or the Bradford circuit. This scheme avoided both the risk associated with district oversight of Methodism being split into large separate units, and the alternative risk of congregational independence as a result of every society having the power to determine its own policy.

The second issue concerned communion, and whether this should continue to be administered only by the few preachers who were clergymen in the Church of England and by those who had been ordained by Wesley. This question was crucial to the future of Methodism, for if administration was to be restricted to these two categories of preachers, apart from the practical difficulty of having inadequate numbers of suitable celebrants,

Methodism would still have been seen as a movement within the Church of England. If, on the other hand, all the Methodist itinerant preachers were able to administer the sacrament in the Preaching Houses, Methodism would be recognised as a separate denomination. The 1791 Conference decided there should be no change of policy, and the following Conference decided by the drawing of lots not to permit sacraments except in London, where this was accepted practice. But pressure from the membership led the 1793 Conference to give limited approval for separate communion,⁽⁷⁾ and this was confirmed in a carefully worded section of the Plan of Pacification⁽⁸⁾ in 1795, allowing communion where it was desired by the trustees, stewards and leaders and approved by Conference. Not all the societies welcomed the opportunity, and until 1810 the congregation of the Octagon Chapel in Bradford processed to the parish church, their preacher at the head, for Morning Prayer and communion.⁽⁹⁾ This, however, was not a common practice and within a few years it became clear that while Conference wished to delay any decision there was a widespread demand from the ordinary members for communion on Methodist premises regardless of becoming separated from the Church of England. It would seem that both Wesley and the Anglican authorities had underestimated the extent to which Methodism, possessing its own membership, ministry, and places of worship, was already capable of a separate existence, although an agreement was reached in May 1792 between several itinerants, including those stationed in the Birstall, Bradford, Leeds and Dewsbury

circuits, that they would not separate from the Church of England,⁽¹⁰⁾.

There was never any formal separation, nor was there any move from the Anglicans to prevent it, but Methodism's new status as a separate denomination was formalised in 1795 by the wide-ranging Plan of Pacification, and confirmed in the Leeds Regulations, later included within the Form of Discipline of 1797. Every minister had to sign a copy of this document to confirm his allegiance to connexional discipline. The Form involved lay leaders to a very limited extent in some local decision-making,⁽¹¹⁾ but as was pointed out at the time of the Leeds organ case there was no suggestion that this document reduced in any way the power of the preachers or the supremacy of Conference.

While Methodism was still establishing its constitution the first divisions within the connexion were already beginning to emerge, and from 1796 the old title of Methodist required amplification to distinguish one group from another. The new century brought new problems, including Lord Sidmouth's attempt in 1811 to modify the Toleration Act to limit its benefits to preachers with a settled congregation. Had it been successful this change in the law would have made it impossible for either itinerant preachers or local preachers to continue, and would have virtually ended Methodist worship, but the combined opposition of Dissenters and Methodists and the intervention of the Archbishop of Canterbury led to the failure of the Bill.⁽¹²⁾ There were other issues in which Wesleyan Methodists

became deeply involved in the first half of the nineteenth century which did not impinge on the conflicts over the pastoral office which led to the divisions; the anti-slavery campaigns, missions overseas, the Centenary of 1839, criticism of early government plans for schools and then new schemes to create Wesleyan Day Schools and a Wesleyan Normal Institution,⁽¹³⁾ and arguments with the Tractarians.⁽¹⁴⁾ There were also several minor divisions which were short-lived,⁽¹⁵⁾ although the expulsion in 1834 of the Wesleyan minister at Ashton-under-Lyne, Joseph Rayner Stephens, is worthy of brief mention.⁽¹⁶⁾ He had campaigned for disestablishment, and later supported the ten hours movement and the Charter. His followers, the Stephenites, included a group at Halifax whose members founded a branch meeting in what became known as the Liversedge Chartist chapel.⁽¹⁷⁾

Wesleyans and Revivalism

The Wesleyan attitude to revivalism was ambivalent. Revivals were seen as evidence of divine power in extra-ordinary circumstances, which made people wary of criticising them. As George Smith wrote, 'We do not affirm that everything pertaining to these wonderful manifestations of grace lies open to human enquiry'.⁽¹⁸⁾ But by the early nineteenth century those involved in revivalism came largely from the working class, and the movement acquired social as well as pastoral implications. At stake was the unity of Methodism, or a potential division over revivalism separating members according to their social class. Every Methodist preacher was expected to

make converts, but in a connexion originally created by the evangelistic activities of Wesley and his immediate followers, many now favoured dignity in worship and an absence of emotionalism, and wished to move the Methodist societies forward into middle-class respectability. On the other hand many poorer members refused to turn their backs on the enthusiasm of the previous century and still saw Methodism as an evangelistic movement in the style of Wesley and his contemporaries, and actively supported the revivalist campaigns which were still taking place.

The strength of revivalism was indicated by the separation of those who left Wesleyanism to find the freedom to worship and evangelise without constraints from Wesleyan ministers. Those in the Bradford area who joined the Independent Methodists placed themselves within this revivalist tradition, as did those who became part of Primitive Methodism. Although the first leaders of both movements were expelled by the Wesleyans, their subsequent membership came largely from the rural and industrial working classes to whom Wesleyan chapels had little appeal. Professor W. R. Ward has pointed out that the real threat to Wesleyan Methodism arose, not because these small groups separated themselves from their Wesleyan roots, but because after separating they coalesced into what amounted to revivalist connexions.⁽¹⁹⁾ It was an indication of the extent of the changes within Methodism after 1791 that those who left the Wesleyan connexion to join revivalist groups were often remarkably similar to the members of the early Methodist

societies in terms of their social background, while those who remained Wesleyans were noticeably different. Years of attendance at worship had encouraged attitudes of thrift and self-improvement, and produced congregations with middle-class aspirations and decreasing evangelistic fervour.

The greatest challenge to Wesleyan aspirations to respectability came from within their own ranks when revivalism in West Yorkshire came to its climax in the Great Revival of the 1790s. A minister in the Halifax circuit, Robert Lomas, started a revival at Greetland in 1793 which affected all the circuit for a year, and 700 members were received.⁽²⁰⁾ Over nine hundred members were received at Leeds, and Huddersfield, Bradford, Keighley and Hull were similarly affected, then 500 new converts became members of churches in the Birstall Wesleyan circuit,⁽²¹⁾ the revival there being led by William Bramwell, an eminent and respected Wesleyan itinerant preacher who had led a revival at Dewsbury before going to Birstall in 1793. Bramwell went to be superintendent at Sheffield, where he had further evangelistic success.⁽²²⁾

In 1803, when he was in the Leeds circuit, Bramwell resigned from the Wesleyan ministry in order to lead a proposed new Revivalist organisation which would have brought together the Leeds Revivalists (James Sigston's 'Kirkgate Screamers'), the Band Room Methodists of Manchester (who declined to accept ministerial oversight of their band meetings) and the Independent Methodists of Macclesfield.⁽²³⁾ If Bramwell had in fact led this proposed revivalist secession in 1803, within



REV. WILLIAM BRAMWELL.

Illustration 3. William Bramwell

six years of the formation of the Methodist New Connexion, it would have dealt a severe blow to the attempts by the Wesleyan conference to hold all the remaining Methodists together. It would also have changed entirely the course of Independent Methodism and Primitive Methodism, if not of the whole Methodist movement. In the event, several itinerant preachers put pressure on Bramwell not to go ahead on the grounds that 'in the present state of the Methodist body the evils of a schism and a division would be much greater than the evils which he lamented and deplored'.⁽²⁴⁾ Bramwell withdrew his resignation and resumed his duties, the Revivalists returned to the Wesleyan churches in Leeds, and the other groups remained separate until another similar opportunity arose. In London, Jabez Bunting expressed his disquiet over Bramwell's involvement in the planned secession, whilst elsewhere in Methodism clashes continued between ministers who were anxious to maintain church order and discipline, and laymen among their members who demanded the freedom to hold their own evangelistic meetings.

Local revivals were seen as spontaneous and unplanned events, and one at Bradford which began in September 1805 lasted until the end of the year. 'The doors of the Octagon chapel for ten or twelve weeks were scarcely ever closed, either day or night; one party of worshippers frequently waiting without till those within had fulfilled the appointed hour of service.' Nine hundred new members were added to the circuit as a result of this revival, which was led by the

circuit ministers.⁽²⁵⁾ A similar revival at Cleckheaton in 1822 added 120 members, and a much larger revival at Yeadon in 1834 attracted 950 new members.⁽²⁶⁾

Attitudes to revivalism continued to divide Wesleyanism and during the 1840s the arrival of an American Methodist evangelist, James Caughey,⁽²⁷⁾ caused alarm among the ministers. He was banned by Conference from all Wesleyan premises in 1847 on the grounds that evangelisation should be the task of the local ministers rather than the result of special campaigns by outsiders, although as Caughey also advocated total abstinence when the Wesleyans were still unwilling to give this movement the support it received from other Methodist denominations, this was a further factor which led to his rejection. When the new railways enabled them to travel more easily, certain Wesleyan preachers regularly became involved in evangelistic campaigns, Rev. Robert Newton being perhaps the best known,⁽²⁸⁾ although he would have been described not as a revivalist but as a visiting Methodist minister.

Rev. Jabez Bunting and the principle of the Pastoral Office

Rev. Jabez Bunting was no stranger to West Yorkshire, having been at one time the superintendent minister of the Halifax circuit. His open opposition to the Luddite movement in 1812 and his refusal to conduct a funeral service for one of the Luddites at the Wesleyan chapel at Halifax meant that for some months afterwards he did not dare go out alone at night.⁽²⁹⁾ Bunting was also an occasional visitor to special events in

West Yorkshire, attending the opening of Woodhouse Grove School in 1812 and the opening of Eastbrook Chapel in Bradford in 1825, and he came to preach at the opening of Gomersal Chapel in 1828.

However, Bunting spent most of his career in London, and historians of Methodism agree that he was the leading personality within the Wesleyan ministry between about 1810 and 1840, but disagree over whether he was 'the last of the Wesleyans',⁽³⁰⁾ a misunderstood hero, leading the Connexion forward and building up the status of its ministers according to the principle of the pastoral office, or 'the Pope of Methodism',⁽³¹⁾ a dictator, determined to impose his will both on Conference and on the Wesleyan Methodist membership. Perhaps he combined the two roles, but in practice Bunting was unpopular largely because after more than a decade of comparatively weak leadership following Wesley's autocratic rule, 'he united force of personality with force of circumstance to effect a wholesale change in English Methodism,' according to Professor W.R. Ward, who suggests that the problems facing the Wesleyans 'called for the determined exercise of discipline locally, reinforced by the collective action of the pastorate in Conference. Bunting inspired a vigour of central executive activity unseen since Wesley.'⁽³²⁾

Bunting started his preaching in a stronghold of revivalism among the Band Room Methodists of Manchester⁽³³⁾ but his views changed dramatically when he became a Wesleyan minister. When he was appointed to Macclesfield in 1802 the

revivalists there were planning to join Bramwell's proposed secession⁽³⁴⁾ in the following year. From then on Bunting saw revivalism as a threat to Methodist discipline, and at a time when the control of Wesleyan Methodism was indecisive he stepped forward to organise the new denomination, referring to it perhaps for the first time, as 'the church'. Ward describes the practical problems faced by the Wesleyans - revivalism and radicalism were strongly supported by the members, while the Conference adopted a 'divide and conquer' approach to previously strong town circuits, which were made into smaller units despite local opposition. At the same time the economic difficulties affecting the country caused problems within the Connexion.⁽³⁵⁾

Bunting's skill as a preacher was the reason for his early rise to prominence, but it was as an administrator that he became best known, and it was in this capacity that controversy surrounded certain of his decisions, none more so than his urge to develop the principle of the pastoral office within Wesleyan Methodism. The point consistently argued by Jabez Bunting was that the Wesleyan ministers, and they only, had an absolute right and indeed a duty to control every aspect of Wesleyan Methodism. In 1820, following the first fall ever in Wesleyan membership, Bunting 'recalled the preachers to their evangelistic mission...(while encouraging)...the re-establishment of discipline in the flock and in the ministry by the determined exercise of the collective authority of the pastorate.'⁽³⁶⁾

J.C. Bowmer, a former Methodist archivist, has examined the claims of the early Wesleyan ministry in terms of the 'pastoral office'⁽³⁷⁾ a concept established to justify the ministers' position in the power struggle between the laymen and themselves within Wesleyan Methodism. Bowmer suggests that Wesley's Anglican background left him with the firm conviction that in order to be effective as a clergyman he needed to possess and exercise authority over his parishioners. In Wesley's case this authority came from his Anglican ordination, and most significantly, he believed that with it went personal accountability to God for the souls of those under his care.

The Methodist attitude to pastoral authority was based on a definition quoted in the first Conference, called by Wesley in 1744. When the question was asked, 'What is the office of a minister?', the answer given was 'To watch over the souls whom God commits to his charge, as he that must give account.'⁽³⁸⁾ The first such 'ministers' were Methodists who were also ordained Anglicans, but Wesley's lay Itinerant Preachers were expected, in the absence of such clergymen, 'to feed and guide, to teach and govern'. The early Methodist preachers therefore exercised a limited pastoral role which was delegated to them, but after Wesley's death they faced a new and different situation - what was their authority now based upon?

Bowmer⁽³⁹⁾ points out that the Methodist itinerants, known at the beginning of the nineteenth century not as ministers but simply as 'Preachers of the Gospel', were in a quite different situation from the Anglican clergy, who claimed

through their episcopal ordination an authority which was accepted within the Church of England. Nor was their situation like that of Dissenting ministers, who held a quite different form of authority as the result of their appointment to a particular pastorate. The Wesleyan preachers were in fact changing their role from preaching which was literally itinerant, and which had originally involved an unceasing round of travel on foot from society to society covering a vast area, to having the pastoral oversight of a number of churches within a circuit. The Wesleyans retained Wesley's own view that itinerancy was essential to Methodism, providing cross-fertilisation of ideas throughout the Connexion, and insisted on a move to a different circuit every two or three years, or as Ward has expressed it, 'the body of preachers made their transition from a genuine itinerancy to the sham, church-based itinerancy they have maintained ever since.'⁽⁴⁰⁾

Margaret Batty has suggested that while Conference was apparently playing down the status of the itinerants, preventing further ordinations, delaying Methodist communion services, and prohibiting the wearing of gowns and bands and the use of ministerial titles, the connexional leaders in fact publicly asserted, from 1793 at the latest, that the itinerant preacher was a minister in the universally-accepted sense of the word, and held all the authority inherent in that office.

⁽⁴¹⁾ She points out that the Conference sermons, subsequently published in the Magazine, were 'emphasising the preachers' rights to govern all aspects of Methodist life.' Texts were

quoted, such as 'Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls as those that must give an account.' (42) Articles in the Magazine, the oral examinations of candidates, gagging orders, the signing of declarations of conformity, even the Conference obituaries, were seen as ways in which pressure was put on all the ministers to present a united front and conform to the connexional norm.(43)

One important implication of the pastoral office was that a Methodist minister should be set apart from secular employment in order to be employed full-time on pastoral duties, with his financial support provided by the members of his congregations. New Testament precedents were available to support this attitude, although Currie casts doubt on the logic of the argument, pointing out that it could equally be construed as reducing the ministers to paid professionals while the lay members became the genuine leaders.(44) In practice after the ministers became accepted as the only persons able to administer the sacraments of baptism and communion, the power to accept and dismiss members was also claimed by them in accordance with the precedent established by Wesley.

Bunting did not acknowledge lay members who exercised a pastoral function as Local Preachers or class leaders as having a status comparable to that of the ministers, and under the principle of the pastoral office he considered it the right and indeed the duty of the ministers to rule and control the members of the societies. John Kent describes how after 1827

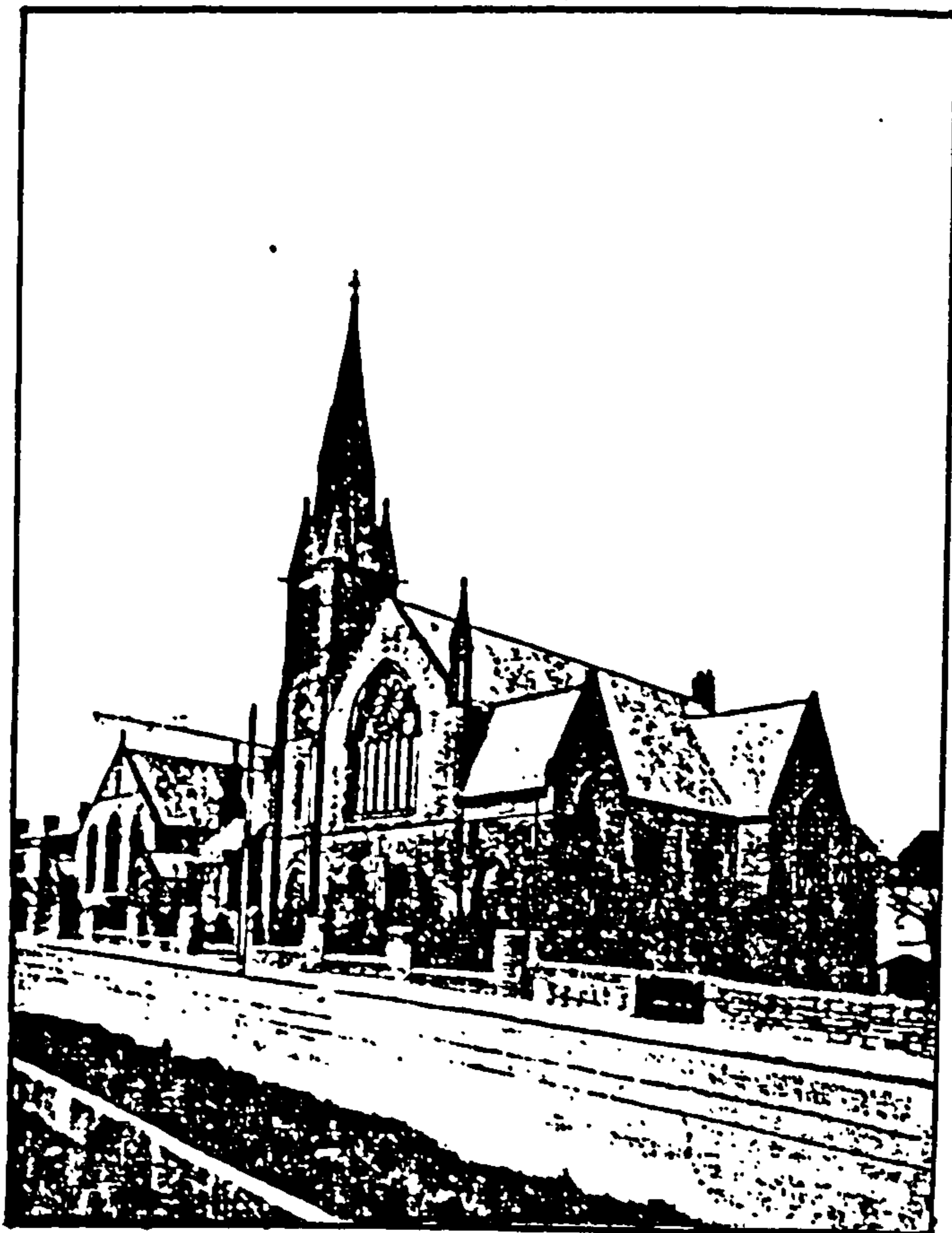
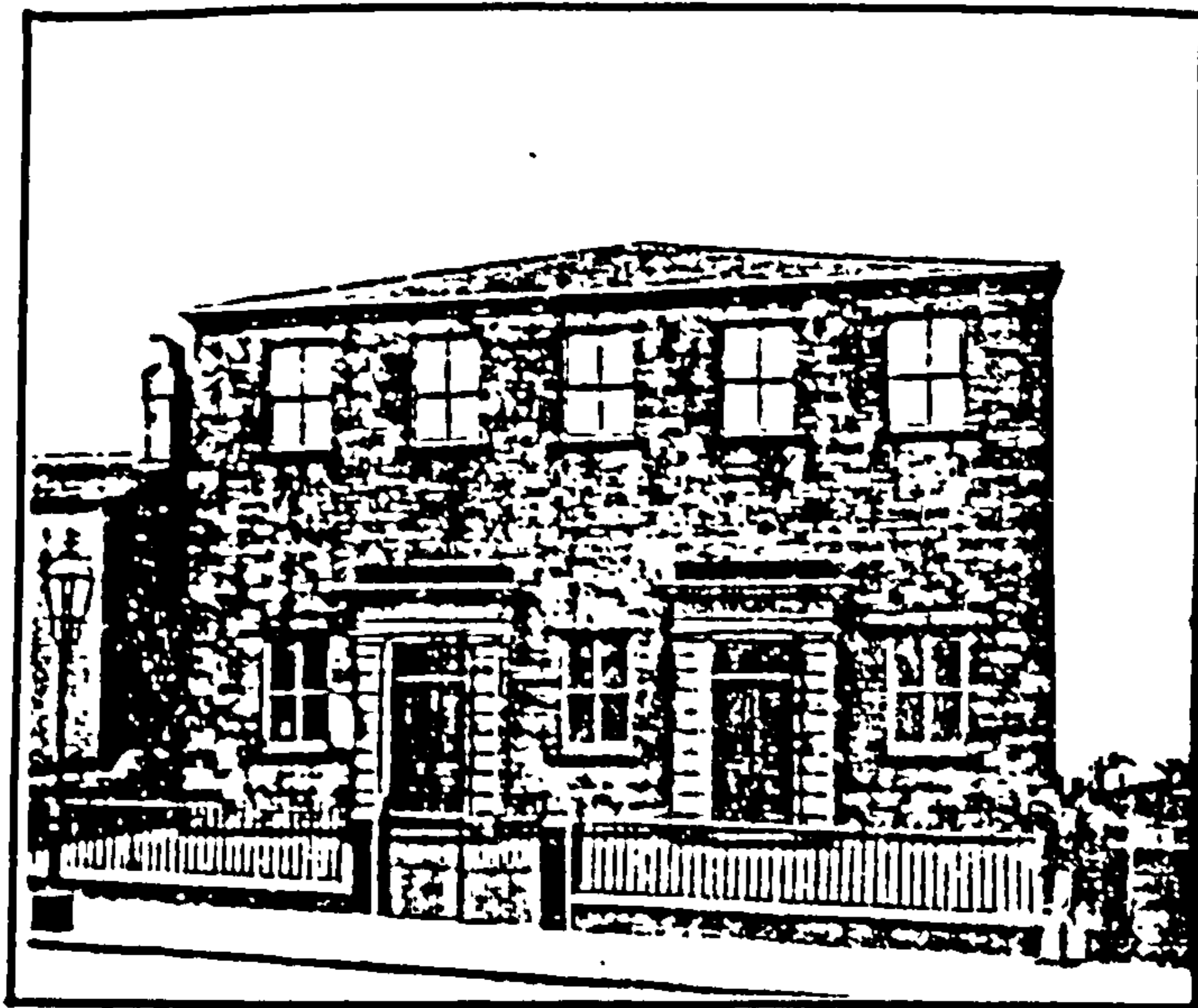


Illustration 4. Westgate Hill Wesleyan Chapel

Old chapel, opened 1800. New chapel, opened 1902, closed 1971

'Bunting took the view that the ministry had an authority somewhat akin to the royal prerogative claimed by the Stuart monarchy; the phrase 'pastoral prerogative' came into fashion, and Bunting believed that this inherent, divinely ordained ministerial authority could not be overridden by an appeal to Conference legislation or to Congregationalist theories of the relationship between the laity and the ministry.' (45) When Bunting's 'high' Wesleyanism was contrasted with the democratic approach of seceding groups he remained convinced that democracy, currently the watchword of political activists, was not appropriate within the church, where without the power of the pastoral office the ministers would be able neither to fulfil their practical responsibilities nor to face the challenge of their divine commission.

Because the ministerial leaders of Wesleyan Methodism supported so strongly the principle of the pastoral office, every effort was made to enhance the status of the ministers. In 1818 the old title of 'Preacher of the Gospel' was replaced by the description of 'minister' and the title of 'Reverend'. From 1836 at the suggestion of Jabez Bunting the ministers were ordained by the laying on of hands, a vote in Conference having been previously considered adequate. (46) The increasing status of the ministers implied by these changes, and emphasised by the opening of the Theological Institution in 1835, was not universally welcomed in Methodism. It is significant that in 1828 the Protestant Methodist secession was a lay organisation with no ordained ministry, following the

precedent established by the Independent Methodists, and that all the subsequent non-Wesleyan groups encouraged lay leadership and held a 'low' view of ministers, and sought ways to avoid the possibility of having too powerful a ministry.

Support for the pastoral office as the key to denominational discipline was frequently Bunting's main theme, and much of his authority came from the positions he held - a member of the Legal Hundred, (47) and secretary of Conference ten times. He became Book Steward and Connexional Editor, Secretary of the Missionary Society, and President of the Theological Institute. In 54 years he attended 53 Conferences, at four of which he was President. He was a member of Connexional Committees, which included many men appointed at his instigation, so he could exercise almost complete control over the Connexion.

Bunting made no secret of his belief that authority and power were necessary to the ministers. 'Where there is duty, there must be power to carry that duty into effect...Talk of the power of the preachers! Why, they would be a very odd set of preachers if they had no power. They would not be the preachers of the New Testament. They would not be the order of preachers which the scriptures recognise, men especially called of God and then especially set apart by the concurrence of the church...if we are to have that charge, we must have power.' (48) The claims of the pastoral office as developed by Bunting were characteristic of Wesleyan Methodism but were never accepted by the other Methodist groups, to whom

Bunting's autocratic style of leadership was seen as 'the whole Methodist Conference buttoned up in one pair of breeches'.(49)

Wesleyan Methodism in the Bradford area

The development of Methodist societies in the Bradford area was encouraged by a series of local revivals between 1790 and the 1830s. These events were significant, although the details of what happened are difficult to assess because the regular Methodist meetings and services held for years or decades in members' houses provide little surviving evidence beyond occasional entries in circuit account books. More detailed evidence of their faith and enthusiasm became available only after they established Wesleyan places of worship, and the pattern of chapel-building is therefore particularly important, as only when there was a building were there chapel records to augment the minutes of the quarterly meetings and the Local Preachers' meetings at circuit level. By 1849 over 60 of the local Wesleyan societies had built their own chapels

Table 3/1 below indicates the very gradual programme of chapel building undertaken by the Wesleyans in the Bingley and Shipley circuits to the north of Bradford. The task continued for over a century. Within Wesleyan Methodism membership involved not only regular attendance at Sunday worship but also weeknight class meetings, where the leader opened the meeting with prayer, and a hymn was sung, after which the leader would ask each member to speak briefly about their recent Christian experiences - problems overcome, and temptations faced.

Table 3/1. Wesleyan chapels in Bingley and Shipley

Chapel	Opened	Present situation
<u>Bingley</u>		
Bingley	1790	Shipley and Bingley
Denholme (Main Road)	1793	Closed 1958
Cullingworth	1806	Keighley circuit
Harden	1814	Closed 1942
Eldwick Crag	1815	Closed c.1930
Wilsden	1823	Bfd West Ct (LEP)
Morton (Lower Chapel)	1828	to Zion 1846
Eldwick Beck (Otley Road)	1832	Shipley and Bingley
East Morton (Zion)	1846	Closed 1960
Micklethwaite	1853	Closed 1958
Gilstead (Ferncliffe Road)	1864	Closed 1995
Castlefields (Crossflatts)	1871	Shipley and Bingley
Bingley (Hill Street Mission)	1870	Closed 1940
<u>Shipley</u>		
Shipley (Providence)	1800	Closed 1959
Baildon (Westgate)	1806	Shipley & Bingley
Windhill	1834	Closed 1961
Baildon Green	1845	Closed 1924
Esholt	1847	Closed 1938
Frizinghall	1847	Closed 1958
Saltaire	1868	Shipley & Bingley
Tong Park	1870	Closed 1959
Charlestown	1870	Closed 1966
Bolton Woods	1886	Closed 1962
Hall Royd	1895	Shipley & Bingley

Methodism also affected the home life of members, whose 'disciplined, simple, pious lives... were...removed from worldly pleasures and centred on home, chapel and business. The duty of hard work, the evils of luxury and extravagance, the virtues of foresight and thrift, moderation and self-discipline were instilled into ordinary church members.' (50) This interaction of home and chapel influence may well explain how Wesleyan Methodism quickly developed into a strong organisation, both nationally and in the Bradford area.

Many second or third generation Methodists were employed in more or less skilled trades, but poverty was by no means uncommon at the end of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth. Writing of another town in Yorkshire, it was claimed that 'the neighbourhood has long been a very neglected one. Its abodes are chiefly those of the lowest ranks in society, and its dwellings therefore generally contain much of the raw material of Methodism.' (51) Authentic accounts survive of a local class meeting held in Mirfield in about 1820 which serve as a reminder that by no means all such meetings took place among the wealthy. One attender later wrote, 'With all this poverty and wretchedness was coupled much kindness. Among the general poverty and squalor there was one family poorer and more squalid than the rest. There was one house that was the constant abode of filth and want. Their beds were nothing but bundles of rags, the stench of which coupled with the damp unwashed floor I can still recall. Yet it was in this abode of misery that meetings for teaching and inculcating

the lofty principles of the gospel of Jesus were carried on, and where the most noisy prayer meetings were held. Though under the most pressing pangs of hunger I could not eat their food, or I might at any time have shared their meals.'(52)

Far from typical, therefore, among the local Methodists was Sir Isaac Holden, born in 1807, who after holding several teaching posts became in 1830 a book-keeper for a firm at Cullingworth, travelling on horse-back to his Sunday appointments as a local preacher in the Bingley circuit. After working for Samuel Lister at Manningham Mills he built up his own textile business, and gave generously to Wesleyan causes including the building of St John's Church in Manningham. Holden became a millionaire and a Liberal M.P. but remained a Methodist local preacher and a member at Eastbrook Chapel in Bradford.(53)

A brief examination of a typical local Methodist society which is still active indicates the way in which most other local societies developed during this period. The society at Thorp in Idle, a village to the north of Bradford, was first mentioned in the account book of the Bradford branch of the Birstall circuit⁽⁵⁴⁾ in July 1763, when a payment from Idle of 2s 10d was recorded. Meetings continued to be held at Idle, with occasional temporary lapses, and the names of the class leaders are known, although nothing is known about them. While members regularly attended Sunday services at the nearest chapel, which was two miles away at Eccleshill, Methodism spread from Idle to the neighbouring communities of Thackley

and Greengates, both of which later had their own chapels, while the Eccleshill society had other outposts at Bolton and Wrose. Separate meetings of the Idle Wesleyans were first held in Jacob Wood's barn in Town Well Fold.

In 1781 there were 30 members at Idle,⁽⁵⁵⁾ eight of whom were weavers, four were spinners, and there was one maltster, a butcher, a comber, a clothier and a tanner. Of the others, the women were apparently housewives, and the men unemployed. Numbers remained around thirty up to 1797, when as a result of the Great West Yorkshire Revival led by William Bramwell the membership rose to over a hundred, and having established a Sunday School in 1805, the members opened the Thorp chapel in 1810. The trustees included 8 men from Idle, 2 from Farnley, 2 from Calverley and one from Bradford, suggesting that the congregation then came from a wide area. This chapel became part of the Woodhouse Grove circuit in 1813, and its members, although challenged by Reformers from Yeadon, remained loyal to Conference during the Reform agitation, and a larger chapel was opened at Idle in 1871.

The Wesleyan places of worship opened within Bradford were so numerous that they are quoted in two parts; Table 3/2 lists the chapels built before the Wesleyan Reform crisis, and Table 3/3 consists of those opened after 1849. Again the pattern of chapel building in Bradford took well over a century, and testified to continuing expansion up to the end of the Victorian period, more or less keeping pace with a rapidly increasing population.

Table 3/2. Wesleyan chapels in Bradford opened 1750-1849

Chapel	Opened	Present Situation
The Octagon	1766	to Kirkgate 1811
Great Horton	1766	Gt Horton Circuit
Eccleshill (Prospect)	1775	to Stoney Lane 1855
Shelf (Witchfield)	1785	Closed 1977
Farnley (Hill)	1797	Leeds West circuit
Clayton Heights (Dolphin)	1806	Great Horton Ct
Low Moor	1809	Trinity circuit
Idle (Thorp)	1810	Woodhouse Grove Ct
Kirkgate	1811	Closed 1938
Woodhouse Grove	1812	Woodhouse Grove Ct
Dudley Hill	1823	Closed 1964
Bradford Moor (Greenhill)	1823	Trinity Circuit
Eastbrook	1825	Closed 1986
Thornton	1825	Bradford (West) Ct
Prospect (Wakefield Road)	1825	Closed 1969
Farsley (Back Lane)	1826	Sold to Reformers 1852
Calverley(Trinity, Clarke St)	1832	Closed 1948
Allerton (Prospect)	1833	Bradford (West)
Wibsey Slackside	1833	Sold to Reformers 1851
Greengates (Brunswick)	1834	Closed 1967
Clayton	1834	Great Horton Ct
Undercliffe	1835	Woodhouse Grove Ct
Abbey (White Abbey)	1838	Closed c1930
Wibsey (Holroyd Hill)	1838	Sold to Reformers 1854
Centenary	1839	to Annesley 1866
Philadelphia(Undercliffe St)	1840	Closed 1905
Low Moor (Oxley Place SS)	1844	Closed 1971
Heaton	1846	Closed 1890
New Leeds(Southend Hall)	1848	Closed 1933

Table 3/3. Wesleyan chapels in Bradford opened 1850-1932

Chapel	Opened	Present situation
Bolton	1853	Woodhouse Grove Ct
Richmond Terrace	1853	Closed 1936
Eccleshill (Stoney Lane)	1855	Closed 1968
Thackley	1856	Woodhouse Grove Ct
Manningham (Carlisle Road)	1859	Closed 1970
Cutler Heights	1860	Trinity circuit
Farsley (Town Street)	1865	Closed c.1970
Clayton Lane Mission	1865	Closed c.1905
Annesley, Little Horton Lane	1866	Closed 1970
Wyke (Huddersfield Road)	1869	Trinity Circuit
Girlington	1870	Bradford West Circuit
Wibsey (High Street)	1870	Gt Horton Ct
Wyke (New Road Side)	1873	Closed c1980
Otley Road	1874	Closed 1968
West Bowling (Rydal Street)	1877	Closed 1941
St John's (Park View Road)	1879	Closed 1968
Victoria Hall (Bolton Road)	1880	Closed 1954
Sandy Lane (Allerton)	1886	Bradford West Circuit
Fairfield Jubilee Hall	1887	Closed c1950
Sunbridge Road Mission	1889	Free Church 1971
Princeville (Legrams Lane)	1889	Gt Horton Ct
Southfield Lane	1889	Gt Horton Ct
Lidget Green	1891	Gt Horton Ct
Bethesda (Maperton Street)	1894	Closed 1952
Tong Street Mission	1895	Closed 1936
Thornbury	1928	Trinity Circuit

Throughout the Birstall and Cleckheaton circuits a very similar pattern of chapel building took place, although Table 3/4 shows that here a higher proportion of chapels were built before 1849. At Cleckheaton, for instance, the first convert was recorded in 1742 and classes began in 1745. The first chapel was opened in 1811 with members living in several local communities, and in time there were outposts in Littleton and Millbridge, both of which organised Sunday Schools. The Cleckheaton trustees, who lived at Liversedge, Cleckheaton or Gomersal, included 5 clothiers, 5 blanket manufacturers, 3 cardmakers, a maltster, a shopkeeper, a carpenter, a cordwainer, a whitesmith and a gentleman.⁽⁵⁶⁾ This list of trustees, like many others, shows occupation but not social status, there being no indication that one cardmaker, Joseph Law, owned a local factory which became probably the largest such enterprise in the country. This was quite in keeping with the Methodist ethos, as there would be no doubt who owned the mill where other members were employed, but within the chapel community, where people were often related by marriage and knew each other's family, such social differences were less important than they were elsewhere.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Such societies showed characteristics typical of eighteenth-century Wesleyanism; a small group of enthusiasts inspired by the first generation of lay leaders and going to hear Wesley preach whenever he was in the area. Gradually attracting more members, they held their own weeknight meetings in homes or in rented rooms led usually by local preachers, and occasionally by ministers. They went to

Table 3/4. Wesleyan chapels in Birstall and Cleckheaton.

Chapel	Opened	Present situation
Birstall	1750	Birstall & Spen Ct
Morley	1770	Morley Ct
Hightown	1774	Closed 1983
Westgate Hill	1800	Closed 1971
Batley	1821	Closed 1955
Churwell	1821	Morley Ct
Gomersal	1828	Birstall & Spen Ct
Drighlington	1837	Morley Ct
Staincliffe	1838	Closed 1967
Gildersome (Greenside)	1845	Morley circuit
Gildersome Street	1845	Closed 1960
Little Gomersal	1845	Closed 1964
Birkenshaw (Old Lane)	1870	Closed 1971
Howden Clough	1872	Birstall & Spen Ct
Birstall (Mount Top)	1880	Closed 1977
Brighouse (Park)	1795	Taken by Reformers 1853
Cleckheaton (New Road)	1811	Sold to Reformers 1851
Cleckheaton (Northgate)	1853	to Whitcliffe Road 1889
Cleckheaton (Whitcliffe Rd)	1889	Closed 1966
Heckmondwike (Greenside)	1811	to Parkside 1866
Heckmondwike (Parkside)	1866	Closed 1959
Scholes	1824	Closed 1967
Roberttown	1839	Birstall & Spen Ct
Wyke (Common)	1843	Taken by Reformers 1851
Littletown	1844	Sold to Reformers 1851
Millbridge	1874	Closed 1967
Oakenshaw	1874	Closed 1977
Hartshead	1884	Closed 1966
Hartshead Moor	1890	Closed 1967

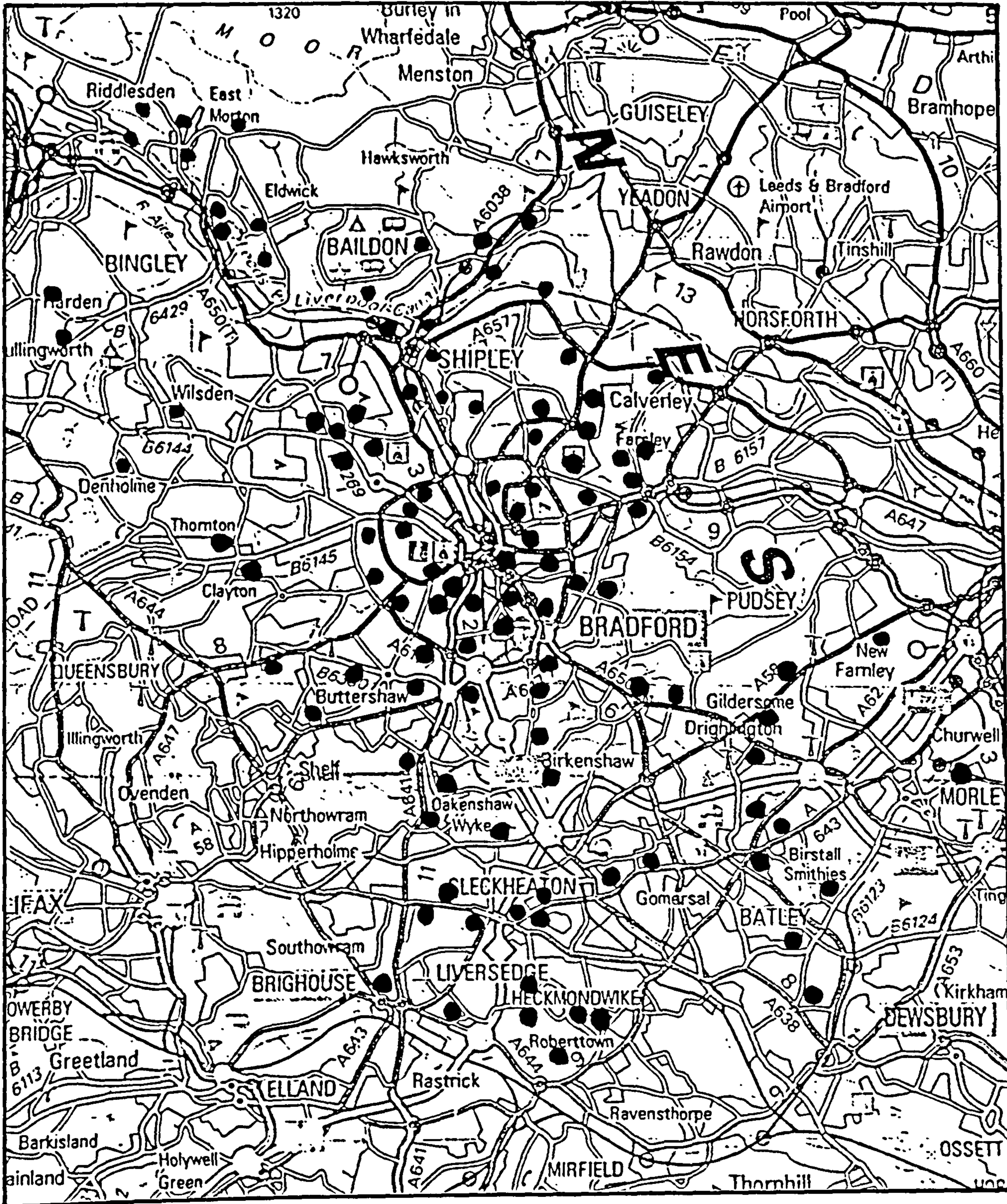
a Methodist chapel in another village until they could afford their own place of worship, a rule of thumb guide for such expenditure being a membership of about a hundred. Such societies then grew steadily with well-attended Sunday services and growing Sunday Schools.

Conclusion

The seeds of discord were being planted during what appeared to be years of progress and consolidation during Wesley's lifetime. Afterwards, with no comparable leader to hold together the opposing factions, every attempt to strengthen the hand of Conference and the ministers and every reference to the pastoral office increased tension between ministerial leaders and members, and it was this which made the divisions inevitable.

When Wesley died in 1791 Bradford was little more than a village without a mill chimney, approached by turnpike roads and the canal which eventually linked the community to both coasts. By 1857 the town had Borough status and was the acknowledged leader in worsted textile manufacture, with railway links to the rest of Great Britain. Meanwhile the town had greatly expanded, and change brought with it new social problems. Methodism in the area had also changed, partly in an attempt to keep pace with the growth of population, but partly through internal conflict.

In 1791 there had been only a handful of purpose-built Methodist Preaching Houses in the Bradford area, but by 1857 the Methodists had largely become established congregations



Map 3. Wesleyan Methodist Chapels.

within their own chapels. The Wesleyans had 65 places of worship in the Bradford area, the various Reformist groups had 28, and the Primitive Methodists 21, with a further handful of chapels belonging to the smaller Methodist groups. The question of the sacraments and whether or not Methodism should remain within the Church of England had been settled quickly, and separation had taken place before the end of the eighteenth century, but the question of authority within the church continued to harass Methodism. It was the primary cause of every division, and as long as the ministers remained certain that the pastoral office gave them absolute power within the church there was no room for compromise. Every new Methodist movement which was created as a result of lay refusal to accept ministerial authority found an echo in the Bradford area, and as new Methodist societies formed their own separate classes and societies and struggled to build their own places of worship, they were following virtually the same pattern of development as the early Methodists of the previous century.

Revivalism became an issue in the Bradford area as members were drawn into Methodism by Bramwell and others in the Great Yorkshire Revival at the end of the eighteenth century, and other local revivals followed. An emphasis on maintaining revivalist worship became the main factor as members moved away from Wesleyan Methodism to join the Independent Methodists, and later the Primitive Methodists.

Bunting controlled Wesleyan Methodism for three decades, and the connexion accepted this throughout his ministry. His

personal visits to the Bradford area appear to have been well received, but there were many who rejected his emphasis on the authority of the ministry and the pastoral office. When the divisions came, they had in the long term a devastating impact in making Methodism a group of divided denominations instead of a united community. Given the strongly held attitudes on both sides of each dispute, and the inflexibility of Jabez Bunting, it is difficult to imagine any other outcome.

The overall impression remains that there was little sympathy among the ministerial leaders of Wesleyan Methodism towards those who in good conscience held different views. It seems probable that none of the leaders of the separating groups would have chosen to leave the Wesleyans had they been permitted to remain, but this was a period when both matters of religious faith and the principle of democratic freedom aroused strong feelings. There is no suggestion of deliberate malice from either side, but all those involved were not only committed to their point of view, they were certain that they were right. Yet when Bunting was certain that he was right, so were Kilham and Bramwell, Sigston and Warren. And so were James Everett, Samuel Dunn and William Griffiths, the three ministers expelled by the 1849 Conference. Perhaps the most surprising outcome, in the circumstances, was that Wesleyan Methodism remained the largest and the strongest of all the Methodist denominations.

The disagreements at national level changed the whole pattern of Methodism in the Bradford area. In 1791, in spite of

differences of opinion over separation from the Church of England and the question of who should be involved in making decisions, all those who claimed to be Methodists in Bradford and the surrounding villages worshipped together in each place, either in their own recently-built preaching houses or more often in members' homes or rented rooms. More importantly they knew each other within their communities and experienced a sense of unity through belonging to different societies within the same circuit. The idea that there could be more than one sort of Methodist would have seemed absurd to such people, and the lists of chapels in the Wesleyan tradition illustrate the continuing vitality of the 'Old Body' throughout the nineteenth century. Despite the divisions, Wesleyanism remained the largest and most powerful Methodist denomination, with a membership in 1791 of 56,605, representing 1.8 per cent of the population, and by 1856 this had become 242,296, or 3.8 per cent of the population.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Yet the monopoly of Methodism was slipping away from the Wesleyans within five years of Wesley's death, and by 1857 there were congregations in the Bradford area claiming allegiance to seven different forms of Methodism; Wesleyan Methodism, the Methodist New Connexion, Independent Methodism, the Wesleyan Methodist Association, Primitive Methodism, the United Methodist Free Churches and the Wesleyan Reform Union.

Notes

1. Ward, Faith and Faction, p.50.

2. J. Wesley, Works, vol. viii, 1766, pp. 298-301, quoted in Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, p.247.
3. J. Wesley, Deed of Declaration, 1784, quoted in R. Davies, A.R. George and G. Rupp, (eds) The Methodist Church, Vol. 4, 1988, p. 195.
4. W.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman and G.Eayrs, (eds), A New History of Methodism, London, 1909, p.382.
5. The Circular was signed by nine preachers including John Pawson then at Birstall and John Allen at Bradford. G. Smith, History of Wesleyan Methodism, 1863, Vol. 2, p. 84.
6. This had the effect of separating the local Methodists into different districts; District 13 consisted of Halifax, Colne, Keighley, Bradford and Huddersfield. District 14 included Leeds, Sheffield, Wakefield, Birstall, Dewsbury and Otley. Smith, Wesleyan Methodism, vol. 2, p. 88.
7. Davies, et al., The Methodist Church, Vol. 4, p. 255.
8. The Plan of Pacification, Minutes of the Methodist Conference, 1795, quoted in Davies et al, The Methodist Church, Vol. 4, p. 264.
9. Stamp, Wesleyan Methodism in Bradford, pp 49,97.
10. J. James, The History and Topography of Bradford and its Parish, Bradford, 1841, p.234.
11. Bowmer, Pastor and People p. 61.
12. Smith, Wesleyan Methodism, Vol.2, p. 502.
13. The Wesleyan Normal Institution founded in Horseferry Road, London in 1851 was later known as Westminster College and moved to Oxford in 1959.

14. Smith, Wesleyan Methodism, Vol. 3, p. 432.
15. Several small local groups existed for a limited period and remained separate organisations outside mainstream Methodism. These included the Methodist Unitarians of north-east Lancashire, the followers of Joseph Cooke. They had links with Chartism and the Rochdale Co-operative movement and were active from 1806 to 1857. Davies et. al., The Methodist Church, Vol. 2, pp. 326-329, .
16. M.S. Edwards, Purge this Realm, a Life of J.R. Stephens, 1994.
17. Halifax and Huddersfield Express, 14 April 1838, quoted by John Hargreaves in his unpublished Ph.D. thesis at Huddersfield University; 'a small chapel has been opened in Cleckheaton by the seceding Wesleyan Methodists of the Halifax circuit at which William Smith of Halifax was one of the preachers.' John Hargreaves has suggested in conversation that this was a Stephenite group, and support for Stephens in the Spen Valley may have been encouraged by Joseph Forsyth, Wesleyan minister at Cleckheaton in 1829, who was expelled in 1834 on doctrinal grounds at the same time as Stephens. The support Stephens gave to the Chartists, particularly his advocacy of the right to carry arms, suggests that the Stephenites who used the room over some cottages in Knowler Hill opposite the end of Church Lane at Liversedge might easily have been referred to as Chartists. They may have been 'Chartists in the week and Stephenites on Sundays', M.S. Edwards, Purge this Realm, a Life of J.R. Stephens, 1994, p. 82. Either the same people or others

- certainly used the premises as a Chartist Chapel, where Ben Rushton of Ovenden was an occasional preacher. F. Peel, Spenn Valley Past and Present, 1893, p. 318-324, F. Peel. Nonconformity in the Spenn Valley, Heckmondwike, 1891, p. 196.
18. Smith, Wesleyan Methodism, Vol.3, p. 615.
 19. Ward, Faith and Faction, 1993, p. 270.
 20. Smith, Wesleyan Methodism, Vol. 2, p. 237.
 21. Ibid., p. 241.
 22. T. Harris, The Christian Minister in earnest, a memoir of the Rev William Bramwell, London, n/d, c.1880, pp.43-46.
 23. W.R. Ward, The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting, London, 1972, p. 46, note 3.
 24. A. Mounfield, A Short History of Independent Methodism, Wigan, 1905, p. 5.
 25. Smith, Wesleyan Methodism, Vol. 2, p. 418.
 26. Ibid., Vol. 3, pp. 65 and 296.
 27. Davies, et al., The Methodist Church, Vol. 2, p. 223.
 28. Ibid., p.231.
 29. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, 1980, p. 641.
 30. Gregory, Sidelights, 1898, p. 530; Kent, The Age of Disunity, pp.103-126.
 31. J. Kirsop, Historic Sketches of Free Methodism, 1885, p.20, and R. Currie, Methodism Divided, 1968, p. 37.
 32. Ward, Faith and Faction, p. 239.
 33. Ward, Early Correspondence, p. 10.
 34. Ibid., p.46, note 3.

35. Ibid., p. 7.
36. Ibid., p. 6.
37. J.C. Bowmer, Pastor and People, a study of Church and ministry in Wesleyan Methodism from the death of John Wesley to the death of Jabez Bunting, 1975.
38. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, 1766.
39. Bowmer, Pastor and People, p. 200
40. Ward, Faith and Faction, p. 279.
41. M. Batty, Stages in the Development and Control of Wesleyan Lay Leadership, Peterborough, 1988, p. 13.
42. Ibid., p. 17.
43. Ibid., pp. 18-19.
44. Currie, Methodism Divided, p. 39
45. Davies, et al., The Methodist Church, Vol. 2, p. 214.
46. Townsend, et al., New History of Methodism, pp.387 and 405
47. Ibid., p.405.
48. Anon, Dr Bunting's Visit to Leeds, June 19th 1850, Leeds, 1850, quoted in Davies et al (eds), The Methodist Church, Vol.2, p.274.
49. R. Davies, Methodism, 1985, p. 121.
50. Davies et al (eds), The Methodist Church, Vol. 2, p.118.
51. D. Mc Allum, 'Memoir of the Rev. David Stoner' in The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, May 1827, p. 150.
52. J. Terry, 'Recollections of my life', unpublished family m.s., n/d. c. 1876, p.19.
53. D.C. Dews, Ranters, Revivalists, Radicals, Reformers and Revolutionaries - A Celebration of Methodist Local Preaching in

Yorkshire, Leeds, 1996, p. 38.

54. Bradford Circuit Book 1763-1788, WYAS Bradford, Ref. DB.16.C/52.

55. Unspecified contemporary document quoted in W. Watson, Idle Thorpe Wesleyan Chapel 1810-1910, Bradford, 1910, p. 68.

56. A pamphlet produced by Haigh Chadwick Ltd of Cleckheaton, to mark 150 years of trading, 1986, p.2. This firm bought the Cleckheaton Wesleyan chapel about 1879 and incorporated it into their adjacent property. It became a store, but was always known as 'the chapel' until demolition in 1985. The nineteen original trustees were; Joseph Law, Joseph Mann, John Hodgson, John Brook, Jonathan Crosley, Benjamin Garside, Joseph Wood, James Walker, Benjamin Blackburn, William Naylor, James Brearley, Jonathan Gledhill, Robert Wharton, Thomas Lang, Richard Lang, Samuel Standerling, Thomas Brook, Samuel Armitage and Benjamin Fitton.

57. The details of occupations on Trust documents are not a good indication of social status simply because of the reluctance of wealthier trustees to emphasise the social differences between the other trustees and themselves. In practice no-one was unaware of the differences. At Broomfield U.M.F.C. chapel near Cleckheaton one of several trustees described simply as a spinner owned one of the largest spinning mills in the district.

58. A.D. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England, 1976, pp. 27-28.

SECTION B. THE EARLY DIVISIONS WITHIN BRADFORD METHODISM

The three chapters in this section examine the origins of the four Methodist groups which separated from the Wesleyan Methodists before 1825; the Methodist New Connexion which seceded in 1797, and the three main denominations which began through revivalist activities by their early members; the Independent Methodists, the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians.

All these early divisions shared one significant characteristic - while there were in every case disagreements between individuals, what conflict there was remained local and personal, and tended to be brief.

Even in the case of the Methodist New Connexion, formed by the first Methodist secessionists to become established as a separate denomination, there were only two short periods of dispute and animosity. The first around 1797 was connected with the initial establishment of the movement, when the disagreements were confined to Wesleyans who held different opinions, and the second in the 1840s was the result of the controversy over the expulsion of Rev. Joseph Barker, which led one quarter of the members to follow him out of the Methodist New Connexion.

Chapter 4

The Methodist New Connexion

Introduction

One question recurred with every division - was separation inevitable, or could the unity of Methodism be retained? The rejection by Conference of Alexander Kilham's call for greater democracy within Methodism, and his refusal to remain silent at what he saw as unjust church government, made separation inevitable. Across the country, particularly in the north and midlands, a minority of Methodists supported Kilham.

The way in which he was treated by the Conference caused dismay and anger among the Wesleyan congregations in Birstall and the Spen Valley, and led to the establishment of secessionist societies there, although there was not the same enthusiasm for the New Connexion in Bradford. During the 1840s all the local Methodist New Connexion societies were affected by the Barkerite controversy.

The Methodist New Connexion secession was of particular importance because in its objectives, its attitude to Wesleyan authority, and its methods it established the pattern followed by later secessionist groups. Although the M.N.C. was formed before the phrase 'pastoral office' was used by the Wesleyans, this was in practice the first of the secessions over the question of ministerial authority.

The origins of the Methodist New Connexion

The previous chapter referred to the two challenges facing the Methodist leadership after Wesley's death in 1791; one

concerned relationships with the Church of England, the other centred on the authority granted to the itinerant preachers as successors of Wesley, and whether or not they should administer the sacraments of baptism and communion to the Methodists in their own chapels. Alexander Kilham and his followers wanted more lay involvement and greater democracy within their church life, and sought to be separate from the Church of England. There was some support for Kilham from ministers and members, and Colin Dews⁽¹⁾ has suggested that the West Yorkshire Revival in the early 1790s, by introducing into the local Methodist societies hundreds of new members who did not share the traditional Methodist allegiance to the Church of England, brought about changes in the outlook of Methodism which encouraged more liberal attitudes, and provided extra support for Kilham. By insisting that real authority came democratically 'from below' rather than through a hierarchical system, Kilham pitted himself against Wesleyanism, which retained Wesley's attitude that 'rulers were given their power by God...people were not fit or qualified to govern'.⁽²⁾

Kilham wrote a series of pamphlets advocating separate communion services led by Methodist preachers, and demanding greater lay involvement in decision making in the chapels and circuits. At the 1795 Conference he was among a small minority of preachers who expressed dissatisfaction with the Plan of Pacification.⁽³⁾ Kilham continued to protest, and in 1795 he wrote his most significant pamphlet, The Progress of Liberty,⁽⁴⁾ advocating self-government with liberty of

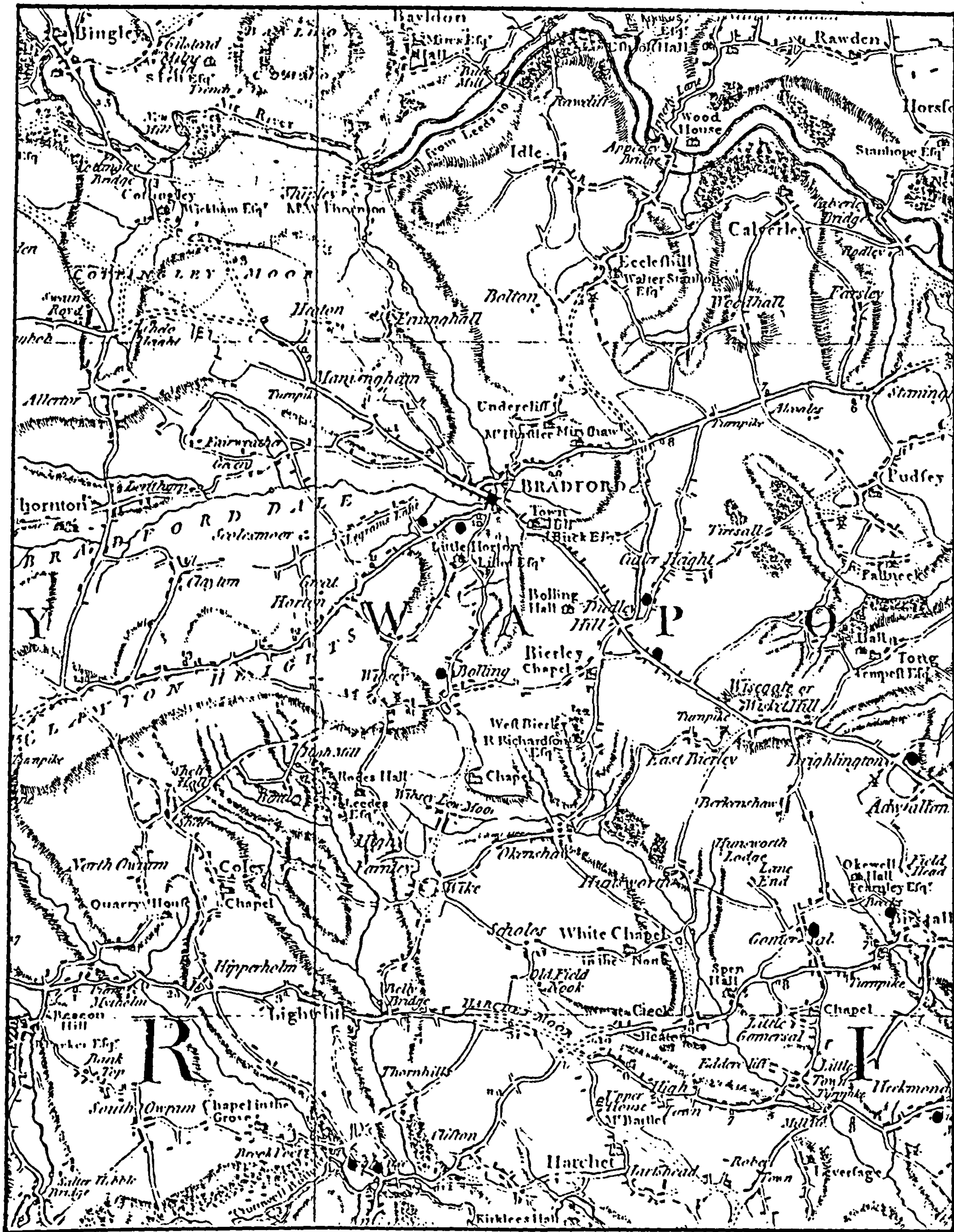
conscience in religious matters, contrasting the political freedom being found within society with the restrictions imposed by the itinerant preachers on Methodist lay members, and suggesting a revised constitution. He was summoned to a District Meeting to defend his actions, and was then called to the Conference of 1796 where he was described as a Paineite and a Leveller and he was expelled from Methodism for writing controversial pamphlets. Some of the reforms he proposed within Methodism certainly led to him being seen as politically suspect, a point not lost on his opponents.(5)

As the number of his supporters grew, Kilham bought the former Ebenezer Particular Baptist chapel at Leeds to be used for worship which was Methodist in style but outside the control of Conference.(6) When the Wesleyan Conference met in Leeds in 1797, negotiations took place with representatives of a Convention or Delegate Meeting of Kilham's supporters, and when the Conference issued the Leeds Regulations, which amounted to a rejection of Kilham's position, the delegates decided to form a separate denomination. At Ebenezer Chapel on 9 August 1797 they held the first Conference of 'The New Itineracy', soon to be renamed 'The Methodist New Connexion', whose members separated 'with great reluctance' from the parent body. (7)

Edward Thompson has traced the political involvement within the New Connexion, and suggests that certain groups within the movement probably had links with Jacobinism. He points out that in Huddersfield, where one third of the

Wesleyans joined the New Connexion, Kilhamites were known as 'Tom Paine Methodists', and in Halifax where they took over the Wesleyan premises at Bradshaw, the members debated political as well as religious issues.⁽⁸⁾ Such radical political activity was quite unacceptable to the Wesleyan hierarchy, who were seeking to establish the reputation of Methodism as a responsible organisation, firmly under the control of Conference and its ministers. Knowing that their actions were being closely studied by the government, the leaders of Methodism were anxious to distance themselves from any suggestion of radical involvement among their members.

David Hempton also offers a political interpretation of Kilham's expulsion, claiming that during 1795 and 1796 Kilham's rhetoric over the need for Methodist freedom was considered to be dangerously close to contemporary radical demands for greater political freedom. Because the leaders of Methodism were anxious for the Connexion to be seen as loyal to the king and to the establishment, Hempton describes Kilham as 'both instigator and victim of a major conservative reaction within Methodism in the autumn and winter of 1795-6'.⁽⁹⁾ Similarly, Semmel sees Kilham's call for democracy as the cause of his expulsion, claiming that having been obliged to give way to more moderate demands by issuing the Plan of Pacification, 'Conference turned against the uncompromising egalitarianism of men like Alexander Kilham, as a sign to the government that Methodism intended to keep its own house in order'.⁽¹⁰⁾ According to George Smith,⁽¹¹⁾ Kilham's leadership of the



Map 4. Methodist New Connexion Chapels.

M.N.C. set the pattern for subsequent reforming movements. 'Every subsequent agitator of the Connexion has succeeded just as he has copied Mr Kilham. Nothing really new in this way has since been brought forth. He was, in the full sense of the word, the first and only Methodist "Reformer".'

The New Connexion attracted a nucleus of ministers, among them William Thom, a thoughtful and effective minister and administrator who gave up his seat on the Wesleyan Legal Hundred to become Kilham's successor, as well as charismatic local preachers like John Shaw, a weaver from Pudsey,⁽¹²⁾ and Ben Rushton, another weaver from Ovenden near Halifax, who became a leader of the Poor Law agitation and a Chartist, being a leading speaker at the 1839 Chartist Camp Meeting at Peep Green near Hartshead.⁽¹³⁾

Worship and doctrine in the New Connexion remained very similar to those in Wesleyanism, but responsibilities and decision-making were shared between ministers and members, and Conference consisted of equal numbers of ministers and laymen. At first only about five per cent of the Wesleyans, some 5,000 people altogether, seceded to the New Connexion. Membership of the M.N.C. rose gradually, but remained at between five and eight per cent of the Wesleyan numbers as both denominations increased in size.⁽¹⁴⁾ Membership reached 10,000 in 1821, and this doubled by 1841, after which there was a temporary decrease caused by the Barkerite controversy. The hope that the New Connexion might gain new members as a result of subsequent Reform movements never materialised in spite of a certain

amount of encouragement on their part.⁽¹⁵⁾

Joseph Barker and the Barkerite Controversy

The Barkerite controversy weakened the Methodist New Connexion nationally and almost ended it in the textile district of West Yorkshire, and Joseph Barker's autobiography⁽¹⁶⁾ provides more than a hint of some instability as it records his constantly changing opinions on matters of religion and freedom. Born in 1806, Barker was brought up in the Wesleyan chapel at Bramley near Leeds, but he failed his first trial sermon as a local preacher, and his final trial sermon was considered barely satisfactory in terms of doctrine.⁽¹⁷⁾ Frustrated by the regulations of Wesleyan Methodism he became a member and subsequently a minister in the New Connexion. Having married without Conference permission, Barker continued to claim the freedom to hold different views, only to find that the New Connexion insisted on ministerial conformity as much as the Wesleyans. There were clashes with ministers and officials in his various circuits on points of doctrine, and his unorthodox views led to an unsuccessful challenge at Conference before he was accepted as a minister in full connexion. Barker, however, became a popular preacher, well known for speaking at meetings where he opposed socialism and infidelity and supported temperance,⁽¹⁸⁾ but he found himself at variance with his colleagues as his views hardened on basic matters of doctrine.

Barker began to object to the creeds, refusing to baptise and denying the necessity of the sacraments, and he spoke against the paid ministry and in favour of greater democracy

within the churches. Despite his heterodox views, it was said that 'on the platform or the pulpit, amidst all changes of theological and political doctrine, Barker was irresistible. Widely read...he was eloquent, skilful, adroit and daring.' He had 'an intimate acquaintance with the scriptures, a ready humour, biting sarcasm, and an abundance of illustrations...to the artisans and labouring classes of the north...he was almost an idol.'⁽¹⁹⁾

When Barker was expelled on doctrinal grounds at the 1841 Conference of the New Connexion held in Halifax, 4,348 members, a quarter of the connexion, withdrew in sympathy, and 29 churches seceded. A leading figure among them at first was Barker's friend and colleague William Trotter, who was expelled at the same Conference. This was ostensibly because of his criticisms of the Preachers' Beneficent Fund, to which he refused to contribute on the grounds that it was contrary to the maxim 'Lay not up treasures on earth', and he also claimed the connexion was holding an unduly large sum in that account which could have been used in evangelism. Trotter issued a pamphlet, 'The Justice and Forbearance of the Methodist New Connexion Conference'⁽²⁰⁾, complaining that the real reason for his expulsion was his known association with Barker, rather than his conscientious objection to the Beneficent Fund.

Barker became an active Chartist, and was editor of The Reformer's Almanac and The People, and addressed Chartist meetings while opposing the use of physical force. He found considerable support in the West Riding ⁽²¹⁾ and he was

imprisoned for his political activities in 1848. Barker became first a Unitarian, followed Quakerism, and then became an unbeliever. He emigrated to America, later returning to England where he lectured widely on Secularism and Atheism before returning to Methodism and becoming a Primitive Methodist Local Preacher. Barker then returned to America, where he died in 1875, described on his memorial cards as 'Preacher, Author and Controversialist.'(22)

Barker's autobiography said very little about the secession which followed his expulsion from the New Connexion in 1841, beyond claiming that 'there was great excitement throughout the whole connexion...the feeling in my favour was very strong and very general. One third of the whole connexion probably separated from my opponents and formed themselves into a new society.'(23) In practice this secession of a quarter of the members confirmed that despite his unpredictable changes of opinion many people were attracted by Barker's personal charisma and eloquence, and they chose to follow him rather than remain within the New Connexion.

A highly critical comment on Barker's character was written by the first U.M.F.C. minister at Cleckheaton in 1860, Rev John Clarke, who knew him personally. John Clarke occasionally addressed meetings to oppose Barker's atheist views, and at Brighouse, then in the Cleckheaton circuit, Clarke spoke on 'The Difficulties of Infidelity' after Barker had put forward the atheist position at a previous meeting. In his private reminiscences Clarke writes that, 'Barker was a

strange man; he always professed to be thoroughly honest and conscientious in all his changes, and to follow his sincere convictions, though he veered like a weathercock to every point on the religious and even the irreligious compass. Scarcely a subject on which he at any time preached, lectured or wrote, that he did not sometime flatly contradict himself and maintain the very opposite.'(24)

Those who left the New Connexion with Joseph Barker were generally referred to as 'Barkerites', but also used the title 'Christian Brethren'. This title had previously been used by Independent Methodist groups in West Yorkshire between about 1815 and 1830⁽²⁵⁾ and was used by Plymouth Brethren from about 1839. ⁽²⁶⁾ The possibility of some links between the Barkerite Christian Brethren and the Plymouth Brethren has been examined by David Brady,⁽²⁷⁾ and despite the difficulties caused by both groups using the same title he has traced occasional incidents of co-operation between the two groups in Lancashire as well as some individuals, such as William Trotter, who at different times were members of both groups. Although among historians of Methodism the title of Christian Brethren is generally considered to be synonymous with the Barkerites, in West Yorkshire the title was also used after 1841 by three Independent Methodist societies which had no Barkerite associations.⁽²⁸⁾

Little is known of the Barkerite Christian Brethren movement except that it was led mainly by laymen, attracted working-class support, and most of the more or less autonomous

societies were apparently short-lived. There may have been as many as 200 societies using the title, but there is no evidence to suggest that there was any central control of the movement, and according to an article by Herbert McLachlan⁽²⁹⁾ the Christian Brethren worshipped where they could, only a small minority having been able to take over the churches originally built by the M.N.C. which they attended. Their premises and their societies were often referred to simply as 'Christian Churches', and a strong influence within the Christian Brethren movement as well as some financial support came from Unitarianism. This led to some Christian Brethren societies becoming officially Unitarian, as happened at Pudsey.⁽³⁰⁾ On the other hand, McLachlan pointed out that among the Christian Brethren there was also a tendency to retain Methodist practices and terminology, and some societies joined other Methodist groups including the Independent Methodists, as in West Yorkshire, and the United Methodist Free Churches. Others joined the non-Methodist Bible Christians.⁽³¹⁾ There were no references to any surviving groups using the title of Christian Brethren when McLachlan wrote in 1923.

Barker showed some interest in the Methodist Unitarian movement in East Lancashire,⁽³²⁾ not many miles from his own home area in West Yorkshire. Support for the Christian Brethren movement was strong in both these areas, and there were certain similarities between these two movements in addition to their common background within Methodism. Both consisted largely of working men, and in both there was an active political aspect,

shown in support for the Charter and encouragement for Co-operation,⁽³³⁾ as well as an egalitarian attitude which was anti-clerical in the chapel and anti-establishment in politics. Some degree of mutual awareness if not co-operation between the Barkerite Christian Brethren societies in East Lancashire and the Methodist Unitarians there seems at least probable.

Among those loyal to Barker was a local preacher in the Christian Brethren society at Rastrick near Brighouse during the 1840s, who described how 'the Chartists, the Socialists and various religious reformers were hard at work...Joseph Barker had just left the New Connexion...and I and a number of friends heartily drank in the great truths he unfolded. A sect sprang up, and we banded together and called ourselves Christian Brethren. We had preaching places in different towns such as Huddersfield, Rastrick, Heckmondwike, Birstall, etc. Most of the preachers on the plan and a great part of the members left the New Connexion at the time of Barker and William Trotter'.⁽³⁴⁾

Without the membership losses caused by the Barkerite controversy the New Connexion would have been a larger and stronger organisation nationally, and would have remained a far more significant part of Methodism in Bradford, Birstall and the Spen Valley.

The Methodist New Connexion in the Bradford area

Most support for the Methodist New Connexion came from the north and the midlands, and in West Yorkshire the towns surrounding Bradford had considerable numbers of M.N.C.

societies - Leeds had eleven, the Batley and Dewsbury area had nine, Huddersfield had fourteen and there were sixteen in Halifax. (35) Except for a short-lived attempt by the Halifax M.N.C. circuit to establish a preaching-room at Bingley in 1819, (36) there was no New Connexion activity in the Bingley or Shipley circuits. Because it was a secessionist movement, every New Connexion society might be assumed to have started with a group of members who had withdrawn from the nearest Wesleyan chapel, and in Birstall and the Spen Valley the New Connexion congregations were typical secessionist societies, but this was never the case in Bradford, where there was only limited and late support for the movement.

The first Methodist New Connexion society in Bradford owed its origins to the enthusiasm of William Grandage, who had attended a New Connexion Chapel in Halifax before removing to Bradford. His personal support for the New Connexion led to meetings being held at a house in Manchester Road, and a Sunday School being started in Hall Ings. This in turn led to the building of Ebenezer chapel near the town centre in 1839 (37) but their first minister, Rev. William Trotter was a friend and supporter of Joseph Barker. When both ministers were expelled from the New Connexion in 1841 Trotter wrote protesting his innocence, (38) and the majority of the congregation at Ebenezer seceded with Trotter and held separate Barkerite services, first in the Temperance Hall and then in premises in Croft Street, where Barker laid the foundation stone in November 1841. Trotter later moved to Lancashire where he

became a leader among the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren.

This secession reduced the Ebenezer M.N.C. society to about twenty members (39) but over the next forty years they increased their membership. Bradford corporation compulsorily purchased their premises for a road widening scheme, and in 1879 they built Mannville chapel in Great Horton Road, but its upkeep was beyond the resources of its members.(40) They took twenty-five years to pay off the building debts, then in 1906 they sold the chapel and moved to more compact new premises in Shearbridge Road. It was quite usual for a debt to remain after the building of a chapel, but it was less common to find that financial support was so inadequate that a move to smaller premises became necessary. The members at Ebenezer opened Bethel in Ryan Street in the working-class district of West Bowling.

Some societies belonged to the New Connexion for only a brief period, one example in Bradford being the chapel at Holme Lane End on Tong Street, which began as an Independent School Chapel in 1835. (41) The society joined the Methodist New Connexion in about 1840, but following the Barkerite dispute it changed allegiance again and became a Christian Brethren society some five years later. Such moves were not uncommon at the time, and there were other cases, both locally and in other towns, where those who left the M.N.C. found themselves within Independent Methodism.(42)

Quite different circumstances led to the building of Salem M.N.C. chapel in Sticker Lane in 1861 by a group who had

Table 4. Methodist New Connexion Chapels

Chapel	Opened	Present situation
<u>Bradford</u>		
Bradford (Ebenezer)	1839	to Mannville 1879
Bradford (Mannville)	1879	to Shearbridge 1906
Bradford (Shearbridge)	1906	closed 1973
Bfd (Salem, Sticker Lane)	1861	closed 1981
Bfd (Bethel, Ryan Street)	1875	closed 1966
Bradford (Holme Lane)	1835	Christian Brethren 1845
<u>Birstall</u>		
Gomersal (Taylor Chapel)	1801	closed c.1826
Adwalton (Zion)	1807	closed 1978
Batley (Commercial St)	1824	to Branch Road 1855
Batley (Branch Road)	1855	to Zion 1870
Batley (Zion)	1870	Batley circuit
Birstall (High Street)	1835	closed 1846
<u>Spen Valley</u>		
Brighouse (Park)(ex-Wes)	1798	reclaimed by Wesleyans 1811
Brighouse (Bethel)	1811	New U.M. church 1904
Heckmondwike (Batley Rd)	1840	sold to P.M. 1848

originally been members of the Dudley Hill Wesleyan Chapel, but had seceded from there in about 1850 following the Wesleyan Reform movement. They built the Wesley Place Wesleyan Reform chapel in Wakefield Road, but in 1860 there was a disagreement at Wesley Place over whether or not the society should join the UMFC with the other chapels in the Reform circuit. The majority of the Wesleyan Reformers there opted instead for membership of the Methodist New Connexion, by no means a random decision in view of the campaign by that denomination to attract Reformers,⁽⁴³⁾ and the holding of the Wesleyan Reformers' Annual Assembly of 1853 at the Ebenezer M.N.C. chapel in Bradford. When Salem was opened, the minority who remained behind at Wesley Place became part of the UMFC circuit.⁽⁴⁴⁾

There was no suggestion of secessionist zeal among the New Connexion societies in Bradford; the first chapel was opened more than forty years after the start of the movement, and all the Methodist New Connexion societies in Bradford developed separately due to particular local circumstances.⁽⁴⁵⁾

There were, however, several strong Methodist New Connexion societies in the Cleckheaton and Birstall circuits, and there is very clear evidence that these were typical secessionist societies which consisted of former Wesleyans who changed their allegiance to become Kilhamites. The earliest evidence of dissatisfaction among the Birstall Wesleyans came from a member describing himself as 'An old Methodist' who claimed in 1797 to have attended worship for fifty years,

making him one of the earliest Methodists. He wrote an anonymous Address to the Methodists in the Birstall Circuit⁽⁴⁶⁾ supporting Kilham's position and suggesting that local Methodists had failed to give credence to Kilham's pamphlets because the minister at Birstall was critical of them, and he reminded his readers of the Conference decision to purchase land for a second chapel following the dispute between Wesley and the trustees over the deeds of the Birstall preaching House in 1783. It was claimed that the land for 'the opposition chapel' had cost £100, much of this coming from very poor members, and the site had later been sold for half its cost. There was criticism of the preachers both for exceeding their authority and making unsuitable appointments of men as local preachers, and of the behaviour of local stewards.

A scheme to employ a second minister was attacked as unreasonable 'when many of us can hardly keep our families from the workhouse, and starve ourselves to support those preachers we already have'.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Contrasting the conditions of the ministers, 'fine, nice, delicate gentlemen, frequently afraid to walk, or even ride a few miles on a dark, dirty winter's evening' and 'the humble, zealous, laborious, disinterested, unassuming, plain men the first preachers were',⁽⁴⁸⁾ the writer calls for a sense of justice rather than an acceptance of ministerial domination. There were several references to Kilham, but no direct reference was made to the M.N.C., suggesting that the document was written in the early part of 1797, after Kilham's expulsion at the 1796 Conference but

before the forming of the New Connexion in August 1797.

A number of Birstall members were disillusioned with the Wesleyan position, and there was sufficient support for Kilham for a number of the members to secede and form an M.N.C. society in the village. Eayrs⁽⁴⁹⁾ refers to this Birstall MNC society, which was in the Huddersfield M.N.C. circuit in 1801. Miall⁽⁵⁰⁾ refers specifically to the Birstall (Zion) M.N.C. chapel in Birstall High Street, which was built in 1836. The sale of these premises by the New Connexion to the Independents in 1846 appears to be significantly close to the time of the Barkerite controversy, and the former New Connexion members who left became known specifically as Barkerites, and they built 'Freedom Hall' in 1849 in Leeds Road facing the Birstall Wesleyan chapel.

Only a mile away from Birstall, the 'Red Brick Chapel' in Oxford Road at Gomersal was used by another Methodist New Connexion congregation. The premises were built as a chapel by a member of the Taylor family of Red House at Gomersal, either by John Taylor(1737-1805), who was described as 'an admirer and friend of John Wesley, who visited the Red House on more than one occasion,'⁽⁵¹⁾ or by his son Joshua Taylor(1760-1840). The Taylors were woollen manufacturers and owned Hunsworth Mill, and Eayrs claims that both John and Joshua Taylor were Methodists, and that Joshua Taylor left the Wesleyans and joined the Methodist New Connexion, and that 'at the separation of 1797 Taylor cast in his lot with Kilham, and built the Gomersal chapel for his followers early in the last century.'

It seems probable that the congregation who used the building transferred their allegiance from Wesleyan Methodism to the New Connexion when the Taylor family did so. This society was on the 1801 Huddersfield New Connexion circuit plan, and was later in the Leeds circuit, and payments to the quarterly meetings were made in pound notes which Taylor issued from his own Gomersal Bank. (52)

While the ordinary members of Wesleyan and New Connexion societies often seem to have been able to remain on friendly terms, the strained relationships between those who joined the Methodist New Connexion and some Wesleyan itinerant preachers are highlighted by the wording on one of the gravestones at the Gomersal New Connexion chapel. The inscription read; 'Isaac and Judy Smith, his wife, lie buried here. Judy died Dec 3 1815, aged 80. Isaac died June 22 1816, aged 84. They were among the first founders of Methodism in this county, but finding that body declining in sincerity, and the Conference seeking dominion and wealth more than the glory of God in the salvation of men, they separated from the society, and in consequence of this exercise of superior principle they were neglected and insulted by the Pharisees of the age.' (53)

If Isaac and Judy Smith then lived at Birstall, they would have been young children when John Nelson began to preach there in 1741, so they might have been Wesleyans for many years, although their family clearly felt that Wesleyan Methodism had been unfair to them. It is not clear when services ceased at this chapel, but it was later than 1826, as

Cadman (54) refers to Independent services being held at the Brick Chapel before Grove Independent Chapel was opened in February of that year, and it was known to be a private house in 1842.

There was for a brief period an M.N.C. society in Heckmondwike, who built a chapel in Batley Road in 1840. In view of the date of opening and the absence of earlier references to a society there it seems unlikely to have been a secession from the Wesleyan Greenside chapel at Heckmondwike, and was probably an outpost of the adjacent Dewsbury M.N.C. circuit. Peel claims that this chapel 'never prospered greatly, and when the tremendous ferment arose in that body consequent upon the expulsion of Joseph Barker, the congregation seem to have been carried away in the commotion and lost altogether in the following of that remarkable man.'⁽⁵⁵⁾ The building was sold to the Primitive Methodists in about 1848.

Joseph Barker's combination of religious and political zeal obviously appealed to the people of the Spen Valley, among whom support for Chartism was also very strong,⁽⁵⁶⁾ and he addressed meetings held in the Upper and Lower (Westgate) Congregational chapels at Heckmondwike which were attended by many Methodists, in spite of ministerial bans on their attendance.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Peel confirms that 'the expulsion of Barker...had a disturbing effect on the Methodists of the Spen Valley, and Messrs Shipman and Richardson, the ministers then stationed in the circuit, had some difficulty with their members who strongly sympathised with Barker.'⁽⁵⁸⁾ This strong

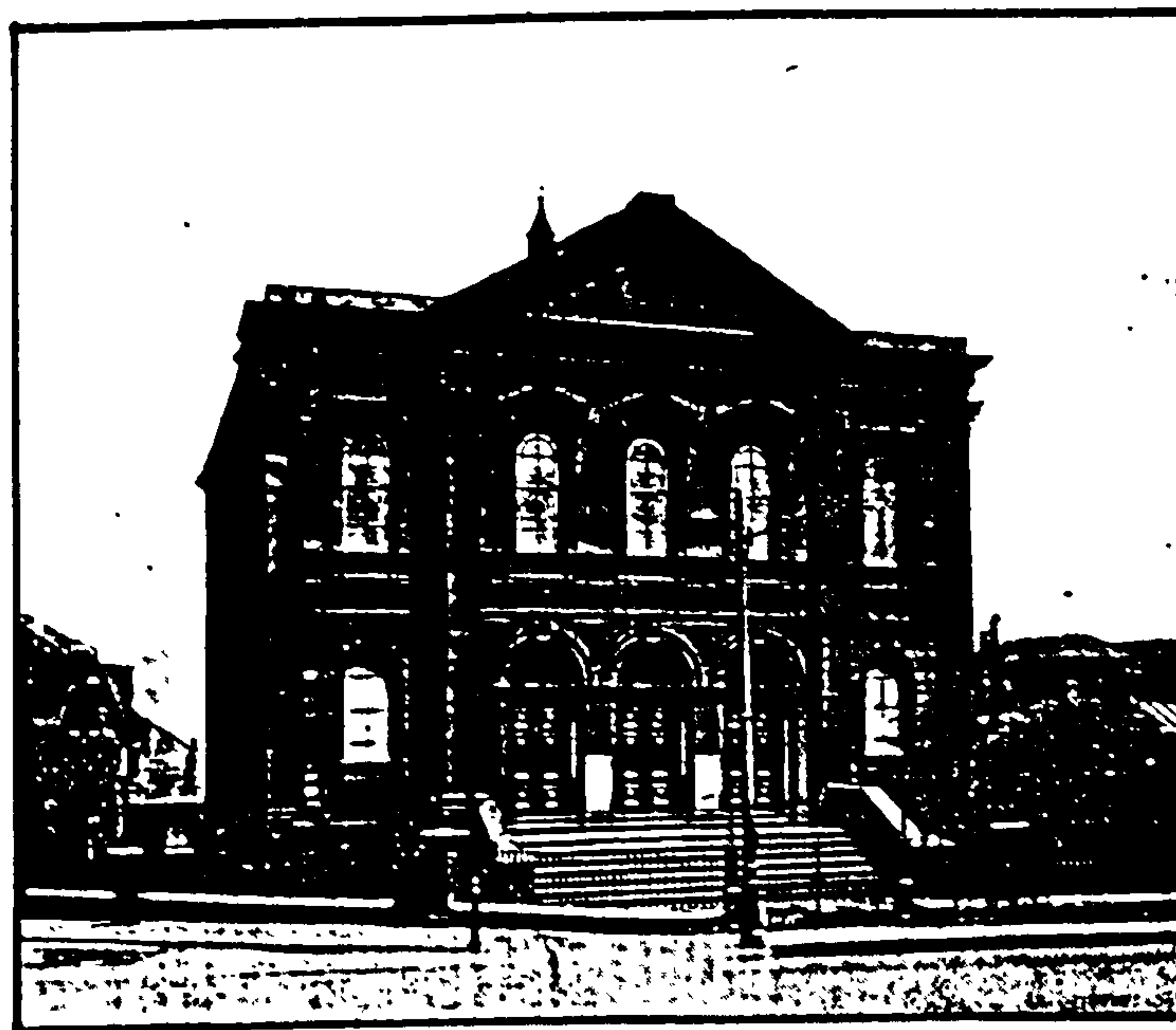
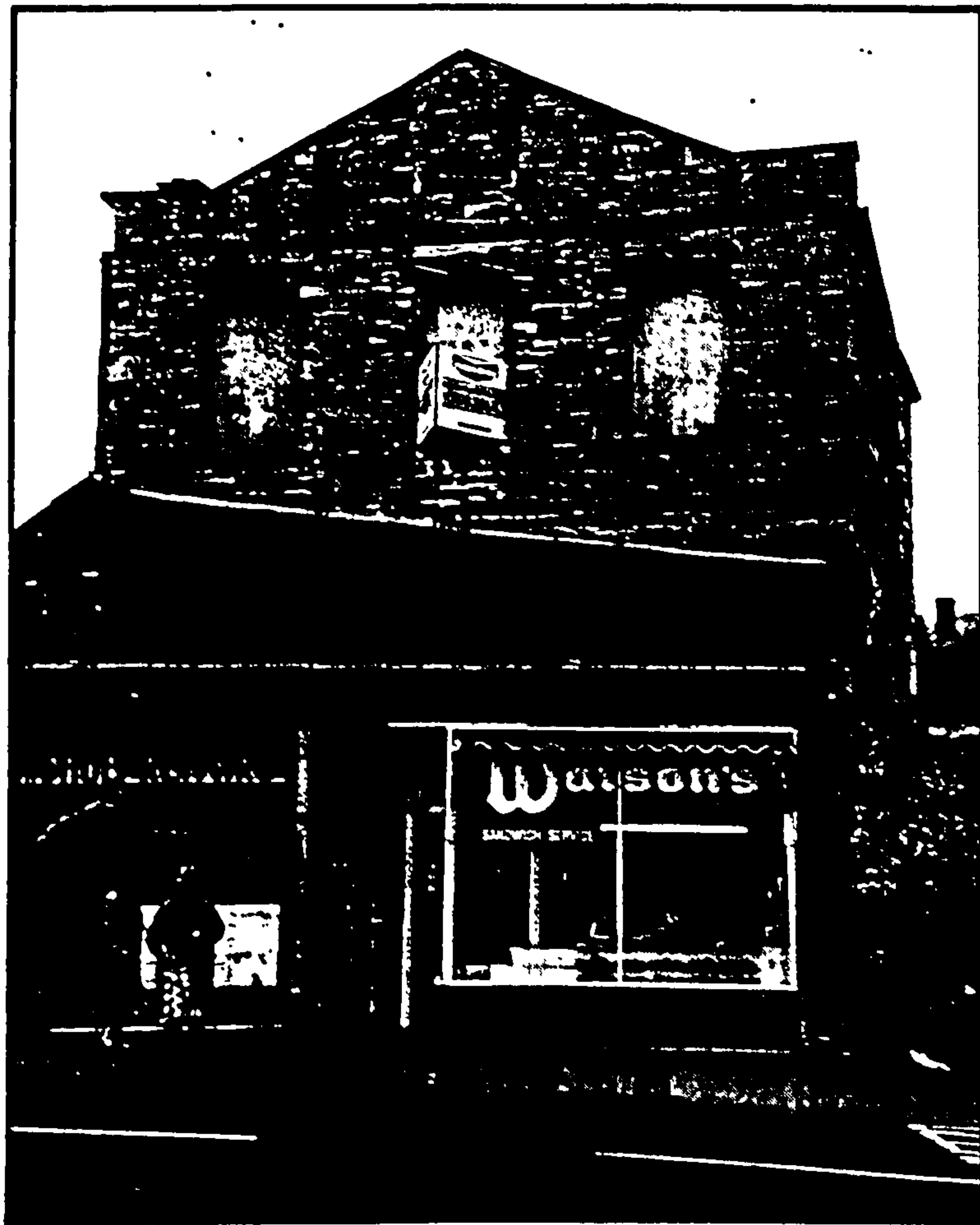


Illustration 5. Methodist New Connexion Chapels

Top, Heckmondwike (Batley Road), 1840-1848

Lower, Batley (Zion), 1870, now Batley Central Church

support for Barker in the Spen Valley area was the main factor in the closure soon after 1841 of the New Connexion chapels at Birstall and Heckmondwike, and possibly that at Gomersal.

At Batley the New Connexion society started 'soon after the division in 1797'⁽⁵⁹⁾, as a secession from the Wesleyan chapel. For some years the Kilhamites attended New Connexion services at Daw Green and Dewsbury, until they rented some pews in the Wellington Street Wesleyan chapel at Batley from 1821. These united services ended when the Wesleyan minister held a love-feast for his own congregation to which the Kilhamites were not admitted.⁽⁶⁰⁾ They then opened Batley M.N.C. chapel in 1824, and when this society was split over Barker, the secessionists formed the Independent Methodist society at Providence Street, moving later to Cambridge Street, both buildings being known locally as 'Trotter's Chapel' after Rev. William Trotter, who was expelled with Joseph Barker.

There was also an M.N.C. society at Adwalton near Drighlington, the result of a secession from Drighlington Wesleyan society. This M.N.C. society was on the Huddersfield circuit plan in 1801, and a chapel within the Leeds M.N.C. circuit was opened on October 1807, which was rebuilt as Zion chapel in 1870.⁽⁶¹⁾

In the early days of the M.N.C. some twenty Wesleyan chapels in different parts of the country were taken over by the New Connexion because the majority of their members supported Kilham. In some cases this became a permanent arrangement but in other places the Wesleyans regained

possession, often after litigation,⁽⁶²⁾ as was the case at Brighthouse in the Cleckheaton Wesleyan circuit. The Wesleyans at Park had opened their first church in 1795, but in 1797 the great majority of the members decided to transfer their allegiance to the Methodist New Connexion, and they continued to hold services at Park while the Wesleyan minority were forced to meet elsewhere. This continued until a decision of the Chancery Division of the High Court returned the premises to Wesleyan use in 1810.

The New Connexion members at Brighthouse then built the nearby Bethel M.N.C. chapel in 1811. William Booth, having previously been a Wesleyan local preacher and a Wesleyan Reform minister, was the New Connexion minister at this chapel before he left Methodism and founded the Salvation Army. (63)

Conclusion

The Methodist New Connexion secession took place at a time of much radical activity and growing political awareness, as well as widespread poverty, and these were factors in its origins, but in terms of Methodist history it was also significant because Kilham and his followers established a precedent. Wherever there was conflict between the preachers and the members, and a group within the Wesleyan church were unsuccessful in attempting to initiate a change which they believed was right and necessary, there was now an alternative possibility. They could leave their Wesleyan chapels and create a new Methodist denomination incorporating the particular characteristics they desired, and the demand for such new

Methodist organisations, begun by the Kilhamites, was to be repeated after each subsequent conflict.

Separation from the 'old body' was seen by the early members of the New Connexion as a necessary decision in accordance with their strongly held principles, and in the circumstances there was no way in which any other outcome was possible. From the Wesleyan point of view, the loss to the Kilhamites of a small percentage of their more radical members could be seen as a reasonable price to pay for maintaining connexional discipline.

Unlike the Independent Methodists, whose members separated themselves gradually from Wesleyanism over a long period, the New Connexion was the first of the secessions in which comparatively large numbers of members chose to leave the Wesleyan church more or less simultaneously. While they did this in order to find a more democratic Methodism like those involved in the subsequent secessions in 1827, 1835 and 1849, there was one important difference. Many of those who joined the New Connexion left the Wesleyan chapels with some reluctance, and they appear to have been able to maintain good relationships with their Wesleyan colleagues. They agreed to differ over the questions of ministerial authority and lay involvement in decision-making, while continuing to share their Methodist heritage, and occasionally, as happened at Batley, the same premises, although relationships between members of New Connexion societies and the Wesleyan preachers could be a different matter. The social class of the early members of the

New Connexion is not clear, and they may have differed somewhat from the Wesleyans from whom they separated, particularly if those recently attracted by the revivals of the early 1790s showed greater support for democracy and less loyalty to the Church of England than those with a longer association with Wesleyan Methodism.

Although there was no clear evidence of support for Kilham among the Methodists of Bingley or Shipley, and various unconnected circumstances led to the formation of the four Methodist New Connexion societies in Bradford long after the initial separation in 1797, in the Birstall and Cleckheaton circuits members of the New Connexion societies were typical secessionists. They deliberately left the Wesleyan societies at Birstall, Batley, and Drighlington, and appropriated Wesleyan chapels at Brighouse and Gomersal, in order to establish themselves as soon as possible after 1797 in the more democratic Methodism advocated by Alexander Kilham.

This early success lasted for some forty years until the controversy over Joseph Barker led to the closure of the New Connexion societies at Bradford (Holme Lane), Birstall (Zion, High Street), Heckmondwike and Gomersal. The Drighlington and Brighouse societies survived, but at two important local New Connexion chapels there were major secessions; William Trotter led the secessionists from Bradford (Ebenezer) to a separate chapel in Croft Street, and those who left Batley (Zion) M.N.C. chapel⁽⁶⁴⁾ became Christian Brethren and so moved into Independent Methodism at Batley (Providence Street).

In time the remaining M.N.C. societies acquired a reputation for steady consistent churchmanship which gave them a middle-class image, emphasised by their many fine churches, and Thompson describes the New Connexion in its later years as being 'more intellectual in inclination...their congregations resemble the older Dissenting churches'.(65)

The Methodist New Connexion was unique as a secession in the absence of rancour between members who remained Wesleyan and those who became Kilhamites. Never more than a fraction of the size of the larger denomination, its members managed to hold on to most of the religious features of Wesleyan Methodism, but in a church where lay involvement was seen as a fundamental principle. Their only major problems arose because Joseph Barker chose to move from the Wesleyans to the New Connexion, and without the controversy caused by his activities the Methodist New Connexion would have remained a larger and stronger denomination, not least in this part of West Yorkshire.

Notes

1. D.C. Dews, 'Leeds and the Methodist New Connexion', in Proceedings of The Wesley Historical Society, Vol. 51, Part 3, 1997, p.97.
2. Turner, Conflict and Reconciliation, p.117.
3. Ibid., p.75.
4. The Progress of Liberty, amongst the people called

Methodists. To which is added the Outlines of a Constitution.
Humbly recommended to the serious consideration of the
preachers and people late in connection with Mr Wesley.

5. Thompson, The English Working Class, p.48.

6. E.A. Rose, 'The First Methodist New Connexion Chapels' in
Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, Vol. XXXVI, Part 1,
1967, p9.

7. R. Davies, A.R. George and G. Rupp, The Methodist Church,
London, 1978, vol. 2, p.289.

8. Thompson, The English Working Class, 1980, p.49. Bradshaw
Chapel is now known as Ogden (Mount Zion)

9. Hempton, Methodism and Politics, p. 69.

10. B. Semmel, The Methodist Revolution, London, 1974, p.114.

11. G. Smith, History of Wesleyan Methodism, 1863, Vol. 2, p.
80.

12. C.J. Davey, The Methodist Story, 1955, p.66.

13. Thompson, The English Working Class, p. 438

14. A.D. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England,
Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914, London, 1984, p.31.

15. R. Currie, Methodism Divided, pp. 222-230.

16. J. Barker, The Life of Joseph Barker, written by himself,
London, 1880. (This autobiography, edited by his nephew,
consisted largely of material previously published in 1846 as
J. Barker, 'History and Confessions of a Man', printed on his
own steam printing-press at Wortley near Leeds. (Bradford
Library, Federer Collection, Ref. 568.3/2) The same material
was also published in parts in Barker's monthly magazine, 'The

Christian' during the 1840s.)

17. Ibid., p. 99.

18. Ibid., p. 222.

19. H. McLachlan, The story of a Nonconformist Library - The Christian Brethren movement, Manchester, 1923, p. 153.

(University of Manchester Library, Christian Brethren Archives)

20. W. Trotter, The Justice and Forbearance of the Methodist New Connexion Conference, London, 1841, (Bradford Local Studies Library, Federer Collection, Ref. 194.2/80) p.8.

21. R.F. Wearmouth, Some Working-Class Movements of the Nineteenth Century, London, 1948, p.192.

22. Barker, Life, p. 384.

23. Ibid., p. 264.

24. J. Clarke, 'Some Account of my Life as a Conscientious Methodist Itinerant Minister 1846-1871', unpublished m.s., n/d, c.1890, p.101, made available by his family.

25. J. Dolan, 'The origins of Independent Methodism, and a survey of Independent Methodism in Yorkshire' in the Journal of the Wesley Historical Society, (Yorkshire Branch), No. 70, 1997, p. 25.

26. D. Brady and F.J. Evans, Christian Brethren in Manchester and District - a history, Manchester, 1997, p. 20, note 52.

27. Ibid., p.20, p. 31. (David Brady is the archivist of the 'Christian Brethren Archive' at Manchester University, which consists principally of records of the Plymouth Brethren.)

28. Non-Barkerite Christian Brethren societies are examined in the chapter on Independent Methodism, those at Cleckheaton and

Baildon Green being secessions from Wesleyan societies, that at Bingley having its origins in a secession from a Primitive Methodist society.

29. McLachlan, The Christian Brethren Movement, (University of Manchester Library - Christian Brethren Archives.)

30. Ibid., p. 176. Barker preached in the open air at Pudsey in 1846 to a crowd of 1400. The Pudsey Christian Brethren society became a Unitarian society in 1853 and built a chapel in Church Lane in 1861. Other Christian Brethren societies known to have become Unitarian include Bolton, Mottram, Macclesfield, Hanley and Newcastle-under-Lyme. The 1853 trust deed of the Mossley (Stamford Road) Christian Unitarian Church referred to 'persons ...who by some are called Christian Brethren and by others Unitarians'. The society was founded by the Christian Brethren in 1841. G. Hague, The Unitarian Heritage, Sheffield, 1986, p. 90.

31. The non-Methodist Bible Christians were a small secession from the Swedenborgians, active in Lancashire about 1830/1840s, believed to have supported the Chartists. They were not associated with the Bible Christian Methodists.

32. Hague, Unitarian Heritage, p. 156. The Methodist Unitarian societies ('Cookites') were founded by Joseph Cooke, a Wesleyan itinerant expelled in 1806 on doctrinal grounds. This small secessionist group was active only in East Lancashire and their societies included Newchurch Methodist Unitarians near Rossendale in 1806 (replaced by Bethlehem Unitarian 1865), Padiham in 1806 (Nazareth Unitarian 1874), Rochdale (Providence

in 1807, Clover Street 1818, (Unitarian 1974), and Todmorden 1824 (Unitarian 1865). Apart from some small societies with only a brief existence, all the Methodist Unitarian societies became Unitarian and lost any formal links with Methodism.

33. 'at least half of the original 28 members of the Rochdale Equitable Co-operative Society were Methodist Unitarians', Davies et al., The Methodist Church, Vol. 2, p. 329.

34. J. Terry, 'Recollections of my Life', unpublished family papers, c. 1865, p. 78.

35. Minutes of the Conference of the Methodist New Connexion, London, 1882. One third of Huddersfield Wesleyans joined M.N.C.

36. E.V. Chapman, John Wesley and Co. (Halifax), Halifax, 1952, p. 45.

37. J. James, History and Topography of Bradford, London, 1841, p.234.

38. W. Trotter, Justice and Forbearance, 1841,

39. Ibid., p. 91.

40. T.A. Edge, Richmond-Shearbridge Methodist Church Jubilee, Bradford, 1956, p. 5.

41. C. Higham, Holme United Reformed Church, Bradford, 1985.

42. J. Dolan, 'The Independent Methodists of Sheffield' in the Journal of the Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire Branch), No. 66, Leeds, 1995, p. 6.

43. Currie, Methodism Divided, p. 222.

44. Anon, Salem Methodist Church Centenary Handbook, Bradford, 1961, p. 2.

45. Secondary sources suggest that there was also a New

Connexion society at Idle, the result of a secession from Thorp Wesleyan Chapel. There was 'a division (some time after 1810) which resulted temporarily in Mount Zion Chapel at Hampton Place', W. Watson, Wesleyan Methodism in Idle, Bradford, 1910, p. 10. This is confirmed by Idle M.N.C. society being listed in the Leeds Circuit plan in 1827, G. Eayrs, A History of Zion Church, Batley and the Batley United Methodist Churches, 1909, p.22. It would be conjecture to suggest that the Mount Zion society was typically secessionist in origin, although the early date gives that impression. William Trotter, referring in 1841 to the first group of M.N.C. societies which became Barkerites, wrote that 'The Bradford friends worshipped till lately in the Temperance Hall, the country societies worship in their respective chapels.' W. Trotter, Justice and Forbearance, 1841, p. 91, suggesting perhaps that there were other M.N.C. societies in the Bradford area which became Barkerite.

46. 'An Old Methodist', An Address to the Methodists in Birstall Circuit, Birstall, 1797. (W.H.S. archives, Oxford).

47. Ibid., p.7.

48. Ibid., p. 12.

49. G. Eayrs, History of Zion Church , p.62.

50. J.G. Miall, Congregationalism in Yorkshire, 1868, p.231.

51. M. Ferrett, The Taylors of the Red House, Huddersfield, 1987, p.8. (Ferrett (p.9) claims that John Taylor was responsible for building the chapel.)

52. G. Eayrs, History of Zion Church , p. 63. (Eayrs attributed the building of the chapel to Joshua Taylor.)

53. W. Cudworth, Round About Bradford, Bradford, 1876, p. 526. When Cudworth wrote, the gravestones were visible, but they have since been lost. Ferrett describes the position of the graves as 'to the left of, and slightly behind the building.' Neither Isaac nor Judy Smith was baptised at Birstall parish church, and there is no record of their marriage in the parish registers. Presumably these events took place elsewhere, but their burials should have been recorded in a register held at the Gomersal M.N.C. chapel at which they were buried. Unfortunately this was a privately-owned building and no registers are listed in the WYAS Guide for Family Historians, 1992.
54. H.A. Cadman, Gomersal Past and Present, Leeds, 1930, p.185.
55. F. Peel, Nonconformity in the Spen Valley, Heckmondwike, 1891, p. 203.
56. F. Peel, Spen Valley Past and Present, Heckmondwike, 1893, p.324.
57. S. Chadwick, 'Recollections of Methodism in the Spen Valley', ms., n/d. but c.1890, p.9.
58. Peel, Nonconformity in the Spen Valley, p. 239.
59. G. Eayrs, History of Zion Church and the Batley United Methodist Churches, London, 1909, p.16.
60. Ibid., p.20.
61. Ibid., p.64.
62. Rose, Proceedings of W.H.S, p. 7.
63. R. Collier, The General Next to God, the story of William Booth and the Salvation Army, London, 1965, p.42.

64. Only one ex-M.N.C. place of worship remains in current use locally, the Batley (Zion) Chapel of 1870, now a joint Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Project, and known as Batley Central Church. The Brighthouse (Bethel) church opened in 1907 and now known as Brighthouse Central Methodist Church was planned by the M.N.C. before the 1907 Union.

65. Thompson, English Working Class, p.815.

Chapter 5

The Independent Methodists

Introduction

The Independent Methodists have maintained a separate Methodist tradition for two centuries. Beginning in Lancashire and Cheshire, they subsequently developed as a result of the coming together of various small groups of working-class Methodists who were unwilling to accept the principle of the pastoral office. They were generally 'the poorest of the poor...their resources were very limited both in terms of finance and in terms of people of ability',⁽¹⁾ but they had significant links with other Methodist groups. There have been groups belonging to the Independent Methodists in this part of West Yorkshire for most, if not all of this time, but an unbroken pattern can be traced only from the 1840s, as there is no firm evidence of any links between the various short-lived Independent Methodist groups which met in the Bradford area before that time.

What all the early Independent Methodist societies, usually but by no means always former Wesleyans, had in common was that they sought mutual support after they had left their previous societies and they worked together in revivalist activities. In many ways they were not unlike the later Primitive Methodists and similar Methodist 'offshoots' in the revivalist tradition which recruited their membership from those outside the churches, although there was also evidence of some support for radical reform.⁽²⁾ Their Methodism was based entirely on the 'Free Gospel' principle, with leadership by unpaid lay

ministers, and with considerable local autonomy.

The Independent Methodist Connexion has always been in practice a voluntary union of local societies rather than a hierarchical organisation, and while usually referred to as the Independent Methodists, a title used by some of their earliest members, other titles have been used both for the denomination and for individual chapels. The denominational title was changed in 1833 to 'The United Churches of Christ', then in 1843 they became 'The United Free Gospel Churches', reverting to 'Independent Methodists' in 1898, and since then all the chapels have used this title. Some had previously also used titles indicating membership of small local groups of societies - Free Gospel, Gospel Pilgrim, Lay Churches or Christian Brethren, although the absence of contemporary records of many of these groups means that it is not possible to define their characteristics with any precision.

Each society's involvement within Independent Methodism was established through their formal acceptance by the Connexional Annual Meetings. It was then confirmed by spasmodic reports of their progress in the denominational magazine, and the cessation of such reports was often the only indication of the closure of early societies. Throughout the nineteenth century Independent Methodism grew by a process of accretion as societies or sometimes local groups of societies became linked with the connexion. This process often followed significant events in other parts of Methodism, particularly so in this part of West Yorkshire, where the Independent Methodists gained

some members from the Wesleyan Methodists in the 1840s. The very early Independent Methodists had close links with the early Primitive Methodists, and after 1841 members of Barkerite Christian Brethren societies who had left the New Connexion sometimes joined the Independent Methodists. Occasionally the Independent Methodist societies provided an alternative destination for Wesleyans who left their chapels during the Wesleyan Reform period.

Various factors led the Independent Methodists to remain outside mainstream Methodism when most denominations within Methodism were actively seeking union in 1907 and 1932, and events in their history have led to the denomination retaining some features of organisation not found in mainstream Methodism. It could in fact be argued that their absolute rejection of the Wesleyan doctrine of the pastoral office, which led to the formation of their first societies, was taken to such lengths that it has now become impossible for the Independent Methodists to return to their Methodist roots.

The Origins of Independent Methodism

Reference has previously been made to the situation following the death of John Wesley in 1791, and the disagreements which arose over the claims of itinerant preachers to have authority over all activities within Methodism. The practical problems raised have been examined by R. Currie (3), who emphasised the contrast between the local congregations and their itinerant ministers. He describes the closely knit circle of the Wesleyan chapel and Sunday School where a large proportion of the

members were related to each other or were friends of long standing, and where many of them held office as class-leaders or stewards or Sunday-School teachers. When Wesleyan itinerant preachers came into such a situation as strangers for no more than two or sometimes three years, they were expected by Conference to rule and control the members of a number of chapels several miles apart.

While the preachers struggled to establish what they saw as the necessary level of order and discipline in the societies, they often had to contend with a widespread tendency towards revivalism on the part of some of their members. These were people who still saw their role as maintaining the religious patterns of mid-eighteenth century Methodism, and who were according to the Wesleyans⁽⁴⁾ 'accustomed to regard evangelistic work and the edification of the individual believer as the things which mattered. These things were to be followed as the judgement and conscience of the individual himself, or the group to which he belonged, might determine. Church order and regulation were of much less moment than soul-saving and individual edification; these must be attended to whatever became of church order.' This critical comment contrasts interestingly with Mounfield's description of the same period from the Independent Methodist position, when to him 'the Methodist church had framed its organisation and established its itinerant ministry. But the wave of evangelical fervour had not spent itself, and it was discovered that there were in many quarters those who were not ready to confine their

work to prescribed limits or accept a privileged itineracy.'⁽⁵⁾
In West Yorkshire the climax of this evangelistic outreach was the Great Revival of the 1790s⁽⁶⁾ associated with William Bramwell, an indication of the strength of the Revivalist wing within Wesleyan Methodism. For many years there were continuing conflicts between ministers anxious to maintain church order and discipline and those lay leaders who sought the freedom to hold their own evangelistic meetings.

The Independent Methodists trace the origin of their movement to one such incident at Warrington in 1796.⁽⁷⁾ The nearest minister then lived 25 miles away at Northwich, and understandably the isolated Warrington Methodists had become used to managing their own affairs at the Bank Street chapel. When they received instructions from the circuit minister that appointments to preach in the chapel must in future be arranged by the minister, they were willing to accept his decision, but when they were told to end their regular prayer meetings in their own homes there was great indignation, as they considered this an infringement of their liberty of worship. The members of one such meeting decided to ignore the ban, choosing instead to quietly withdraw from the circuit. The absence of any rancour between those who remained in the Wesleyan circuit and those who left it was seen as a significant aspect of the foundation of the new denomination.

Peter Phillips, a chairmaker who as a boy had listened to Wesley preaching, became the leader of this separate group, which included Richard Mills and Richard Harrison, both

experienced local preachers, and William Maginnis, a 22 year-old glasscutter who later became a local preacher. They seem to have been typical contemporary Methodists who took their religion seriously and they met for worship in a rented room until they built the first Independent Methodist chapel at Friars Green at Warrington in 1802. They were then joined by a number of Quakers, and the interchange of Methodist and Quaker patterns of dress and worship led to the group acquiring the title of Quaker Methodists. In retrospect, this event at Warrington involving only a handful of members a year before the formation of the Methodist New Connexion was seen as the first significant separation within Methodism.⁽⁸⁾

At about the same time other small Methodist groups, mainly in Lancashire and Cheshire, separated from Wesleyan Methodism because they were reluctant to accept the authority of the Conference as it was being exercised by the itinerant preachers. They all still considered themselves to be Methodists, and they were brought into closer contact with each other through some of the lay preachers who moved between the groups.⁽⁹⁾ During the first two decades of the nineteenth century some societies established links with both the Independent Methodists and Primitive Methodists, who shared similar revivalist and anti-Wesleyan attitudes. The Quaker Methodists of Warrington, for example, had some contacts with the Camp Meeting Methodists who later became part of the Primitive Methodist Connexion.⁽¹⁰⁾ Lorenzo Dow, the American evangelist who introduced Camp Meetings to England, became a

dynamic link between the various groups, which he described as the 'third division of Methodists', the Wesleyans being the first, and the New Connexion the second. Dow co-operated with Peter Phillips, leader of the Independent Methodists, as well as with Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, the future Primitive Methodist leaders.

As well as the Quaker Methodists there were the Tent Methodists from Bristol and Manchester,⁽¹¹⁾ (who made use of a large tent for evangelistic meetings, but offended official Wesleyanism by not obtaining the approval of the local Wesleyan superintendents for their meetings,) the Magic Methodists of Delamere Forest (whose worship included trances)⁽¹²⁾ and the Independent Methodists of Oldham who had left their parish church.⁽¹³⁾ With them were associated two of the three groups who had been involved in Bramwell's abandoned secession of 1803, the Leeds Revivalists (or 'Kirkgate Screammers') and the Bandroom Methodists from Manchester. The Independent Methodist groups at Macclesfield and Stockport had both seceded from the New Connexion,⁽¹⁴⁾ a pattern which was to be repeated later, and the 'Free Gospellers' came from Preston.⁽¹⁵⁾ The first meeting of delegates from these different Methodist organisations was held in Manchester,⁽¹⁶⁾ and the first Annual Meeting for which printed minutes exist was held at Macclesfield in 1808. On the title page was the text often associated with various anti-Wesleyan and reformist groups,⁽¹⁷⁾ 'One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren'.

The early growth of the movement involved the inclusion of

these various revivalist groups within the Independent Methodist connexion. Like the Primitive Methodists, the Independent Methodists were early supporters of the Temperance movement, with a tradition going back to 1830. Independent Methodist membership grew steadily from 1808, when there were some 1,200 members in 16 churches, to over 5,000 members in 97 churches in 1884, and by 1918 there were over 9,000 members in 145 churches, although numbers have since decreased in line with those of other denominations. At national level, the Independent Methodist Connexion of Churches now has some 3,500 members in 105 churches, most of which are in Lancashire and Cheshire or in County Durham.

Professor Ward's comment⁽¹⁸⁾ that the Wesleyans were not concerned when revivalist groups left their denomination, but became concerned when these small groups coalesced to form new denominations, apply particularly aptly to the Independent Methodists. They developed as an amalgamation of groups who shared one common characteristic - they absolutely refused to accept the Wesleyan principle of the pastoral office.

Independent Methodists in the Bradford area

Between 1815, when the Independent Methodist movement began to spread across the Pennines, and 1841, when Joseph Barker was expelled from the Methodist New Connexion and some of his Barkerite followers joined them, there were several diverse and often short-lived groups of Independent Methodists in West Yorkshire. This was a period of instability, when such religious groups came and went quite unpredictably, and most

information is gleaned from secondary sources. Although known by various titles, they all rejected the principle of the pastoral office to the extent of insisting on lay and unpaid ministers.

The first such group to meet locally called themselves Christian Brethren, and were active only from 1815 to about 1830, after which time they were no longer quoted in the annual reports. Their societies included Rastrick near Brighouse and Round Hill near Queensbury, as well as Leeds, Elland, Huddersfield and Holmfirth. Benjamin Rushton of Ovenden, who left the New Connexion in 1821, was among their preachers from 1824. He was described as a minister (i.e. preacher) at Rastrick in 1827, and in the following year he was the Correspondent for the society at Round Hill.⁽¹⁹⁾ His name appears again in connection with Little Horton Gospel Pilgrim chapel at Bradford in 1837.⁽²⁰⁾ Well known as a Chartist as well as a Methodist, Rushton claimed in 1839 that he had given nothing to parsons since 1821, and he stipulated that no paid minister should officiate at his funeral.⁽²¹⁾ Both comments were characteristic of the Independent Methodist attitudes, although Rushton left the Christian Brethren some years before his death in 1853, and when he died he was given a Chartist funeral at Halifax.

In 1824 there was another local circuit of Independent Methodist societies known as the Earlsheaton Union,⁽²²⁾ whose fifteen preaching places included Wibsey, Brighouse, Birstall, Drighlington, and Morley. This group may possibly have started



Map 5. Independent Methodist Chapels

as early as 1800, but apparently all the societies had closed by about 1830 for lack of support. John Ryley Robinson, who claimed to have information from his father and grandfather about early Methodism in the Dewsbury area, provides the only details other than those in the connexional magazines. He writes of the Earlsheaton chapel in 1826 that 'This chapel was built by J. Boothroyd, who became an Independent Methodist. His followers declined, and he preached in it till there being no congregation, proposals were made to the Wesleyan Methodists to take it, which they did. On a square stone in front was inscribed the following verse;

Come sinner, come, however poor,
Christ's grace is free, draw near.
This place is for a house of prayer
There's no collections here.'

This Free Gospel inscription was, not surprisingly, removed when the chapel became part of the Wesleyan circuit.⁽²³⁾

A quite separate group known as the Gospel Pilgrims held services in the Bradford area between about 1830 and 1850. Records of this group's activities have been found only in West Yorkshire, in Hull, and in Norfolk, and they joined the Independent Methodists, then known as the 'United Churches of Christ' in 1834. Only one copy of their 'Gospel Pilgrims' Preachers' Plan for the Leeds and Bradford Churches' ⁽²⁴⁾ has survived, but this one document suggests an organisation that could only have been built up over a number of years. The circuit plan shows 21 places of worship listed with regular

services, and allowing for most of these to have been held in rented rooms or in members' houses, references were made to at least four chapels. These included Mount Carmel chapel in Little Horton Lane near the top of Park Road, opened in 1836, and used for a Bradford Chartist meeting in 1839, and Bradford Gospel Pilgrim chapel opened in 1843 at Spring Street off Manningham Lane. It is believed that on closure, probably in the late 1840s, this chapel was sold to the Primitive Methodists.⁽²⁵⁾ Other chapels referred to were at Keighley and Leeds. Services were being held regularly at six other meeting places in the Bradford area.

The Gospel Pilgrim's plan listed thirty local preachers, and these again included Benjamin Rushton of Ovenden. This may only indicate that he was sufficiently well known locally to be invited to take services occasionally for the Gospel Pilgrims, as there was no separate list of visiting local preachers on this plan. His name appeared as No. 30 in the list of local preachers, and his home town of Halifax is listed as a place of worship. It is, of course, possible that the inclusion of Rushton's name could indicate some degree of co-operation between the Gospel Pilgrims and the original Christian Brethren, but neither group has left any written records apart from this single copy of a Gospel Pilgrim circuit plan, and in such circumstances and with such flimsy evidence, it would be unwise to read too much into the appearance of Rushton's name on this plan, not least because although his name is listed, he had no appointments to preach during that quarter.

The Gospel Pilgrim plan, with the significant text 'We are a despised people',⁽²⁶⁾ has the appearance of a typical Methodist circuit plan of the period, referring to the circuit's representation at the Conference of the United Churches of Christ held at Bolton-le-Moors at Easter 1834, and the usual arrangements for sacraments, church meetings, quarterly collections and lovefeasts, but interestingly including Camp Meetings at Keighley and Leeds, at which several Local Preachers were appointed to preach. At Keighley, for example, five local preachers were involved; J. Redman of Wapping, Bradford, J. Parkinson of Little Horton, C. Wooller of Wellington Street, Bradford, S. Cowling of Seven Stars, Wakefield Road, Bradford, and B. Gill of Philadelphia Street, Bradford. This use of a characteristically Primitive Methodist type of service suggests some degree of similarity of outlook between the Primitive Methodists and the Gospel Pilgrims, both Revivalist denominations which were becoming established in Bradford at about the same time, and raises the possibility of some unrecorded co-operation taking place between the two groups.

There may have been some significance in the fact that all the Gospel Pilgrim societies in Bradford met within walking distance of Wesleyan chapels. The Little Horton chapel was a mile from Great Horton, but Spring Street was near Kirkgate, and Wellington Street and George Street were both very near Eastbrook. Wesleyans and Gospel Pilgrims both worshipped within the small communities of Bradford Moor and Seven Stars. The

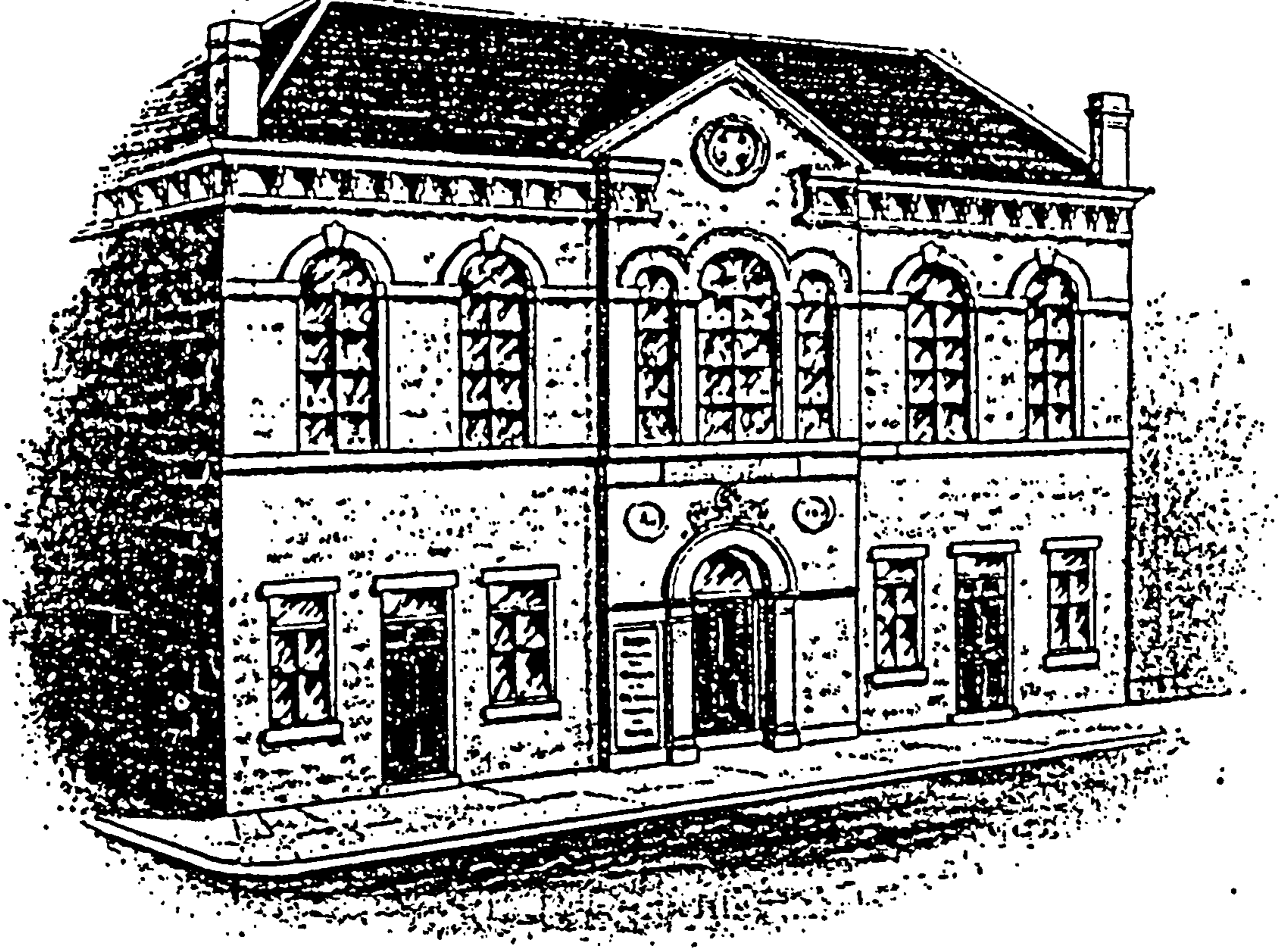


Illustration 6. Nook Independent Methodist Church, Cleckheaton

Gospel Pilgrims also met at Bolton near Eccleshill, and at Stanningley between Farsley and Pudsey. The two groups would obviously have been aware of each others' presence in such small communities, but the situation could have arisen because the Gospel Pilgrims held services in the main communities around Bradford in the way that the Congregationalists or any other denomination might have done. If there was a planned attempt to create a rival system on Methodist lines, the absence of information about the Gospel Pilgrims prevents further research. They apparently ceased to worship in Bradford during the 1850s, although there is evidence of Gospel Pilgrim societies at Cleckheaton and Batley as well as other towns in West Yorkshire.⁽²⁷⁾ Why they dispersed remains a mystery.

Only one document has been found from another local group calling themselves the 'Primitive Methodist Revivalists'. The Birstall Circuit (probably the only circuit) of this group produced a preaching plan in 1833 ⁽²⁸⁾ with twelve places of worship and 16 Local Preachers as well as ten 'exhorters'. Printed in Bradford, the plan includes preaching places at Birstall, Drighlington, Cleckheaton, Little Gomersal and Bradford within the local area, as well as others at Huddersfield, Wakefield and Leeds. It would appear that this organisation was not associated with the Primitive Methodists, but a link between this group and the equally elusive Gospel Pilgrims has recently been traced by John Dolan, the Independent Methodist archivist, who has found that seven of the Primitive Revivalist preachers had links with Gospel

Pilgrim places of worship. (29) Each of these early Independent Methodist groups appears to have been active locally for only a limited number of years, but even this conjecture lacks documentary confirmation.

Definite links with existing Independent Methodist places of worship can only be traced back to the second group of Christian Brethren societies, usually known as the Barkerites, who left the Methodist New Connexion following the expulsion of Joseph Barker in 1841. The fact that they called themselves Christian Brethren does not necessarily imply any links with the earlier group of the same name, as although it is quite possible that some continuity existed with the original Christian Brethren groups, there is no evidence to support this hypothesis. Confusingly, the Christian Brethren title was used in West Yorkshire and in Lancashire by both Barkerites and the Plymouth Brethren. (30)

The situation is made even more complex by the use of the Christian Brethren title during the 1840s by three Independent Methodist societies in West Yorkshire which certainly had no links with Joseph Barker. The non-Barkerite Christian Brethren societies at Cleckheaton, Bingley and Baildon Green were formed in the period of unrest which preceded the Reform period, and Vickers describes them as 'originally independent companies seeking light and freedom. Their chief protest was against pastoral supremacy, but they were also influenced by their sympathies for the Temperance movement.' (31) Again, while these three societies had no links with Barker, the possibility

remains that they may have taken the title because they were aware of its previous use in West Yorkshire before 1830. It is even possible that they had personal links with members or former members of the earlier Christian Brethren societies, which were known to have been active only ten years previously.

The Independent Methodist church still holds services at Cleckheaton, and describing its origins in a situation typical of similar societies formed in the 1840s, the denominational magazine referred to great unrest at the New Road Wesleyan chapel in Cleckheaton. In 1842 'a few earnest souls, dissatisfied with the Wesleyan paid ministry, met for mutual edification twice a week in a room which had been occupied by the Gospel Pilgrims or Independent Methodists, but still attended the Sunday services at the Wesleyan chapel.'⁽³²⁾ They were, it is recorded, 'heartily sick of the absolute power of the priesthood in the Wesleyan body'⁽³³⁾. The specific incident which led to their secession in 1845 was a request from several local preachers for permission to hold a Temperance Meeting in the Wesleyan Sunday School, which was agreed to by the trustees but vetoed by the minister in accordance with the Conference decision in 1841. The group of twenty-five members who joined the Christian Brethren had been among the leaders of the Cleckheaton Wesleyan society, and their president or lay minister was Joseph Spencer, a master tailor who had been a local preacher and Sunday School teacher. Those who transferred their allegiance to the new group built their own place of worship in 1847, which was replaced in 1874 by the present Nook

Independent Methodist Chapel in Chapel Street.

This society was responsible for a branch Sunday School at Hunsworth,⁽³⁴⁾ opened in 1852 to serve a small coal-mining community at the north end of the village. The Independents and Wesleyans had recently closed their class meetings in Hunsworth after holding them for some forty years, and the Independent Methodists had apparently held their own cottage meetings there from 1845. The Sunday School was used for Sunday worship and Sunday School activities until its closure when the colliery was closed down and the community was dispersed.

A dispute between the minister and one of the local preachers in the Bingley Primitive Methodist society occurred in 1848. During a sermon the local preacher 'made remarks which were resented by the minister',⁽³⁵⁾ and this led to the secession of the local preacher and some members, who became Christian Brethren. This confirms the explanation by James Vickers that the society was formed like others in West Yorkshire as a protest against 'pastoral supremacy',⁽³⁶⁾ although the minister in this case was a Primitive Methodist and not a Wesleyan. Evidence of the poverty of members of this group is provided by a description of their first cottage meetings, when they sat on stocks of wool used by hand woolcombers, and an old chair without a back, with one leg propped up on a stone, was the pulpit. Their first chapel was opened in 1852, and in 1868 they built the chapel in Leonard Street which is still in use, and which retains the Christian Brethren inscription on the gable end. Independent Methodist

services were also held from 1872 at the nearby village of Wilsden, (37) in premises provided by Mr J Lister, which were to be available free of charge during his lifetime, and services were still being held there in 1886.

The Baildon Green Christian Brethren society started in 1843, and although the Wesleyans did not open a chapel in the village until 1846, the Wesleyan society had met there for some years. The Shipley Wesleyan circuit records for the Reform period are missing, but the Independent Methodist archives reveal that 'A number came out (of Wesleyan Methodism) in consequence of the unchristian and unscriptural pressure on the poor members for money to support an hired ministry'. (38) In effect the Independent Methodist society in this small village became the destination of secessionists from the Wesleyan chapel, perhaps rendering unnecessary any Wesleyan Reform society after 1849. In 1858 three adjoining cottages were bought for five pounds each by three men who supported the Christian Brethren. The premises were modified and 'given to the people of Baildon Green for ever, to be used as a place of religious instruction for the youth of both sexes of parents residing in Baildon Green' (39) The society only became formally part of the Independent Methodist connexion in 1912, and this continued until the Independent Methodists ceased to use the premises in 1990. There also was a short-lived Shipley Independent Methodist Mission, possibly in rented rooms, in 1886. (40)

It is clear that these three Independent Methodist

societies began during the 1840s specifically as a reaction against attempts at ministerial domination in Wesleyan or Primitive Methodist societies. Vickers claims that it was specifically this strongly felt opposition to current Wesleyan practice that led also to the building of the Independent Methodist chapels at Batley (Providence Street) and Thornhill Edge (formerly Gospel Pilgrims) in 1840, Dewsbury (Thornton Street, formerly Daw Green Gospel Pilgrims) in 1845, and Flockton in the late 1840s.⁽⁴¹⁾ The dates support Vickers's statement, and also suggest that these congregations had much in common with the Wesleyan Reformers who left the Wesleyan church for very similar reasons a few years later after the expulsions at the 1849 Wesleyan Conference.

On the other hand, there were other Christian Brethren groups in West Yorkshire who had left the Methodist New Connexion after the Barkerite controversy and then affiliated with the Independent Methodist Connexion. This happened in several local societies, following the precedent of transfers from the New Connexion to Independent Methodism which apparently began in Sheffield in 1814.⁽⁴²⁾ One unusual link between members who left the New Connexion with Joseph Barker and Independent Methodism was provided by the congregation of Holme Lane End Chapel on Tong Street to the south of Bradford. The society opened their first chapel in 1835, when they described themselves as Independents or Congregationalists, but they joined the Methodist New Connexion in about 1840. They changed allegiance again in about 1845 following the Barkerite

controversy, and became a Christian Brethren society. A new chapel known as Zion was built on the west side of Tong Street and opened in November 1858 by the Christian Brethren, and although in about 1865 the society returned to Congregationalism,⁽⁴³⁾ it was for some years after 1843 the main chapel of what was known briefly as the Holme Lane District of Independent Methodist Churches, which included several local societies. The minutes of the Annual Meeting of the United Free Gospel Churches record in 1851 the admission on trial of the societies at Birstall, Cleckheaton, Gomersal, Batley, Holme Lane, Baildon, Baildon Green and Batley Carr, when they were described as the 'Yorkshire Churches', although they were received as societies in full connexion in 1853 as the 'Bradford Churches'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ The use of these titles suggests that the former Gospel Pilgrim societies in Bradford no longer existed by that time, although meetings had been recorded at Mount Carmel in 1850.⁽⁴⁵⁾ It seems likely that personal links between these churches survived long after the Holme Lane congregation officially ceased to be Independent Methodists, as the Holme Lane choir sang at the opening of a new organ at the Cleckheaton Christian Brethren chapel in 1880, when they were anachronistically described as the 'Holme Lane Independent Methodists'.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Another of the Holme Lane group of churches was at Batley, where the Birstall Circuit of the Primitive Methodist Revivalists⁽⁴⁷⁾ built a chapel in New Street in 1833. Their

Table 5. Independent Methodist Chapels

Chapel	Opened	Present situation
Bradford (Spring Street) (GP/IM)	1834	Closed 1840
Little Horton (Mt Carmel)(GP/IM)	1836	Closed 1850
Bradford (Holme Lane)(CB/IM)	1845	Congregational 1865
Bingley (CB/IM)	1852	Yorkshire I.M. circuit
Baildon Green (IM)	1858	Free Evangelical 1990
Batley (New Street) (PMR/GP)	1833	to Park Road 1874
Batley (Park Road) (IM)	1874	to Cambridge St 1884
Batley (Providence St) (CB/IM)	1840	to Cambridge St 1884
Batley (Cambridge Street) (IM)	1884	Closed 1976
Cleckheaton (Nook) (CB/IM)	1847	Yorkshire I.M. circuit
Hunsworth Sunday School (CB/IM)	1852	Closed c. 1880
<u>N.B. also</u>		
Dewsbury (Thornton St)(GP/IM)	1845	Yorkshire I.M. circuit

leader at Batley was Billy Wood of Birstall, who was a local preacher for the Gospel Pilgrims. Either all the Primitive Methodist Revivalists at Batley decided to change their

allegiance, or Billy Wood left that group in order to become a Gospel Pilgrim, as this became a Gospel Pilgrim society, associated at one time with the movement in the Bradford area.⁽⁴⁸⁾ In 1851 it was known as the United Free Gospel Pilgrim Chapel, and a number of Wesleyan Reformers subsequently joined this society, and interestingly in 1858 the Birstall (Mount Tabor) United Methodist Free Churches circuit agreed to accept the society,⁽⁴⁹⁾ although if this amalgamation took place at all it seems to have been only a short-term arrangement, and the New Street congregation probably went on to form part of the Park Road I.M. society in 1874. Meanwhile the Barkerite Christian Brethren members who had seceded from Batley Zion M.N.C. chapel built a chapel in Providence Street, which was run entirely by lay leaders, whose minutes were written in an old exercise book labelled 'Arithmetic'. Their chapel was known as 'Trotter's Chapel'⁽⁵⁰⁾ after Rev William Trotter, who had been expelled with Barker in 1841. These two strands of Independent Methodism in Batley joined in 1884 at the new Cambridge Road chapel, again known locally as 'Trotter's Chapel'.

There were other Independent Methodist meetings in the area which never developed to the point of building their own premises, and consequently had only a limited existence. In 1843 one Daniel Hopkinson was expelled from the Birstall Wesleyan society for what was described as 'no other crime than that of preaching doctrines taught both by Wesley and the New Testament'.⁽⁵¹⁾ This guarded comment may conceal some criticism

of the ministers, such incidents being not uncommon during the 1840s. He probably joined the society described as Christian Brethren⁽⁵²⁾ which met at the Mount Pleasant School in Birstall and was active until about 1856. As the Wesleyan Reformers were by that time well established in the village, and were planning to build Mount Tabor chapel, it may well be that the Independent Methodists at Birstall decided to join the Reformers. Their views of Wesleyanism were very similar, and the Independent Methodist Anniversary services in 1850 were taken by 'two expelled Wesleyan Local Preachers (i.e. Wesleyan Reformers) from Bradford'.⁽⁵³⁾

Another Independent Methodist society was formed at Gomersal in 1848, 'in consequence of the unscriptural assumptions of the travelling preacher' at the Primitive Methodist meetings,⁽⁵⁴⁾ but no trace remains of this group who seceded from the society two years before the first Moor Lane chapel was opened in 1850. Some years later there was evidence of another Independent Methodist society which met in Oldfield Lane at Heckmondwike between 1876 and 1880. They met in 'a decent and commodious room...for a rental of £8.10 0 per year'.⁽⁵⁵⁾

The churches described in this chapter represent a variety of backgrounds and half a century of turmoil in local Methodism, yet there was one important common factor shared by all these societies; behind their formal links with the Independent Methodist connexion there was both a strong wish to retain their Methodist identity and a determination to

reject the principle of the pastoral office. This led them to insist on an unpaid lay ministry and the local autonomy of each society, and on this basis they developed as a separate denomination while maintaining relationships with other Methodists.

Conclusion

Independent Methodism has claimed to be a predominantly working-class denomination, and after Peterloo the literature of the denomination expressed 'a vigorous, almost militant approach to issues of social justice.'⁽⁵⁶⁾ The former Wesleyans, New Connexionists and Primitive Methodists who transferred their allegiance to Independent Methodism did so because it offered an alternative style of Methodism beyond the control of Conferences and 'hired' ministers, who were seen as being opposed to social reform. A typical anti-ministerial comment attributed to Peter Phillips⁽⁵⁷⁾ was that 'If it could be shown that a man's preaching was better because he was paid for it, they would admit their error'.

Following the coming together of the various separatist movements in Lancashire and Cheshire at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Independent Methodists were represented in this part of West Yorkshire after 1815 by a series of more or less similar revivalist groups. There is only tentative evidence of links between some of these groups; such links were certainly possible but the surviving archival material is tantalisingly sparse. The disappearance of so many of these early Independent Methodist societies was a result of the

denomination's emphasis on the autonomy of every congregation. After the controversial 'Bond of Union' issue in 1853,⁽⁵⁸⁾ which came near to splitting Independent Methodism by defining and strengthening the links between the chapels and the connexion, and the establishment of a Connexional Model Deed, it became much more difficult for societies to drift away from the connexion in this way.

Despite the variety of their backgrounds the Independent Methodists have always agreed on certain basic principles - the need for democracy and local autonomy in church government, support for revivalist preaching, and later for the Temperance movement. The slogan 'A free gospel and a free ministry' was taken to imply personal freedom of worship, but there was even greater emphasis on the principle of lay leadership, including in particular a lay and unpaid ministry, seen as a fundamental New Testament principle. This was epitomised in the story of an Independent Methodist member in Cleckheaton who happened to be the town crier, who went round the town challenging any paid minister to debate this principle from his reading of the bible, but without eliciting any response.⁽⁵⁹⁾ This reliance on unpaid local ministers chosen from within each society meant that the Independent Methodists were able to expand quickly, their main outlay being on renting or eventually building places of worship.

Vickers claimed that 'ministerial supremacy caused the birth of our denomination, and it has been, again and again, the cause of churches joining our ranks,'⁽⁶⁰⁾ but the

Independent Methodists have also pointed out that there was never any confrontation between the Wesleyans and the first Independent Methodists at Warrington.⁽⁶¹⁾ Because of this absence of animosity, the Independent Methodists have probably remained the closest of all the Methodist denominations to Wesley's definition of a Methodist as a friend to all, and an enemy to none. This attitude, reminiscent of the Quaker influence in their origins, may explain why there has been so little written about this Methodist movement, and particularly why there appears to be a complete absence of the sort of controversial material which is very evident in the case of other divisions.

The traditional willingness of the Independent Methodists to provide a haven for Methodists who wished to be retain their identity outside the jurisdiction of the Wesleyan Conference became particularly important in West Yorkshire during the late 1840s, when a number of Independent Methodist societies were formed by members disillusioned at the way in which certain ministers were claiming to have absolute control of the Wesleyan societies by virtue of the pastoral office, and these were very similar in outlook to contemporary Wesleyan Reform societies. In some cases, notably at Baildon Green, the existence of an Independent Methodist society meant that no Wesleyan Reform society was felt to be necessary.

Because the Independent Methodists have always maintained the principle of every church being independent and self-governing within a circuit organisation, as part of a connexion

having an Annual Meeting with only representative and advisory functions, they have in practice been congregationalist in church government while remaining firmly Methodist in doctrine and outlook. Within their lay ministry men and women have been equally involved for many years, and this explains why they were not involved in the negotiations leading to the 1932 union - Currie claims that they were 'simply ignored'⁽⁶²⁾, but it would have been as impossible then for the Methodists to accept a lay ministry which included many women, as it would for the Independent Methodists to overcome their aversion to an ordained, paid, and exclusively male ministry.

The expulsion of Joseph Barker from the Methodist New Connexion led in some places to the creation by former MNC members of Christian Brethren societies. Some of these joined the Independent Methodists, but locally three of the Christian Brethren societies who became Independent Methodists were not Barkerite, and had previous links only with Wesleyan or Primitive Methodism. The current circuit plan of the Yorkshire Independent Methodist Circuit lists only the churches at Cleckheaton, Dewsbury and Bingley, with a combined membership of about 100. These churches represent three distinct traditions within Independent Methodism; Cleckheaton began as a secession from the Wesleyans, Dewsbury is believed to be the only surviving society in the Gospel Pilgrim tradition, and Bingley was the result of a division within a Primitive Methodist society.

Notes

1. J. Dolan, Peter's People, Early Independent Methodists of Warrington. Independent Methodist Resource Centre, Wigan, 1996, p. 21.
2. Among the many meetings which took place following Peterloo to protest against the action of the Manchester magistrates was one at Newcastle, where one of the speakers, William Stephenson, was a Wesleyan local preacher. He was expelled, not by his own circuit, but by the Committee of Privileges in London, and such was the local reaction that within a year fourteen new Independent Methodist societies were formed in the Newcastle area by former Wesleyans. D. Hempton, Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850, 1987, p. 106.
3. Currie, Methodism Divided, p.44.
4. Townsend et al., New History of Methodism, Vol. 1, p.556.
5. A. Mounfield, A Short History of Independent Methodism, Wigan, 1905, p.1.
6. Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire Branch) No.36, Leeds, 1980, p.4, also C. Dews, Ranters, Revivalists, Radicals Reformers and Revolutionaries, Leeds, 1996, p. 44.
7. Mounfield, Independent Methodism, p.5.
8. Dolan, Peter's People, p. 2.
9. Vickers, Independent Methodism, p.8.
10. Mounfield Independent Methodism, p.21.
11. Bowmer, Pastor and People, p. 80.
12. Vickers, Independent Methodism, p.13.

13. Vickers, Independent Methodism, p.13.
14. Ibid., pp.11 and 13.
15. Dolan, Peter's People, p.8.
16. The date was controversially either 1805 or 1806, see Vickers, Independent Methodism p.9, and Dolan, Peter's People, p. 8.
17. Matthew, chapter 23 verse 8.
18. Ward, Faith and Faction, p. 270.
19. Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Independent Methodist Connexion, 1828, (IMRC, Wigan)
20. Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the United Churches of Christ, 1837, p. 17. (IMRC, Wigan)
21. Thompson, English Working Class, p.440.
22. Minutes of the Assembly of the Independent Methodist Connexion, 1824, (IMRC Wigan). The other societies in the Earlsheaton Union were at Earlsheaton, Mirfield, Hopton, Netherton, Criggleston, Emley Moor, Skelmanthorpe, Knottingley, Bexhill and Cross Pipes.
23. J.R. Robinson, Notes on Early Methodism in Dewsbury, Birstal and Neighbourhood, Batley, 1900, p.89.
24. The Bradford and Leeds Churches Gospel Pilgrims' Preachers' Plan, (May to July 1834), (IMRC Wigan) See also E. A. Rose, 'Who were the Gospel Pilgrims?', Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, Vol. XXXV, Part 2, 1965, p. 56. for Gospel Pilgrim societies in Norfolk.
25. J.James, A History and Topography of Bradford, London, 1841, p.235.

26. 1 Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 10.

27. The Cleckheaton Gospel Pilgrims met in Northgate c.1840-1842, and Gospel Pilgrims met at Batley (New Street) from 1833. Gospel Pilgrim societies were reported in 1837 at Dewsbury (Daw Green), Thornhill Edge, Mirfield, Wakefield and Hull in the Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the United Churches of Christ (I.M.), 1837. Further Gospel Pilgrim societies at Ossett (Street Side), Gawthorpe, and Thornhill (Combs) were referred to in the Independent Methodist Magazine, 1847, (IMRC, Wigan)

28. Circuit Plan of the Birstall Primitive Methodist Revivalists, 1833, Yorkshire Branch archives of the Wesley Historical Society, Y.A.S., Claremont, Leeds.

29. John Dolan told me in November 1996 that he has traced seven preachers from the Primitive Methodist Revivalist plan and found references to them in the archives of the Gospel Pilgrims at the Independent Methodist Resources Centre at Wigan; J. Ellis, J. Stapleton, W. Aspinall and J. Brear attended Daw Green Gospel Pilgrim chapel at Dewsbury; Billy Wood and T. Walker went to Batley (New Street) Gospel Pilgrim Chapel. J. Hampshire attended the Gospel Pilgrim chapel at Wakefield.

30. The use of the Christian Brethren title in West Yorkshire by the Plymouth Brethren was confirmed during 1998 in a conversation with Mr Christopher Blakeborough of Cleckheaton, a former member of the Plymouth Brethren at Brighouse. Its use in Lancashire is examined in D. Brady and F.J. Evans, Christian Brethren in Manchester and District - a History, Manchester,

- 1997, p. 17.
31. Vickers, Independent Methodism, p.163
 32. There was no Gospel Pilgrim society listed at Cleckheaton on the 1834 plan, although there was a Primitive Methodist Revivalist Society there in that year. The reference below to meeting in Northgate where Gospel Pilgrims previously met is an interesting additional reference to the Gospel Pilgrims.
 33. U.F.G.C. Magazine, 1850, p.28.
 34. Free Gospel Advocate, 1852, p.67.
 35. Handbook of the 91st Annual Meeting of the United Free Gospel Churches, Bradford, 1896, p. 3.
 36. Vickers, Independent Methodism, p. 163.
 37. Free Gospel Magazine, 1872, p.235.
 38. United Free Gospel Churches Magazine, 1850, p.26.
 - 39 F. Greenhalgh, 'History of Independent Methodism', M.S. at Bradford Reference Library, n/d., p.10.
 40. The Preaching Plan of the Baildon Green I.M. Circuit, January - April 1886. (I.M.R.C., Wigan).
 41. Vickers, Independent Methodism, p.163.
 42. J. Dolan, 'The origins of Independent Methodism and a survey of Independent Methodism in Yorkshire' in the Journal of the Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire Branch), No. 70, 1997, p. 437.
 43. C. Higham, History of Holme U.R.C. 1835 - 1985, Bradford, 1985.
 44. Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the United Free Gospel Churches, 1850-1853, (IMRC, Wigan).

45. U.M.F.G. Magazine, 1850, p.213.
46. 'Local Choirs - The Independent Methodist Chapel, Cleckheaton', in the Cleckheaton Guardian, 17 September 1908.
47. Circuit Plan of the Birstall Primitive Methodist Revivalists, 1833, Yorkshire Branch archives of the Wesley Historical Society, Y.A.S., Claremont, Leeds.
48. J. Fearnside, History of Batley, Birstall and Heckmondwike, Batley, 1860, p.33.
49. Minutes of the Quarterly Meetings of the Birstall (Mount Tabor) Wesleyan Reform/UMFC circuit 1855-1876, WYAS Wakefield, Ref. C87/2/1, 1858,
50. J. Willans, Batley Past and Present, its Rise and Progress, Batley, n/d., c.1880, p. 22.
51. U.F.G.C. Magazine, 1850, p.27.
52. M. Clegg, A History of Birstall, Otley, 1994, p. 91.
53. Ibid., 1850, p.327.
54. Ibid., 1850, p.27.
55. Independent Methodist Magazine, 1879, p.143.
56. J. Dolan, Peter's People, p.14.
57. Mounfield, Independent Methodism, p.7.
58. Vickers Independent Methodism, p. 51.
59. United Free Gospel Magazine, 1850, p.213.
60. Vickers, Independent Methodism, p.6.
61. Mounfield, Independent Methodism, p.6.
62. Currie, Methodism Divided, p.253.

Chapter 6

Nineteenth Century Methodist Evangelicals in Bradford - the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians

Introduction

Every division within Methodism gave rise to a new Methodist denomination, which in the case of the secessions consisted largely of former Wesleyans. The Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians were quite different in that their members came mainly from outside the church-going population. This led to them remaining different from the Wesleyans in their outlook until two unions ended their separate existence; for the Bible Christians this came in 1907, and for the Primitive Methodists in 1932.

When Wesley and his immediate followers created new Methodist societies from the 1740s and added to their numbers through preaching which could only be described as revivalist, they offered a religious experience or conversion which involved forgiveness of sins, membership of the Methodist societies and ultimately the hope of heaven. Wesley himself had few illusions about the effect of such preaching, acknowledging that not all his hearers would respond, and that not all of those who responded would remain within Methodism,⁽¹⁾ but he knew personally countless individuals whose lives had been changed by their religious experiences and he visited many societies that were successful, and their numbers grew throughout his lifetime.⁽²⁾ The significance of the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians arose from the fact that

they successfully maintained this impetus of evangelism for a further period, taking on this responsibility when Wesleyan Methodism was largely turning away from such activities.

Revivalism remained for many members the main function of Methodism into the nineteenth century, with the aim of attracting new members and strengthening their church. At the level of each Methodist family, however, it was by no means certain that the children of Methodist parents would experience conversion in the way that their parents had done. As they grew up within a Methodist environment and absorbed its views gradually such children may have become active Methodists, but they were unlikely to experience that contrast between personal despair and religious hope which characterised the experience of the first generation of converts, and over a period attitudes towards revivalism inevitably changed. Before the end of the nineteenth century the Primitive Methodists had lost their early zeal and settled down to a style of worship not much different from that of the Wesleyans, although they retained the working-class image which had been part of their history.

There was therefore confusion over the proper role of revivalism within Methodism. While official Wesleyan policy saw revivals as an accepted part of religious life, without which the church would cease to grow, it was understood that all revivalist activity would be under the control of the preachers and within the discipline of Wesleyan Methodism.⁽³⁾ Reports of local revivals within Methodism were comparatively frequent at

the end of the eighteenth century and in the early years of the nineteenth,⁽⁴⁾ although they had virtually ceased in all branches of Methodism before the end of the century. Unfettered emotionalism was contrary to Wesleyan demands for order and control, and there was always suspicion on the part of the Wesleyan leadership when local revivals were led by laymen without the consent of their circuit ministers. The leaders of such groups, often local preachers, virtually always left or were expelled from their Wesleyan societies.

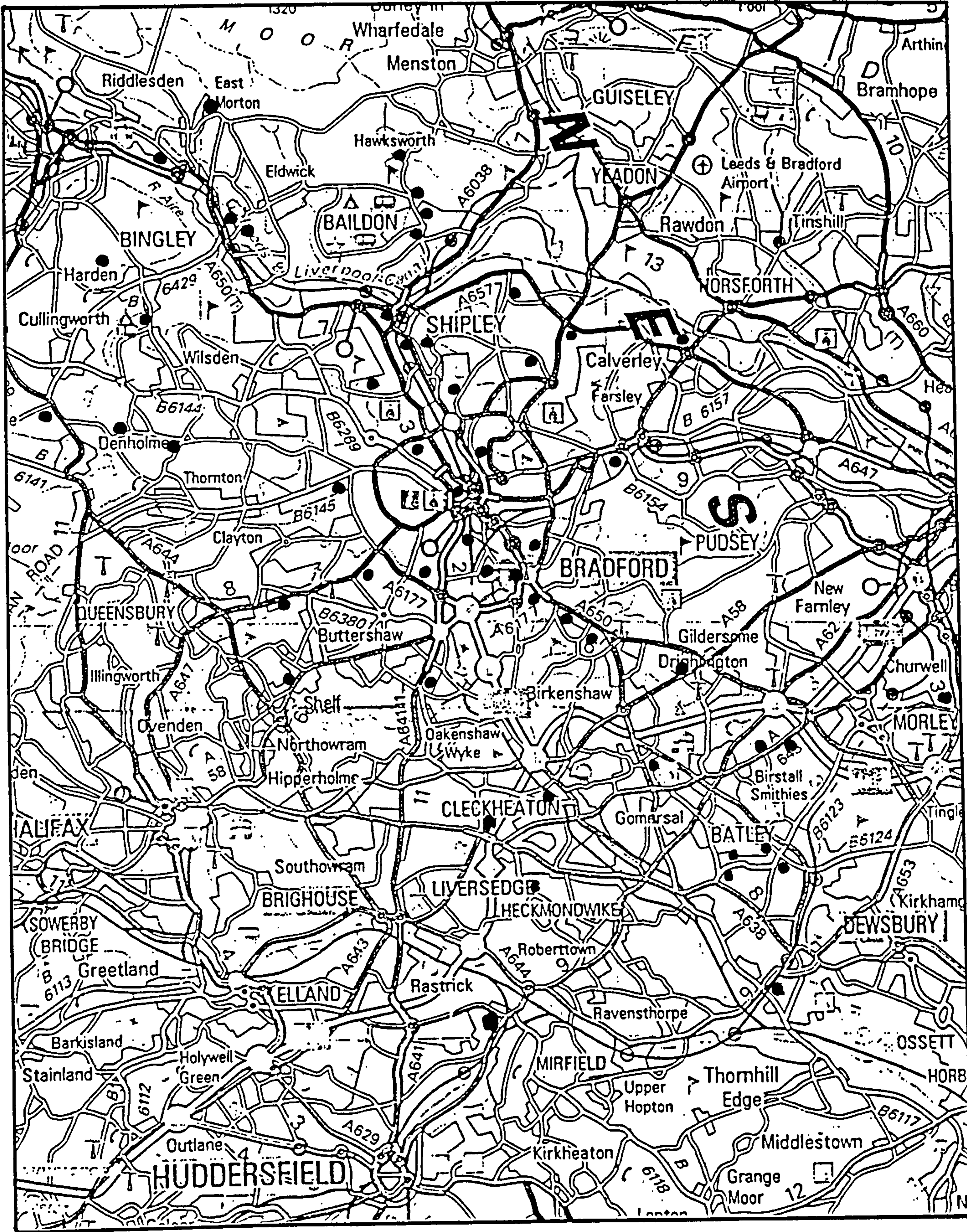
During the first decades of the nineteenth century two important new Methodist movements in the revivalist tradition came into being. The first such group, the Primitive Methodists, were originally members of several small Methodist groups in Staffordshire, drawn together by their shared enthusiasm for revivalism. Their aim was to continue the work Wesley and his contemporaries had started almost a century earlier, and they used techniques of evangelism which had been successful during Wesley's own ministry, but had later been discarded by the Wesleyans. At a time when Wesleyan worship always took place in their chapels, the Primitive Methodists, whose members came mainly from the working class, took their message to others from a similar background by going out of their chapels and preaching in the streets and holding camp meetings which were open to anyone who chose to attend.

Originally intensely loyal and active members of Wesleyan Methodist societies, the first leaders of Primitive Methodism found themselves excluded by ministers suspicious of unofficial

revivalist activities outside their own control. These took place at a time of political turmoil as well as being a period of hardship verging for many on starvation, when the leaders of Wesleyan Methodism were anxious to avoid any suggestion that Methodists could be in any way associated with radicalism. Those expelled were therefore obliged to create their own organisation, and Primitive Methodism became a separate Methodist denomination, quite distinct from its Wesleyan origins, although the early Primitive Methodists often had much in common with the minority Revivalist wing within Wesleyanism.

It is noteworthy that the early leaders of Primitive Methodism received help in establishing their societies from a number of sympathetic Wesleyans, not all of whom wished to change their own allegiance. Some Wesleyans assisted the Primitive Methodist cause in Leeds in 1819,⁽⁵⁾ and progress throughout the Dewsbury and Bradford branches of the Leeds Primitive Methodist circuit was significantly faster than the spread of the first Methodist societies had been in the same area after 1740. The opening of twenty-five preaching places in these two branches between 1819 and 1821 suggests that other Wesleyan sympathisers also helped to prime the Primitive Methodist pump.

Although many of the early leaders of Primitive Methodism were former Wesleyans, most subsequent members were recruited from among those outside organised religion, and what they lacked in social background they made up for in religious zeal. As the Primitive Methodist numbers grew, the first



Map 6. Primitive Methodist chapels.

leaders from a Wesleyan background were replaced by men who knew only Primitive Methodism, and they avoided involvement in Wesleyan disputes and secessions, and created a form of Methodism which became more strongly associated with working-class activities, particularly in terms of leadership in trade unions and political movements. E.P. Thompson's view was that 'the poor man's dissent...of the Primitive Methodists was a religion of the poor: orthodox Wesleyanism remained as it had commenced, a religion for the poor,'(6)

The Bible Christian societies in Bradford provide another example of a group who originally left Wesleyan Methodism after a dispute over the issue of denominational discipline. The way in which this Methodist group was formed, and the attitude of the Wesleyan leadership towards the Bible Christians in the events which led to their separation from the parent body, are in some respects very similar to the situation of the first Primitive Methodists, who were their contemporaries. The Bible Christians were a smaller group, again predominantly working class, whose doctrinal position was no different from that of any other Methodists. Their movement had its origins in the series of revivals in Cornwall which took place for half a century from the 1760s, and support for the movement was always strongest in the south-west.

In practice members of this denomination were also found as a minority group in other parts of the country as well as overseas, but characteristically these isolated Bible Christian societies existed for two purposes - to enable migrants from

the south-west to continue to worship within a familiar setting, and secondly to provide a nucleus of Bible Christians who aimed to evangelise new areas. Their presence in Bradford was the result of quite fortuitous circumstances, but led to the establishment and development of two Bible Christian places of worship in the town. Within a few years both the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians became separated from their Wesleyan origins, but they both claimed to represent the original revivalist tradition within Methodism which was then no longer acceptable to many Wesleyan Methodists.

The Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians

Given the reluctance of the leaders of Wesleyan Methodism to tolerate lay leadership of revivalist activities within the connexion at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it became inevitable that the Primitive Methodists would soon be separated from their Wesleyan roots. Two revivalist groups came together to form the Primitive Methodist Connexion - one was the Camp Meeting Methodists led by Hugh Bourne, a carpenter and mill-wright from Staffordshire who was converted, became a Wesleyan, and in 1800 led a revival. During another revival in 1804 at Tunstall the conversion took place of William Clowes, a potter by trade, who started to preach regularly at services, and his followers, known as the Clowesites, were the second group.

The Camp-Meeting Methodists held their first open-air meeting during 1801. Kendall⁽⁷⁾ refers to this as 'the Camp Meeting without a name', pointing out that as such meetings

became established on a regular basis they represented an entirely lay form of evangelism which bypassed ministerial control. These events were characterised by two forms of lay activity; 'conversation preaching' in which converts would speak individually about their faith to those willing to listen, and the 'prayer of faith',⁽⁸⁾ which involved a group of lay people praying in turn for the conversion of individuals present. All this took place against a background of many small intimate cottage prayer meetings consisting entirely of lay people, where those present felt free to express opinions without the constraints of chapel discipline or the presence of a minister. Hugh Bourne, whose loyalty to the Camp Meeting movement was to lead to his expulsion from Wesleyan Methodism, helped to build the group's first chapel and preached in it, his innate shyness making him hold his left hand in front of his face, a mannerism which he retained throughout his life.⁽⁹⁾

Bourne and Clowes were not the only leaders of revivalist groups on the fringes of Methodism.⁽¹⁰⁾ In 1805 they were present at a service taken by an eccentric American evangelist, Lorenzo Dow, and encouraged by Dow's support for camp meetings, which were then popular in America, they arranged to hold a camp meeting in May 1807. This took place at Mow Cop, a viewpoint on the hills near Biddulph, near a folly in the form of a castle. It involved several thousand people coming for a whole Sunday to hear preaching and to pray and sing hymns on the level area below Mow Cop, and to accommodate the numbers present separate stands were put up so that four preachers

could each address part of the crowd. The success of this event led to a second meeting at Mow Cop in July, but the local Wesleyan ministers objected and the 1807 Conference banned further camp meetings, on the grounds that 'It is our judgement that, even supposing such meetings to be allowable in America, they are highly improper in England, and likely to be productive of considerable mischief'.⁽¹¹⁾ Wesleyan suspicions of camp meetings arose because such meetings were entirely lay activities and were not subject to connexional discipline imposed by the ministers. Further concern arose because in America the worshippers often travelled many miles to attend camp meetings which lasted several days, and these actually involved a camp where those attending spent the nights between their daytime religious activities. In this country the name remained without the camp, but some Wesleyans were still uneasy about the implications of large numbers of Methodists being involved in unofficial religious meetings.

Bourne and Clowes met James Crawfoot, another former Wesleyan local preacher who had been dismissed after preaching for the Quaker Methodists at Warrington. Crawfoot was the leader of the so-called 'Magic' Methodists of Delamere Forest, whose worship involved trances, and he became an evangelist under the guidance of Bourne and Clowes. Despite the official ban by the Wesleyan authorities there was a further camp meeting at Norton in August 1807, and when Bourne was expelled from the Wesleyan society at the Quarterly Meeting of the Burslem circuit for taking part in this event he gave up his

employment to become a full-time evangelist and the leader of the Camp Meeting Methodists, who became a distinct and separate Methodist organisation from March 1810.

Later that year Clowes too was expelled from the Wesleyan Methodist society for taking part in camp meetings, and with his followers he worshipped in a chapel in Tunstall. The beginning of Primitive Methodism dates from the amalgamation of the Clowesites and the Camp Meeting Methodists in May 1811, (12) although it was not until the following year that they took the title of Primitive Methodists, a reference to Wesley's last address to the Preachers at Chester, when he challenged them to follow the example of the 'primitive Methodists', meaning by the phrase the first of the early Methodists. (13) Their preaching plans for many years were often headed 'Primitive Methodists, known also by the name of Ranters'

Early in the nineteenth century there were many meetings and informal links between different groups of Revivalists and their leaders, who included both Primitive Methodists and Independent Methodists. These groups used techniques of revivalism not unlike those which had brought success to the original Methodists eighty years earlier, and small Revivalist groups still existed at the time as a minority movement within Wesleyan Methodism. William Bramwell was among a small minority of Wesleyan Preachers who combined orthodox preaching and Revivalism, and he was the leader of many Revivals including those in Dewsbury and Birstall, (14) but revivalism was viewed with suspicion by Bunting, who wished to separate Wesleyan

worship from its earlier methods in order to increase the social standing of the church.

Primitive Methodist camp meetings attracted those unwilling to attend services in churches, but any comparison with the earlier field preaching of Wesley and his colleagues needs to be examined with care. The emphasis on an individual preacher was replaced by the involvement of large numbers of lay people. The class meetings which Wesley had used were continued by the Primitive Methodists, but there were attempts to share the leadership between the members.⁽¹⁵⁾ Primitive Methodist services took place wherever they could find shelter in hired rooms or barns, and their first chapels were usually simple structures, often being converted cottages, and in this respect they followed the pattern of the Methodists of the previous century. Their evangelistic campaigns and local missions, like the original Methodist preaching, reached all parts of the country in spite of violent opposition at some of their open air services which was reminiscent of the difficulties faced by the first Methodists. They were also dependent on a large number of local preachers, although unlike the Wesleyans they had a number of women preachers.⁽¹⁶⁾

Reflecting their suspicion of ministerial authority, the Primitive Methodist Conference established the principle in 1820 that there should be two lay delegates and only one minister or 'Travelling Preacher' from each circuit. The Primitive Methodists, like the Independent Methodists, were early supporters of the Temperance and Teetotal movements, and

both denominations took a leading part in these activities (17) which were seen as particularly important among their mainly working-class membership, where drink-related problems were particularly serious.

Primitive Methodists often became leaders within working-class communities. (18) Long before education became universal, they were accustomed to order and discipline within the life of their chapels, where their continued membership was evidence of personal integrity, and where they gained confidence as well as skills in literacy, public speaking, and leadership. Many Primitive Methodists were involved in activities outside the life of the chapel, and held office in trade unions and on local councils, and the role of Primitive Methodist local preachers in trade-union activities, particularly in the coalfields of Durham and Northumberland, has been investigated by Wearmouth (19) and Colls. (20) One incident in 1831, for example, involved Tommy Hepburn, a Primitive Methodist local preacher and miners' leader, who insisted on leading prayers at the start of a meeting between miners' representatives and Lord ~~Rosebery~~ ^{Londonderry} to discuss working conditions. (21). A measure of the involvement and solidarity of Primitive Methodists in industrial action, and the severity of the consequences they faced, is indicated by the drop in Primitive Methodist circuit membership in Durham due to evictions by the mineowners following a strike; the 1,500 members recorded there in 1843 had shrunk to 520 only twelve months later. (22)

Primitive Methodism spread northwards from Staffordshire

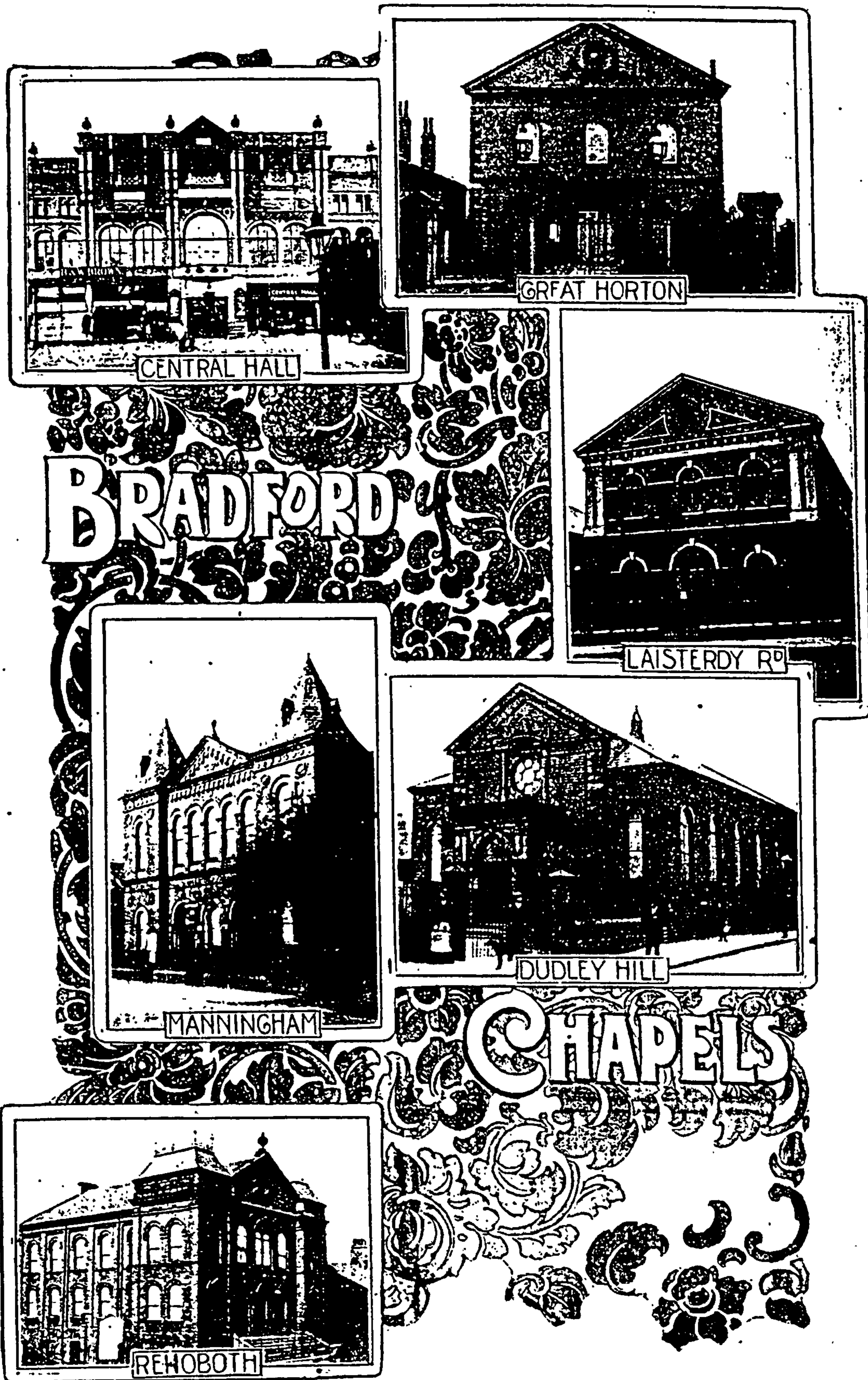


Illustration 6. Primitive Methodist chapels in Bradford⁽²³⁾

along the River Trent and reached Hull in 1819. Within Yorkshire the movement spread outwards from Hull and quickly reached Leeds, and William Clowes addressed meetings in Leeds and Dewsbury. At about the same time members of other Primitive Methodist groups moved north through Sheffield and Barnsley to reach Wakefield and Huddersfield, where the first two Primitive Methodists to arrive spent a night in the town dungeon. From there they moved in 1821 to Halifax, and having established a meeting at Shelf, they moved on towards Bradford where the two groups met. They founded an early society at Dudley Hill before moving north up the Aire valley to Silsden.

The main centre of Primitive Methodism in this part of the West Riding was Leeds, a town with a strong revivalist tradition where there had for many years been a very active group of women preachers. When Wesleyan Methodism became unwilling to accept women preachers in the early nineteenth century, some of them joined the Primitive Methodists. One Leeds preacher, Ann Carr, became the leader of the 'Female Revivalists' or 'Jumping Ranters', and being unwilling to accept the discipline of the Primitive Methodists she then led a secession with its own three chapels, the first opened in 1825, and this movement caused difficulties in the area for the Primitive Methodists until Ann Carr's death in 1841.⁽²⁴⁾

Just as certain lay revivalists in the Potteries who were expelled from Wesleyan Methodism became Primitive Methodists, so in Devon and Cornwall very similar circumstances led to the formation of the Bible Christians. The two groups shared many

characteristics in terms of their emphasis on evangelism, the working-class background of most of their members, their acceptance of women preachers, and their support for the Temperance movement. In time the Primitive Methodists became a large organisation, but the Bible Christians were always a small group.(25)

The first leader of the Bible Christians, William O'Bryan, was born in 1778, and after his conversion he preached in the Bodmin area. Later he acted as an assistant to the Wesleyan preachers, and established several new preaching places in Cornwall, but in 1810 his application to become an itinerant preacher was turned down because he was married. His continuing lay evangelism was then deemed by the Wesleyan authorities to be irregular, and his membership ticket was withdrawn. He was again accepted as a member in 1814, when the societies he had established were included in the Wesleyan circuits, but his membership was again ended on the grounds that he had failed to attend class meetings, when it was known that he had been involved on preaching tours some distance away.

The point at issue was whether or not the Wesleyan hierarchy could control and limit the activities of their lay preachers. O'Bryan saw himself as a loyal Wesleyan, active in the growth of his church, but the ministers saw him as a threat to their monopoly of authority within Wesleyan Methodism. He reluctantly left the Wesleyans, who were then relatively well established in Cornwall, and started to preach in Devon. In 1815 he was invited to Shebbear, between Bideford and

Okehampton, and the chapel there became the centre of the denomination's activities. Although until 1828 the legal title of the denomination was 'Arminian Bible Christians', it later became the 'Bible Christian Methodists'.

Although the on-going revivals in the area provided the momentum for each subsequent revivalist movement, O'Bryan's personal drive and determination virtually created the Bible Christian organisation, yet his strong convictions and his unwillingness to compromise made him difficult to work with. Shaw (26) describes him as 'by birth an Anglican, by inheritance a Quaker, and by choice and temperament a Methodist. And yet an unsatisfactory Methodist, for his allegiance was only to its doctrines and not to its discipline. He claimed a roving commission, subject to no ecclesiastical superior, the privileges of a new Wesley, a law giver but not a law abider...who was constitutionally unable to work in harness with other people either as a colleague or leader.' Without him there would have been no Bible Christian Connexion, but with him there could be no links with the Wesleyan Methodists.

Two characteristic activities of the Bible Christians were the holding of missions in new areas, and schemes which catered for Bible Christian workers from Devon and Cornwall who had moved north to find work in the mines or quarries or other industries such as textiles who still wished to maintain links with their own denomination and to worship in the Bible Christian tradition. The Bible Christians organised a mission to Bradford which was significant because it was one of several

attempts to establish a Bible Christian church in a northern city, and other towns involved in similar schemes included Blackburn, Bolton, Birmingham and Chesterfield. (27)

Primitive Methodists in the Bradford area

The involvement of sympathetic Wesleyans in the furtherance of Primitive Methodism helped the new movement in the Bingley area. The Primitive Methodists in Leeds were invited to preach at Silsden by John Flesher and John Parkinson, two young Wesleyan Local Preachers. The first two Primitive Methodists arrived in March or April 1821, and were probably John Hewson, a former miner, and Thomas Batty, whose Wesleyan parents were close friends of William Bramwell. (28) Two years after establishing a Ranter chapel at Silsden in December 1821, the town became head of a large circuit stretching from the village of Barley, near Pendle Hill, to Shipley, and societies were formed locally at Baildon, Baildon Green, Bingley, Cottingley, Harden, Ryecroft, Micklethwaite, Cullingworth, East and West Morton, Shipley and Wilsden Hill. (29)

The eight Primitive Methodist chapels opened in Bingley and the surrounding villages, listed in table 6/1, support the view that early Primitive Methodism was strongly supported in rural working-class communities, although many congregations who succeeded in building a chapel were unable to pay for their premises, and having built they found themselves for many years in difficulty paying even the interest on their debts. Behind the apparent success of the denomination, in fact, there were long-term financial problems in several local chapels due to

Table 6/1. Primitive Methodist Chapels in Bingley and Shipley

Chapel	Opened	Present Situation
<u>Bingley</u>		
East Morton (Hillside)	1827	Closed 1988
Denholme Clough	1834	to Halifax 1901
Wilsden (Zion)	1844	Closed 1961
Harecroft (Blackburn Memorial)	1851	Bradford (West) Ct.
Ryecroft	1853	Closed 1939
Bingley (Hill Street)	1854	Moved 1907 to Zion
Bingley (Zion, St John Street)	1907	Closed 1967
Crossflatts (Aire Street)	1878	Closed 1966
Denholme	1885	Closed 1898
<u>Shipley</u>		
Baildon (Bank End)	1824	Moved 1865 to Zion
Baildon (Zion, Browgate)	1865	Closed 1961
Shipley (Saltaire Road)	1840	Closed 1957
Windhill (Bethel, Leeds Road)	1868	Closed 1970
Baildon (Low Hill)	1874	Closed 1930
Baildon (Moorside)	1879	Closed 1917
Crag Road	1886	Shipley & Bingley

their outstanding debts. The records of Bingley circuit (30) show that in 1884 debts amounted to £1,872, and only ten pounds had been paid off in the previous year. £1,050 of this was the debt on the Bingley chapel, which had been built for £1,049, but the original debt of £830 on completion of the premises had been increased by additional later expenditure of £2,709 which the 400 hearers seemed unable to cover. At Denholme Clough the original debt continued unchanged for thirty years, while at Crossflatts the debt had increased since the building had been in use. Only two chapels in the circuit reported no debts, and in 1886 an appeal was sent to the Conference to drop one of the two ministers, on the grounds that the circuit owed the ministers twenty-two pounds, and twelve pounds was owed to the circuit steward.

Fortnightly services at Shipley were led by Primitive Methodists from the Bradford Mission of the Leeds circuit as early as 1821, but members from Silsden were also involved in the town. The society in Shipley first met in the 'Old Room' in Westgate, then moved to other premises in Westgate before building a chapel in 1840,⁽³¹⁾ and Primitive Methodist services took place at Baildon from 1822.⁽³²⁾

The Primitive Methodists became the second largest Methodist denomination throughout Bradford, being firmly established there before the Wesleyan Reform movement. Reference has been made above to the two groups of Primitive Methodists whose evangelism brought the first Primitive Methodist preaching to Bradford during the early months of

1821. Two ministers from Leeds, Rev Thomas Holliday and a Mr Revel, having been arrested for preaching in the streets at Halifax and committed to the Wakefield House of Correction, were released on bail at Wakefield and subsequently appeared and were acquitted at the Bradford Sessions. Leaving the court they started to preach in the streets of Bradford,⁽³³⁾ and associated with Holliday and Revel were a group referred to as the 'Singing Pilgrims', possibly a local revivalist group, who started to hold open-air meetings at Great Horton and Dudley Hill.⁽³⁴⁾ Despite being again prosecuted for preaching in the streets, they made quick progress and by September of that year the Leeds Primitive Methodist Plan quoted the Bradford Mission as having twelve preaching places, which almost certainly would at first be in the homes of members.⁽³⁵⁾ In March 1822 four more preaching places were shown, at Wibsey, Clayton, Daisy Hill and Allerton.⁽³⁶⁾ Open-air services in the centre of town were led by the Bradford minister, Rev J Coulson, and there were soon 300 members within the Bradford First Primitive Methodist Circuit, which was formed in 1823. Bradford would appear to have been another area where a number of revivalist Wesleyans 'primed the pump' to start Primitive Methodist activity, which grew in the town with such rapidity that the Primitive Methodist Conference met there in 1832.

The strength of the Primitive Methodists in Bradford led to most of the early preaching places developing into chapels, listed in Table 6/2 below, and these were built in two distinct periods, the first group were opened between 1823 and 1846,

Table 6/2 Primitive Methodist Chapels in Bradford

Chapel	Opened	Present Situation
Dudley Hill (Ebenezer)	1823	Trinity circuit
Idle (Ebenezer, Town Lane)	1823	Closed 1960
Shelf (Wadehouse)	1823	Closed 1977
Providence/Central Hall	1824	Closed 1955
Great Horton (Bethel)	1825	Closed 1974
Daisy Hill (Salem, Smith Lane)	1835	Free Church 1970
Sun Street (Philadelphia)	1835	Closed 1893
Greengates (Springfield)	1836	Closed 1985
Calverley (Park)	1840	Woodhouse Grove Ct
Laisterdyke (Zion, Maltby St)	1846	Closed 1959
Bowling Back Lane (Pen Street)	c1860	to New Hey Rd 1882
Low Moor (School Street)	1870	Closed 1947
Drighlington (Whitehall Road)	c1870	Closed 1939
Horton Bank	1871	Great Horton Ct
Brownroyd (Ingleby Road)	1872	Closed 1966
Woodlands Street (City Rd)	1875	Closed 1964
Bolton Woods (Livingstone Road)	1878	Closed 1926
Bowling Old Lane (Rehoboth)	1878	Closed 1963
Tyersal (Bury Street)	1878	Closed 1961
Manningham (Heaton Road)	1879	Closed 1959
Tennyson Place	1881	Closed 1968
New Hey Road	1882	Trinity circuit
Dirkhill (All Saints Road)	1883	Closed 1972
Eccleshill (Norman Lane)	1910	Woodhouse Grove Ct

after which there was a period of almost twenty-five years before the second wave of building which took place between 1871 and the end of the century. The first three Primitive Methodist chapels in Bradford were all opened in 1823 at Shelf (Wadehouse), which was originally in the Halifax circuit, Idle

(Ebenezer), and Dudley Hill (also Ebenezer). The headquarters of Bradford Primitive Methodism was the Providence chapel in Manchester Road, and later this was replaced on the same site by the Central Hall seating 900 people, the Primitive Methodist equivalent to the Wesleyans' Eastbrook Hall.

There was a very early Primitive Methodist presence at Great Horton, which may have been typical of such early societies. (37) In May 1821 John Coulson visited the village, and during the summer months meetings were held in the open air. A 'barn-house' was then used for services by the eleven members until the upper room of a cottage became available, and the congregation, now forty in number, dug out the foundations for the chapel at Town End in order to save expense. The chapel cost £803, of which only £118 had been raised when it was opened in 1825, leaving a debt on the premises of £685. The chapel was visited in 1832 by Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, the two founders of the movement, (38) and among its members was Isaac Jefferson, the 'Wat Tyler' of Bradford Chartism, who was sentenced to prison for his part in the 1848 agitation in Bradford.

The second wave of Primitive Methodist chapels was intended to complete the provision of the denomination's places of worship throughout the town, and to ensure that the members moving out to the growing suburbs were able to continue to worship near their new homes, although to the west of the town there were never any Primitive Methodist societies at Clayton, Thornton or Allerton. In 1889 Rehoboth became a Mission Church

(39) in an attempt to increase income and provide facilities in a working-class district of the type associated with the Forward Movement in Wesleyan Methodism. Only one Primitive Methodist church was opened in Bradford during the twentieth century, at Norman Lane in Eccleshill in 1910.

Primitive Methodist premises, usually consisting of a chapel and a Sunday School, were characteristically plain and reflected the values of congregations with little money to spare, and the financial problems associated with small congregations on low incomes which were common within the Primitive Methodist connexion were not unknown in Bradford. The annual returns required each circuit treasurer to state the cost of all buildings and subsequent expenditure on maintenance, as well as the debt on completion of the building and the current debt on each property. It was taken for granted that such problems would arise, and it was usually hoped that the debts would be paid off at some time in the future. For some Bradford societies the struggle was too much. This explains the premature closure of Philadelphia (Sun Street) Chapel, opened in 1835 and closed in 1893, and of Drighlington (Whitehall Road), opened in 1870 and closed in 1939. What is surprising is that except for the chapel at Bolton Woods, which was closed in 1926, all the other Primitive Methodist chapels in Bradford survived until the widespread closures of the 1960s.

Although the Primitive Methodists did not have any purpose-built places of worship in Birstall and the Spen

Valley until the middle of the nineteenth century, table 6/3 indicates that considerable building took place during the following fifty years. There is evidence that as early as June 1821 services were being held at Drighlington, Birkenshaw, Morley, Roberttown, Hightown and Hartshead Moor,⁽⁴⁰⁾ and three months later the plan also included Gomersal and Birstall.⁽⁴¹⁾ Some of the societies in this area failed to survive long enough to build chapels, and no trace survives of the early Primitive Methodist meetings held at Birkenshaw or Hartshead Moor.

Five Primitive Methodist societies in the Birstall area built chapels, although only two were within the present circuit boundaries. These were at Gomersal, where the first Bethel (Moor Lane) chapel was opened in 1850 and replaced with larger premises in 1872, and at Birstall, where the Primitive Methodists met at first in a cottage in Low Lane, and in about 1860 bought the former Independent chapel in High Street. This proved adequate until 1885, when they built a much larger chapel, Zion (Low Lane), but the upkeep of this building proved beyond their means, and it was closed and sold in 1909, and the congregation was dispersed. As well as two societies at Batley, there was the very early chapel opened at Morley in 1821, where the Leeds Female Revivalists had led a secession in 1826.⁽⁴²⁾ This chapel was sold, and the replacement Ebenezer Primitive Methodist chapel was opened at Hunger Hill at Morley in 1835.

According to Peel,⁽⁴³⁾ the first Primitive Methodists in the Spenn Valley held meetings at Tanhouses between Hightown and

Table 6/3 Primitive Methodist chapels in Birstall/Cleckheaton

Chapel	Opened	Present Situation
<u>Birstall</u>		
Morley	1821	Closed 1960
Gomersal (Bethel, Moor Lane)	1850	Closed 1964
Batley (Wellington Street)	1855	Closed 1966
Birstall (High Street)	1860	to Low Lane 1885
Birstall (Low Lane)	1885	Closed 1909
Batley (Trinity, Talbot Street)	1871	Closed 1975
<u>Cleckheaton and Spen Valley</u>		
Heckmondwike (Batley Road) (MNC)	1848	to new chapel 1869
Heckmondwike (Batley Road)	1869	Closed 1975
Liversedge (Highfield)	1860	Closed 1967
Dewsbury Moor (School Lane)	1860	Closed 1968
Hightown (Trinity)	1871	Closed 1969
Cleckheaton (Clarence Street)	1874	Closed 1901
Norristhorpe (Ebenezer)	1887	Birstall & Spen Ct

Roberttown during the early days of the movement, and they attended Sunday services in nearby towns. These meetings at Tanhouses may have replaced the 1821 meetings held in Roberttown and Hightown which were referred to above, and probably led to the formation of the Hightown society. Peel records that services were sometimes held in cottages in High Street at Heckmondwike and at Dewsbury Moor, and worship probably continued in most places, although no circuit records survive for the next twenty years. In 1844 open-air services were again reported, and Rev James Austen preached in the market place at Heckmondwike. As the Heckmondwike Primitive Methodists increased in numbers they bought the former New Connexion chapel at Batley Road, where a revival in the 1860s added 200 new members to the church. This led to them opening a new Batley Road Primitive Methodist chapel at the cross-roads above the old chapel in 1869, and Rev James Austen was invited back to preach at the opening service.

Other Primitive Methodist places of worship provided opportunities for worship throughout the Spen Valley, including Dewsbury Moor, where the cause was believed to have been started 'early last century as a result of a wonderful revival amongst the Old Methodists' (44), another hint of sympathetic Wesleyans assisting the early Primitive Methodists. There were references to occasional Primitive Methodist meetings during the 1850s at 'Doghouse' (45) or Norristhorpe, which led to the formation of a society there in 1883 and the first Norristhorpe chapel in 1887. (46)

The early closure of the chapel at Cleckheaton in 1901 was followed closely by the sale of the Birstall chapel in 1909. Both were in towns with a strong Methodist tradition, and this raises again the problems of adequate finance examined above in relation to the other Primitive Methodist circuits. It is understandable that the Primitive Methodists wanted to have premises comparable to those of other Methodist groups in each town, but in fact their income was smaller. This is confirmed by the list of occupations of the Cleckheaton trustees in 1876; three labourers, two gardeners, two miners, two grocers, a painter, a spinner, a card dresser, a currier, and a stone merchant.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Perhaps both these congregations would have survived had they chosen to remain in their original premises until they had saved a larger amount of capital.

Within the local Primitive Methodist circuits the old tradition of holding regular Camp Meetings was maintained, with meetings being arranged in 1871 at Batley, Hightown, Scholes, White Lee and Roberttown. Again in 1873 arrangements were made to hold Camp Meetings at Heckmondwike, Gomersal, Batley, Littleton, and Cleckheaton,⁽⁴⁸⁾ and these continued spasmodically until the 1890s.

The Primitive Methodists were successful in establishing their societies and then building chapels throughout the area, and although those in Bradford were established before the Reform agitation, the rather later societies in Birstall and Cleckheaton usually managed to attract a congregation from within small communities which already supported Wesleyan and

Wesleyan Reform premises as well as Church of England and Independent places of worship.

Bible Christians in Bradford

The mission to Bradford took place when a number of Bible Christian textile workers from Wellington in Somerset came to find work in the Bradford mills at a time when the textile industry in Somerset was in difficulties. (49)

The chapels listed in table 6/4 were in fact two quite different Bible Christian societies, both in Bradford. The Toller Lane Bible Christian Chapel had its origins in 1872, when Bible Christian families from Somerset started holding cottage meetings in Hollings Road, and these proved very successful. In 1877 one of their leading ministers, Rev. S. L. Thorne, was appointed to the town by the Bible Christian Conference, and in 1878 an iron chapel was erected (50) which became the headquarters of the Bradford Bible Christian District, with oversight of the movement throughout northern

Table 6/4. Bible Christian Chapels in Bradford

Chapel	Opened	Present situation
Toller Lane	1878	Closed 1949
East Bowling (Ebenezer)	1894	Closed 1958

England.⁽⁵¹⁾ In 1886 a new church was built on the same site in Toller Lane, at the junction with Ashwell Road. This appears to have been an active society, and at one time they rented temporary premises in Marion Street at Listerhills for use as a Mission Room.⁽⁵²⁾

The Bible Christians at Toller Lane were always part of a local circuit and a connexional system, but the other Bible Christian congregation at Ebenezer Bible Christian Chapel in East Bowling were never included in any circuit, and despite the title it was always in practice an independent society. It seems probable that this was another place of worship for textile workers from the south-west, in a strongly working-class area. Their independent status probably explains why none of the customary written records have been preserved, and in fact most of the information that is available has been traced recently from local residents by a local history group.⁽⁵³⁾ Meetings were held in a room over a shop from about 1880 until new premises were built, and after 1894 the Ebenezer Bible Christian society worshipped in an iron chapel on the south side of Bowling Back Lane, between Peace Street and Parry Lane. It had slatted seats and a coke stove in the middle of the room.

In contrast to the hierarchical style of church government favoured by the Wesleyans, most of the non-Wesleyan traditions including the Bible Christians held to the congregational principle that 'all power and authority rest ultimately in the Church Meeting'.⁽⁵⁴⁾ In accordance with this principle the

East Bowling society had apparently made a specific decision to remain outside the connexional system. They were therefore never part of the Bible Christian circuit, and had no formal links with the Toller Lane society. Had they been part of a circuit this would have involved greater financial obligations to cover ministerial oversight and would have taken away their independence. The East Bowling congregation always retained the Bible Christian title, and it was a very active society up to the 1940s, but as the old property in the area was cleared the congregation became scattered, and when the Ebenezer chapel closed in 1958 the remaining members went to Cutler Heights Methodist Church.

Further evidence that the members of this virtually independent society saw themselves as part of the Methodist tradition was provided when they gave the proceeds of the sale of their property to the Methodist Church.⁽⁵⁵⁾ One baptismal register is the only surviving document from this society.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Conclusion

Hugh Bourne described the formation of the Primitive Methodist church as 'undesigned of man', implying that it came into existence as an act of Providence, not as a result of any human intention, but individuals were involved in its activities and other individuals reacted to what was taking place. There seems little doubt that the Wesleyans had not realised the significance or foreseen the growth of this movement, whose first leaders, expelled from their chapels by the ministers for what could well be described as an excess of zeal, would have

much preferred to remain within the Wesleyan church. There is a certain irony in the fact that by removing the future leaders of Primitive Methodism from their churches, the Wesleyans had in practice ensured the continuity of the revivalist tradition within Methodism, while losing any chance they had previously had of controlling its development. Long after mainstream Wesleyan enthusiasm for revivalist activities had ended, there was continuing interest from Primitive Methodists, Bible Christians and Independent Methodists, and a number of smaller and more short-lived groups, among whom during the early years of the nineteenth century there was co-operation involving a sharing of ideas and exchanges of preachers.(57)

Had all these groups combined their resources, there might have been one strong Methodist denomination in the revivalist tradition, but in the absence of any inclusive organisation the Primitive Methodists became the most successful and by far the largest revivalist group within Methodism. To many people outside Methodism the movement was seen as consisting only of Wesleyans and Primitive Methodists, these being the best-known of the Methodist denominations.

The Primitive Methodists had no illusions about their social status. 'Primitive Methodism has no ecclesiastical pedigree of which to boast. It has sprung from a root out of dry ground - the lowly working class of English society...Such an origin is neither a matter of boasting or of humiliation. It is simply a matter of fact.'(58) They were associated with an enthusiastic approach to worship reflected in the name

'Ranters', and an involvement in radical politics. Among many similar accounts, the problems faced in 1872 by George Edwards, a Norfolk agricultural labourer preparing to take his first service as a Primitive Methodist local preacher, emphasise the challenges that had to be faced. Unable to read, but anxious to conceal the fact, he decided to learn by heart the first chapter of St John's gospel and the three hymns he planned to use, so that he would appear to be reading. He was gradually taught to read by his wife, and subsequently became a Trade Union organiser and later a Member of Parliament.⁽⁵⁹⁾

By the middle of the nineteenth century the Primitive Methodists were the second largest Methodist group nationally and in the Bradford area, and they never experienced the divisive conflicts which affected the Wesleyans.⁽⁶⁰⁾ By the end of the century they were not unlike the other Methodists in terms of their background and outlook. Their membership remained slightly below half of the Wesleyan totals, and in 1932⁽⁶¹⁾ the Methodist Church in England received 447,122 members from the Wesleyan tradition, and 199,549 from Primitive Methodism.⁽⁶²⁾

The Bible Christians were a smaller Methodist revivalist movement⁽⁶³⁾, in many ways not unlike the Primitive Methodists, and both groups began at about the same time. Their founder, William O'Bryan, was expelled from Wesleyan Methodism, again for what could be described as an excess of zeal and a disregard for ministerial authority. Their presence in Bradford was due to the arrival of a number of textile workers who had

previously been members of Bible Christian societies in Somerset. When they moved to Bradford in the 1870s both congregations chose to maintain their own religious traditions rather than join any of the existing Methodist societies. Apart from this quite understandable wish to retain their separate identity, there was evidence of an intention to remain within a wider Methodism on the part of the Toller Lane society, although the Ebenezer congregation were an independent society, with no formal links even with the other Bible Christians in Bradford.

Within a few years of the first Primitive Methodist societies being established in West Yorkshire, and the Bible Christians opening their first chapels in Devon and Cornwall, what might be considered as the first phase of the Methodist divisions had come to an end, and after the mid-1820s attitudes hardened over the issue of connexional discipline. It is sometimes assumed that all the divisions in Methodism arose from conflict, but this is only partly true of the earlier divisions, where except for the Conference decision to expel Alexander Kilham, the conflicts were in practice limited to people who knew each other, and difficulties could be dealt with at circuit level. There was apparently no animosity between the members looking for greater democracy in church government who left their Wesleyan societies to join the Methodist New Connexion, and those they left behind. The Independent Methodists have always claimed that their withdrawal from Wesleyan societies had been undertaken without

antagonism. Much the same could be said of the men who led the Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians out of Wesleyan Methodism, as when they could not agree with the ministers who felt obliged by Conference to control every aspect of Wesleyan Methodism, including its methods of evangelism, at least there could be a dignified agreement to differ - the layman understanding the minister's dilemma in the face of unauthorised activities within his circuit, and the minister accepting that lay leaders felt impelled to follow the leading of conscience in arranging camp meetings or other services to take Methodist preaching to those outside the chapels. Both could claim a precedent in the attitude of Wesley when faced with the regulations of the Church of England - generally speaking rules were to be obeyed, but where Wesley was certain that the rules restricted his activities he felt confident to overlook them in pursuit of his objectives.

During the first quarter of the nineteenth century members of all the different Methodist groups appear to have accepted their separate status without animosity. The Wesleyans remained the most numerous group, with classes or societies in most communities, and the Primitive Methodists were next in size. The New Connexion, the Independent Methodists and Bible Christians were smaller in membership but were growing in importance. The overall impression is that as each separate group of Methodists developed their own organisation at chapel, circuit, district and connexional levels the ordinary members, while aware of the reasons for their own separation from

Wesleyan Methodism, accepted that different Methodist societies met in the neighbourhood, and were content to remain separate within their own chapels.

All this was to change after 1827, and during the next twenty-five years the secessions of the Protestant Methodists, the Wesleyan Methodist Association and the Wesleyan Reformers were to be marked not by disagreements between individuals within their own circuits but by more serious conflicts between the Wesleyan Conference and increasingly large numbers of members.

Notes

1. J. Wesley, Works, ed. T. Jackson, 1865, Vol. xiii, pp. 320-321.
2. Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, p. 159.
3. Gregory, Sidelights, pp. 246-247.
4. Local revivals included West Yorkshire (including Birstall) in 1793, Bradford in 1805, Yeadon in 1833/4 etc.
5. W. Beckworth, A Book of Remembrance, being records of Leeds Primitive Methodism, London, 1910, p.xxx.
6. Thompson, The English Working Class, p. 41.
7. H.B. Kendall, Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church, London, n/d, c.1905, Vol.1., p.33.
8. C.H. Goodwin, Cries of Anguish, Shouts of Praise, the development of Methodist Revivalism 1739-1818., Cannock, 1994, p.52.
9. Kendall, Primitive Methodist Church, Vol. 1, p.34.

10. Townend et al., New History of Methodism, vol.1, pp.555-557.
11. Kendall, Primitive Methodist Church, Vol 1, p. 77.
12. H.B. Kendall, History of the Primitive Methodist Church, London, 1919, p.28.
13. Ibid., p.29.
14. Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire Branch), No 36, Leeds, 1980, p.4.
15. Kendall, Primitive Methodist Church, Vol.1, p.33.
16. Although not officially sanctioned by Conference, a few women took services and preached, rather than exhorted. Wesley himself did not prevent it. G. Milburn and M. Batty, Workaday Preachers, the story of Methodist local preaching, London, 1995, pp. 165-190.
17. A. Mounfield, A Short History of Independent Methodism, Wigan, 1905, pp. 27-30.
18. Thompson, English Working Class, p. 430.
19. R.F. Wearmouth, Some Working-Class Movements of the Nineteenth Century, London, 1948, p.298.
20. R. Colls, Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield; Work, Culture and Protest 1790-1850, Manchester, 1987, Part Two, Culture, pp.118-203.
21. Wearmouth, Working-Class Movements, p.301. (Subsequently, Tommy Hepburn was apparently dismissed. He became a door-to-door tea salesman, later working at Felling Pit on the proviso that he did not take part in trade union activities. Colls, Pitmen, p.99.)
22. Ibid., p.305.

23. Kendall, Primitive Methodist Church, Vol. 1, p.477.
24. C. Dews, 'Ann Carr and the Female Revivalists of Leeds: a study in female preachers, secession and Primitive Methodism', in 'From Mow Cop to Peake', Essays to commemorate the 175th Anniversary of the beginnings of Primitive Methodism, Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire Branch), Occasional Paper No. 4, Leeds, 1982. p.15.
25. Gilbert, Religion and Society, 1976, p. 31, for connexional statistics 1826-1906.
26. T. Shaw, The Bible Christians 1815-1907, London, 1965, p.16. O'Bryan attended the parish church and was a churchwarden. He was converted by Methodists, and the Quaker tradition in his family was said to account for the early Bible Christians' customary plain clothing and simple hairstyles, and references to their leader as 'Friend O'Bryan'.
- 27.. O.A. Beckerlegge, 'Northern Bible Christians', in the Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, XXX, Part 2, 1957, p.39.
28. W J Robson, History, records and reminiscences of Silsden Primitive Methodism, Silsden, 1910, p.10.
29. Ibid., p.186.
30. Bingley Primitive Methodist Circuit, Quarter Board Minutes 1884-1898, (WYAS Bradford, Ref 40D76/3/2)
31. The first Shipley P.M. chapel was built in 1840 in Low Lane, near the centre of the town. The Saltaire Road P.M. chapel was built nearer Saltaire in 1870.
32. There were three P.M. chapels in Baildon; one opened in

1824 at Bank End, later replaced by Browgate (Zion), the second served a small community outside the village called Moorside which has been completely demolished, and the third was at Low Hill, serving also the lost village of Sconce, on the road to Hawksworth.

33.Kendall, Primitive Methodism, Vol.1, p.489.

34.These classes included Bradford, Dudley Hill, Bradford Moor, Shelf, Horton, White Abbey, Eccleshill, and Idle.

35.T.A. Fairweather and P. Ackroyd, A Short Historical Survey of Rehoboth Church, Bradford, Bradford, 1928, p. 11.

36.'Plan of the Travelling and Local Preachers in the Leeds Circuit of the Primitive Methodists, September - December 1821', in Beckworth, Leeds Primitive Methodism, pp.37, 40.

37.Anon, One Hundred Years of Primitive Methodism in Great Horton, Bradford, 1924, p. 17.

38.Ibid., p.87.

39.Fairweather and Ackroyd, Rehoboth, p.28.

40.'Plan of the Travelling and Local Preachers in the Leeds Circuit of the Primitive Methodists, June to September 1821', in Beckworth, Leeds Primitive Methodism, p. 34.

41.'Plan of the Travelling and Local Preachers in the Leeds Circuit of the Primitive Methodists, September - December 1821', in Beckworth, Leeds Primitive Methodism, p.37.

42.Dews, Ann Carr and the Female Revivalists, p.24.

43.F. Peel, Spen Valley Past and Present, Heckmondwike, 1893, p. 436.

44.Article on Dewsbury Moor Primitive Methodist Chapel in The

Spensorborough Guardian, 1908.

45. Heckmondwike Primitive Methodist Circuit Schedules, 1854, WYAS Wakefield, Ref. C7/1/5/1. 'Doghouse' was the name of the village renamed Norristhorpe about 1874. Norristhorpe Congregational Church was similarly known originally as Doghouse Congregational Chapel, Centenary Brochure, 1969, p.2.

46. The Norristhorpe Ebenezer P.M. church, opened in 1906, is the only remaining P.M. building in use in the Birstall and Spen circuit.

47. Heckmondwike Primitive Methodist Circuit, Quarter Board Minutes, 1870-1884 (WYAS Wakefield, Ref.C25/48), 1876.

48. Ibid., 1871 and 1873.

49. Methodist Recorder, July 1961; Shaw, Bible Christians, p.60.

50. Anon, Handbook of the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches, Bradford, 1902, p.79.

51. There were ten B.C. Districts in England and one in Wales, as well as ten 'unconnected stations' or separate circuits. Five of the largest Districts were in Devon or Cornwall, and the Bradford District was the only one north of a line between London and Bristol, and included only nine out of 206 ministers, 988 out of 32,202 members, and 15 out of 622 chapels. Although in theory it covered most of England, it was statistically the smallest of the Bible Christian Districts. The Bradford B.C. District continued until the denomination became part of the United Methodist Church in 1907. Minutes of the United Methodist Church Conference, 1907, quoted in R. Davis et al., The Methodist Church, Vol. 4, p. 626.

52. After 1907 the Toller Lane congregation became the only society in the Toller Lane U.M. circuit. They joined the Shearbridge U.M. circuit in 1910, and Westgate members joined them on the closure of their premises in 1913. The Toller Lane society then became part of Bradford South East circuit in 1915. Toller Lane was closed in 1949, the members going to Heaton Road ex-P.M. premises, one of three chapels which amalgamated in 1969 to form Trinity Methodist Church in Lilycroft Road.

53. G. Bridgeland, Laisterdyke Roundabout, Bradford, 1992, p.28.

54. W. Redfern, Modern Developments in Methodism, 1906, p.83.

55. Bridgeland, Laisterdyke Roundabout, p.33.

56. Ebenezer Bible Christian Church, Bowling Back Lane, Bradford; Baptismal Register 1947-1958, W.Y.A.S. (Bradford) Ref. 75D/20/2/2. The only surviving document is a standard Baptismal Register in which the pages are headed 'Ebenezer Church Bible Christians'. No other documents such as minutes of church business meetings have been traced.

57. Vickers, Independent Methodism.

58. Extract from the Address to the Societies, Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference, 1875, pp. 92-93.

59. G. Edwards, From Crow-scaring to Westminster, London, 1922, p. 32.

60. In 1877 following a dispute over the plans to divide the Sunderland circuit there was a small local secession who formed the Christian Lay Churches. Their members joined the

Independent Methodists as the Northern Counties Confederation.

E. Milburn, 'Tensions in Primitive Methodism in the Eighteen-seventies', in Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, Vol. xl, Part 4, 1976, p. 93 and Vol. xl, Part 5, 1976, p. 135.

61. R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers, Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700, Oxford, 1977, p. 143.

62. A small group of P.M. societies in the Hull area refused to accept Methodist Union in 1932 and still remain active as the 'Continuing Primitive Methodist Connexion'.

63. There was another smaller organisation who used the title of Bible Christians. This was a secession from the Swedenborgians, referred to sometimes as the 'non-Methodist Bible Christians' and its members were active in undenominational schools in the Manchester area in the 1820s and 1830s. W.R. Ward, Religion and Society in England 1790-1850, 1972, pp. 95, 121, 179, 200 and 208. They were also referred to in Shaw, Bible Christians, p.102, where he suggests that references to involvement in Chartism apply only to the non-Methodist Bible Christians.

SECTION C.
CONFLICTS AND SECESSIONS IN BRADFORD METHODISM 1827-1857.

The early divisions within Methodism which gave rise to the Methodist New Connexion, the Independent Methodists, the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians have been examined in the previous section. Events during the early years of each of these groups led occasionally to disappointment and indignation, but they involved only limited conflict, and when problems arose they could usually be dealt with within each circuit.

After 1827 this pattern suddenly changed, and the next three secessions led to deep feelings of betrayal and bitterness among the Methodist people involved. In 1827 the problems were centred on Leeds, and in 1835 on certain towns in Lancashire, but after 1849 the whole connexion was involved in the agitation.

The mutual acceptance of different styles of Methodism which had characterised the previous divisions was no longer felt to be an appropriate response when Conference and the membership were diametrically opposed on three fundamental issues of connexional discipline.

Chapter 7

Movements opposed to the Wesleyan hierarchy - the secessions of the Protestant Methodists, the Wesleyan Methodist Association and the Wesleyan Reformers.

Introduction

The first of the three conflicts began in 1827 as a disagreement between the trustees and class leaders of the new Brunswick chapel at Leeds over the provision of an organ to lead the singing. Behind the question of the organ there was the recurring problem of the government of Methodism, and the question of whether authority should ultimately rest with the Conference or with the local members and officials. Like the following secessions of 1835 and 1849, this dispute involved Rev Jabez Bunting, who had been active in a previous dispute with some of the Leeds Methodists. Difficulties escalated when the trustees referred the matter to the district meeting and ultimately to conference, and those who refused to accept the decision of conference seceded and worshipped separately as the Protestant Methodists or 'Non-conforming Wesleyans'.

Hardly had this dispute been settled when a second dispute arose which had its most serious repercussions among the Wesleyan congregations of Manchester, Rochdale and Liverpool. This time the disagreement began over a scheme to open a Theological College in London for the training of ministers, not in itself unexpected when other denominations were making similar arrangements, but there were complaints over both the scheme itself and the way in which it was introduced. The

underlying problem was, however, the way in which the matter was dealt with by conference. The main spokesman against the scheme was Rev Dr Samuel Warren, the superintendent minister of the Manchester circuit, whose expulsion at the 1835 conference led to the secession of the 'Warrenites', who established the Wesleyan Methodist Association. Their title, suggesting loyalty to the principles of John Wesley but the rejection of the current form of church government, reflected the similarities and differences between the parent body and the secessionists,

The third secession was that of the Wesleyan Reformers, initiated by the sending to every minister of a series of anonymous pamphlets known as the 'Fly Sheets', criticising the Wesleyan hierarchy in London, and in particular the activities of Jabez Bunting and the way in which he was controlling Wesleyan Methodism. The Conference of 1849 expelled three preachers including James Everett, who was suspected of writing the Fly Sheets. Those who advocated Wesleyan Reform did not at first expect or intend to leave their chapels, but were determined to work within the connexion to curb the power of Bunting and introduce greater democracy and lay involvement into the government of their religious activities. This became the last and most serious of the secessions within Methodism, and across the country about one third of all the Wesleyan members left their chapels, and many of them began to worship as a separate Methodist group. The proportion of those who left was particularly high in some circuits in the Bradford area.

These three events were all evidence of an intention on

the part of rank and file members to exercise some control over the way in which Wesleyan Methodism was developing. The fact that each incident ended in secession brought little satisfaction either to those who left or those who remained within the connexion. For those who left there were the practical problems of establishing a different form of Methodism, which made extra personal and financial demands to build new places of worship and to create an organisation in accordance with their particular requirements. For those left behind, usually but not in every case the majority, it often meant maintaining the societies without many of the more experienced and most respected leaders.

The Protestant Methodists

The provision of an organ in the Brunswick Wesleyan Chapel at Leeds was the ostensible cause of the dispute in 1827 which led to the secession of the Protestant Methodists, or Non-Conforming Wesleyans, known locally as the 'Non-Cons' or Sigstonites, after their leader, schoolmaster James Sigston. In 1803 Sigston had antagonised Rev. Jabez Bunting by supporting William Bramwell in an argument over revivalist activities in the town.⁽¹⁾ The dispute over the organ was therefore seen in Leeds as a continuation of the earlier conflict over the government of Methodism, and the recurring question of whether authority should be vested in the ministers and Conference or shared with the local members was raised again.

Sigston became the leader of those Leeds Methodists who stood for local democracy, while Bunting's involvement in the

dispute was part of his campaign to defeat all opposition to the principle of the pastoral office, if necessary by expulsions. Bunting complained of 'a radical faction... and Methodistical Luddism' in Leeds,⁽²⁾ and in view of his earlier disputes with the same Methodists there they expected that Bunting would approach the organ affair with a less than impartial attitude. It was known that he felt he had a score to settle, and he had said in Conference that 'the Yorkshire Methodists, with all their excellences, need teaching a lesson'.⁽³⁾ Benjamin Gregory, a former President of Conference whose accounts of all three secessions were based on both written records and personal experience⁽⁴⁾ claimed that because of this background 'Leeds had the dire misfortune of being chosen as the battlefield between pastoral supremacy and popular revivalism'⁽⁵⁾. The events of the Leeds organ case reflected the opposing views of Bunting and Sigston, but the scales were always weighted in favour of Conference.

Early Methodist services were usually held in small buildings, where the singing was accompanied by violins and 'cellos. Organs were rare, and the introduction of further organs was banned by Conference, but as bigger chapels came into use Conference passed the 'organ law' in 1820 which stated that 'in some of the larger chapels where some instrumental music may be deemed expedient in order to guide the congregational singing, organs may be allowed by special consent of the Conference, but every application for such consent shall be first made at the district meeting, and if it

obtain their sanction, shall be then referred to a committee of conference, who shall report their opinion as to the propriety of acceding to the request.'⁽⁶⁾

When Brunswick Chapel was opened in Leeds in 1825 it was the largest Wesleyan chapel then built and it could have been claimed that an organ would be necessary to lead the singing, but the premises were opened without one. In the following year the trustees raised a petition for an organ. The class leaders opposed the suggestion, and the local preachers, who as a group were not directly involved in the debate, informally raised a petition against the scheme on the grounds that an organ, associated as it was with liturgical services, would take away the traditional simplicity of Methodist worship.

Although the Leaders' Meeting had decided against the organ, in February 1827 the trustees voted to request conference permission for an organ, and asked the leaders to reconsider. The next month the leaders again voted against an organ, by 60 votes to 1.⁽⁷⁾ The trustees then started an organ fund, but the district meeting refused to approve the proposed organ on the grounds that it was 'not expedient under existing circumstances'. According to Wesleyan law the matter should have ended at that point, with the trustees having the right to apply again at a later date.

Four trustees then made the matter into a major confrontation by insisting that the district meeting decision was ambiguous; although not considered expedient, permission for an organ had not actually been refused. On these grounds

they appealed to Conference for permission to have an organ, without informing the leaders or local preachers, who only heard of it during Conference.⁽⁸⁾ They hurriedly sent a deputation to put their case, only to find that several Leeds trustees invited there by Jabez Bunting had already met a committee who had given approval for the organ, and this approval had been ratified by Conference.

This action was in deliberate defiance of the known decision of the district meeting, whose approval was necessary under Methodist law before the case could be considered by conference. It contravened the wishes of the minister, many members and the leaders and local preachers in Leeds. In an attempt to satisfy the Leeds complainants, Conference convened a different committee to meet the delegates of the leaders and local preachers, but in spite of their opposition this committee confirmed the earlier Conference approval for the organ. Gregory's comment was that 'it is a most perilous proceeding for the highest church court to take the initiative in irregularity. Against this Mr Bunting himself had faithfully forewarned the Conference some years before, in his golden maxim, "If we do not respect our laws, what wonder that our people should not heed them".'⁽⁹⁾

Returning to Leeds, the local preachers and leaders of both the Leeds circuits, which had been one circuit until 1826, met and agreed to defer discussion of the matter until the new minister in the Leeds (East) circuit took up his appointment, but when he came Rev Edmund Grindrod supported the

conference decision. When Grindrod suspended the Local Preachers' secretary, Matthew Johnson for three months for involving members of the Leeds (West) circuit in the dispute, almost all the local preachers in both circuits withdrew their services for one quarter - a unique Methodist 'strike'.

By this time division had actually taken place and the Protestant Methodists no longer attended Wesleyan services, but held separate services led by local preachers in premises close to each of the chapels. In an attempt to re-impose his authority on the situation, Grindrod arranged a special district meeting for early December 1827. This was considered by many to be irregular in that it included several superintendent ministers who did not live in nearby circuits, as was required, and Rev Jabez Bunting attended as 'the Adviser to the President' on his own authority.⁽¹⁰⁾ Although this meeting approved the actions of Edmund Grindrod, and proposed the exclusion from the society of the leaders of the protest against the organ, the irregularities in the constitution of the meeting infringed the 1795 Plan of Pacification and, more significantly for the secessionists, the Leeds Regulations of 1797.⁽¹¹⁾

The first general meeting of the Protestant Methodists was held on Christmas Day 1827 in the Ebenezer M.N.C. Chapel at Leeds, and in the following months the Protestant Methodists purchased two more chapels.⁽¹²⁾ There were about twelve Protestant Methodist societies in the Leeds area by the time of the 1828 conference, at which Bunting declared that the affair

represented 'an insurrection against the pastoral office', and went further in claiming that 'it is the judgement of the conference that the special district meeting held at Leeds was both indispensably necessary, and in the most extra-ordinary emergency, constitutional also'.⁽¹³⁾

A statement issued from the 1828 Wesleyan conference condemned the secession and supported the decision of the special district meeting. This had the effect of making what might have been a temporary division into a permanent secession and those opposed to conference separated formally from Wesleyan Methodism. The Protestant Methodists, fundamentally opposed to ministerial control, established themselves as a lay movement, not unlike the Independent Methodists in their refusal to use ministerial titles, their emphasis on the independence of each society, and a yearly meeting without legislative powers. Local preachers were employed as lay missionaries to undertake the tasks previously fulfilled by the ministers. The Protestant Methodists existed as a separate group for only eight years until 1836, when they amalgamated with those involved in the Warrenite secession.

It has been stated that the Leeds organ cost a thousand pounds and a thousand members,⁽¹⁴⁾ but these were only the losses in Leeds. The Protestant Methodists had nearly 2,500 members in 1829, and almost 4,000 in the following year.⁽¹⁵⁾ Most of their societies were formed in the north of England, with strong support at Barnsley, Halifax and York, but there were also societies in the London area and elsewhere.

Bunting's role in the Leeds organ controversy and his obvious determination to uphold the principle of ministerial authority as well as insisting on his personal right to intervene as he chose were the root causes of the secession. It is therefore salutary to realise that when Bunting was challenged by a claim that his actions contravened the Plan of Pacification of 1795 and the Leeds Regulations of 1797, he accepted that they did,⁽¹⁶⁾ and in Gregory's personal reminiscences of a speech made by Bunting at Leeds in 1838, when referring to the organ case, 'he made confession of his own undue indulgence in a party spirit.'⁽¹⁷⁾

Protestant Methodists in the Bradford area

There was no support for the Protestant Methodist movement in the Bingley or Shipley circuits, and there were only two secessions to Protestant Methodism from Wesleyan societies in the Bradford area, at Eccleshill and at Yeadon, both then in the Woodhouse Grove circuit.

The Yewdall family had been closely involved in Eccleshill Methodism for several generations. In 1775 Thomas Yewdall had been among the first trustees at Eccleshill Wesleyan chapel with whom Wesley had argued over the wording of the preaching-house deeds, but in 1835 his descendants, John and David Yewdall, became leading members of the Protestant Methodists who seceded from the Wesleyan society at Eccleshill.⁽¹⁸⁾ The break-away group may also have attracted members from the nearby Bolton society, where the membership figures show a reduction at about the same time.⁽¹⁹⁾

Because the Protestant Methodists amalgamated with the Wesleyan Methodist Association in 1836, the chapel in Victoria Road at Eccleshill built by the Protestant Methodists actually belonged to the Wesleyan Methodist Association from its opening in 1838 until 1857, when it became part of the U.M.F.C. The Victoria Road congregation had no organ themselves for some years, the singing being led by violins, basses and flutes.

The other Protestant Methodist secession in the Woodhouse Grove circuit took place at Yeadon before that society left the circuit in 1830. Gregory describes the Protestant Methodist chapel there as 'almost half as large again as the chapel they had left...the most distinguished-looking public building in the place.'⁽²⁰⁾

Although there was never a Protestant Methodist society in the Spen Valley,⁽²¹⁾ there was an echo of the Leeds case in the controversy which arose over the drawing up of the deeds of Gomersal Wesleyan Chapel, near Cleckheaton, which opened in 1828. The trustees were obviously aware that the 'Organ Case' had recently been an issue only eight miles away at Leeds, where the decisions of the Wesleyan hierarchy were being challenged by some of the members. While the majority of the Gomersal trustees were satisfied to adopt the Conference deed as it stood, there were others who wished to include a clause 'uniting the Gomersal leaders and the trustees in any plan relative to the management of the services, such as the introduction of an organ, liturgy, etc.'

This was a clear reference to the Leeds case, in which

the leaders and trustees had been divided on the issue of the organ. Conference action had exacerbated this division at Leeds, and the intention at Gomersal was to avoid the possibility of a similar dispute there, and the modified wording received at first the approval of the minister, Rev. J. Walmsley. Subsequently the District Chairman, Rev. Edmund Grindrod, raised no objection to the added clause at the District Meeting, but he decided to inform his friend Rev. Jabez Bunting who had agreed to preach at the opening services. Bunting refused to approve the modified deed, which was clearly incompatible with the principles he had defended at the special district meeting at Leeds, and he threatened to cancel his visit if the offending clause was not removed. In the end another meeting of the trustees was called, which removed the added clause, but six of the trustees resigned over the issue. Summarising the situation, Raper wrote that 'There was dissent and rumblings throughout Methodism opposing the dictatorial stance of Conference. Gomersal was caught up in this revolt, which was centred upon Leeds.'(22)

The Wesleyan Methodist Association

In 1830 the Wesleyan Conference first considered the possibility of a Theological Institution for the training of ministers.(23) This had much to commend it when ministers of other denominations already had such training, but objections were raised against the scheme. These included the cost of the establishment, and the absence of the statutory period of one year for consultation with the membership, but there was also

some concern that such training might mean the end of the individuality that had been a characteristic of Methodist ministers, and a moulding of the ministry into a group of men who might be even more inclined to support both the Conference and the principle of ministerial supremacy.

The 1833 Conference appointed a committee to make detailed plans for the Institution, and a report was made to the following Conference, but the committee exceeded its brief in making nominations for the officers of the Institution. Most significantly the post of President of the Institution was offered to Jabez Bunting, which gave him an opportunity to select and influence every candidate for the Wesleyan ministry,⁽²⁴⁾ and this led to increased opposition to the entire scheme from those seeking a more democratic system within Wesleyanism.

The Leeds Regulations of 1797 were again invoked when the Conference failed to provide the agreed period of one year between the decision to have an Institution and its implementation, on the grounds that this was not a matter which concerned the circuits or the societies. During the negotiations over the Institution it was discovered by Dr Warren that the Regulations and the Plan of Pacification of 1795 had never been entered in the Minutes of Conference, and so were not valid in law.⁽²⁵⁾ Both documents delegated certain powers and rights to the lay membership, and were considered to be fundamental in maintaining a balance between ministerial and lay authority, and this discovery raised considerable

anger, and led to the publication of some one thousand pamphlets.(26)

Dr Samuel Warren was a member of the committee which had made plans for the Institution, but he later became the leader of those opposing its opening on the grounds that the appointment of Bunting as President would place too much power in the hands of one man. In November 1834 the Grand Central Association was formed by members of the Manchester and Liverpool circuits, with the limited intention of obtaining a clarification of the 1797 Regulations, access for laymen to Conference as observers, and a promise never again to hold a Special District Meeting such as that held at Leeds in 1828, an indication of the link between the earlier conflict over the organ and the conflict over the Institution.

During the 1835 Wesleyan Conference Warren and several other ministers were expelled for challenging the authority of Conference, and a meeting of delegates from the Grand Central Association met in the city at the same time and attempted without success to put their point of view to Conference. In August 1835, within weeks of their failure to petition Conference, the Grand Central Association met in Manchester and changed their title to the Wesleyan Association. Although the Protestant Methodists united with them at their first Annual Assembly in 1836, there was no expectation that the Association would go as far as the Protestant Methodists in terms of creating an entirely lay organisation. Several other small Methodist groups allied themselves with the Wesleyan

Association,⁽²⁷⁾ whose membership by 1837 was over 21,000, with over 600 places of worship and 67 ministers.

There was disagreement in 1837 over the future policy of the Association, when Warren wished to take his followers as a body into the New Connexion, which already represented a reformed style of Methodism with a strong emphasis on lay involvement. The other leaders including Robert Eckett wanted a separate denominational identity for the movement, with circuit independence and free representation. Under this proposal each society would have the right to decide its policy on ministry and organisation, which obviously came close to being a Congregational polity. Warren was defeated over the issue, and he subsequently went into the Anglican church. In 1839 their title became the Wesleyan Methodist Association, and Robert Eckett,⁽²⁸⁾ whose leadership style has been compared to that of Jabez Bunting, became the leader of the movement.

There was at first very strong support for the Association in Lancashire, particularly from Manchester, Liverpool and Rochdale,⁽²⁹⁾ but membership fell to some 19,000 in 1846 and had dropped to 18,000 by 1856.⁽³⁰⁾ In spite of financial and administrative difficulties and its failure to attract new members, the Association, founded as a protest against the setting-up of a theological college, and more particularly the way in which the scheme had been handled, remained a separate denomination until 1857, when amalgamation with the majority of the Wesleyan Reformers led to the establishment of the United Methodist Free Churches.

Wesleyan Methodist Associationists in the Bradford area

There were no Associationist chapels in Bingley or Shipley, and none in the Birstall or Cleckheaton circuits, where the New Connexion already provided a haven for disillusioned Wesleyans.

Table 7 shows that in Bradford there were two chapels which belonged to the Wesleyan Methodist Association, although only one of these societies had its origins in the Warrenite movement. The main chapel was in Bridge Street near the centre of the town, where former members from Kirkgate and Eastbrook Wesleyan chapels 'who were infected with a desire for Reform'⁽³¹⁾ built a chapel to seat 1200 people. This was opened in June 1838, significantly only three years after the beginning of the movement, when the Associationists were showing themselves to be typical secessionists in the first flush of enthusiasm for their cause.

Table 7. The Chapels of the Wesleyan Methodist Association

Chapel	Date	Present situation
Bradford, Bridge St	1838	Closed 1888
Eccleshill, Victoria Rd	1838	Closed 1949

The second chapel, also opened in 1838, was built by the Victoria Road Protestant Methodist society which had seceded in 1836 from the Wesleyan chapel at Eccleshill. As their chapel

was not built until after the amalgamation of the Protestant Methodists with the W.M.A. in 1836, the building belonged on completion to the Wesleyan Methodist Association.

The Wesleyan Reform Movement

Behind the enthusiastic worship and outreach, the building of more chapels and the spread of Methodism to new areas, a potential problem existed for the leaders of Methodism after 1791. The greater the power given to Conference, the more probable became a reaction from those seeking more democratic systems of church government, and the number of Methodists willing to challenge the principle of pastoral supremacy grew progressively larger.

During the 1840s there were a series of incidents in the Wesleyan circuits to the south of Bradford, none of which was particularly important in itself, but the fact that so many disputes took place indicates continuing stress in the relationships between the ministers and the people. At the same time Bunting was criticised in a series of four anonymous pamphlets known as the Fly Sheets,⁽³²⁾ each of which carried the ascription 'By order of the Corresponding Committee for detecting, exposing and correcting abuses. (London, Manchester, Bristol, Liverpool, Birmingham, Hull, Leeds and Glasgow.)' They were at first sent by post to the ministers only, and although these documents were strongly criticised, not least because of their anonymity, they represented the views of a small minority within the conference who opposed the way in which so much power had been allowed to accumulate in the hands of Jabez

Bunting and his associates, as well as many of the members.

Fly Sheet No. 1, entitled 'Location, Centralization and Secularisation', was published in 1844,⁽³³⁾ and complained about the policy of leading Wesleyan ministers who remained in the London circuits and as a group dominated Connexional Committees. James Everett attended the 1845 Conference, and it is possible that if he was the author of the Fly Sheets he had come to observe the reactions of those criticised, but no reference to the document was made that Conference. It was followed in 1846 by Fly Sheet No. 2. 'The Presidential Chair, the Platform and Connexional Committees',⁽³⁴⁾ which criticised Bunting's leadership of the Conference, and again attacked the tendency for major decisions to be made by a small nucleus of ministers stationed in the London area. During the 1846 Conference the first two Fly Sheets were referred to scathingly by Dr Bunting, although he said he had not read them.⁽³⁵⁾

In 1847 Fly Sheet No. 3. Reclaimed Ground⁽³⁶⁾ claimed that Conference had unfairly censured the American revivalist James Caughey, who had preached in England from 1841 until debarred by Conference in 1847, while supporting the very similar evangelistic work being undertaken by Rev. Robert Newton. Two particular aspects of Caughey's preaching were criticised, firstly that as a freelance evangelist he was answerable neither to a circuit as a local preacher, nor to Conference as a minister, and secondly that in his preaching he either made local enquiries and introduced personal details as if they had been supernaturally revealed to him, or he made unspecified

threats such as 'Some young man who now sits before me will die this year',⁽³⁷⁾ but at the same time his effectiveness in adding new converts to Methodism could not be denied.

The Conference again discussed the Fly Sheets in 1847, when a resolution was passed condemning them and expressing sympathy for those who had been criticised.⁽³⁸⁾ Dr Osborn was given permission to ask all the ministers to sign a Declaration denying any involvement. The fourth Fly Sheet ⁽³⁹⁾ appeared in 1848, opposing the re-election of Newton as President of Conference. As the Fly Sheets had originally been sent only to ministers, their existence remained virtually unknown to most Methodists. Two significant actions then made them public knowledge, first a series of articles refuting the claims of the Fly Sheets were printed in the Wesleyan Times, described as Papers on Wesleyan Matters. These were anonymous and were considered 'coarse and vulgar',⁽⁴⁰⁾ but in answer to them the complete text of the four Fly Sheets was then published with comments under the title The Fly Sheets Vindicated in 1849.

The Bradford Observer⁽⁴¹⁾ claimed that 'In a word the Fly Sheets are the manifestoes of the Liberal Party, and bear the same relative aspects to the present ruling powers as the Anti-Corn Law tracts to the Protectionists and tax-mongers...these sentiments are deeply cherished by the very large part of the most intelligent of the Wesleyan laity, who yield to none in their hearty abhorrence of every form of tyranny, intolerance and assumption.' Even after the Fly Sheets had become available to the general public, it would have still been possible for

Conference to have taken no action, in which case the matter might not have led to open revolt. The Conference's determination to discover and punish the unknown writer of the Fly Sheets was the main factor which changed a widespread unease about the state of Wesleyan Methodism into a movement aiming for the reform of the connexion from within. Beckerlegge has suggested that the hunt for the culprit only took place in order to distract attention from those responsible for the actions complained of in the Fly Sheets.⁽⁴²⁾ There can be no doubt that the expulsion of the three ministers after their 'trial' at the 1849 Conference brought the Reform movement to a climax after which there was no possibility of a return to the previous situation.

When Conference met in 1849, thirty-six ministers had still failed to sign the Declaration, and of these James Everett was the main suspect on the grounds of his known authorship of other anonymous articles critical of the Wesleyan hierarchy. When Everett refused to either confirm or deny authorship he was expelled on the grounds that there was 'the strong and generally prevalent suspicion' that he was responsible for writing the Fly Sheets. Despite these suspicions there was never any evidence against Everett, who never revealed whether or not he had written the documents. Kent's comment was that 'Everett himself was the stuff of which Piltdown forgers are made, and if he did not write the Fly Sheets, he must have been sick with envy of the man or men who did.'⁽⁴³⁾ The two other ministers expelled were Samuel Dunn,

author of the monthly Wesley Banner, and William Griffith, a contributor to the Wesleyan Times. They were given the opportunity to retain their status if they agreed not to continue their writing, and when they refused to comply with these conditions they were expelled. Thomas Jackson, as President of Conference, later wrote of the proceedings as his 'painful duty' (44) in the Conference, while The Times, (45) not unwilling to support journalists who were under attack, likened the proceedings to those of the Star Chamber.

This attitude was shared by the Bradford Observer, whose editorial comment (46) was that 'the Wesleyans are displaying their strength, their status and their varied resources to crush the innocent, to condemn the unconvicted, yea even the unaccused. When we see such a body advancing the most intolerant remnant of inquisitorial tyranny, we think it is time to interfere. It is the extension of the power of priestcraft in its most objectionable form that we recognise and denounce in these unconstitutional, un-English and un-Christian proceedings.'

Although the widespread Reform agitation was basically a lay movement in response to what was seen as excessive ministerial authority, it was the three expelled ministers (47) who provided the leadership of the movement immediately after the 1849 Conference. In August a meeting attended by 2,000 people was held in the Bradford Temperance Hall to express sympathy with the expelled ministers. (48) This was followed in October by two meetings addressed by the three expelled

ministers, held simultaneously in the Temperance Hall and the Mechanics' Institute, when the roads were blocked by the crowds, and hundreds were left outside. It was claimed that 'not many wealthy or influential' persons attended, but 'the thousands present were almost exclusively Wesleyans,'⁽⁴⁹⁾ but some indication of the more general interest in the Wesleyan situation is provided by the fact that several ministers from other denominations attended, as did several members of the council. Within the first crucial twelve months, while interest remained intense, the three expelled ministers addressed 140 meetings across the country, attended by 170,000 people.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Many meetings were held in order to give financial support to the expelled ministers, and a number of Wesleyans were expelled by their ministers for supporting the cause of Reform. Not all ministers were equally keen to expel their members, some being prepared to overlook such activities in the interest of long-term peace in the circuits, but others were ruthless.

Conference continued to demand conformity and obedience at a time when many members were looking for greater democracy. Their hope of influencing decisions on local and national issues within the local congregation and the circuit meeting reflected the ongoing debate over the question of democracy at the time of the Chartist movement. The ministers, claiming that their calling made them personally responsible for the spiritual progress of their members for whom they would have to answer on the Day of Judgement, rejected the principle of democracy within Methodism, on much the same grounds as a

teacher might reject the principle in a classroom, whereas the members saw their chapels as appropriate settings for the exercise of a longed-for democracy which was still denied to most of them within society. The ministers were caught between the demands of Conference and the clearly expressed wishes of their own members for greater freedom.

The Conference had in fact placed the ministers in an invidious position. Those who had tried to be lenient were criticised as disloyal, while those who acted in strict obedience to the Conference found themselves virtually destroying the societies in their care. At chapel level they faced considerable resistance, as apart from the spiritual aspects of chapel life, the congregations were made up of strong-minded men and women who were close friends and were often members of inter-connected families. Many of the office-holders and local preachers were educated and articulate, and they regarded the more dogmatic of the ministers at best as strangers, and at worst as intruders.

Yet some ministers exercised considerable restraint. Gregory, for instance, ⁽⁵¹⁾ described at length the care taken by his ministerial colleagues to avoid any friction or loss of members when he served in the Rochester circuit after the 1849 expulsions, where their joint decision was 'not to take the initiative in agitation'. Life in the circuit went on steadily until the 1850 Conference sent into the circuit a replacement minister whose response to the superintendent's advice to maintain the stability of the circuit was the statement 'I am

not here to please the people, but to maintain the authority of Conference'. He accordingly met the three classes which comprised the congregation of one chapel after taking the service there, and discovering that a collection for the expelled ministers had been made a year before, he promptly confiscated the class books and so, in the phrase of the time, 'dis-membered' the entire congregation. The superintendent, when he heard what had happened, 'sat silent and aghast, trembling like an anxious Eli', and restored the class books to the leaders. But the damage done could not be overlooked, the members 'withdrew the supplies', and reduced their giving. The next superintendent minister was in the Buntingite mould, and what had been a loyal and contented circuit suffered losses which had not been made good half a century later. Gregory's personal reflections highlight what was probably one of the most important factors which differentiated those circuits which survived the Reform agitation more or less unscathed from those which lost a major part of their membership. This was the attitude of individual ministers, and the relationships between each minister and his congregation. The examination of how this affected specific circuits is not an easy process, as each minister served in several circuits during the Reform period, and each chapel in every circuit had several ministers.

As in the Rochester circuit, it was only after the 1850 Conference had directed the ministers to act to remove all members with Reformist sympathies from their congregations across the country, that the Wesleyan numbers started to fall

significantly as congregations were divided. This is shown by the statistics of nationwide Wesleyan losses from 1849 to 1855; only 2,126 members were reported as lost at the Conference of 1850, 57,000 in 1851, 20,946 in 1852, 10,290 in 1853, 6,797 in 1854 and 3,310 in 1855. Of this total loss of 100,469 Wesleyan members, less than half joined the Reform societies. The majority apparently ceased to attend any religious services, as there is no evidence of increases in other branches of Methodism or in other denominations. During the first few years of agitation the leaders and members of the Reform movement still hoped to be able to reform Wesleyanism from within, and a meeting at Leeds Music Hall in September 1850 was one of many held to encourage Reformers to 'stop the supplies', or to withhold contributions to Wesleyan funds. This was intended to shorten the period of any conflict, potentially many years, to one of a few months. The meeting carried the resolution 'that this meeting is fully convinced that a shorter method of arriving at an amicable adjustment of the question now pending between Conference and people will be... a stoppage of supplies'.⁽⁵²⁾ It is noteworthy that the Reformers specified their aim to be 'an amicable adjustment', an indication of the absence of animosity towards Conference on their part at that time. Even when threatened with the withholding of their class tickets, many of them refused to accept that their expulsion by the ministers or even by Conference meant a final separation from the church which they saw as their own, and the chapels to whose funds they had contributed generously over the years.

Often the expelled Reformers had been among the original founders of the Wesleyan chapels which they were obliged to leave.

Even after the conflict had subsided the Reformers continued to use the Wesleyan title on Wesleyan Reform documents for some years, on the grounds that they saw themselves as the true successors of John Wesley, while they referred disparagingly to those remaining in the Wesleyan societies as 'Conference Methodists'. The Reform class tickets continued to be headed 'Wesleyan Methodist Society. Established 1739', and the Reformers' hymn book was similar to the Wesleyan original but with a supplement.⁽⁵³⁾ Their circuit preaching plans often retained the Wesleyan Methodist title and layout, and were in fact identical to earlier Wesleyan plans apart from the absence of any ministers' names and the inclusion of the Reformist text, 'One is your Master, even Christ, and ye are all brethren'. The Wesleyan Reform circuit plans included varying proportions of former Wesleyan Local Preachers, still taking services in the same communities, although services usually had to be held in different premises.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Whereas it was possible to fill most offices within the Reform chapels quite quickly, the local preachers held their status at circuit level, and could not be replaced without preparation and training which took considerable time. In a new organisation in which there were no ministers the presence or absence of experienced local preachers was therefore a vital factor in the effectiveness of each Reform circuit; where they were available

the main Methodist activity of Sunday worship could continue, but where there were no local preachers among the members the Reform circuits had great difficulty in maintaining both Sunday services and their general credibility.

Conclusion

These three secessions were not separate events. Gregory described them as 'three concatenated secessions'⁽⁵⁵⁾ and they were all brought about by similar conflicts between a Conference desperate to maintain control and a membership determined to introduce democracy into their religious life. Each new movement succeeded in creating a different kind of Methodism outside the control of the Wesleyan Conference. The Protestant Methodists created an entirely lay organisation, while the Associationists and the Wesleyan Reformers shared authority and responsibility between laymen and ministers, but there was always an emphasis on democracy and on lay involvement at all levels within Free Methodism, which continued after the three secessionist groups came together in 1857 to form the United Methodist Free Churches.

While some Protestant Methodist societies were formed elsewhere, this was fundamentally a local dispute among the Leeds Methodists, and most of those involved attended the 'Old Chapel'. As Bradford is near to Leeds, it is interesting to note that this secession directly affected only two of the societies in Bradford, and led to a serious but short-lived disagreement at Gomersal. The Protestant Methodists maintained their separate existence for only seven years, and during this

period repercussions of the dispute at Leeds were discussed by the Wesleyan Conference and were among the issues which led to the formation of the Grand Central Association in 1834. Following the Warrenite secession of 1835 and the formation of the Wesleyan Association, the Protestant Methodists became part of the Association at their first Conference in 1836.

It could be argued that the Warrenite secession in 1835 was not particularly important to the Wesleyans. The proportion of their members affected was very small, and the conflict was again largely limited to one county, but it was significant as an indication of continuing resistance by lay leaders against what they saw as high-handed and unconstitutional decisions of Conference. Perhaps more significantly, nothing done at the time by the Wesleyan hierarchy served to reduce this underlying reluctance by some of the ordinary members to accept their demands. Nor was there any suggestion of appeasement on the part of conference, who were determined to continue to rule the connexion, and to dispose of all opposition. Within Bradford the Associationists remained a small minority, and their two chapels had only a limited importance.

It would appear at first glance that the expulsion of Everett, Dunn and Griffith by the Wesleyan Conference in 1849 was the spark which caused the explosion within the church that became known as the Wesleyan Reform movement, but it is also clear that there had been a gradual deterioration over several years in relationships within the Conference as well as across the connexion. Had there been a less dictatorial stance on the

part of the Wesleyan Conference during the 1840s, and had there been a more charitable attitude among the membership, the conflict might perhaps have been avoided, but each party saw itself as supporting the only possible policy for the church, and the absolute certainty that they were right made compromise impossible for both parties.

Certain Conference decisions seem to have exacerbated the problems of 1849. Gregory suggests that the first mistake was probably the decision to insist that James Everett returned to a circuit after two long periods as a supernumerary. His withdrawal from the active work was originally due to problems of health, but he travelled widely to fulfil his many preaching appointments, and his placement in a circuit by the 1834 Conference meant that he lost both his freedom and the income from a lucrative business he had built up as a bookseller, and this was seen by some as an explanation for the Fly Sheets, if indeed Everett did write them. A tactical error was perhaps then made in 1849 in expelling simultaneously all three ministers, whose situation drew considerable sympathy. Had Everett alone been expelled, it might have been easier to have seen his expulsion as warranted.

Even so, had no further action been taken by Conference in 1850, it seems possible that the Wesleyan societies might have survived the controversy with only very limited losses, a view supported by the fact that barely 2,000 people had left the church during the twelve months following the 1849 expulsions. There seems to be no doubt that it was the instruction to the

ministers from the Conference of 1850 to root out all traces of opposition which was the real starting-point for the expulsions and withdrawals of membership which devastated the Wesleyan connexion. The Bradford Observer, after an editorial critical of the expulsion of the three ministers in August 1849, recorded only two protest meetings in Bradford, the second in late October being addressed by the expelled ministers themselves. There were advertisements in the Bradford Observer for verbatim reports of speeches by the expelled ministers in the anti-Wesleyan Wesleyan Times, offers of their portraits to new subscribers to that paper, and offers of copies of the proceedings of Conference 'from authentic sources' at four shillings and sixpence per dozen,⁽⁵⁶⁾ followed by spasmodic references to the Reform issue over the next few months. In March 1850 an editorial in the Bradford Observer⁽⁵⁷⁾ referred to 'a lengthy document issued by the President of Conference' which criticised the 'slander, falsehood, anarchy and confusion' excited by the expelled ministers. Although often suggesting that both sides in the Wesleyan Reform issue should be more thoughtful and considerate of each other's point of view, the general editorial attitude of this paper tended to support the Reformers rather than the Wesleyans. The Wesleyan document was described as proceeding 'to denounce their principal ideas of Reform and to assert that their personal restoration to the ranks of Methodism is a thing impossible. Whatever readiness the ministers may evince in compliance with this modest demand it is not likely that the mass of the laity

will quickly suffer a few individuals to sign a manifesto whose sum and substance is 'No Reform is wanted and none shall be had'. Occasional coverage in the Bradford press between the Conferences of 1849 and 1850 made it clear that the problems within Wesleyan Methodism continued to become more serious, and were in fact heading for a crisis after August 1850. The surviving records of the local circuits indicate that it was after the September Quarterly Meetings of 1850 that the membership figures plummeted in the Bradford chapels, although it was not until 1852 that the Reformers published their Declaration of Principles.(58)

Notes

1. Gregory, Sidelights, p. 72.
2. M. Batty, Stages in the Development and Control of Wesleyan Lay Leadership 1791-1878, London, 1988, p.140
3. Gregory, Sidelights, p. 72.
4. Rev. Joseph Fowler was born in Bradford in 1791, becoming a Wesleyan itinerant in 1811. He regularly attended the Wesleyan Conferences and took copious notes of proceedings. These were edited in 1898 by Rev Dr Benjamin Gregory, a younger contemporary, who as a boy attended Woodhouse Grove School. Gregory in Sidelights supplements Fowler's records with his personal reminiscences of people and events.
5. Gregory, Sidelights, p. 73.
6. J. Kirsop, Historic Sketches of Free Methodism, 1885, p. 20.
7. J.T. Hughes, 'The Story of the Leeds "Non-Cons"',

Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, Vol. XXXV, Part 4,
1965, p. 84.

8. Hughes, Proceedings, Vol. XXXV, Part 5, 1966, p. 122

9. Gregory, Sidelights, p.53.

10 Batty, Development and Control, p.146.

11 Gregory, Sidelights, p. 55.

12. Hughes, Proceedings, Vol. XXXVII, Part 5, 1970, p. 137.

13. Gregory, Sidelights, p.59.

14. Ibid., p. 95.

15. Hughes, Proceedings, Vol. XXXIX, Part 3, 1973, p. 75.

16. Gregory, Sidelights, p. 98.

17. Ibid., p. 99.

18. J.W. Overend, Souvenir Booklet of the Victoria Road
Methodist Church, Eccleshill, 1838-1938, Bradford, 1938.

19. The class at Bolton was part of the Eccleshill Wesleyan society from 1781 to 1829, when Bolton became a separate society. Membership in 1813 was 48, but fell to 16 in 1830. It seems possible that those who left, having been part of the Eccleshill society until 1829, followed their friends there into the Protestant Methodist secession. R.C. Allan, ed., The History of Bolton in Bradford-dale, Bradford, 1927, p. 257.

20. Gregory, Sidelights, p. 71.

21. M. Clegg, A History of Birstall, Otley, 1994, p. 88, has suggested that there was a Protestant Methodist society at Zion chapel in Birstall High Street in 1836. This seems to be due to a misunderstanding of the phrase 'Wesleyan Protestants' in the chapel deeds at the West Riding Registry of Deeds at Wakefield,

(Ref. 1836 BL, p. 136, Item 117.) Built by the Birstall M.N.C. society in 1836, this became an Independent or Congregational chapel in 1846, and from 1860 to 1885 was a Primitive Methodist chapel.

22.J. Raper, Methodism in Gomersal 1827-1977, Bradford, 1977, p.1.

23.Gregory, Sidelights, p.93.

24.Davies et al., The Methodist Church, Vol 2, p.316, and Gregory, Sidelights, pp.170-172.

25.Kirsop, Free Methodism, London, 1885, p. 29.

26.Davies et al, Methodist Church, p.316, footnote.

27.These included the Arminian Methodists of Derby and the Independent Primitive Methodists of Scarborough in 1837, the Independent Wesleyans of North Wales in 1838, and the Scottish United Methodist Churches in 1839.

28.Currie, Methodism Divided, p.220.

29. D.A. Gowland, Methodist Secessions, the origins of Free Methodism in three Lancashire towns, Manchester, 1979. David Gowland examines the quite different local aspects of the Warrenite movement in Manchester, Rochdale and Liverpool.

30.Gilbert, Religion and Society, p.31.

31.H. Hird, Bradford Remembrancer, Bradford, 1978, p.188 footnote.

32.Anon., The Wesleyan Reform Union, its Origins and History, W.R.U. Bookroom, Sheffield, 1896, includes the full text of all the Flysheets.

33.W.H. Jones, History of the Wesleyan Reform Union, 1952,

p.23.

34.Ibid., p.25.

35.Gregory,Sidelights, p.395.

36.Davies et al., Methodist Church, Vol.2., p.234.

37.Gregory, Sidelights, p.391.

38.Ibid., p.407.

39.Davies et al., Methodist Church, Vol.2., p.234, Note 39.

40.Gregory, Sidelights, p.436.

41.Bradford Observer, 16 August 1849.

42.O.A. Beckerlegge, The United Methodist Free Churches - a Study in Freedom, 1957, p.34.

43.Kent, The Age of Disunity, 1966, p.81.

44.T. Jackson, Recollections of my own Life and Times, London, 1873, pp. 335-8.

45.The Times, 3 September 1849.

46.Bradford Observer, 16 August 1849.

47.O.A. Beckerlegge, The Three Expelled, 1996.

48.Bradford Observer, 30 August 1849. One speaker, Mr J. Myers of Thornton, was listed as a local preacher on the Bradford and Great Horton Wesleyan Reform circuit plan in 1851.

49.Ibid., 1 November 1849.

50.Beckerlegge, United Methodist Free Churches , p.36.

51.Gregory, Sidelights, p.481-6.

52.Bradford Observer, 19 September 1850.

53.The Hymn Book of the United Methodist Free Churches, comprising the Collection of Hymns by John Wesley, A.M., with Miscellaneous Hymns suitable for Occasional Services, with a

Preface by James Everett and Matthew Baxter, 1860.

54. Birstall and Cleckheaton Wesleyan Reform Circuit Plan, for May to October 1851, inscribed 'Wesleyan Methodist', WYAS (Bradford), Ref. 57D76/2/n/21a.

55. Gregory, Sidelights, p. 58.

56. Bradford Observer, 30 August 1849.

57. Ibid., 18 March 1850.

58. Extracts from the Wesleyan Reform Declaration of Principles;

1. That Christ is head over all things to His Church, and His Word the only and the sufficient rule both of its faith and practice.

2. That no rules or regulations should be adopted, but such as ... have received the full concurrence of the Church.

3. That the admission of members into the Church, the exercise of discipline upon them, and their exclusion...are rights vested solely in the hands of the Church members...and that it is the right of members to be present at all meetings for the transaction of the general business of the Church.

4. That the nomination and election of all office-bearers is the inalienable right of the Church.

5. That all local courts should be independent, and their decisions affecting internal economy final.

6. That any restriction upon discussion...on matters affecting the Church is an unwarranted interference with its liberties.

7. That preachers of the gospel are not 'lords over God's heritage' for 'One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.' Jones, Wesleyan Reform Union, p.38.

Chapter 8

The Wesleyan Reformers in Bingley and Shipley

Introduction

Wesleyan claims to authority by virtue of the pastoral office and the various lay reactions from within Methodism reached a climax during the agitation which took place following the expulsion of Everett, Dunn and Griffith by the 1849 Conference. The issue of particular significance at this time was the way in which those who left Wesleyan Methodism established themselves as a viable alternative denomination - no easy task, and not one in which the Reformers were altogether successful.

During the Reform period the Bingley and Shipley Wesleyan circuits were separate, but the Reformers from such a small area would be expected to work together, and they all joined the Wesleyan Reform Union. Events in the societies at Shipley and in the villages round Bingley indicate that the Reform movement had a major effect on grass-roots Methodism in these two local circuits.

Methodism was well established in Bingley, where Wesley preached regularly in the parish church, yet the Wesleyan societies were seriously affected by the Reform agitation. Church and circuit membership for the most critical period can be traced, although not without some difficulty, as the Bingley circuit schedule book⁽¹⁾ has been damaged. Despite the shortage of primary sources for the period, it is clear that many members in and around Bingley supported Reform, and the Wesleyan cause was seriously weakened.

The first records of Methodism in the Shipley area are of John Wesley preaching in 1748 at Baildon, where there may have been a Methodist class during the 1740s,⁽²⁾ and there was a Methodist class at Shipley in 1763.⁽³⁾ The Shipley circuit was formed in 1823, but this long tradition of Methodist worship did not prevent disruption after 1849. Most circuit and chapel records for the Reform period are missing, but an intriguing reference to unspecified problems in the two main societies was provided by the minutes of the Circuit Quarterly Meeting in June 1853, which form part of the Shipley Circuit Book.⁽⁴⁾

As Rev. Samuel Allen was leaving the circuit after his stay of three years, which included most of the Reform agitation, the minutes reported the unanimous support of those present for the resolution 'That this meeting once more expresses its entire approval of the Rev S. Allen's conduct as the superintendent of this circuit in those painful cases of discipline which have occurred in connection with the Shipley and Baildon societies.' This is the only piece of evidence to indicate that Reform was at one time an issue at Baildon.

Following the 1849 Conference the expectation was that the search for the writer of the Fly Sheets would end in the expulsion of a handful of members and perhaps the departure of a few hundred sympathisers - a scenario the Wesleyans had by this time seen played out on at least three occasions. What actually happened was so unexpected that the initial reaction on both sides must have been amazement and disbelief. There was no plan of campaign on either side beyond the intention of

Conference to maintain connexional discipline, and the equally strong resolve on the part of the members to insist on greater democracy within Methodism. In practice this was all that was needed to provoke the most serious of all the divisions.

Bingley Circuit

Table 8/1 below lists all the Wesleyan chapels in the circuit immediately before the start of the reform agitation.

Table 8/1. Bingley chapels in 1848 and years of opening

Bingley	1790
Denholme	1793
Cullingworth	1806
Harden	1814
Eldwick Crag	1815
Wilsden	1823
Morton	1828

The conflict at Bingley within the Primitive Methodist society in 1848 which gave rise to the Christian Brethren or Independent Methodist society there has been examined above in Chapter 5 as part of the local development of Independent Methodism. The disagreement was, as Vickers suggested,⁽⁵⁾ a reaction against the principle of pastoral supremacy, but on this occasion it involved the travelling preacher and a local preacher from the Primitive Methodist circuit. In summary, what began as a dispute between the two men over remarks made in a sermon led to a secession in search of democratic freedom

in worship and those involved were in this way 'emancipated from the thralldom of priestly despotism'.⁽⁶⁾ Their first chapel was opened in 1852, and in 1868 the congregation built the present Independent Methodist chapel.⁽⁷⁾

There is no evidence that any of the Bingley Wesleyans were ever involved with this new Methodist group, but if they were it was probably only a temporary arrangement. Pages have been cut out of the schedule books for the Wesleyan circuit but this does not conceal short-term losses from the Bingley society. Between the entry for June 1846 when membership was 422 and the next returns in June 1850 the membership of the Wesleyan chapel at Bingley fell considerably, but table 8/2 shows that the numbers soon recovered and then remained between 350 and 400 throughout the Reform period. The presence of this Independent Methodist place of worship in Bingley meant that after 1849 there was no need for a specifically Wesleyan Reform chapel in the town, as this society was able to fulfil the same function for any Wesleyans who wished to transfer their allegiance.

In the surrounding villages the movement for Reform led to the creation of three societies which became part of the Wesleyan Reform Union, but no Reformers in the Bingley Circuit joined the U.M.F.C. Table 8/2 below indicates the extent of the losses caused when those advocating reform left or were expelled from their societies. The situation at Denholme was typical of other local villages, in that there had been a Methodist presence from the 1760s, with meetings held in an

upper room over two cottages before the chapel was opened in 1823.⁽⁸⁾ Following the Reform agitation the congregation was divided and 71 members left the chapel, and a Wesleyan Reform Union chapel was built in the village in 1853.⁽⁹⁾

Table 8/2. Wesleyan Methodist Chapels in Bingley and membership changes over the Reform period

<u>Name of Chapel</u>	<u>June1846</u>	<u>Sep1850</u>	<u>Dec1850</u>	<u>Sep1852</u>	<u>Dec1857</u>
Bingley	422	385	377	347	371
Denholme	182	132	121	111	165
Cullingworth	267	208	251	224	197
Harden	101	105	116	59	41
Wilsden	136	181	171	184	206
Eldwick Crag/Morton	59	80	86	48	37
<u>Circuit Totals</u>	<u>1167</u>	<u>1091</u>	<u>1122</u>	<u>973</u>	<u>1017</u>

There was a similar reaction in the nearby village of Cullingworth, where the first chapel was built in 1806, and replaced by a larger one in 1825.⁽¹⁰⁾ Seventy members were lost during the Reform period, but no Reform chapel was built in the village, as the Cullingworth Reformers worshipped at the Wesleyan Reform Union chapel in Denholme, only a mile and a half away.

Harden appears to have been the centre of Reform agitation in the Bingley circuit. Here again Methodism was first established in the village during the middle years of the eighteenth century, and a chapel was built in 1813 and

enlarged in 1835. This congregation too was divided over Reform, fewer than half of the members supporting Conference, and both parties in 1851 claimed ownership of the chapel. The Reformers formed a new trust and held the premises until the Wesleyans took the matter to the Court of Chancery, where possession was awarded to them, and on 23 May 1853 the Wesleyans opened a new minute book, describing themselves as 'the trustees of Harden Wesleyan chapel appointed by the decision of the Chancellor'.

It is an indication of the fervour with which the Wesleyans and the Reformers both claimed possession of the Harden chapel that the case went to litigation. The Wesleyan trustees' minutes refer to the 'suit in Chancery instituted under connexional sanction for the recovery of the Harden Wesleyan Chapel from unfaithful trustees to whom Mr Wilkinson had conveyed it, who had excluded those local preachers who were regularly appointed from the pulpits, introduced other preachers not so appointed to conduct divine services, and alienated the Sunday School conducted therein from Wesleyan Methodism'. The new trustees agreed to contact Mr Wilkinson, the leader of the Reformist group among the original trustees, offering him £200 'as a liquidation of any and every claim he may have on the trust'. (11) This money was to prove useful when the Harden Reformers built their own place of worship nearby, which was in the Wesleyan Reform Union. (12) The Wesleyans claimed that as a result of the Reformist occupation of the premises their debt had increased from £160 to £457, and

they received a connexional grant of £125.

The situation at Wilsden was unusual in that the number of Wesleyan members appeared to increase during the Reform period, but in fact this must be attributed to a temporary presence of the Wesleyans from Harden who lost the use of their premises to the Reformers between 1851 and 1853. Wilsden was the only society in the Bingley circuit where the issue of Reform did not lead to a division.

To the east of Bingley, the chapel at Eldwick Crag opened in 1815 on the edge of Ilkley Moor near Dick Hudson's was on the circuit schedules up to 1846, but when a new schedule book was started in 1852 similar numbers to those previously given for Eldwick Crag were quoted for the first time for Morton. This suggests that the Eldwick Crag Wesleyans were then counted as members of the East Morton society, whose chapel was only a mile from Eldwick Crag. Services were held in both chapels, and this link between the Wesleyan Methodists of the adjacent villages of Eldwick and East Morton suggests that the Reformists from these societies may have joined the Reformist members from nearby Micklethwaite to form the Wesleyan Reform society there, as no Reform chapel was opened in either Morton or Eldwick. The Micklethwaite Reformers met from 1853 in a cottage, then moved to a farm before building their chapel in 1875, and one description of this congregation provides the only local reference to the U.M.F.C., as Turner (13) claimed that the Reform society at Micklethwaite was 'called U.M.F.C., but they joined the Wesleyan Reform Union'. The Wesleyan

society at Micklethwaite was on the circuit plan from 1840, and the Reformist members had left the society before the Wesleyan chapel was opened in 1853.

Table 8/3. Membership losses in Bingley during the Reform period and the probable destination of the Reformers.

<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>as%</u>	<u>Probable Destination</u>
Bingley	75	18	? Independent Methodists
Denholme	71	39	Denholme W.R.U.
Cullingworth	70	26	Denholme W.R.U.
Harden	60	59	Harden W.R.U.
Wilsden	(gain)70	(gain)51	-
Eldwick Crag/Morton	22	37	Micklethwaite W.R.U.
<u>Circuit totals</u>	<u>228</u>	<u>20%</u>	

The pages for the period between June 1846 and June 1850 were cut out of the Bingley Circuit Schedule Book⁽¹⁴⁾ and it is not possible to examine the very early effect of the Reform movement on each society in the circuit during those years. However, by comparing membership statistics before and after the Reform period, it is clear that circuit membership was reduced by 228, or 20 per cent, during the Reform period. Taking the membership figures over a longer period, those for 1857 were very similar to those twenty years earlier, although this does not take into account the fact that membership might normally have been expected to increase during that time. There were serious losses from every society throughout the circuit except at Wilsden.

The minutes of the Bingley circuit local preachers' meeting confirm that the Harden chapel was the main centre of Reformist activity in the circuit. A complaint was brought to the meeting in December 1850 that Joseph Bradley of Harden 'annoyed one of the local preachers of the Horton circuit on a recent given occasion, just previous to his going into the pulpit to conduct divine service, disturbing his mind by passing a violent censure upon the superintendent of the above circuit and saying that he was going to hell.'⁽¹⁵⁾ It was also alleged 'that at Manningham and Cottingley he was heard to say while preaching that he would give five pounds for gunpowder to blow up all the colleges in the kingdom', an obvious reference to the controversy in 1835 over the Theological Institution. Joseph Bradley was to be 'solemnly admonished as to the impropriety and sinfulness of going about slandering brethren and others,' being required 'forthwith to express his sincere contrition.'

The minutes for September 1851 meeting record that it was agreed that Joseph Bradley 'be not allowed to enter this meeting should he attempt it, being no longer a preacher amongst us.' He was taken off the plan, but as there was some doubt about his membership it would seem likely that he had already transferred his allegiance to the Reformers. Two other Bingley circuit local preachers resigned at about the same time, one in March 1852 for no specified reason, and Samuel Atkinson in June 1854 after he 'stopped taking Wesleyan services, gave up his sitting in chapel, and preached in the

figures were quoted. In 1842 there were 537 members, but the figure dropped to 415 in the following year. This was some years before the Reform agitation, and some local dispute or circuit reorganisation may have taken place, all records of which have been lost. More significantly, in 1850 the membership stood at 444, and by the following year it was down to 306. This reduction of 138 members, or 31 per cent, can reasonably be attributed to the Reform agitation, and confirmation of this is found in the Centenary Booklet which states that 'the agitation in 1849 certainly did affect the circuit.' The number of chapels in the Shipley circuit before 1849 is shown in table 8/5 below;

Table 8/5. Shipley circuit - Chapels in 1848

and years of opening

Shipley (Providence)	1800
Baildon (Westgate)	1807
Windhill	1834
Baildon Green	1845
Esholt	1847

A further hint of problems within the Shipley circuit comes from the absence of entries in the Local Preachers' Minute Books between 1842 and 1850. In September 1842 the minutes included only 'Present, Rev. J. Pretty'. This suggests that relationships between the ministers and local preachers in Shipley may well have been less than cordial for a decade.

Secondary sources confirm that there were difficulties, and William Cudworth claimed that 'the Reform agitation among the Wesleyan body was very strong at Shipley, and caused great disruption...the Conference Party however retained the chapel, but gave up the Sunday-school room'.⁽¹⁸⁾ The register has survived of those who left Providence chapel at Shipley as Reformers and built the Wesleyan Reform Union chapel in Hall Lane in 1863. This was an official Wesleyan Reform Chapel Register,⁽¹⁹⁾ and listed 14 members 'transferred from another denomination' and nine 'new converts' when the first entries were made in 1851. All these members had addresses in Shipley, which rules out the possibility that the Baildon and Shipley Reformers had been jointly responsible for the founding of this society. The Wesleyan Reform circuit schedules for 1865-67 show that this was soon a thriving chapel with some 150 members.⁽²⁰⁾

Table 8/6. Shipley circuit - Membership losses during the Reform period and the probable destination of the Reformers

<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>losses</u>	<u>as%</u>	<u>Probable destination.</u>
Shipley			Hall Lane W.R.U.
Baildon			none
Windhill			none
Esholt			none
Baildon Green			Independent Methodists
<u>Circuit Total</u>	<u>138</u>	<u>31</u>	

There was a split among the members at Baildon Green Wesleyan School Chapel, 'in consequence of the unchristian and unscriptural pressure on the poor members for money to support a hired ministry'(21). In view of these comments it is no surprise that Baildon Green Independent Methodist chapel was opened in 1858,(22) and this became the alternative non-Wesleyan place of worship for the Methodists of this very small village. The small society at Esholt does not seem to have been involved in the Reform agitation, nor does the Windhill society, whose premises were then basically a Sunday school.(23)

It is not clear how many of the circuit's local preachers were among the Reformers. The Shipley Circuit Book quotes in full two letters which had obviously been seen as important at the time, and which refer to the Reform agitation. In the first letter written to the superintendent minister in January 1851, James Boocock, a local preacher from Baildon, asked for his name to be left off the Wesleyan plan unless it was acceptable for him to take services for the 'Reformers, so called',(24) when not preaching in the Wesleyan chapels. Both the local preacher's letter and the minister's reply were courteous and indeed friendly, but it was made clear that there was no way in which such co-operation would be permitted by the Wesleyan minister, and James Boocock's resignation was accepted at the next meeting.

He did, however, come back on the plan in December 1860, 'with the agreement that he do not allow himself to be on any

The events in both these circuits took place against the background of annual membership losses between 1849 and 1855 which have been considered above, and it will be remembered that after a small loss between the Conferences of 1849 and 1850, some 57,000 people across the country left between 1850 and 1851, evidence that it was the call to ministers at the 1850 Conference to eradicate all support for Reform that led to the greatest losses, and there were then progressively smaller losses in the following years. The local circuits followed the national pattern.

For those individuals who left or were expelled from their chapels and then chose to become involved in the Reform movement, the over-riding problem during the early 1850s, once they had found a place in which to hold their services and people to lead worship, was to determine their long-term policy. When it became clear that there was no longer any possibility of either reforming Wesleyanism from within, or of returning to the Wesleyan societies they had left, they had to plan for the future, and as a temporary expedient many of the various Wesleyan Reform congregations were organised in circuits which were understandably run on familiar Methodist lines, but were entirely lay organisations, and became in effect autonomous units under the principle of 'circuit independence.' In Bradford, for example, the Reformers had got together by 1851 to form a Bradford Reform Circuit, while both the Cleckheaton and Birstall Reformers established Reform circuits.

Their original status as independent Reform circuits was not envisaged as a long-term policy, and delegates were sent to the annual meetings of the General Reform Committee, established in March 1850 to provide central leadership for the Reform movement, and to co-ordinate the activities of local Reform Committees. The Reformers adopted the slogan 'No secession, no surrender, no supplies', emphasising their hope then that there was still scope for reconciliation, while making it clear that in the meantime they would remain separate and would not support the Wesleyan cause before agreement was reached.

Every year from 1850 until 1856 the leaders of the Reform Movement met wherever the Wesleyan Conference was being held, and in 1853 when the Wesleyan Conference met in Bradford the Reformers' delegate Meeting was held in the Ebenezer New Connexion chapel. Each year they made the same requests by letter to Conference which were formalised in the Declaration of Principles in 1852. This document summarised the policy and outlook of the Reformers, and was seen as their Magna Carta. Year after year requests for the Declaration to be accepted were ignored by the Wesleyan Conference, while in the circuits the Reform movement was in practice becoming a separate denomination with its own membership, places of worship and local preachers. When approaches were made to other Methodist groups, the New Connexion was willing to receive the Reformers, but only if they accepted the current connexionalism of the New Connexion, which was unacceptable to them. (26)

An agreement in principle to an amalgamation between the Reformers and the Wesleyan Methodist Association was accepted in 1855. It was, therefore, several years before it became clear that the circuits had in fact only two permanent choices; after 1857 they could if they wished amalgamate with those who had left the Wesleyans after 1828 and 1835, thereby becoming part of the United Methodist Free Churches. Alternatively, as 'non-amalgamating Reformers', after 1859 they could join the Wesleyan Reform Union. The U.M.F.C. or 'Free Methodists' became a national movement with churches throughout the country, but the Wesleyan Reform Union was a smaller organisation confined mainly to parts of Yorkshire and the Midlands, with only a scattering of churches elsewhere. The opportunity to make this second choice between the two Reformist organisations applied therefore only to a small proportion of all the Reformers, and Bradford was among the areas where this opportunity was available.

The decision was a difficult one, not least because both organisations appeared to offer a more secure future than the Reformers had experienced since leaving their Wesleyan chapels. Local circuits usually sent delegates to meetings of both groups, and circuit meetings then discussed the situation and arrived at a decision. One factor in favour of joining the Wesleyan Reform Union was that many Reformers were reluctant to place themselves under any form of connexional authority, even one devised by themselves, and the conditions of the W.R.U. were seen as less demanding. It would certainly appear that

sometimes the fundamental policy decisions which led some societies into the United Methodist Free Churches, and others into the Wesleyan Reform Union, owed more than a little to chance.

In practice the decisions made by the Reformers who joined the Free Methodists and those who joined the Wesleyan Reform Union were far-reaching. The U.M.F.C. developed a connexional system based on the traditional Methodist pattern, albeit with greater lay involvement and a relationship between ministers and members which was characterised by partnership rather than Wesleyan ideas of pastoral supremacy. The Wesleyan Reform Union was, as its title implied, a union of chapels with a congregationalist polity, in which each church retained administrative autonomy, with the authority to make decisions vested in the meetings of the members.

The Reformers who chose the United Methodist Free Churches could not know that in fifty years their chapels would become part of the United Methodist Churches, much less that in 1932 their descendants would be in the same Methodist Church as the Wesleyan societies from which they had separated. Those who founded the Wesleyan Reform Union were similarly unaware that their descendants would become and remain one of only two small Methodist denominations to remain outside the jurisdiction of Conference. The local autonomy which the Wesleyan Reform Union so valued, and the consequent absence of any equivalent to the Methodist Conference with authority to determine connexional policy, proved to be both a strength and a weakness, and this

was one of the factors that prevented closer links with other Methodist groups in 1907 and 1932. (27)

Of the 100,000 people who left Wesleyanism after 1849, about half seem to have been lost from the churches. Some 46,000 were in various independent Reform circuits in 1856, and of these 20,000 joined the U.M.F.C. on its formation in 1857, (28) and many others joined in the next few years. As a result of their amalgamation with the 18,000 former Wesleyans who had seceded in 1828 or 1835, and had become known as the Wesleyan Methodist Association, the numerical strength of Free Methodism continued to grow, reaching 53,000 in 1861 and eventually bringing over 80,000 members into the United Methodist Church in 1907. (29)

In contrast, only 17,000 ex-Wesleyans joined the Wesleyan Reform Union in 1859, and their first Annual Meeting was held in 1860 in Bradford, at Bethesda Wesleyan Reform Chapel in Peckover Street. Their numbers fell to 12,000 within the following year, and continued to fall. (30)

Conclusion

In Bingley and Shipley those who became Reformers all went into the Wesleyan Reform Union. In the township of Bingley supporters of Reform had the opportunity to transfer to the Independent Methodists, but there is no evidence that any of them did so in spite of known losses from the Wesleyan society. In the surrounding villages there was obvious evidence of support for the principle of Reform, and given that over 270 members left their Wesleyan chapels the most interesting

question which arises from the situation in this circuit is why there was apparently no attempt by any Reform congregation to become part of the U.M.F.C. It is possible that some person or incident made such an impression in the circuit that there was a definite reluctance to join the Free Churches. On the other hand, local opinion might have been in favour of the less demanding requirements of the Wesleyan Reform Union.

The deliberate removal of pages from the Bingley circuit schedules may indicate a desire on the part of later Wesleyans to remove from their records all traces of an embarrassing period in their history. It is possible that other records of the Reform period have not been preserved for the same reason, and it may be significant that the account of the agitation at Harden, which was written on the front three pages of an account book, is the only surviving record of events from any of the seven chapels. The minutes of the local preachers' meetings, some plans and the damaged schedule book are the only surviving circuit records for the period.

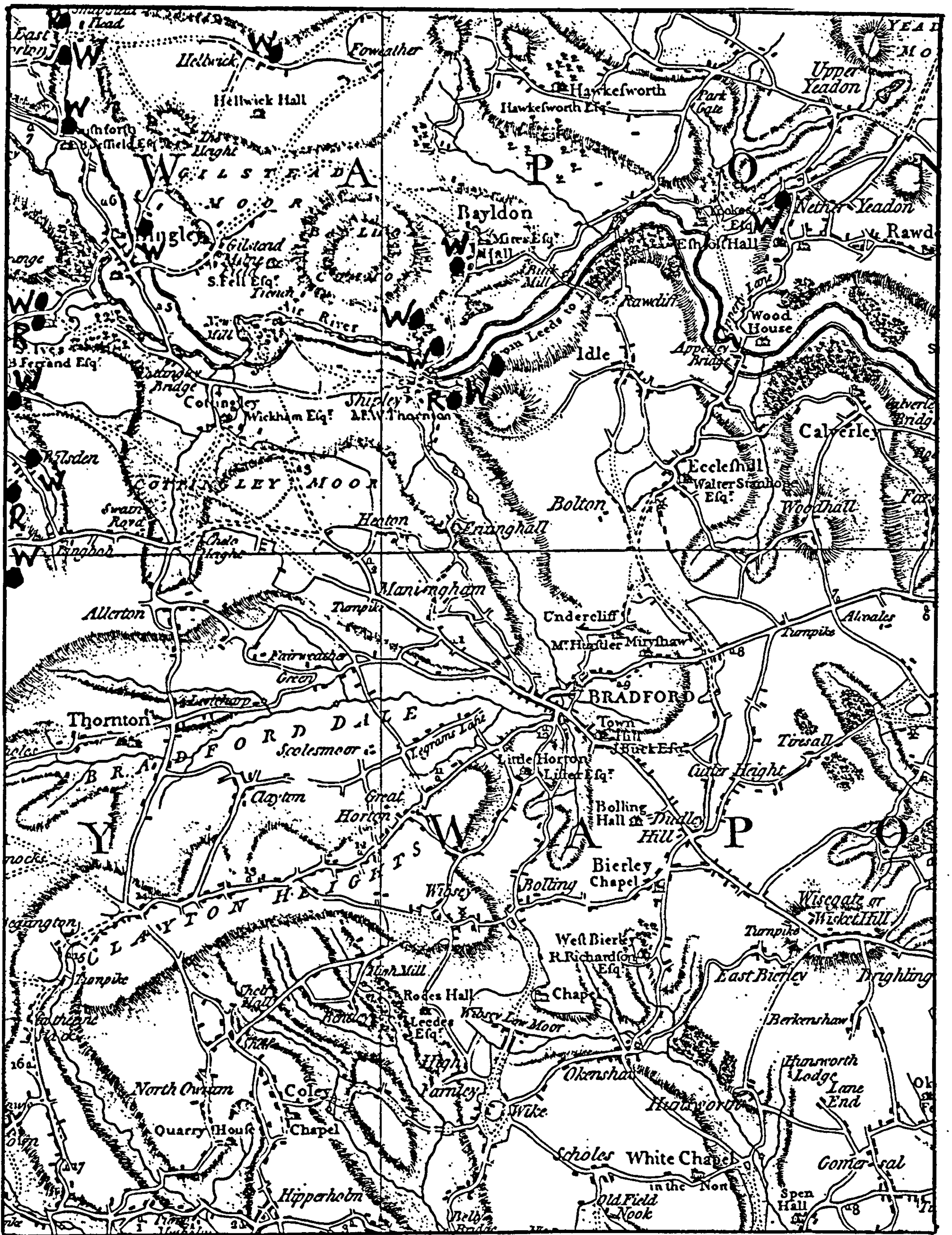
The division of the Bingley Wesleyan circuit was permanent. Without any U.M.F.C. societies to reintroduce links with mainstream Methodism, the three Wesleyan Reform Union chapels in the area of this circuit continued their separate existence for over a century, although all have closed in recent years. Bingley Independent Methodist church is now one of only three such churches in Yorkshire. All the Wesleyan societies survived the Reform period and retained their premises, although at Harden this required litigation. Perhaps inevitably, most of

the former Wesleyan places of worship involved in the Reform agitation have also closed; only the societies in Bingley and Cullingworth are still active, while at Wilsden the Methodists and the United Reformed Church share the former U.R.C. premises. The Bingley circuit was in many ways typical of most local Wesleyan circuits, and followed the country-wide pattern of division over the issue of Reform, while the question of Reformist competence to create an alternative Methodist system found an answer in the establishment of three successful societies, listed in table 8/8.

Table 8/8 The Reform Chapels in Bingley and Shipley
in the Wesleyan Reform Union

Wesleyan Chapel	Wesleyan Reform Union Chapel opened
Harden	Harden 1854 - c.1975
Denholme	Denholme 1853 - c.1968
Micklethwaite	Micklethwaite 1875
Shipley (Providence)	Shipley (Hall Lane) 1863
(Baildon Green	Independent Methodist 1858)

At Shipley, where only three chapels had been opened before 1840, two secessions took place. It is unfortunate that so little evidence has survived of the Reform movement in the Shipley circuit, particularly so as it seems possible that the absence of such records may be deliberate. On the other hand



Map 7. Wesleyan and Reform chapels in Bingley and Shipley

i

enough information has survived to indicate that the circuit lost a third of its membership over the Reform period.

The outcome of the Reform movement in terms of the division of the Shipley congregation is quite clear. The Providence chapel at Shipley was the main place of worship in the circuit, with a membership in 1830 of about 230, and this would probably have increased later. Although more members probably left the Wesleyans in 1851 than the handful who joined the Reformers when they worshipped in the former Wesleyan Sunday School premises in Commercial Street, soon after the Shipley Wesleyan Reform chapel was built in 1863 it had a membership of about 150 - a figure rather greater than the total Wesleyan losses some fifteen years earlier.

The reference in the Local Preachers' minutes to difficulties at Baildon is intriguing, but in the absence of any records this remains a mystery. There is no evidence of a Reform congregation being formed in Baildon, although Reformist members from there could easily have walked down the hill to worship at the Independent Methodist chapel at the isolated village of Baildon Green, which was opened near the Wesleyan chapel there.

The main issue in the Shipley Wesleyan circuit was whether the Reformers made a successful attempt at creating an alternative non-Wesleyan form of Methodism for their own members. To some extent they did so - the effect of the Reform agitation in the circuit included the division of at least two societies, but this led to the opening of a Reform chapel at

Shipley, and an Independent Methodist chapel was opened at Baildon Green. Moreover, the agitation itself did not last many years. In March 1856 the Wesleyan Quarterly Meeting minutes reported that the meeting 'rejoices in the financial and spiritual prosperity of the circuit as shown in the reports of the circuit stewards and the superintendent minister, and offers its earnest thanksgiving to Almighty God for the same.' (31)

Notes

1. Bingley Wesleyan Circuit Schedules, 1837-1849, (WYAS Bradford, Ref. 40D76/4/8/2, and 1849-1860, Ref 40D76/4/8/3.)
2. Letter from John Nelson to John Wesley dated 29 August 1750, quoted in T.Jackson (ed.), Early Methodist Preachers, Vol.1., London, n/d, c.1900, p.173.
3. Bradford Methodist Circuit Book 1763-1788, (WYAS Bradford, Ref. DB/16/C/52.)
4. Shipley Wesleyan Circuit Book, 1823-1865, which includes early membership statistics 1823-1837, some Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1851-1857, and the Local Preachers' Minutes 1838-1865, (WYAS Bradford, Ref 40D76/1/1/1a.)
5. Vickers, Independent Methodism, Wigan, 1920, p.163.
6. Ibid., p. 163.
7. Handbook of the 91st Annual Meeting of the United Free Gospel Churches, 1896, p.3. IMRC, Wigan.
8. Ward, Wesleyan Methodism in Bingley, page 19.
9. Cudworth, Round about Bradford, p.138.

10. Ibid., p.252.
11. Harden Wesleyan Chapel, Trustee's Account, 1853-1889. (WYAS Bradford, Ref.40D76/11/6.)
12. Cudworth, Bradford, p.219.
13. H. Turner, Ancient Bingley, 1890, p. 172.
14. Bingley Wesleyan Circuit Schedules, 1837-1849, (WYAS Bradford, Ref. 40D76/4/8/2.) and 1849-1860, (Ref 40D76/4/8/3.)
15. Bingley Wesleyan Circuit, Local Preachers' Minutes, 1831-1870, (WYAS Bradford, Ref. 40D76/4/3/1.)
16. Bingley Wesleyan Circuit Preaching Plans 1843-1875, (WYAS Bradford, Ref. 40D76/4/5/1.)
17. Anon, A History of the Bradford Shipley Wesleyan Circuit 1823-1923 (Centenary Handbook), pasted inside a scrapbook. (WYAS Bradford, Ref. 1D88/22.)
18. W. Cudworth, Bradford, p.299.
19. Register of Members of the Shipley Wesleyan Reform Society 1851-1880, 'Published by the Wesleyan Reform Bookroom, 8 Exeter Hall, Strand, London.' (WYAS Bradford, Ref.36D80/1)
20. Bradford Wesleyan Reform circuit schedules 1865-1867, (WYAS Bradford, Ref. 36D80/22.)
21. United Free Gospel Churches Magazine, 1850, p. 26, IMRC, Wigan.
22. Baildon Green Wesleyan Sunday School Account Book 1845-1875, (WYAS Bradford, Ref. 40D76/2/2/1a.)
23. A. Costigan, Windhill Wesleyan Mission, Bradford, 1989, p. 16.
24. Although the copy of the letter in the Shipley Circuit Book

refers to 'Ranters, so called', which would have meant the Primitive Methodists, both the nature and timing of the letter and the use of the phrase 'so called' indicate that the original letter would have referred to preaching for 'the Reformers, so called'. This is confirmed by the entry in the Local Preachers' minutes for December 1860, which refers twice to 'Reformers.'

25. H. Whiteley, Baildon Methodist Church Centenary 1890-1990, Bradford, 1990, p.13.

26. Currie, Methodism Divided, p. 225.

27. Beckwith, Records of Leeds Primitive Methodism, London, 1910, p. 105.

28. W.H. Jones, The History of the Wesleyan Reform Union, 1952, p. 60.

29. Gilbert, Religion and Society, 1976, p. 31.

30. The Wesleyan Reform Union. still a separate denomination, currently has some 3,000 members in over 100 churches, usually organised in circuits with paid ministers, and most of their churches are still to be found in Yorkshire and the midlands.

31. Shipley Wesleyan Circuit Book 1823-1865, WYAS Bradford, Ref. 40D76/1/1/1a.

Chapter 9

The Wesleyan Reformers in Bradford

Introduction

Conflict between Wesleyan ministerial authoritarianism and claims for greater powers for lay members precipitated all the disputes in Bradford Methodism following the 1849 Conference. The vital issue in all the circuits in and around Bradford was the ability of the Reformers to create a new style of Methodism which was as successful as the Wesleyan societies they had left, but closer to their own expectations, with more lay participation and greater democracy.

The agitation divided the Bradford West, Bradford East and Great Horton circuits. The Bradford Reformers, irrespective of the Wesleyan circuits they had left, became part of a single Bradford Reform Circuit, and the effectiveness of the Reform movement in the town will therefore be considered as a whole.

Woodhouse Grove circuit was the least involved during the Reform agitation. The main reason was probably the decision to make this a separate circuit in 1813, thus excluding members of these societies from the network of relationships which existed throughout the rest of Bradford Methodism, which remained one circuit until the next round of circuit changes in 1835. After 1849 the Reformers in the three other Bradford circuits were able to work together more easily because many of the leaders already knew each other. The second factor was the presence of Woodhouse Grove School, opened in 1812 at the instigation of Jabez Bunting as the northern equivalent of Wesley's Kingswood

School at Bristol, and like Kingswood an academy for the sons of Wesleyan ministers, which may have led to greater support for Conference in this circuit than elsewhere in Bradford. Another factor was that the stress caused by secession was already familiar to the members of this circuit following the events at Eccleshill, where many members became Protestant Methodists after 1827. Lastly, the reorganisation of local circuit boundaries in 1830, when Yeadon and Guiseley were separated from the Woodhouse Grove circuit, probably had some influence on attitudes within the circuit, as the Yeadon Methodists had a reputation for revivalism and for opposition to the Wesleyan Conference.

The Bradford West Circuit experienced serious disruption following the 1849 Conference. Although all the societies were well established, three major changes in circuit boundaries may have made it difficult to create stability within the circuit as a whole. When the Bradford circuit was divided in 1835, the Bradford West circuit was formed with nine societies, but five of these moved into the Great Horton circuit in 1842, and two more societies were added to Bradford West circuit in 1843. On the other hand, this circuit included the large and prestigious Kirkgate society in the centre of the town, whose beginnings lay in the original Bradford society at the Octagon Chapel near Randall Well Street off Great Horton Road, visited by John Wesley soon after it was opened in 1766.

The Bradford East circuit, similarly formed by the division of the Bradford Wesleyan circuit in 1835, experienced serious

losses as a result of the agitation over Reform. Yet while the great majority of the Reformers in Bradford West circuit opted to join the Wesleyan Reform Union, all but two of the seceding groups in the Bradford East circuit joined the United Methodist Free Churches. The widespread unsettling effect of the Reform agitation can be clearly seen in this circuit, where the sense of isolation and insecurity felt by both congregations and individuals led to the series of new allegiances entered into by the seceders from their main society at Eastbrook, and gave rise to a second secession at Dudley Hill.

The Great Horton circuit, sometimes referred to as 'Bradford South', was formed in September 1842 by taking seven churches from the Bradford West circuit, to which Shelf (Witchfield) was added in 1846 from the Cleckheaton circuit. Half the membership of this circuit moved from Wesleyanism to Reform following the 1849 Conference, providing a further example of a circuit torn apart by controversy. Neither side gained from this dissension; the Wesleyan cause was seriously weakened, while the Reformers were unable to produce an overall policy and went their very separate ways, despite the existence at one time of a Great Horton Wesleyan Reform circuit. Few written records of this Reform circuit have survived, and most information about it comes from secondary sources.

At connexional level there was a complete absence of planning or any specific policies to deal with the crisis which followed the expulsion of the three ministers at the 1849 Conference, as the extent of the ensuing agitation could not

have been foreseen. Afterwards the intention of Conference to maintain connexional discipline, and the equally strong resolve on the part of many members to insist on greater democracy within Methodism, meant that each new situation had to be dealt with as it arose by both Wesleyans and Reformers. The agitation from the most serious of all the divisions continued for several years, and during this time all the Wesleyan societies in Bradford were caught up in the local skirmishes of a battle which affected circuits and societies throughout the country.

The Woodhouse Grove Circuit

The fact that the Reform movement was not a major issue in this circuit was emphasised by the absence of any representatives at the first Public Meeting of Wesleyan Reformers at the Bradford Temperance Hall in March 1850,⁽¹⁾ at which members of the other three circuits were actively involved. The situation of the circuit prior to the Reform agitation is shown in table 9/1;

Table 9/1. Woodhouse Grove circuit;
Chapels in 1848 and years of opening

Eccleshill	1775
Idle (Thorp)	1810
Woodhouse Grove	1812
Greengates (Brunswick)	1834
Undercliffe	1839
Bolton. (In rented rooms until 1853)	

There was physical violence over the Reform issue only two miles away at Yeadon, where there had been a major secession to the Protestant Methodists from the Wesleyan society in 1828,⁽²⁾ when this society was still part of the Woodhouse Grove circuit. During 1833 and 1834 a religious revival at Yeadon brought in many converts to the area. Smith records⁽³⁾ that nine hundred people were added to the membership of local societies, six hundred of them at Yeadon, and Watson⁽⁴⁾ claims that half the entire population of the village described themselves as Methodists. Consequently the Conference insisted on stationing a second minister there in spite of opposition from the members, the minister, and the District Chairman,⁽⁵⁾ and although the cost of the appointment was reduced by the generosity of the Woodhouse Grove circuit, relationships between the Yeadon society and the Wesleyan Conference, and not least with Jabez Bunting, were seriously damaged.

It was therefore not surprising that after 1849 Yeadon became a hotbed of support for Reform. The chapel and the minister's manse were attacked and damaged by an angry mob, and a local preacher, Will Starkey, helped in the defence of the property armed with a gun. The Reformers seized the Queen Street Wesleyan chapel at Yeadon, but when the Wesleyans sought legal redress the Court of Chancery decided in December 1853 in favour of Conference retaining possession of the premises.

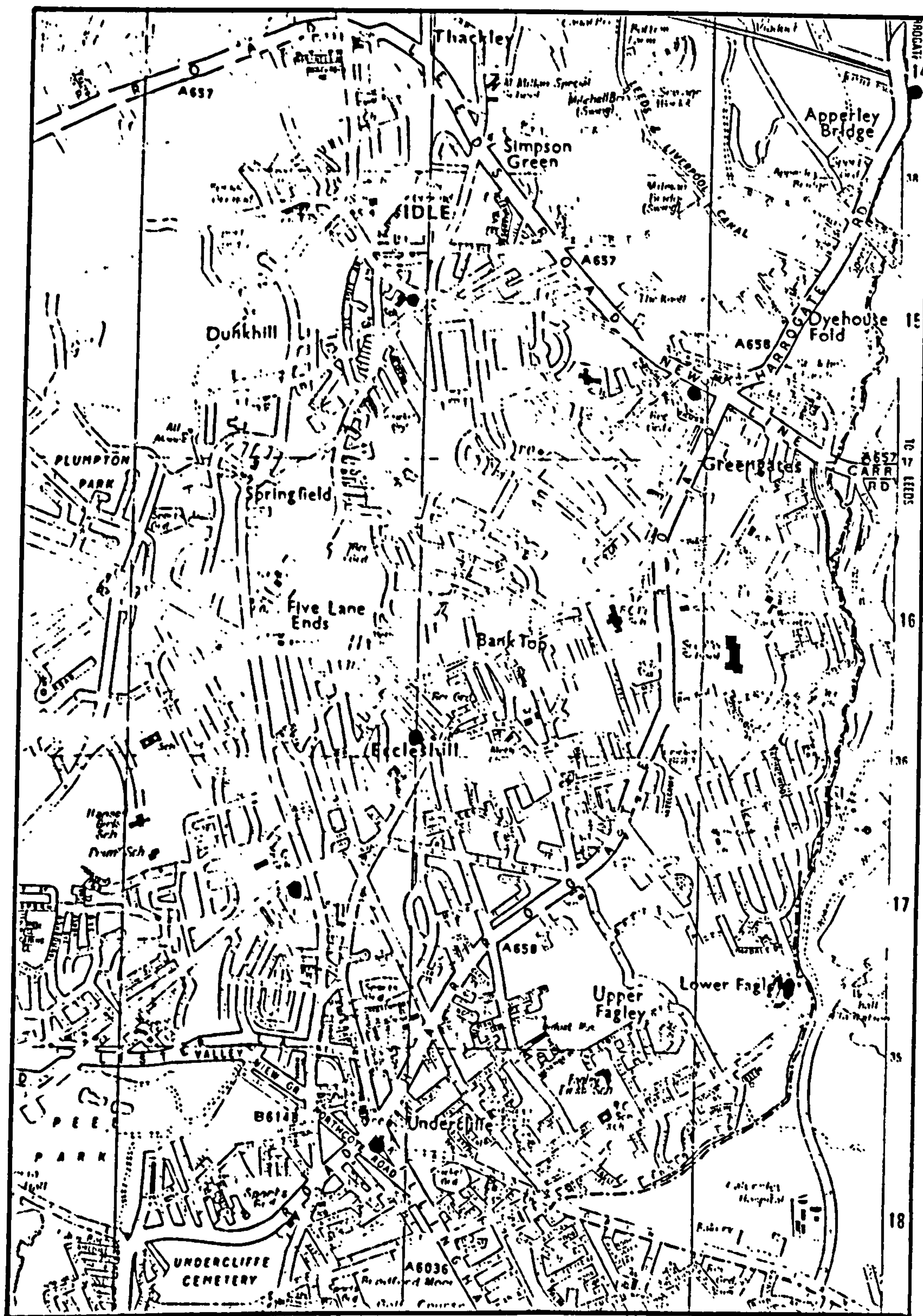
Mr T.P. Bunting, the solicitor son of Jabez Bunting, wrote to the minister at Birstall, 'We gave the Yeadon recusants a good beating in court yesterday. The trustees are

removed and are to pay their own costs and some of ours.'⁽⁶⁾ In practice, however, the chapel remained permanently in Reformist hands. W.E. Forster, the member of Parliament for Bradford, whose mother was living at Yeadon, referred to these events as 'the last pitched battle in the last civil war that ever was fought on religious grounds in England',⁽⁷⁾ and it was the Yeadon Reformers who caused the only incident to disturb the otherwise placid Woodhouse Grove circuit.

Table 9/2. Woodhouse Grove circuit. Wesleyan chapels
and membership 1848 - 1851⁽⁹⁾

<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>Dec1848</u>	<u>Sep1850</u>	<u>Dec1850</u>	<u>Apl1851</u>	<u>Jun1851</u>
Woodhouse Grove	107	103	98	97	99
Idle	126	151	153	156	150
Eccleshill	152	164	171	168	173
Undercliffe	59	52	53	56	59
Greengates	59	48	51	50	46
Bolton	30	31	37	34	36
<u>Totals</u>	<u>533</u>	<u>539</u>	<u>563</u>	<u>561</u>	<u>563</u>

During 1849 there was a disturbance at Thorp chapel at Idle, which Watson referred to as 'the backing-up do'. A crowd of Reformers walked down from Yeadon to Idle ready to 'back up' any support they found, and it would appear that there was the potential for unrest in the Idle society, where 'there were undoubtedly some in the church who sympathised with the



Map 8. Wesleyan chapels in Woodhouse Grove circuit.

reforming party.' (8)

No service was held on the Sunday when the Reformers came, and their attempt to take over the new Sunday School building was thwarted when the two men who had provided the stone and much of the money said that the Reformers must recompense them personally if they took the premises. The Sunday School remained in Wesleyan hands, but there was a delay of some years before the deeds were drawn up, and these stipulated that any trustee who ceased to be a member of the Wesleyan Society could not retain his status as a trustee.

The Sunday School anniversary collections at Thorp for 1849 were down on previous years, and the Whitsuntide procession had only a quarter of the usual walkers, but Watson refers to the part played by the minister and the leaders in avoiding more serious conflict. This suggests that there had been a real risk of Reformers at Idle taking over part of the premises with the support of sympathisers from Yeadon, but they seem to have been dissuaded, and no Reform society was formed in Idle. In practice any supporters of Reform in Idle probably either returned later to Wesleyanism or went to another denomination in the village, where there were Baptist, Congregationalist, and Primitive Methodist chapels.

The earlier separation of the two circuits meant that the influence of the Yeadon Reformers on the Woodhouse Grove circuit was limited, but the fact that the 'backing-up do' has not been totally forgotten is an example of the occasional usefulness of secondary sources. The author of the Idle Chapel

Centenary Book writing fifty years after the events was clearly less inhibited than the secretaries responsible for the official records of Thorp chapel⁽¹⁰⁾, although the incident was almost certainly known at the time to everyone in the circuit. Membership numbers actually increased at Idle every quarter during 1849, and this pattern was reflected throughout the circuit, as indicated in table 9/3;

Table 9/3. Woodhouse Grove circuit - Membership losses during the Reform period and the probable destination of the Reformers.

<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>as%</u>	<u>Probable destination</u>
Woodhouse Grove	8	7	
Idle	(gain)24	(gain)19	
Eccleshill	(gain)21	(gain)14	
Undercliffe	0	0	
Greengates	13	22	
Bolton	(gain) 6	(gain)20	
<u>Totals</u>	(gain)30	(gain) 6%	

There is no evidence of Reform sympathies in any society other than at Idle. Woodhouse Grove Chapel, although on the school premises, served a local congregation as well as the school community. Eccleshill was a strong society but had already suffered a secession in 1835 to the Protestant Methodists, whose chapel was nearby. The three smaller societies do not

Bradford West circuit

Before the start of the Reform movement this circuit had been gaining members. Between the circuit reorganisation in 1843 and 1848 the membership grew from 1594 to 1714, and although Manningham lost fifty members, the circuit membership continued to rise until 1849 and remained stable until 1850.

Table 9/5. Bradford West circuit - Chapels in 1848
and years of opening

Kirkgate	1811	(replacing 1766 Octagon)
Low Moor	1809	
Manningham	1822	(school chapel)
Bowling Lane	1823	(school chapel)
Abbey	1838	(White Abbey)
Centenary (Clayton Lane)	1839	

In March 1850 two representatives from the Bradford West circuit, J. Foster and William Savage, both local preachers, attended the National Reform Delegate Meeting in London, knowing that this might mean the loss of their Wesleyan membership. They subsequently gave a report of the delegate meeting at the Wesleyan Reform meeting held in the Bradford Temperance Hall at the end of March.⁽¹¹⁾ When the superintendent minister discovered that Savage, while a local preacher in his circuit, had spoken in the Temperance Hall which was then the Reformers' place of worship at a meeting called to raise funds for the three expelled ministers, he withheld the local preacher's class ticket, thus expelling him

from Wesleyan Methodism. Gregory records that this small local incident in the Bradford West circuit had widespread repercussions.⁽¹²⁾ Savage appealed against the superintendent minister's decision to the District Chairman, and his membership was restored. The case was reported at the 1850 Wesleyan Conference, where it was accepted that expulsion required a decision by a Leaders' Meeting, and could not be an arbitrary decision by a minister, although this ruling did not prevent many more such expulsions by individual ministers taking place during the Reform agitation.

There was considerable bitterness between the two parties in this circuit, and the Bradford Observer reported that during one particularly acrimonious local preachers' meeting, 'detective police' were on hand outside the Kirkgate chapel to keep the peace, should this have become necessary.⁽¹³⁾

During the years of uncertainty after 1849 most, if not all, of the Reform societies in Bradford became part of the Bradford Wesleyan Reform circuit. This independent circuit was probably intended only as a temporary arrangement, and in practice this was particularly the case for the congregations which chose after 1857 to become part of the United Methodist Free Churches. The remaining churches which preferred not to become part of what became known as 'Free Methodism' continued in the Reform circuit for several years and then, more or less as a body, joined the Wesleyan Reform Union. By so doing they became the Bradford Circuit of the Wesleyan Reform Union, at which point the Bradford Wesleyan Reform circuit ceased to

exist. The role of the Bradford Wesleyan Reform circuit was therefore a crucial one, being between about 1851 and perhaps 1867 first the temporary home of all the Reform congregations in Bradford, and the starting point from which they opted to join either the 'Free Methodists' in the U.M.F.C. or the Wesleyan Reform Union. Unfortunately the written records of this circuit are sparse and not easy to trace.⁽¹⁴⁾

Within the Bradford West circuit only the Reformers who seceded from the main Kirkgate society became part of the United Methodist Free Church. They were not listed on the Reform plan in 1851,⁽¹⁵⁾ perhaps because they left the Wesleyans rather later than other groups, but having met from 1852 at the Oddfellows Hall in Thornton Road, they built a very impressive chapel in Westgate⁽¹⁶⁾ with the carved inscription at eaves level, 'Opened by the Wesleyan Reformers in 1854'. This suggests that they already intended to remain separate from Wesleyanism, several years before the creation of the U.M.F.C. and the Wesleyan Reform Union made a choice of future allegiance possible. In practice they were still listed on the Bradford Wesleyan Reform plan in May 1857⁽¹⁷⁾ and they probably joined the U.M.F.C. soon afterwards, and certainly before 1865, when they were no longer included in the Reform schedules.⁽¹⁸⁾

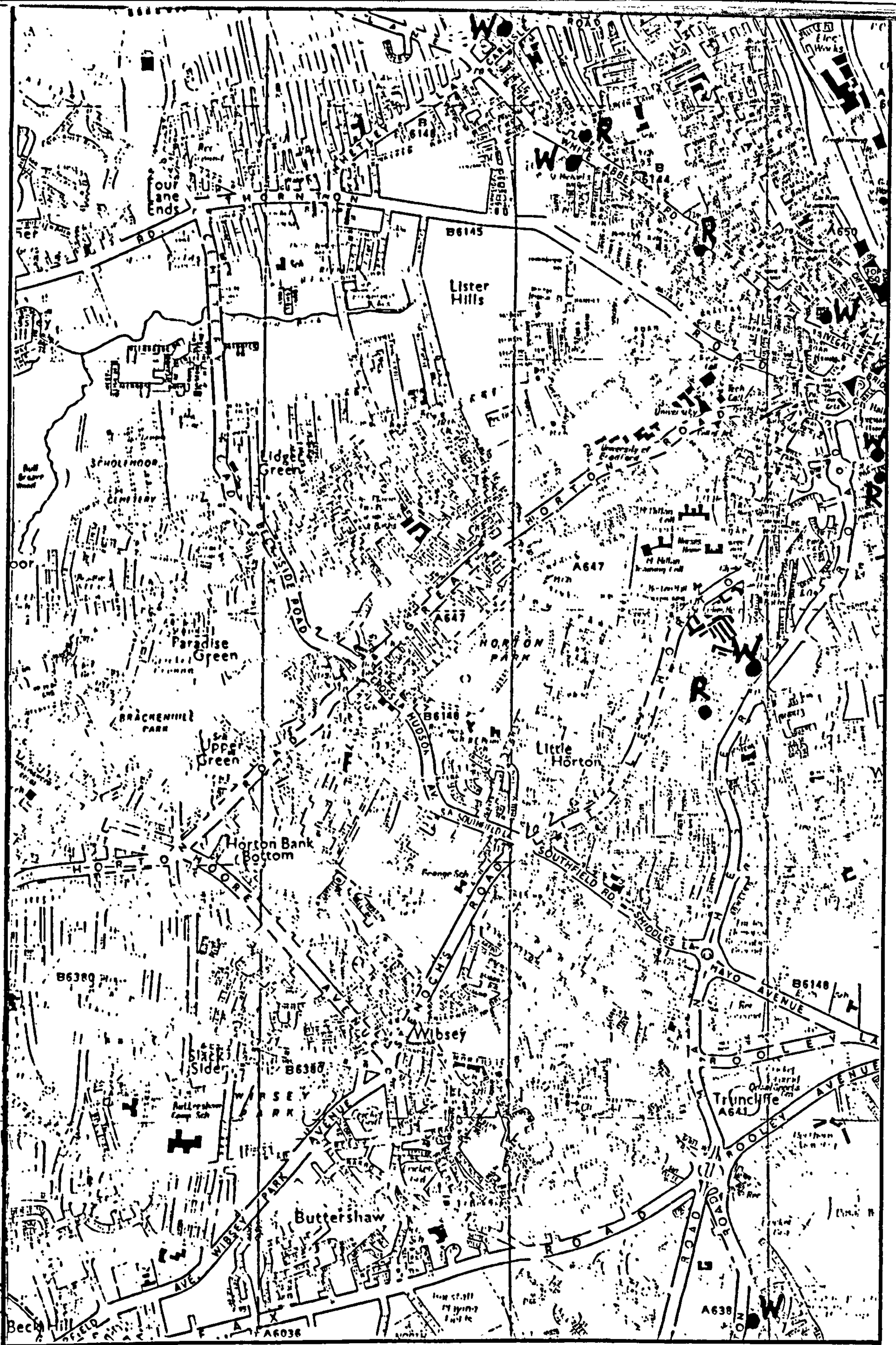
Uncertainty over the allegiance of individual members during the Reform agitation meant that membership totals were entered in the circuit schedules at irregular intervals, instead of quarterly as before, and no membership figures were entered in the schedules for September 1850 or September 1851.

Table 9/6. Bradford West - Wesleyan chapels
and membership 1848-1851⁽¹⁹⁾

<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>Sep1848</u>	<u>Jun1849</u>	<u>Sep1849</u>	<u>Mar1850</u>	<u>Mar1851</u>
Kirkgate	662	685	686	679	605
Low Moor	273	309	354	339	325
Manningham	134	86	89	90	93
Bowling Lane	77	87	86	86	29
Abbey	336	345	347	341	245
Centenary	232	271	272	288	112
<u>Totals</u>	<u>1714</u>	<u>1783</u>	<u>1834</u>	<u>1823</u>	<u>1409</u>

Reformers who seceded from the Bradford West circuit were responsible for founding three of the four local Wesleyan Reform Union societies. The Muff Field Wesleyan Reform society, which was to become the leading Wesleyan Reform Union chapel in Bradford, had its origins in a decision by a number of Methodists at Bowling in 1823 to build a Sunday School. This was intended 'to be denominated a Wesleyan Methodist Sabbath School, yet free for the children of every religious denomination.'⁽²⁰⁾ The building was also used on Sundays for Methodist worship.

After the three ministers were expelled at the 1849 Wesleyan Conference the majority of the leaders and trustees of the Sabbath School supported the Reform movement, while a smaller number wished to remain part of the Wesleyan Connexion. Exasperation over the Reform issue led to physical violence, and on one occasion a scuffle broke out during a service taken



Map 9. Wesleyan and Reform chapels in Bradford West circuit.

by a local preacher, Thomas Haigh. It would appear from the report in the Bradford Observer⁽²¹⁾ that Haigh favoured the Wesleyan position, and the Reformist members present took exception to the collection that day going to 'poor circuits', meaning Wesleyan circuits where Reformers had 'stopped the supplies.' The meeting room was crowded, and those attempting to take the collection in their hats - the collection plates having been hidden away - were physically restrained and their clothing was torn. The police had been present at the service, and four men were later charged at the Borough Court, although the police claimed that 'they would have taken the whole congregation into custody if they had had a force equal to the task, as it would appear the whole congregation were offenders.' At court John Kay was bound over to keep the peace, and the cases against Abraham Thornton, Frederick Stephenson and Joseph Thomas were dismissed.

From 1849 to 1851 there was a long-running dispute over the ownership of the Bowling Lane premises, and the caretaker, who supported Reform, refused to hand over the key to the Wesleyan group, who took the matter to litigation. When the spokesmen were asked in court what the premises were to be used for by the two groups, the Wesleyan representative said it would be a Sunday School and Preaching Place, but the caretaker who was the Reform spokesman had been advised to claim that it would be a Sunday School only, as that had been the original purpose, which was confirmed by the inscription over the door. The premises were granted by the court to the Reformers for

that purpose only, which left the Wesleyans with no Sunday School premises, and the Reformers in possession of the Sunday School but unable to use it for worship.

A new Wesleyan Reform chapel was opened in 1853 at Muff Field, and in keeping with the Reformers' view that they were the only true Wesleyans, the deeds stipulated 'that in the said chapel and school shall be taught and inculcated the doctrines and principles of Christianity which were taught and set forth by the late Rev. John Wesley in his published Sermons and Notes on the New Testament', while other clauses were virtually Congregationalist in polity, providing for 'the complete supremacy of the members in meeting assembled', giving them the right to choose ministers, admit and expel members, exercise financial control, and appoint trustees'.(22)

The Abbey Street W.R.U. chapel at White Abbey in Westgate was the new place of worship for the seceders from the White Abbey Wesleyan society and probably also for those from the society at Manningham. As it was sometimes described as Lilycroft, former members of the Lilycroft Wesleyan class may also have gone there. The 1865 Wesleyan Reform schedules indicate that membership was then about 55.

The third chapel in the Wesleyan Reform Union was at Park Lane, opened by the Reformers who had seceded from the Centenary Wesleyan chapel. This chapel was listed on the 1865 Wesleyan Reform schedules, but no details were entered. The congregation moved after some years to larger premises at Central Avenue.

Table 9/7 Bradford West - Membership losses during the Reform period and the probable destination of the Reformers

<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>as%</u>	<u>Probable destination</u>
Kirkgate	81	12	Westgate WR/UMFC
Low Moor	(gain)52	(gain)19	
Manningham	48	36	Abbey Street WRU
Bowling Lane	58	67	Muff Field WRU
Abbey	102	29	Abbey Street WRU
Centenary	176	61	Park Lane WRU
Totals			413 23%

There was no link between the Reform movement and the establishment of the W.R.U. chapel at Low Moor. Quite unusual membership statistics indicate that the Wesleyan membership at Low Moor increased by about 80 during the twelve months from September 1848, and although it dropped again there was an overall increase of 50 during the Reform period.

The Wesleyan Reform Union chapel at Low Moor was opened in rather unusual circumstances, and owed its origin to a disagreement among the congregation of the School Street Primitive Methodist society in about 1870. Following the breaking off of an engagement to be married, one of the two families involved left School Street and held cottage services, and this group built a two-storey iron chapel near Manor Row in 1879. This began as an undenominational society,⁽²³⁾ but perhaps because the Wesleyan Reform Union had two chapels not far away at Wibsey, the Low Moor society became part of the

perhaps socially superior to other congregations in the circuit. The absence of any overall Reform policy within the circuit appears to have been typical of the Bradford circuits.

The limited number of sources of information available for Bradford West circuit, as elsewhere, makes it difficult to produce a balanced summary of events during the Reform period. While official statistics provide a minimum of information, the local details and the involvement of personalities can only be gleaned from newspapers and secondary sources.

The Bradford East Circuit

This circuit, like the Bradford West circuit, was formed by the division of the former Bradford Wesleyan circuit in 1835, and both circuits experienced serious losses as a result of the agitation over Reform. Table 9/9 shows the situation before the beginning of the Reform movement.

Table 9/9 Bradford East - Chapels in 1848 and years of opening.

Dudley Hill	1823
Bradford Moor (Greenhill)	1823
Eastbrook	1825
Prospect, Wakefield Road	1826
Farsley	1827
Calverley	1832
Philadelphia, Undercliffe Street	1845
New Leeds, Southend Street	1848

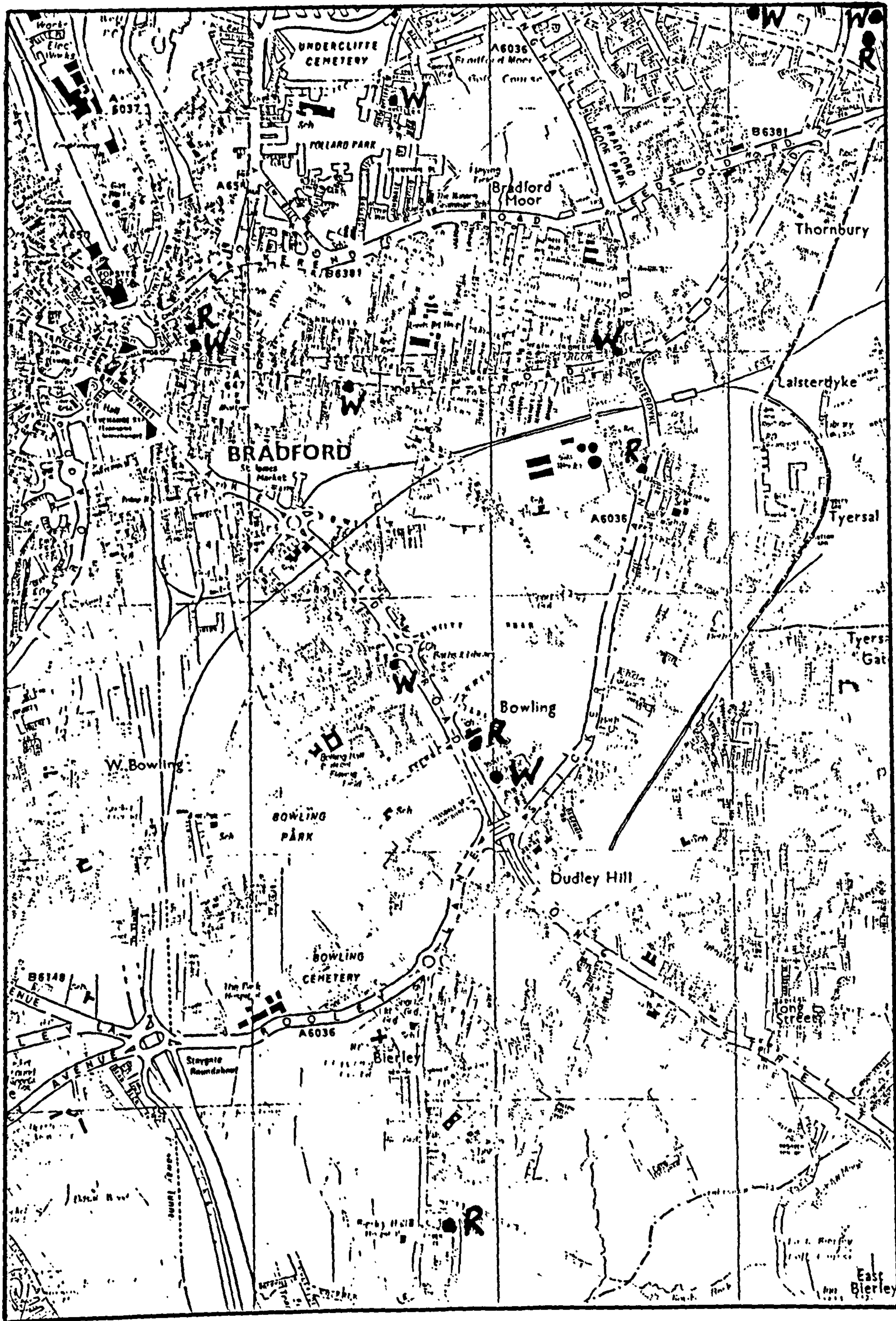
When the Reformers had become established as virtually independent societies within the Bradford Wesleyan Reform circuit they faced difficult decisions regarding their future policy. For a number of years they were no longer Wesleyans, but still Methodists in theology and outlook. After 1857, when the possibility of joining with the members of the Wesleyan Methodist Association meant being part of a new Methodist connexion, most reform societies in this circuit decided to join the U.M.F.C., but two societies opted for other alternatives.

It is not often that we can see the problems of the Reform period through the eyes of those directly involved, but some notes left by John Bearder who was a member at Dudley Hill chapel give a valuable glimpse of the views of one former Wesleyan who sided with the Reformers.⁽²⁵⁾ 'Well there came a day when trouble and anxiety seemed to be hanging over the Wesleyan body...the great body of preachers acting arrogantly towards the great body of members, usurping too much authority over the people, seeming to want to lord it over God's heritage...allowing no lay representation. All the societies were in a ferment. The people, or many of them, withdrew their allegiance, saying in their hearts, We will not have these to reign over us.'

In January 1850, between the three expulsions at the 1849 Conference and the mass exodus of members later in 1850, the Bradford Observer⁽²⁶⁾ published an anonymous letter from 'A Wesleyan Methodist' under the headlines 'The Wesleyan Methodism

of 1850. Threatened Expulsions in the East Circuit'. The writer claimed that on the previous Sunday evening at a Society Meeting after the public worship at Eastbrook, 'the venerable superintendent (who has the will and the power to perform his threat, if he dare) said that our society is like a garden that has got too thick to thrive well, and that it must be weeded of everyone who is not satisfied with Methodism as it is, and (I suppose with the vain hope of saving himself the disgrace of expelling) recommended every dissatisfied person to withdraw from the Connexion before the March visitation.'

In the following week there appeared a reply from the superintendent minister, Rev. W. Bird, denying that he had threatened his members, and denying any particular involvement in the three expulsions, although he had attended the previous Conference and voted for expulsion. (27) This was followed again a week later⁽²⁸⁾ by an editorial summarising what were described as extremely lengthy replies to the superintendent's letter from the first writer and from Rev Samuel Dunn, one of the three expelled ministers. 'Wesleyan Methodist' repeated his accusations, and Dunn claimed that Mr Bird had been personally responsible for his problems in the Nottingham circuit, where Bird 'had pursued him with a resolution to hunt him down.' The Editor allowed Bird the right of reply, which he chose not to exercise, and the correspondence was closed, but before the publication of the next weekly edition the Conference had suspended Rev J. Bromley, and under the headline 'The Schism in



Map 10. Wesleyan and Reform chapels in Bradford East circuit.

the Wesleyan Body' the Bradford Observer⁽²⁹⁾ commented that 'We had hoped that the excitement upon the expulsions of 1849 would have taught the Wesleyan Conference the extreme inexpediency of pursuing a course so fearfully prejudicial to the peace and usefulness of the Methodist Body'.

During March 1850 at the National Delegate Meeting of Reform leaders held in London, the Bradford East circuit was represented by J. Poulter, a trustee and leader, and M. Bottomley, a leader. Those attending had been warned that they would thereby forfeit their Wesleyan membership, ⁽³⁰⁾ and afterwards the delegates reported back to a meeting at the Bradford Temperance Hall, to those described for the first time as 'Wesleyan Reformers'. Here the Chairman, Mr J. Morren, was interrupted by John Wesley Barrett, a Wesleyan who arrived like Daniel in the lion's den to challenge the voting at the March quarterly meeting of the Bradford East circuit. He claimed that the majority of the circuit had voted narrowly in favour of Conference, and despite some barracking it was agreed that there had been some confusion at the quarterly meeting, but not surprisingly the Temperance Hall meeting was certain that the Reformers had been in the majority, although it was accepted that in the confusion 'some had voted with both hands.'⁽³¹⁾

A subsequent meeting of Reformers at the Temperance Hall in May 1850 heard how Lord and Hudson had their status as preachers withdrawn at the local preachers' meeting of the Bradford East circuit, when they refused to answer charges made against them by the superintendent minister, Rev. W. Bird, that

they were both guilty of 'violations of discipline and unconstitutional agitation to effect organic changes in Wesleyan Methodism.' (32)

Within the Bradford East or Eastbrook Wesleyan Circuit the typical drop in membership of one third over the Reform period is clear from Table 9/10, but local decisions by Reform congregations over future policy led to an interesting variety of solutions to the problem of finding the most appropriate framework within which they could worship. The loss of members did not occur evenly throughout the circuit, the congregations at Philadelphia and New Leeds being apparently unaffected by the controversy, but six of the chapels were divided over Reform and one of the separate classes joined the Reformists.

Table 9/10 Bradford East - Wesleyan chapels
and membership 1848-1851 (33)

<u>Name of Chapel</u>	<u>Dec1848</u>	<u>Sep1850</u>	<u>Dec1850</u>	<u>Apr1851</u>	<u>Jun1851</u>
Dudley Hill	280	254	55	71	68
Bradford Moor	274	230	229	221	213
Eastbrook	935	901	812	790	752
Prospect	158	81	77	74	75
Farsley	148	136	44	45	44
Calverley	78	78	71	69	66
Philadelphia	120	122	127	124	121
New Leeds	88	111	114	119	115
Classes (4)	43	55	24	23	18
<u>Circuit Totals</u>	<u>2124</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1553</u>	<u>1536</u>	<u>1472</u>

All the Reform groups from the Bradford East circuit joined the Bradford Wesleyan Reform circuit, but their 1865 schedules show

that only the Bierley Lane and Peckover Street societies remained in the circuit long enough to become part of the Wesleyan Reform Union. The Reformist members who seceded from Eastbrook chapel met for worship in the Temperance Hall in Chapel Street, across the street from Eastbrook, from 1851 to 1852 before building Bethesda Wesleyan Reform chapel in Peckover Street.⁽³⁴⁾ It was at a national meeting held there in 1860 that the 'non-amalgamating' Reformers who had not joined the United Methodist Free Churches met at the first annual meeting of the Wesleyan Reform Union. ⁽³⁵⁾ When this congregation decided to build a smaller chapel in Undercliffe Street in 1881, however, they took the title of 'Congregational Methodists' and were in practice an independent society until they rejoined the Wesleyan Methodists in 1894 as part of the Otley Road Wesleyan circuit, which made them the only Reform congregation in the Bradford area to return as a body to Wesleyan Methodism.⁽³⁶⁾

Three United Methodist Free Church congregations were created in this circuit as a result of the Reform movement, and each had some unusual characteristic. The Reformers who left Bradford Moor chapel at Laisterdyke, later known as Greenhill, met at first in members' houses and in rented accommodation including 'the long room over the bar at what is now called the Golden Lion', and a joiner's shop in Lilac Grove Street⁽³⁷⁾ before opening the Laisterdyke 'Free Wesleyan' Chapel, an uncommon title, in 1857.⁽³⁸⁾ This building was later replaced by Swaine Green (Providence) U.M.F.C. chapel⁽³⁹⁾ on the same

site at the top of Bowling Back Lane.⁽⁴⁰⁾

At Farsley the Wesleyan chapel was put up for auction in 1851 due to the division of the congregation over Reform.⁽⁴¹⁾ The premises were bought by the Reformers, who were probably joined there by the dozen Reformers at Calverley who could easily have walked about a mile to the Farsley Reform chapel, which was equally convenient for the Reformers who left the class at Woodhall Hills. This left the Wesleyans without a place of worship at Farsley until their new chapel was built in 1865.

Dudley Hill Wesleyan chapel, dating from 1823 and the oldest society in the circuit, lost four-fifths of its membership to the cause of Reform. The Bradford Observer⁽⁴²⁾ records how in October 1850 the expelled minister, Rev. William Griffith, was invited to address a meeting in the Dudley Hill Wesleyan Schoolroom, 'which has never passed into the hands of Conference and is therefore beyond its jurisdiction'. The size of the crowds arriving for the meeting meant that many would have been left outside, and some of the chapel trustees who supported Reform arranged for the meeting to take place in the Wesleyan chapel.

Rev. William Bird was well known to John Bearder, whose memoirs describe how 'the report about stopping the supplies reached the ears of the superintendent, Rev Bird, just about that time he should have come to grandfather's to review the class which was held at his house, a preaching service being usually held on Wednesday night, and after that he would renew

the tickets of the members. He did not come on that occasion. (This omission deprived the members of the class of their status as Wesleyan members.) At Dudley Hill chapel on the following Sunday Mr Bird quoted the familiar ministerial argument against 'stopping the supplies' - 'The chapels are ours and the debts are yours'.(43)

Perhaps with support from the Reformers who had left Prospect chapel lower down Wakefield Road, the Reformers of Dudley Hill built Wesley Place Wesleyan Reform chapel in Wakefield Road. In 1860 there was a second dispute among this congregation over whether or not to join the United Methodist Free Churches. The majority of this Wesleyan Reform society seceded for a second time to become part of the Methodist New Connexion and built Salem chapel in Sticker Lane, while a minority of the Reform congregation remained at Wesley Place and joined the United Methodist Free Churches.

It is not often that secondary sources provide the details of actual incidents which precipitate the personal decisions which lie behind circuit statistics, but Gregory, with his personal memories of Bradford, tells an interesting anecdote about the Bradford Eastbrook circuit which illustrates the way in which the attitude of one individual minister could affect relationships in a congregation and a circuit. At one of the chapels, not referred to by name but possibly Dudley Hill, the incoming superintendent minister in September 1849 enquired about the congregation's views on Reform. Discovering that some leaders had subscribed to the Relief Fund, 'he took their

Class Books and bestowed them in his pocket'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ This one incident at a time when feelings were already running high was enough to explain the loss from the Wesleyan circuit of most of the members. The Reformers sometimes referred to such events as 'excommunication', although it was not unknown for them to refer to those who had been 'dis-membered by the ministers'. In fact the losses were serious enough at Dudley Hill (where membership fell from 254 in September 1850 to only 55 in the following quarter) and Farsley (where only 44 remained out of 136 in the same period) for a note to be added to the circuit schedule book to the effect that these figures were 'a decrease by Reformed'.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Table 9/11. Bradford East - Membership losses during the Reform period and the probable destination of the Reformers.

<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>as%</u>	<u>Probable Destination</u>
Dudley Hill	225	80	Wesley Place WR/UMFC
Bradford Moor	61	22	Swaine Green FWC/UM
Eastbrook	183	20	Bethesda WR/Cong.M/W
Prospect	84	53	Wesley Place WR/UMFC
Farsley	104	70	Farsley WR/UMFC
Calverley	12	15	Farsley WR/UMFC
Philadelphia	(gain) 1	(gain) 1	
New Leeds	(gain) 27	(gain) 31	
Woodhall Hills (Class)	25	58	Farsley WR/UMFC
Bierley Lane (Class)	22	100	Bethel WRU
<u>Totals</u>	<u>688</u>	<u>32</u>	

Table 9/11 above summarises the original destinations of the Reformers from this circuit, and there appears at first glance to have been considerable support for the United Methodist Churches, with little evidence of support for the Wesleyan Reform Union. Of more than 750 people who left the Wesleyan societies, most might therefore have been expected to join the U.M.F.C. However, the Bierley class joined the Wesleyan Reform Union, and the Bethesda congregation joined and then left the Wesleyan Reform Union before becoming Congregational Methodists and then, a generation later, returning to the Wesleyan circuit. Most of the Reformers from Dudley Hill went not into the U.M.F.C. but into the Methodist New Connexion. These later changes of direction affected so many of the members who had originally supported Reform, that the actual number of members who were permanently in the U.M.F.C. may have been only half of those who had been within that denomination in the early 1850s.

Evidence of the strength of feeling against Wesleyanism at the time is provided by the statistics - only one fifth of the Wesleyans at Dudley Hill, for example, continued to worship there, and less than a third of those at Farsley. At Eastbrook, an important town-centre chapel, the proportion of Reformers was not so large, but those who left numbered nearly 200 people. The way in which both the numbers and the ratio of Reformers varied from society to society emphasises the individual nature of the decisions which were called for by the dispute. The overall pattern of events in the circuit is summarised in Table 9/12 below;

activity in the Bradford East circuit, where the lack of unity among the Reformers was a handicap to them, dividing and weakening what had been a potentially united Reform movement.

The Great Horton Circuit

The normal routine of this circuit was in abeyance during the Reform agitation, and the ability of the Reformers to create a new style of Methodism under more democratic control was crucial. Despite the establishment of a number of quite successful Reform societies, within a few years these had become separated into three different denominations. Until June 1849 the Circuit schedules were kept normally, but after the Conference of that year pages are missing and the membership totals were not entered until June 1850. The September figures for that year were entered, but those for December were not written in. The records for the next two years are complete, although not in chronological order in the schedule books.

During this period of confusion two representatives from the circuit, J. Harker, a local preacher and trustee, and W. Thomas, a trustee, attended the first National Reform Delegate Meeting in March 1850. (46) Such links with other Reformers through their national organisation were essential for members of local circuits who chose to support Reform. The difficulties experienced by those who remained loyal to the Wesleyan Conference were exemplified by the entries in the Wesleyan Circuit Stewards' Account Book (47) which show how the circuit finances were affected by the loss of members. The average

quarterly income up to 1848 was about £90, but in 1851 only £60 was raised, and each chapel held a Tea Party to raise money to balance the accounts, as the circuit expenses, largely for stipends, remained the same when the membership fell. Table 9/13 below shows the situation prior to the Reform agitation;

Table 9/13. Great Horton circuit -
Chapels in 1848 and years of opening

Shelf	1785
Clayton Heights (Dolphin)	1806
Great Horton	1814
Thornton	1825
Allerton	1833
Slackside	1833
Clayton	1834
Wibsey	1838

In this circuit only the Allerton chapel showed an increase in membership over the Reform period, and the overall increase there of 24 members over three years was fairly modest. Neither Clayton nor Clayton Heights societies appear to have been influenced to any extent over the issue of Reform, although membership fell slightly at both chapels. The three class meetings were not seriously affected, but most chapels obviously suffered severe disruption during the Reform period.

There is irony in the fact that this was the only Bradford circuit in which a separate Wesleyan Reform circuit was formed, although the existence of the Great Horton Reform circuit failed to unify the Reformers, whose attempts to establish

themselves were marked by dissension and changes of allegiance which continued until long after the Reform period itself. Table 9/14 below shows the rapid fall in Wesleyan membership;

Table 9/14. Great Horton circuit - Wesleyan chapels
and membership 1848 - 1851⁽⁴⁸⁾

<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>Dec1848</u>	<u>Jun1850</u>	<u>Sep1850</u>	<u>Mar1851</u>	<u>Jun1851</u>
Shelf	164	172	161	25	30
Clayton Heights	63	69	65	56	56
Great Horton	297	335	330	131	117
Thornton	293	304	302	236	225
Allerton	101	145	145	127	125
Slackside	24	26	22	6	6
Clayton	62	57	55	53	53
Wibsey	180	297	278	100	86
Little Horton (Class)	19	18	16	14	14
Four Lane Ends (Class)	14	13	13	14	16
Crossley Hall (Class)	13	12	12	12	11
<u>Totals</u>	<u>1230</u>	<u>1448</u>	<u>1399</u>	<u>774</u>	<u>739</u>

Shelf Witchfield chapel suffered proportionately the most severe losses, with 85 per cent of the members supporting Reform. The small Wesleyan congregation survived, and a Wesleyan Reform chapel was built on the other side of the road by the Reformers in 1853. This was called Bethel, and its members first joined the Wesleyan Reform Union. Some fourteen years later they changed their allegiance and in 1873 they joined the United Methodist Free Churches, although since 1915, following a second change of direction, they have been an independent society.

A more unusual case of denominational change occurred at Great Horton, where the Chapel Quarterly Account Book⁽⁴⁹⁾ listed 19 class leaders and their members until December 1850,



Map 11. Wesleyan and Reform chapels in Great Horton circuit.

when seven leaders' names had the comment, 'Expelled'. Over two hundred members left this Wesleyan chapel, but not before tempers were lost and violence occurred. The Bradford Observer,⁽⁵⁰⁾ under the headline 'Wesleyan Reunion - Extraordinary Uproar at Great Horton' reported that on Friday 27 December 1850 the Wesleyans were holding a musical evening with speeches in aid of Wesleyan circuit funds, to which admission was by ticket only. No tickets were sold to the Reformers who had been expelled, and the speeches were all in support of the Conference position. In order to ensure that no Reformers attended the event the doors were barricaded and guarded, and a police constable was present. However a crowd of Reformers gathered outside the building, and one of them, Thomas Myers, demanded to be admitted, claiming that he had a right of access as a trustee. Myers was also a circuit steward, the senior lay official of the circuit. When permission was refused the Reformers broke down the door and there was an argument followed by a struggle between Myers and those guarding the door. Blows were struck, and those pushing inwards were met by others pressing against them. Two men took a cab to Bradford and brought back four more policemen, and Myers took out a summons against a Wesleyan called Robertshaw for assault, while the Wesleyans threatened to summon the Reformers for damage and trespass.

The account submitted to the Wesleyans by the Bradford solicitors Terry and Watson⁽⁵¹⁾ referred to 'the riot at the Great Horton Methodist Chapel', and they defended Robertshaw

against the summons taken out by Myers. The Wesleyan minister, Rev. J. T. Barr, was asked in court whether Myers was a trustee, to which he replied at first that he was not a member but refused to say whether or not he was a trustee. The magistrates insisted on a reply, as Wesleyan law stated that a trustee could not be removed unless a crime or a breach of Wesleyan discipline had been proved. In practice Myers was still a trustee although the minister no longer accepted him as such, and he was reluctant to admit that Myers retained this legal status after expulsion as a member. The Bradford magistrates dismissed the case on the grounds that they had no jurisdiction to act, the title to the premises being in dispute. Although the Wesleyans held on to the chapel, the original deeds were actually in the possession of the Reformers, and 'the parties in possession of it declined to show it'⁽⁵²⁾. A new trust was formed and the solicitors proceeded to draw up new deeds in consultation with Percy Bunting, the Connexional solicitor, which ensured that the premises remained in Wesleyan hands.

The outcome of the conflict at Great Horton was that the Reformers built their new chapel in 1851 only yards away from the Wesleyan premises, and convinced that they were in the true Wesleyan tradition, while those remaining with the minister were 'Conference Methodists', they called their place of worship 'Wesley Place'. This was a strong Reform society, whose premises had to be enlarged in the following year, and for ten years this society was part of the Great Horton Wesleyan Reform

circuit. Then on the grounds that they were a society run on Congregational rather than connexional principles some members of this society suggested that their Wesleyan Reform circuit should adopt the title of Congregational Methodists. They were not supported in this by the other Reform societies, most of which later joined the UMFC, and so they left the Reform circuit to follow a fully Congregationalist pattern of church government. This led to them leaving Methodism altogether, and they joined the West Riding Congregational Union in 1863, and became known as the Wesley Place Congregational Church.⁽⁵³⁾

At Thornton, once part of William Grimshaw's Haworth Round, what happened during the Reform period followed a familiar pattern. The Wesleyan chapel had been erected in 1825, and the Reform agitation there led one member, Jabez Pickles, to suggest that 'All they need to do is build a wall across the middle of the chapel, one section to worship on each side - before long they'll want it clearing away.'⁽⁵⁴⁾ In practice the Thornton trustees were equally divided over the question of Reform, but the deeds prevented any attempt at a Reformist takeover,⁽⁵⁵⁾ and those who left as Reformers built the New Road chapel in 1857. This too was originally in the Great Horton Wesleyan Reform circuit, but later became part of the UMFC.⁽⁵⁶⁾

A mile away from Thornton the Wesleyans had established a Sunday School at the out-lying hamlet of Egypt. In April 1852 'Mr John Cowherd opened the school with 194 scholars and teachers present.' In the afternoon he arrived with 'a great

many scholars' and when they had been in school a few minutes he asked 'as many as was for him' to follow him to the Moorcock Farm buildings. The following week only 18 were present at the Wesleyan school, but relationships between the two groups remained friendly, as two months later the Wesleyan school was closed for the day so that the remaining scholars could attend the Sunday School Anniversary at Moorcock Farm.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The Wesleyan Sunday School was later taken over by the Reformers, and remained their place of worship until the Egypt UMFC chapel was opened on the site in 1891, although the well outside retained the inscription, 'Wesleyan Sunday School'.

Table 9/15. Great Horton circuit - Membership losses during the Reform period and the probable destination of the Reformers

<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>as%</u>	<u>Probable destination</u>
Shelf	147	85	Bethel WRU/UMFC/Free
Clayton Heights	13	19	
Great Horton	218	65	Wesley Place (Cong)
Thornton	79	26	New Road WR/UMFC and Egypt WR/UMFC
Allerton	(gain)24	(gain)24	
Slackside	20	77	Reformers took chapel and joined W.R.U.
Clayton	9	15	
Wibsey (Holroyd Hill)	211	71	Reformers took chapel and joined W.R.U.
Classes;			
Little Horton	5	26	
Four Lane Ends	(gain)2	(gain)14	
Crossley Hall	2	15	
Totals	678	55%	

This circuit provides the first examples of Wesleyan premises actually being taken over by the Reformers, the most obvious indication of Reform superiority in numbers. The Reformers took over two Wesleyan chapels in this circuit, one in the centre of Wibsey at Holroyd Hill and the other at Wibsey Slackside. At Wibsey, where the Wesleyan chapel was opened in 1838, over 200 members left the chapel during the Reform period and worshipped in a room at the Swan Inn until 1853, when they were able to purchase the chapel quite legally from the Wesleyan authorities and they later joined the Wesleyan Reform Union and built new Sunday School premises. (58) Meanwhile the Wesleyans retained the original Sunday School premises as their place of worship until they built a new Wesleyan chapel in 1869 in High Street. (59)

At Slackside, only a mile away from the Wibsey chapel, a school-chapel was opened in 1834. A disagreement over finances had led to a note being made in the circuit schedule to the effect that 'the Slackside congregation refused to make any contribution to the connexional collection during 1850', (60) and during the Reform period the Reformers were numerous enough to take over the building, which being a school chapel may not have involved a model deed, and they joined the Wesleyan Reform Union. There appears to have been no specific provision at Slackside for the few remaining Wesleyans, who probably walked to the Wesleyan society in Wibsey.

The Great Horton circuit was obviously divided over the issue of Reform, although two societies were almost unaffected,

of the Reformers, and the reason for this can be found in the minutes of the circuit Local Preachers' Meeting. Unlike the circuit schedules and the Circuit Stewards' accounts books, in which evidence of a division is quite obvious, the Local Preachers' minutes show little evidence of any departure from normality, with mainly routine matters being recorded. The number of local preachers dropped from twelve in 1849 -, hardly enough even then without help from adjacent circuits - to only seven in 1851, and it was reported in June 1852 that 'Brother Oddy has not met in class nor attended the means of grace among us and has neglected his appointments',⁽⁶¹⁾ suggesting perhaps that he supported Reform. Because in the Great Horton circuit over half of the local preachers remained loyal to Wesleyanism, the Reform congregations were left with very few local preachers to maintain continuity of worship, while at the same time they were deprived of the lay leadership at circuit level which local preachers could have provided. There is an obvious contrast between the confusion in the Great Horton Reform circuit and the position at Birstall and Cleckheaton, where the positive support of most of the experienced local preachers enabled the new Reform circuits to be quickly established and effectively managed.

Conclusion

A detailed examination of events throughout the Bradford area during the Wesleyan Reform period indicates that local personalities and local situations created different reactions in each circuit and chapel, but this was clearly a traumatic

period for all those involved. It is therefore salutary to realise that members of other churches do not seem to have been interested in what they saw as an internal squabble among the Wesleyans. Even other Methodist groups observed developments with a certain detachment, and a Primitive Methodist writer expressed relief that his own denomination stood aloof from such goings-on, writing that 'it is satisfactory to find no trace of any intervention in this sad controversy on the part of our own community, and certainly it gained no advantage from it.'(62)

Unlike the Wesleyan Methodists, whose church government involved meetings at the level of society, circuit, district and connexion, the Wesleyan Reformers operated mainly at the level of society and circuit, and instead of Conference with executive authority, the Annual Delegate Meetings of the Reformers provided only an opportunity for consultation without claiming authority over either circuits or societies. At the first such meeting at London in March 1850 delegates tried without success to discuss their differences with the President of the Wesleyan Conference, and in 1851 at Newcastle they agreed to continue as the 'Reform movement', later the Wesleyan Reform League, then the Wesleyan Reform Society.(63) They still hoped that Wesleyan Methodism could be reformed from within, but when the Delegate Meeting held at Bradford in 1853 stipulated, 'No secession, no surrender, no supplies', their rhetoric ignored the reality of what had already taken place in the local societies, where most expulsions and withdrawals had

occurred between 1850 and 1852, and the Bradford Reformers were already well established by 1851.

It is important to emphasise the very real distinction between the original 'Wesleyan Reform' circuits and the post-1859 'Wesleyan Reform Union' circuits, particularly because their titles were so similar, and in many cases societies moved from one to the other. The early Wesleyan Reform circuits in Bradford were basically independent organisations with no formal status. They represented all the local Reform societies and sent delegates to national meetings, but they were not expected to be permanent. Their function was to provide mutual support for the local Reformers when the question uppermost in their minds was whether they would in time return to the Wesleyan chapels, as many originally hoped, or remain permanently outside the Wesleyan fold. The local Reform societies belonged originally to either the Bradford Reform circuit which functioned between about 1851 and 1867 or the associated Great Horton Reform circuit, between about 1851 and 1861. The few records which survive of these independent Reform circuits give the impression of quite understandable instability. The societies listed on the Reform circuit plan in 1851⁽⁶⁴⁾ could not have predicted their future policies, and several small groups listed then⁽⁶⁵⁾ had closed or perhaps amalgamated with larger societies before 1857, when they were no longer included on the plan.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Most of the societies which opted to join the U.M.F.C. in 1857 were not listed on the plan of the Reform circuit in August 1857 or the following year⁽⁶⁷⁾,

although the Reformers at Dudley Hill and Laisterdyke, who both joined the U.M.F.C., rather unexpectedly still figured in the Reform schedules⁽⁶⁸⁾ ten years later.

The impression given by these schedules is that the Reform societies in Bradford decided individually which organisation to support and when to make the transition. By 1868 it would appear that all the societies had made up their minds where their future lay, and the original Wesleyan Reform circuit therefore ceased to exist. There is no evidence of any subsequent formal links between the Reformers in the U.M.F.C. and those in the W.R.U., listed below in table 9/17, although it seems probable that long-established personal friendships would continue across this new denominational divide.

Table 9/17. Reform Chapels in Bradford which joined the WRU⁽⁶⁹⁾

Wesleyan Chapel	WRU Chapel opened
Eastbrook	1852 (Bethesda) (Wesleyan 1894)
Bowling Old Lane Wes. SS	1853 (Muff Field)
Wibsey	1853 - 1983 (Chapel taken over)
Shelf (Witchfield)	1853 (Bethel, became UMFC 1873)
Slackside	c1855 (Chapel taken over)
Bierley Lane (class meeting)	1855 (Bethel)
Centenary	c1855 (Park Lane/Central Ave)
Abbey	c1855 - c.1895 (Abbey Street)

No new local Wesleyan Reform Union societies were formed in Bradford after 1879, but the relative strength of the Wesleyan Reform Union societies in the area was shown by the annual returns for 1895 for the movement nationally. The combined membership of the Bradford and Bingley and the Wibsey circuits was 997 out of a national total of 7,678, with Wibsey as the second largest circuit in the Union. (70)

It would have been interesting to compare the strength of support for the UMFC and WRU societies in Bradford in more detail, but adequate information is not available. The 1851 religious census cannot be relied on to give a balanced picture as it took place during the Reform agitation. The Bradford Observer Religious Census might have been expected to provide accurate information in 1881, but because this census was restricted to the area within the city boundaries, there were references to only five societies in the W.R.U. with a total of 635 attenders, with no details for Slackside, Wibsey, Bierley Lane or Low Moor, as these were not part of the city until 1899. The list of U.M.F.C. societies did not include the Thornton society, then outside the city boundary, but included three societies formed long after the Reform period. Excluding these later societies, there were four U.M.F.C. societies listed with 639 attenders. This would suggest that although the original Bradford Reformers became more or less evenly divided between the W.R.U. and the U.M.F.C., the W.R.U. might have received greater support at first, while the U.M.F.C. membership increased later as new premises were opened. The

subsequent changes of allegiance to Wesleyan Methodism at Bethesda, to the U.M.F.C. at Shelf and to Congregationalism at Great Horton make the comparison even more complicated. The Wesleyan Reform societies which opted to belong to the United Methodist Free Churches are listed in table 9/18 below;

Table 9/18. Reform Chapels in Bradford which joined UMFC⁽⁷¹⁾

Wesleyan Chapel	UMFC chapel opened
Farsley	1852 (former Wesleyan chapel)
Shelf	1853 (Bethel WRU, UMFC in 1873)
Bradford (Kirkgate)	1854-1913 (Westgate)
Dudley Hill	1855-1954 (Wesley Place)
Greenhill (Bradford Moor)	1857-1948 (Laisterdyke Free Wesleyan, later Swaine Green UMFC)
Thornton	1857 (New Road), and
"	1891-1965 (Egypt)

It is possible to compare the subsequent progress of the former Free Methodist societies and Wesleyan Reform Union societies in the area. Following Methodist union in 1932 there were eight ex-UMFC societies in Bradford in two United Methodist circuits. It was thought advisable to rationalise the many overlapping circuits around Bradford, and those whose origins lay mainly in anti-Wesleyan secessions and had become United Methodist circuits were looked at first, on the grounds that theirs were usually the most scattered societies. By 1939 as a result of

dismantling the small and widely-spaced U.M. circuits most of their churches found themselves in various ex-Wesleyan or ex-Primitive Methodist circuits, which meant the end of any concerted influence in the town from former United Methodists. This could be cynically construed as a means of virtually eradicating within Bradford Methodism any surviving anti-Wesleyan feelings from the previous century, as the descendants of the secessionists had been divided and conquered. Only Park Methodist church in West Bowling now represents the Free Methodist tradition in Bradford, although the majority of the existing Methodist churches in the adjacent Birstall and the Spen Valley circuit were formerly in the U.M.F.C.

In comparison, the Wesleyan Reform Union have remained a completely separate denomination, unaffected by the unions and reorganisations of mainstream Methodism. They have been rather more successful in maintaining their societies, although their congregations are not large.⁽⁷²⁾ In Bingley and Shipley two of the four Wesleyan Reform Union societies have survived, while five such societies, about half the original number, are still active in Bradford.

Of the 1,800 Bradford members who left their Wesleyan chapels many, probably most, became Reformers within some twenty congregations spread across the town in the Bradford Wesleyan Reform circuit. Unfortunately each society gave priority to building new premises without enough consideration being given first to cooperation or future planning. The result was that the Reform congregations, potentially a major force

among the Free Churches and numerous enough to have had a significant influence within the town, missed their opportunity to become a unified movement. Instead of working together in one Reform denomination or the other, as they might have done given more vigorous leadership throughout the town, they ended up with the worst possible outcome as a result of the division between the U.M.F.C. and the Wesleyan Reform Union. The chapels in both these groups were so far apart that despite their best efforts any sense of belonging to a local circuit was difficult to achieve. This meant that all the societies which developed as a result of the Reform agitation in Bradford became separate and isolated congregations.

At a personal level, those who had opposed Wesleyan claims to pastoral authority in the Bradford area faced the expense of building new chapels. The eventual cost of the Reform movement, however, was measured in the damage done to Wesleyan Methodism and to the unity of the Methodist people.

Notes

1. Bradford Observer, 4 April 1850.
2. Gregory, Sidelights, p 71.
3. G. Smith, A History of Wesleyan Methodism, 1863, Vol. 3, p. 296; the figures quoted were 600 converts at Yeadon, 250 at Guiseley and 100 at Rawdon.
4. W. Watson, Wesleyan Methodism in Idle, Bradford, 1910, p.91.
5. Gregory, Sidelights, pp.168-169.
6. A letter from T.P. Bunting, the solicitor son of Rev. Jabez

Bunting, to the Birstall Wesleyan minister, among Miscellaneous Papers in the Birstall and Spen Circuit safe relating to Birstall Chapel.

7. Watson, Idle, p.101.

8. Ibid., p. 102.

9. Woodhouse Grove Wesleyan Circuit Schedule Book 1838-1933, W.Y.A.S. (Bradford), Ref. 80D83/1/2.

10. Minute Books of Thorp Wesleyan Chapel, Idle, 1833-1860, WYAS, (Bradford), Ref. 80D83/2/10.

11. Bradford Observer 4 April 1850.

12. Gregory, Sidelights, p. 472.

13. Bradford Observer, 9 May 1850.

14. The few remaining documents include schedules at WYAS (Bradford) and plans at the Methodist archives at John Rylands University Library, Manchester. The schedules are listed as 'Bradford Circuit' and the early Reform plans have the misleading 'Wesleyan' title, and are filed as such.

15. Circuit Plan of the Bradford and Great Horton Wesleyan Reform circuit, March to June 1851, Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

16. The Westgate chapel has been in commercial use since closure in 1913, but as a shop it retains many of its chapel features, including the line of the balcony, supported by typical pillars, and the handrail to where the pulpit stood.

17. Bradford Reform Circuit Plan, 1857, Methodist Church Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester. 'Leeds Scrapbook', Ref. MAW/MS/319, p. 194.

18. Bradford Wesleyan Reform Circuit Schedule Sheets, 1865-1867, WYAS (Bradford), Ref.36D80/22.
19. Bradford West Wesleyan Circuit Accounts Book 1842-1874 (WYAS Bradford Ref.17D81/14.)
20. Minute Book of the Committee of the Wesleyan Sabbath School, Bowling Lane, Instituted by Subscription, 13 June 1823, p.1. (WYAS (Bradford), Ref. 32D91.)
21. Bradford Observer, 20 February 1851.
22. S.M. Thornton, Muff Field, n/d., c.1950.
23. L.E.E. Blackburn, Low Moor Wesleyan Reform Chapel Golden Jubilee Handbook, Bradford, 1979, p.3.
24. Ibid., p.8.
25. J. Bearder, 'John Bearder's Memoirs and Dudley Hill', p. 4, (unpublished family papers in the possession of Eric Robinson.)
26. Bradford Observer, 31 January 1850.
27. Ibid, 7 February 1850.
28. Ibid, 14 February 1850.
29. Ibid, 21 February 1850.
30. The Watchman, quoted in the Bradford Observer, 14 March 1850.
31. Bradford Observer, 14 March 1850.
32. Ibid, 9 May 1850
33. Bradford (East) Wesleyan Circuit Schedules, (WYAS Bradford, Ref. 47D86/9/2.)
34. S. Vero, A Mercantile Meander, Bradford, 1989, p.22.
35. D.C. Dews, The Spark of Grace, 250 Years of Methodism in West Yorkshire, Leeds, 1988, p. 19.

36. The Wesleyan Reform chapel in Peckover Street later became the Bradford Labour Institute and Labour Church, and the birthplace of the Independent Labour Party. The building has since acquired a 1920s facade.

37. Bearder, Memoirs and Dudley Hill (unpublished family papers in the possession of Eric Robinson.)

38. Samuel Harrison wrote a long poem about the building of the Laisterdyke Free Wesleyan chapel, of which he was a member;

'They sought out a place where the chapel should stand

And they borrowed some money and purchased the land.

Then the trenches were dug with a mattock and spade

And of course in due time the foundations were laid...'

(unpublished family papers in the possession of Eric Robinson.)

39. A mortgage of £4,000 to build the new Laisterdyke chapel was arranged through a Mrs Terry, the former wife of a Dudley Hill mill owner, who after being widowed married a local Methodist. (Memoirs, unpublished family papers in the possession of Eric Robinson.)

40. There is no evidence of any formal links between the Methodist circuit and Bradford Moor Old Sunday School, although the congregation there used the Methodist Hymn Book until closure in about 1993, and there was a tradition of co-operation in musical events etc.

41. Cudworth, Bradford, p.472.

42. Bradford Observer, 31 October 1850.

43. J. Bearder, 'Memoirs and Dudley Hill', p. 4, (unpublished family papers in the possession of Eric Robinson.)

44. Gregory, Sidelights, p. 471.
45. Bradford (East) Wesleyan Circuit Schedules, (WYAS Bradford, Ref. 47D86/9/2.), September 1850.
46. Bradford Observer, 4 April 1850.
47. Bradford Great Horton Circuit Stewards' Account Books 1842-1880, (WYAS (Bradford) Ref. 57D76/1/b/7a.)
48. Bradford Great Horton Circuit Schedules, 1842-1852, (WYAS Bradford, Ref. 57D76/1/b/8/a.)
49. Great Horton Chapel Quarterly Account Book 1847-1869 (WYAS (Bradford) Ref. 57D76/2/n/2.)
50. Bradford Observer, 2 January 1851.
51. Account from Terry and Watson, Solicitors of Bradford, to the Great Horton Wesleyan Circuit, 1851, (WYAS (Bradford), Ref. 57D76/2/d/12/3.)
52. This information is taken from the account from Wells and Ridehalgh, Solicitors of Bradford, to the Great Horton Wesleyan Circuit, January 1851, (WYAS (Bradford) Ref. 57D76/2/d/12)
53. Anon., Congregational Union Autumn Assembly Handbook, Bradford, 1938.
54. J. Wilman, A Short History of Bethel Methodist Church and Sunday School, unpublished m/s, 1938, (in the possession of Mrs Maud Lumb of Thornton.)
55. Report Book of Bethel Methodist Church and Egypt Sunday School, Thornton, 1852-1880, (Maud Lumb's papers.)
56. Cudworth, Bradford, p.162.
57. Log Book of Egypt Methodist Free Church Sunday School, 1852-1859, (Maud Lumb's papers.)

58. Anon, Wibsey Wesleyan Reform Church Centenary Handbook, 1938, (WYAS Bradford, Ref.94/D87/18.)
59. Cudworth, Bradford, p.27.
60. Bradford Great Horton Circuit Schedules, 1842-1852, (WYAS Bradford, Ref. 57D76/1/b/8/a.), 1850.
61. Minute Book of the Great Horton Wesleyan Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting 1842-1895, (WYAS (Bradford), Ref 57D76/1/b/2a.)
62. Beckwith, Records of Leeds Primitive Methodism, p. 105.
63. W.H. Jones, History of the Wesleyan Reform Union, 1952, p. 49.
64. Circuit Plan of the Bradford and Great Horton Wesleyan Reform circuit, March to June 1851, Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester.
65. Ten Reform classes listed in 1851 were not on the 1857 plan. These were at Clayton Heights, Scarlet Heights, Bullwell Syke, Girlington, Sticker Lane, Tyersal Gate, Old Road, Mitchell's Buildings, Bunker's Hill, and Bedford Street. The class at Haycliffe Hill may have been the nucleus of the W.R.U. chapel there, opened in 1875.
66. Bradford Reform Circuit Plan, 1857, Methodist Church Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester. 'Leeds Scrapbook', Ref. MAW/MS/319, p. 194.
67. Bradford Reform plan for 1858, J. Parker, Rambles from Hipperholme to Tong, 1904, p. 59.
68. Bradford Wesleyan Reform Circuit Schedule Sheets, 1865-1867, WYAS (Bradford), Ref.36D80/22.

69. Later W.R.U. chapels included Wibsey (Haycliffe Hill) (1875) and Low Moor (1878).
70. Anon., The Wesleyan Reform Union - Its Origin and History, Sheffield, 1896.
71. Anon, Year Book of the Wesleyan Reform Union, Sheffield, 1993.
72. Later additions to the Free Methodist chapels included Free Street (Mount of Olives) (1878), West Bowling (Park) (1878), Four Lane Ends (Wallis Street) (1880) and Wibsey (North Road Mission) (1909) (formerly an independent society)

Chapter 10

Wesleyan Reformers in Birstall and Cleckheaton

Introduction

The recurring theme of this research has been the Wesleyan demand to maintain discipline by invoking the principle of the pastoral office, and the ways in which Methodist members sought to circumvent this attempt to control their every action. One specific issue has been the extent to which the Reformers, after leaving the Wesleyan chapels, were able to create a different style of Methodism which successfully maintained the Wesleyan tradition but without the emphasis on ministerial supremacy which they found unacceptable.

Within the circuits to the north of Bradford and in the town itself the Reformers had struggled with this problem with only limited success, but in Birstall and the Spen Valley the Reformers created a rather different situation which led to a much more permanent future for their movement. Before the Cleckheaton Wesleyan circuit was separated from the Birstall circuit in 1817 the early societies in both areas were in the same circuit, so it is appropriate to examine the effects of the Reform period on the two circuits together, particularly as the Reformers from these circuits, while remaining in two separate circuits, held joint meetings and at one time produced a joint plan.

Reference has previously been made to the absence of any specific plan of campaign on either side after the 1849 Conference other than the intention of the ministers to

maintain connexional discipline, and the equally strong resolve on the part of many members to insist on greater democracy within Methodism. In practice this was all that was needed to provoke the Wesleyan Reform agitation which led to the most serious of the divisions and devastated almost all the Wesleyan Methodist societies in both circuits.

The Birstall Wesleyan Circuit, which Wesley had visited frequently and which included the oldest Methodist society in West Yorkshire, was seriously disrupted. In most of the Wesleyan societies there was the typical division between those who remained loyal to the Conference and continued to attend their Wesleyan place of worship, and those members who were expelled from the societies or who chose to leave them. The factor which then made the Reformers in the Birstall circuit successful was that those who left their Wesleyan chapels quickly formed themselves into Wesleyan Reform societies, every one of which joined the Birstall (Mount Tabor) Wesleyan Reform circuit, while none of the Reform societies joined the Wesleyan Reform Union. The availability of parallel sets of records from the Wesleyan circuits and the Reform circuits has made possible a much more detailed examination of the Reform period in the Birstall and Cleckheaton areas than has been possible in any of the Bradford circuits. Unlike the Reformers in Bradford, all the Reformers from the Birstall circuit worked together from the early 1850s, joined the U.M.F.C. together in 1862, and then continued to co-exist with the Wesleyans until the middle years of the twentieth century, almost every small community

possessing both a Wesleyan and a Reform place of worship.(1)

Equally strong and well-organised support for Reform occurred in the Spen Valley, an area of villages and small towns quite separate from the surrounding larger towns - Leeds, Huddersfield, Halifax, and Bradford. The extent of support for the Wesleyan Reform movement in the Cleckheaton circuit is indicated by the fact that after 1850 the Reform congregations consisted of two thirds of the members from the original Wesleyan circuit, and as in the adjacent Birstall circuit they quickly organised themselves into a Wesleyan Reform circuit before joining the U.M.F.C., in their case in 1860.

It is significant that the Cleckheaton Reform circuit had the support of almost all the local preachers from the original Wesleyan circuit. This was the key factor enabling the Reformers there to make their own plan and hold their own services in almost every community where there had previously been a Wesleyan society. Here, as at Birstall, the long-term effect of the Reform period was that for many years two Methodist circuits existed side by side, one Wesleyan and the other starting with the title of Wesleyan Reform, then known as United Methodist Free Churches, and later United Methodist.(2)

Long before the climax in 1849 there had been many indications of growing irritation and a lack of mutual goodwill between the ministers and their congregations in this circuit. Although none of these incidents taken in isolation would have been considered significant, the records looked at together suggest an uneasy relationship in which offence was taken too

easily by all parties.

At Brighouse, where John Wesley had preached several times, the Methodists met in cottage meetings until the first Park Wesleyan Chapel was opened in 1795. Members appealed for donations from local Methodist societies to build the chapel, but there was some controversy over whether the Brighouse deeds should include the statutory reference to Conference control. When the congregation at their circuit chapel at Birstall were approached to make a donation the superintendent minister of the circuit, whose manse was at Birstall, turned the Brighouse Methodists away with the words, 'If you say Conference shall have no control over your chapel, you shall not beg here.' (3) Then in 1797, within two years of the chapel being opened, the Kilhamites or Methodist New Connexion who had a number of chapels in Halifax and other nearby towns won over the allegiance of the majority of the members at Brighouse, who took possession of Park chapel for the New Connexion. Those choosing to remain Wesleyans met elsewhere until a High Court decision in 1810 returned Park chapel to the Wesleyans, making it necessary for the Methodist New Connexion congregation to built Bethel chapel nearby.

The situation deteriorated during the unsettled years of the 1840s, when Chartist activities attracted much support in the communities of the Spen Valley, and in many of the societies within the Cleckheaton Wesleyan circuit there was a clear pattern of increasing conflict between itinerant ministers and local members.

The Birstall circuit.

It could be said with some justification that the disputes in the Birstall circuit between connexional authority and the local membership began during the lifetime of John Wesley, when he complained to the Birstall trustees in 1782 about the deeds of the Preaching House,⁽⁴⁾ which were not in accordance with the Model Deed.⁽⁵⁾ The private deeds gave the trustees and leaders at Birstall the power to appoint and dismiss itinerant preachers after the death of the two Wesleys, which if implemented would have challenged the fundamental Methodist principle of itinerancy.

The dispute led to threats by Conference to build a second chapel at Birstall to be under the model deed, and a plot of land was bought but the scheme was then dropped. Local members had paid for the land, which caused resentment, and the matter was taken up again in 1797 as part of the Kilhamite argument in support of a secession from the Wesleyan chapel, and featured in an anonymous pamphlet issued at Birstall by a supporter of Kilham.⁽⁶⁾ Local awareness of this old dispute was reinforced by the presence in the village of the New Connexion chapel in High Street where the congregation was made up largely of members who had seceded from the Birstall Wesleyan chapel at the end of the eighteenth century, and the High Street members were themselves divided during the 1840s over the case of Joseph Barker.

Table 10/1 below shows the situation in the circuit before the Reform agitation;

Table 10/1. Wesleyan Chapels in the Birstall Circuit
in 1848 and years of opening

Name	<u>Built</u>
Birstall	1751
Hightown	1774
Morley	1796
Westgate Hill	1800
Gomersal	1827
Drighlington	1837
Batley	1838
Staincliffe	1838
Churwell	1839
Gildersome	1845
Gildersome Street	1845

There was a further incident at Birstall Wesleyan chapel in 1850 when the minister, Rev. Benjamin Pearse, refused permission for Rev James Everett to occupy the pulpit for the Sunday School Anniversary after he had been expelled by the 1849 Conference. Everett had preached there previously and had been invited again according to custom by the trustees, but when he was barred from the chapel six of the trustees arranged for handbills to be printed advertising Everett's visit, and he preached at an open-air Anniversary service. (7)

Some idea of the strength of feeling throughout the

circuit over the issue of Reform can be seen at Birstall, where within four years of opening a new and very large chapel almost half of the people who had struggled to raise the money to build it had left and started again as Reformers at Mount Tabor chapel. They did not leave without an attempt to claim possession of the premises, and the resulting Birstall Case, and a subsequent appeal in the Court of Chancery⁽⁸⁾ left the Wesleyans in possession of the Chapel but weighed down by debts. The Reformers meanwhile decided to remove certain items for their own use, and one night a group of them entered the Sunday School and removed some benches and a clock, which started to chime as they passed the door of the manse, and continued to do so as they walked to their temporary accommodation in a former workshop and malt kiln in Low Lane. ⁽⁹⁾ The Reformers then moved on to the Barkerite 'Freedom Hall' in Huddersfield Road, on the opposite side of the road facing the Wesleyan chapel⁽¹⁰⁾ until Mount Tabor chapel was built.

Other congregations in the Birstall circuit were similarly divided, and those who no longer approved of the Wesleyan system moved away to worship separately, but often there was also a background of resentment and hostility because of the way in which Conference, or the ministers as its local representatives, had dealt with earlier problems. At Hightown, for example, there was a hint of unrest in their refusal to contribute to the Wesleyan Auxiliary Fund in 1848. The circuit accounts include a marginal comment, 'They won't permit a collection at Hightown',⁽¹¹⁾ The Hightown Reformers were soon

at work building their own place of worship, which they opened in 1851.

The Westgate Hill congregation had established a Wesleyan Sunday School at Birkenshaw and had also held cottage meetings in the neighbouring village of East Bierley. Both these outposts were taken over by the Reformist element among the congregation, who held their services there while the Wesleyans continued to worship at the chapel at Westgate Hill. A new Wesleyan Reform School-chapel was opened at East Bierley in 1853, while at Birkenshaw the Reformers bartered 'their' school premises for a piece of land in Bradford Road on which they built their chapel in 1871, when they expressed their gratitude for the 'providential gift' of the old schoolroom.(12)

The Gomersal Wesleyans had experienced Jabez Bunting's annoyance over their attempt to unite Leaders and Trustees in any decisions over styles of worship when they were drawing up the chapel deeds in 1827 at the time of the Leeds organ case. (13) This was not the only conflict at Gomersal, as the minister insisted in 1851 that he should take over responsibility for the Sunday School, which up to then had always been a lay activity in the village. He quite correctly quoted the decision of the 1828 Conference, whose ruling had been quietly overlooked at Gomersal, but in practice this only added to local concern over the principle of ministerial authority , and precipitated the departure of many of his congregation who opened their own Reform chapel nearby at Birdacre in 1852. Similar divisions of congregations took place

across the circuit except at Staincliffe, where membership fell by only a dozen.

Table 10/2 below indicate the extent and rapidity of the changes as members left their Wesleyan societies. It is clear from the table that the expulsion of the three ministers in

Table 10/2. Membership changes over the Reform period
in the Birstall Circuit⁽¹⁴⁾

Name of chapel	Dec1848	Sep1850	Dec1850	Mar1851	Jun1851
Birstall	435	373	278	243	241
Gomersal	228	194	98	100	97
Batley	221	186	145	137	123
Morley	179	258	195	198	184
Churwell	95	138	10	27	26
Westgate Hill	185	175	126	125	121
Hightown	168	169	38	45	43
Gildersome	50	97	51	48	52
Drighlington	74	90	70	54	52
Staincliffe	46	61	68	54	55
Gildersome Street	43	43	0	0	0
Totals	1724	1784	1079	1031	994

1849 had little immediate effect on membership in the local chapels, whereas all the Reformist sympathisers were excluded from the Wesleyan societies following the 1850 Conference, where the ministers were instructed to expel all those whose loyalty to the Wesleyan leadership was in doubt. Subsequent losses were a result of the application by the ministers of the Conference policy, and in the months that followed the expelled Reformers met where they could and established the new Reform societies shown below in Table 10/3;

Table 10/3. Membership losses during the Reform Movement
and the probable destination of the Reformers.

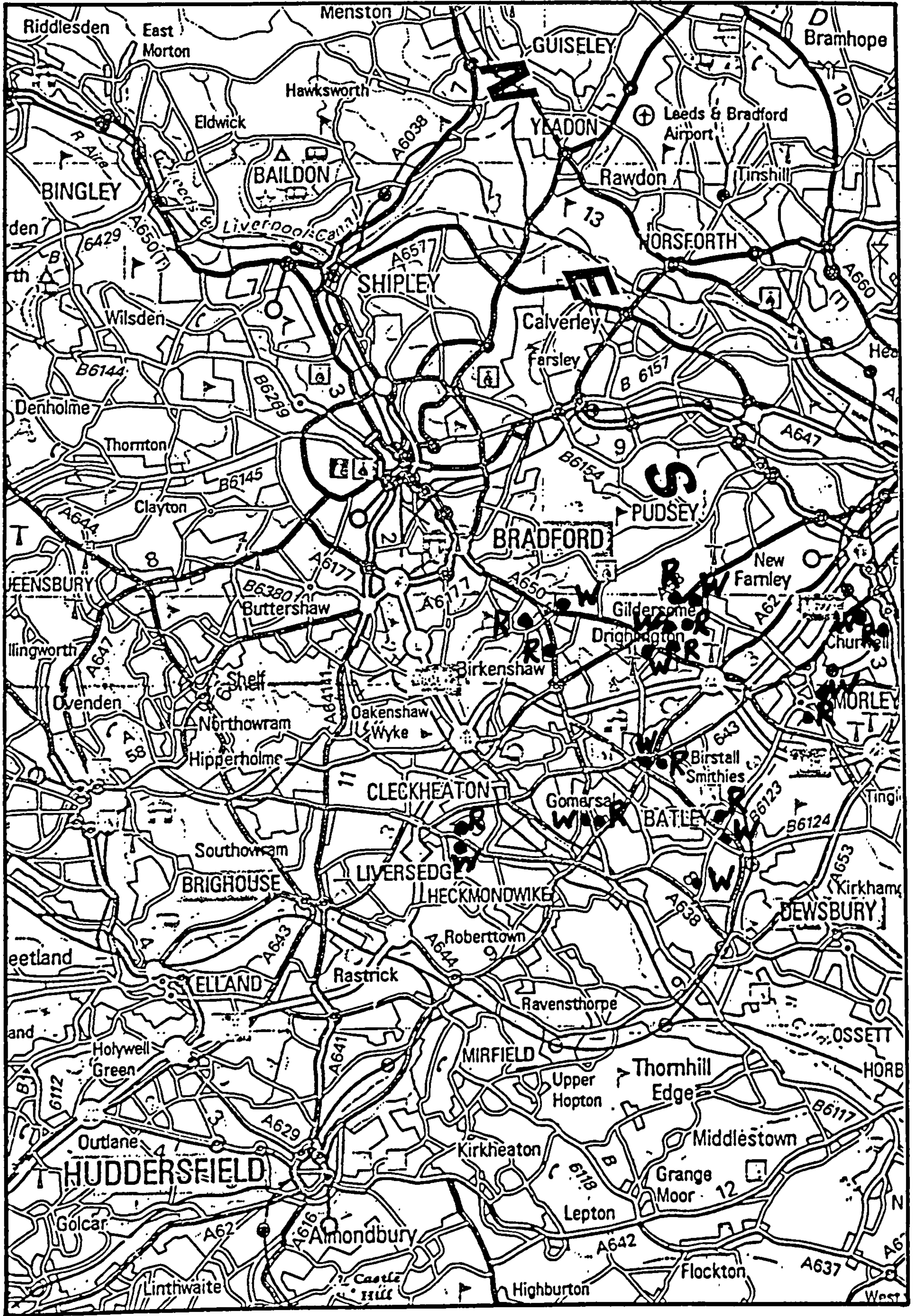
<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>as %</u>	<u>Destination</u>
Birstall	194	45	Mount Tabor
Gomersal	131	57	West View
Batley	98	44	Talbot Street
Morley	74	29	Bethel
Churwell	112	81	Zion
Westgate Hill	64	35	Birkenshaw, E. Bierley
Hightown	125	74	Reform chapel
Gildersome	45	46	Zion
Drighlington	38	42	Adwalton Moorside
Staincliffe	13	19	none
Gildersome Street	43	100	Reform chapel
<u>Totals</u>	<u>937</u>	<u>54%</u>	

The availability of the records for both Wesleyan and Reform circuits in Birstall and Cleckheaton has made it possible to see the pattern of transfers from Wesleyan to Reform, and it would appear probable that virtually all those who left their Wesleyan chapels in the Birstall circuit went straight into Reform societies, who were able to call on about half of the originally Wesleyan local preachers. This was the main factor that made the survival of the Reform societies possible in this circuit, usually at first in rented premises until a new chapel was built. This was usually within a few years, although at Batley the Reformers had a very unsettled period before being becoming strong enough numerically and financially to open Talbot Street chapel, which was not built until 1887. Rather

similar difficulties faced the Wesleyan society at Gildersome Street, but after a number of 'nil' returns this society became established again.

Although the percentage of members leaving the Birstall Wesleyan chapels was less than in the adjacent Cleckheaton circuit, the actual numbers involved were greater. This is particularly significant in view of the fact that a century earlier it was from Birstall that Methodism had first been established in the Bradford area under John Nelson

The Minute Book of the Quarterly Meetings of the Birstall Wesleyan Circuit (15) confirms the impression of difficult circumstances within the circuit. No minutes were recorded between 1843 and 1846, then one meeting was minuted in 1848 and another in 1850. The Minute Book records the passing of a resolution expressing loyalty to the Wesleyan cause in September 1850, with the words 'This meeting having heard with regret the statements made by the ministers and some of the Society Stewards, respecting certain class leaders and members of society withholding their usual contributions for carrying on the work of God in this circuit, and also from one of the Connexional Funds, resolves that such a course of proceedings is altogether at variance with the rules of the Wesleyan Methodist Society, and therefore can not be tolerated by this meeting.' As the subsequent vote however showed twenty-nine in favour, and ten against the motion, the circuit meeting was already showing signs of a division on the matter of Reform, and at the end of the meeting the minutes record that 'Mr David



Map 12. Wesleyan and Reform chapels in Birstall circuit

Parkin requested the following resolution be put to the meeting - "That this meeting deeply sympathises with those individuals who have been obliged to stop the supplies through the tyranny of Conference". The secretary was apparently not a Reformer, as he added 'Of course the resolution was not put to the meeting.'

At the next quarterly meeting in December 1850, when the main exodus of the local Reformers had already taken place, it was thought necessary to pass a resolution which declared 'That this meeting reviewing the state of the work of God in this circuit, and the recent disciplining acts of its ministers, desires to express its deep sympathy with them in the slanders which have been heaped upon them, and its determination to bear up their hands in affectionate prayer and hearty cooperation, believing those acts to have been necessary, and judiciously exercised.'⁽¹⁶⁾ Apart from some discussion in the following meetings on arrangements for opening the Birstall Wesleyan Day School, no minutes were written from April 1851 to March 1853, and after the meeting in June 1853 the next minutes are for September 1863. As in the adjacent circuit, Wesleyanism in Birstall was going through a period of considerable weakness. The Circuit Stewards' Account Books ⁽¹⁷⁾ confirm the figures in the Circuit Schedules ⁽¹⁸⁾ and show how the recorded numbers were stable until September 1850. The April 1851 returns however show a drop in six months from 1784 members to 1031, and nearly forty more had left by June 1851. The loss between December 1848 and June 1851 of 937 members represented 54 per cent of the Birstall Wesleyan

circuit membership, although in some cases the figures in Table 10/3 may indicate not only permanent losses but also some temporary fluctuations during a time of extreme uncertainty.

It is interesting to compare the records of the Birstall Wesleyan circuit with those of the group who left and formed the Birstall Wesleyan Reform circuit, who were active at the same time, but whose surviving records start in 1855. The Birstall Reform circuit then consisted of thirteen places of worship, serving the Reformers who had left each of the Wesleyan chapels and built as near to them as possible, and 720 members, a figure surprisingly close to the Wesleyan losses of 734. Apart from quarterly returns of membership, which showed little fluctuation, most of the business of the Reform meetings consisted of discussions over future policy, and their uncertainty reflected the lack of any national leadership at the time when the Reformers were rapidly becoming established at local level as a separate Methodist group, while their delegates were still seeking without success to negotiate with the Wesleyan Conference. The first entry states 'That it is the opinion of this meeting that it is right to support and sustain the seventh year's campaign', in other words to maintain pressure on the Wesleyan Conference for changes during 1855-6, but by 1856 a series of meetings were being arranged in every society to consider amalgamation with the Wesleyan Association, and delegates were sent to the Reform Assembly at Bristol.

In September 1856 the Birstall Reform circuit agreed to join the Reform League, which was then the title of the

original Reform movement, but by June 1858 they voted 20 - 10 that 'respecting amalgamation, this circuit remain as it is.' By October 1858, when most Reformers had already joined forces with the Wesleyan Association to create the United Methodist Free Churches, the Birstall circuit still hesitated, and agreed 'that this meeting considers it expedient that an organization should be immediately formed between all circuits and churches calling themselves Reformers, who have not amalgamated with the Wesleyan Association.' They went on to state 'that this circuit is desirous to correspond with any church or circuit who are disposed to organize on some broad basis which will not interfere with local independency.' It is apparent that having left one connexional system, there was some reluctance to take the risks implicit in becoming involved in another, and the next Quarterly meeting recorded the formation of a new circuit committee to consider the matter. A deputation from 'the Wesleyan Reformers of Bradford' was received in 1859, and delegates were actually sent to the Annual Meeting of the Wesleyan Reform Union held at Bradford in September 1860, and again in 1861, but no decision was made to join that organisation.

Then in September 1861 the meeting agreed that 'This circuit ought to be amalgamated with the United Methodist Free Churches, and resolves to do so without delay,' and after a representative had attended the Annual Assembly in 1862, the first U.M.F.C. minister, Rev. John Carr, came to Birstall in December 1862. (19)

The role of the Reformist local preachers was crucial in establishing and developing the Reform societies, and the Minutes of the Local Preachers' Meetings add detail to the position within the circuit. At the Local Preachers' Meeting of the Birstall Wesleyan circuit in September 1850, (20) several of the local preachers were asked by the superintendent minister, 'Will you apologise for having taken part in the Reform Meeting (so-called) and promise to cease agitating in the future?' None of them was prepared to do this or to promise 'to desist from agitation, and heartily unite with their brethren in carrying on the work of God as formerly.' As a consequence the following resolution was passed at the December Local Preachers' Meeting, 'The following have been excluded from the privileges of our religious fellowship on account of their persevering in attending and taking part in unconstitutional meetings; W.Driver, D.Parkin, John Birkby, W. Rhodes, Samuel Brooke, George Kershaw, Benjamin Sands, W. Kershaw and J. Ackroyd. The existence of a Reform Preaching Plan, a combined edition for the Reformers of Birstall and Cleckheaton for April to October 1851, indicates that by that time if not earlier the Reform societies were meeting for worship in every community previously on the Wesleyan plan, relying on the local preachers to take all the services. The outcome of the Reform movement within the Birstall circuit is summarised in Table 10/4 below. Particularly noteworthy are the percentage of lost members and the number of new Reform places of worship.

The Cleckheaton Circuit

Controversy between ministers and people had already reached serious proportions in the Spen Valley many years before the expulsions of 1849. The early story of the society at Cleckheaton and the formation of the Littleton society in Liversedge is known in some detail through the personal reminiscences of Samuel Chadwick, who was involved in local chapel and circuit life as a class leader and local preacher from the 1820s to 1854, when he emigrated to the United States. In about 1890 he visited Littleton and agreed to write down his memories, and his notebook has been carefully preserved in the records of the local circuit. (22) The availability of Chadwick's notes makes it possible to add a rare personal dimension to the more formal records of the period.

His earliest account of conflict between a minister and his congregation at Cleckheaton dates from as early as 1827, when Rev. Joseph Womersley 'attempted to interfere in the management of the Cleckheaton Sunday School', then held at the New Road chapel. The minister claimed quite accurately that he was only carrying out the Connexional policy laid down by the 1827 Conference, (23) but the next time Mr Womersley was due to preach at a morning service the teachers took the scholars and held their classes in a weaving shop in Syke Fold. They returned in time for the afternoon service, which was taken by a local preacher.

The Cleckheaton circuit was well established before the

start of the Reform agitation, and table 10/5 lists the places of worship then in use;

Table 10/5. Wesleyan Chapels in the Cleckheaton circuit
in 1848 and years of opening.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Built</u>
Brighouse	1795
Cleckheaton	1811
Heckmondwike	1811
Oakenshaw	1822
Scholes	1824
Roberttown	1839
Wyke	1843
Littleton	1844

During 1840 the members of the Cleckheaton chapel who lived in the town opened a Sunday School in School Street, (now Cheapside) in the middle of Cleckheaton, using money collected by all the members, despite an earlier agreement to build the school on land in front of the chapel, which was between Cleckheaton and Littleton. The Littleton Methodists who lived over a mile from the new Sunday School were understandably annoyed, and decided to open their own school in Littleton. Members of both Sunday Schools continued for several years to attend services in the chapel, until a new chapel and Sunday School were opened in Littleton in October 1844.

The issue of Temperance found Wesleyan ministers and lay

members holding opposing views. Soon after the Littleton chapel was opened, a Temperance Meeting was held there on the authority of the trustees, the speaker being a Congregational minister from Heckmondwike. When the Wesleyan minister, Rev. Roger Moore, happened to walk past and found out what had happened he threatened the trustees with legal action if another Temperance Meeting was held, on the grounds that such meetings were contrary to Wesleyan policy.(24)

At the time Wesleyan ministers refused to use non-alcoholic wine for the sacrament, and strongly opposed all Temperance activities, although support for the movement had been growing from 1830 among the Independent Methodists and the Primitive Methodists, both denominations with a mainly working-class membership. Many Wesleyan lay members wished to encourage support for Temperance, which was the occasion of another dispute at the Cleckheaton chapel in about 1843.

A number of members including several local preachers sought permission to hold a Temperance meeting in the Sunday School, and the trustees had given their approval. The minister, however, vetoed the proposal in accordance with Conference policy, and as a result of this decision a group of between twenty and thirty members decided to leave the Wesleyan society. They formed a Christian Brethren society, which met at first in a rented room in Northgate previously used by a Gospel Pilgrim society, and they then built their own premises, later to be replaced by the Nook Independent Methodist Church in Chapel Street.

Table 10/6 below indicates the rapidity and scale of the losses experienced by the Wesleyan societies in this circuit. The immediate impact of the decision at the 1850 Conference to expel Reformers is beyond doubt.

Table 10/6. Membership changes over the Reform period⁽²⁵⁾

<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>Dec1848</u>	<u>Sep1850</u>	<u>Dec1850</u>	<u>Mar1851</u>	<u>Jun1851</u>
Cleckheaton	197	186	65	65	62
Littleton	75	58	15	15	18
Heckmondwike	211	181	35	33	44
Roberttown	57	49	43	44	42
Brighouse	140	118	33	32	35
Scholes	60	44	20	20	13
Wyke	23	19	0	0	0
Oakenshaw	9	8	10	10	10
<u>Totals</u>	<u>772</u>	<u>663</u>	<u>221</u>	<u>219</u>	<u>224</u>

The dramatic development of Wesleyan Methodism in the Spenn Valley during the early decades of the nineteenth century can be attributed to the success of William Bramwell's revivals in the 1790s. It was because of the enthusiasm engendered during the revivals, and the increased membership, that the Methodists at Heckmondwike bought a piece of land at the corner of the Green and opened Greenside chapel in 1811. Chadwick⁽²⁶⁾ recalls a disagreement which occurred there in about 1839 when Rev Thomas Padman, the minister, tried to overrule local traditions regarding the love feast, in which prayer and conversation had usually been interspersed with the spontaneous

singing of hymns. He decided that there would be no hymns other than those he announced, but one day when Padman was in the pulpit a member of the congregation started a hymn, and all those present joined in while the minister protested and attempted to shout over the singing. After the hymn the minister hurriedly closed the meeting.

Nothing indicates the strength of support for Reform in this circuit more than the fact that in five of the eight societies the Reformers obtained possession of the Wesleyan premises. At Cleckheaton, Littleton, Brighthouse, Scholes and Wyke the Reformers became the owners of what had been the Wesleyan chapels. No laws were broken in these events, and as the great majority of the members in these chapels supported Reform they would have argued that having previously been the main contributors to the building and maintenance of the premises they had a certain moral right to retain possession. The three chapels which remained in Wesleyan hands were at Heckmondwike, where a new Reform chapel was opened in 1852 just across the road from the Greenside chapel, at Roberttown where there were only a handful of Reformers in the Centenary chapel who apparently left the society and failed to establish a separate meeting place in the village, and at Oakenshaw where less than a dozen members were principally involved in running a Sunday School for the village.

At the New Road chapel at Cleckheaton, when the Reformers 'stopped the supplies' by refusing to contribute to the chapel funds, the small minority of the society who remained Wesleyans

were unable to maintain the chapel, which they put up for sale. It was purchased by Mr Samuel Law, a local manufacturer and a Reformer, who made arrangements for the premises to be leased to the Reformers. A document was drawn up creating a committee of lessees who were to be responsible for finances and property, in the way that trustees usually functioned. Samuel Law was the President of the Lessees, and the secretary of the lessees was also to be chapel secretary. The funds were to be banked, and used for the eventual purchase of a chapel.⁽²⁷⁾ The Wesleyans moved to a site nearer the centre of Cleckheaton, building a chapel in Northgate in 1853.

Perhaps the most intriguing take-over occurred at Littleton, where the chapel deeds were kept in a safe at the manse. In August 1850, after Rev. Walker had removed and before his successor had arrived, one of the manse trustees who supported Reform was looking over the property when he noticed the key was in the safe. He extracted the chapel deeds, which did not give him ownership of the chapel, but did enable the Reformers to know the conditions of the deed, and legal advice was obtained. Under the Wesleyan Model Deed if the collections became insufficient to maintain the premises the trustees were to inform Conference, and if no money was forthcoming within three months the property was to be sold and the trust dissolved. Virtually all the members at Littleton were Reformers, and by withholding their payments they ensured that the premises could not be maintained financially. The President of Conference was informed by Mr Wavell, a Halifax solicitor

acting for the trustees, and their letter was acknowledged but no money was sent. In February 1852 the chapel building was auctioned quite legally in the presence of three solicitors, one of them being T.P.Bunting, the son of Rev. Jabez Bunting. As they knew how much was required to clear the debts on the premises, this was the price paid by the Reformers, who thus obtained the chapel free of debt, while there was no surplus for the Wesleyan connexion.⁽²⁸⁾ This church was enlarged in the same year, and replaced in 1892.

At Brighthouse the Reformers were again in the majority, and the chapel premises were rented by them from the Wesleyan Conference for a number of years before being purchased in 1873, while the Wesleyan minority had to make arrangements to worship elsewhere.⁽²⁹⁾

At Scholes near Cleckheaton the Reformist majority took possession of the Wesleyan chapel, and in 1879 added a new chapel, retaining the older premises as a Sunday School. There were problems over subsidence, and the Reformers offered both buildings back to the Wesleyan Conference in return for the debts being paid off. At one time it appears that both the Wesleyans and the Reformers were using the premises, and negotiations over the chapel continued until the Wesleyans built another chapel for their own use in 1890, which they called 'Hartshead Moor, Scholes', while the Reformers continued to use both the original building and the new chapel.⁽³⁰⁾

At Wyke Common the entire congregation of 23 supported Reform, and the Wesleyan chapel of 1843 in Bink's Fold

remained in Reformist hands from 1851 until about 1875, when the society disappeared from the circuit schedules. The replacement Wyke Wesleyan chapel was opened in Huddersfield Road in 1869. The number of Reform societies worshipping in their original chapels is shown clearly in Table 10/7 below.

Table 10/7. Membership losses during the time of the Reform movement and the probable destination of the Reformers.

<u>Name of chapel</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>as %</u>	<u>Destination</u>
Cleckheaton	135	69%	Original chapel
Littleton	57	76%	Original chapel
Heckmondwike	167	79%	Reform chapel
Roberttown	15	26%	none
Brighouse	105	75%	Original chapel
Scholes	47	78%	Original chapel
Wyke	23	100%	Original chapel
Oakenshaw	(gain) 1	(gain)11%	none
<u>Totals</u>	<u>548</u>	<u>71%</u>	

The manuscript notes left by Samuel Chadwick give a very detailed account of events in the Cleckheaton circuit following the 1849 Conference. He recalls how the three expelled ministers spoke at meetings up and down the country, and how 'the people sympathised with them, and Cleckheaton circuit all but unanimously took their part, and as in other places began to subscribe to their support and to the carrying on of the Reform movement.' The Methodists in Cleckheaton knew that their superintendent minister, Rev. John Walker, was going to attend

the 1850 Conference and would afterwards be stationed in a different circuit. At the June quarterly meeting after open discussion of the position of the circuit, there was no move to ask for a new minister to be appointed, and Mr Walker was left in no doubt that unless there was an end to the Conference hostility towards Reform no minister appointed by Conference would be supported financially by the circuit in the foreseeable future. He was specifically asked to convey to Conference the feelings of the circuit, although Chadwick expressed doubts as to whether or not he would carry out their wishes.

When the Wesleyan Conference met in August 1850 there were further expulsions of ministers who supported Reform, and in a desperate attempt to establish discipline within the connexion, in Chadwick's own phrase Conference 'sent its ministers to their circuits to wage war with, and cut off, all who would not make the most abject submission to their authority.' Two ministers were sent to the Cleckheaton circuit, Rev. William Winterburn and Rev. Peter Prescott. The September Quarterly Meeting,⁽³¹⁾ at which ministers would normally be welcomed at the start of their appointment, instead confirmed the resolution passed in the June meeting, stating that no ministerial appointment was required and no financial support would be given. Most members were already contributing to the Reformers, and when the Circuit Stewards received the payments from the churches the amount exactly covered their own out of pocket expenses but left nothing for the support of the

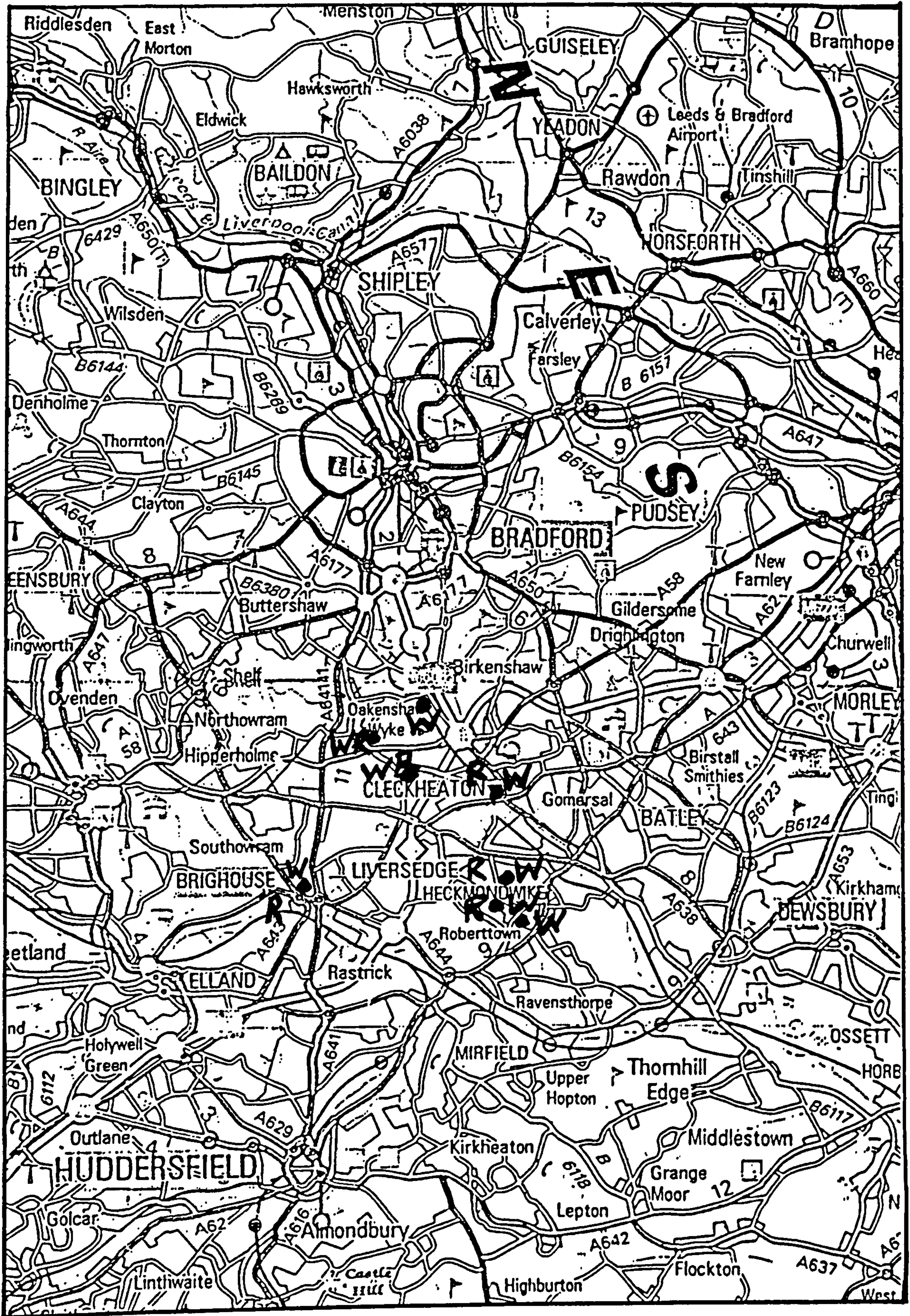
ministers. The ministers were obliged to seek the financial help of Conference, whose policy in such cases was to give support only when the most rigorous steps were being taken to eradicate the supporters of Reform.

With the intention of shortening the length of time that any future conflict might last, the Reformers decided to withhold payments to Wesleyan funds, and in the uncertainty of the time this appeared to be a reasonable policy. The Bradford Observer reported that a meeting was held in October 1850 at the Wesleyan Schoolroom in Cleckheaton, when local Reformers heard reports from their delegates who had attended a meeting in London. They then voted on 'the resolution of "No Supplies", which was put to the meeting and carried by a large majority.' (32)

The Cleckheaton Wesleyan Circuit Minute Book (33) has normal routine business reported up to March 1849, but after that meeting the records did not start again until September 1853. The missing four and a half years remain a mystery, but indicate the seriousness of the problems in the circuit at that time. Some information from the missing period is provided again by Chadwick, who recalls that during December 1850 the ministers used their quarterly visitation of the classes as an opportunity to assess the allegiance of each member individually, and to confirm their continued financial support. Those who no longer paid towards the upkeep of the Wesleyan ministers lost their membership, as did those who paid to both Wesleyan Funds and Reform Funds. Others were dismissed on

different grounds, but when Chadwick was asked for his class book he refused to hand it over. It would have included records of payments, and would therefore have been evidence against any member not supporting the ministers. By refusing to reveal the details he enabled his class to continue, although their subsequent meetings were held as Reformers, and they met at a private house.

The degree of co-operation between all the Reform congregations in the Birstall and Cleckheaton circuits was one of the main factors in their development. The minutes of the Cleckheaton Wesleyan Reform Circuit begin with the statement 'The painful circumstances in which the members and office bearers in this circuit are placed by the unfeeling manner in which they have been deprived of their standing in (the Methodist) society render it necessary that some plan should be adopted to unite them more firmly together in love, and by fully depending on the Lord, continue their labours until the object of their hearts be accomplished - a full reform of the Wesleyan Connexion...This meeting recommends that the whole of the scattered members throughout the circuit be collected into classes and placed under proper leaders, and as far as possible that the old leaders be appointed.'⁽³⁴⁾ The minutes include quarterly membership returns, starting in March 1851 with six places of worship and 410 members, and show little variation over several years. The Cleckheaton Wesleyan circuit losses of 548, representing 71 per cent of the membership in 1848, were never completely accounted for by transfers to the Reformers in



Map 13. Wesleyan and Reform chapels in the Cleckheaton circuit.

the Cleckheaton circuit.

Here, as at Birstall, there was uncertainty over their future policy. Amalgamation with any larger organisation was turned down in 1854, when talks were taking place nationally with other Methodist groups, but no firm plans had been put forward. Apparently through concern over the risks attached, it was resolved 'that our delegates be instructed to inform the delegate meeting that this meeting adheres to the principle of no amalgamation or connexional organization.' The following year their views had changed, and in July 1855 they recorded 'that this meeting rejoices in the success which has already attended the labours of the Special Reform Committee and the Wesleyan Association Committee to bring about an amalgamation, and hopes they will be brought to a satisfactory conclusion.'

Opinions had changed again by March 1857, when they decided 'that this circuit remain, as at present, independent of any other circuit or connexion.' Then in 1859, when the U.M.F.C. was well established, the Cleckheaton Reformers sent delegates on one occasion to a meeting of the Wesleyan Reform Union, but there were no subsequent attempts to join the Union. Amalgamation with the United Methodist Free Churches was finally approved by the Quarterly Meeting in May 1860, and Rev John Clarke was appointed as minister in the same year.⁽³⁵⁾ The records of both the Reform circuits give the impression of enthusiasm and a sense of purpose which seems to be entirely absent from the Birstall and Cleckheaton Wesleyan circuits during the same period.

As well as the records of the Quarterly Meetings, the minutes of the Local Preachers' Meeting of the Wesleyan circuit also indicate the extent of the disruption that took place over the Reform question. The Minute Book of the Cleckheaton Wesleyan Circuit Local Preachers had recorded from 1844 a pattern of deliberate late arrival at the meetings by the local preachers, and after the expulsions of September 1849 the original minutes of that month's meeting were cut out of the book, and rewritten, and by December of that year it was decided that the ministers should make a preaching plan using the ministers, and some local preachers in training, and that exhorters who were not trained as preachers should lead house meetings but not take services in the chapels. This was because sixteen of the local preachers had already withdrawn their services, leaving only the two ministers, a few local preachers, and some exhorters.

Samuel Chadwick was a local preacher as well as a Reformer, and he recalls how when all the Local Preachers assembled at Cleckheaton chapel in December 1850 for their quarterly meeting there was no minister present. Two of the members went to the manse but were sent away by Mr Winterburn who refused to say where he planned to hold the Local Preachers' meeting. Of the 22 Local Preachers on the plan, only three were invited by the minister to a meeting at his house. The remaining 19 were known to be in favour of Reform, and were later joined by one of the three others. They decided to take no services that week, and to make enquiries as to which

chapels wished to have their services. They arranged to meet later to draw up a Wesleyan Reform Circuit plan.

During the evening of the same day Samuel Chadwick went to the malt kiln at Birstall which was being used by the Reformers in that area, to hear Rev. James Everett. Afterwards Chadwick was invited to address the meeting to inform them of the events at Littleton and Cleckheaton during the previous few days, and Everett asked him to write out his speech so that it could be published in the Reformist Wesleyan Times.

Samuel Chadwick's reminiscences are confirmed by the minutes of the Cleckheaton Wesleyan Local Preachers' Meeting held in December 1850, which recorded that fifteen local preachers, two preachers in training and one exhorter had forfeited their membership of the meeting, no longer being recognised as local preachers in the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

After 1850 no regular Wesleyan Local Preachers' Meetings were held in the Cleckheaton circuit, and the minute book records that the meetings in March, June and September 1851 were cancelled because only the ministers and one or two local preachers were present, and after two years without meetings those planned each quarter from September 1853 to December 1855 were all cancelled because the local preachers did not attend. The shortage of Wesleyan local preachers within the circuit is emphasised by the list of local preachers from other circuits on the 1854-5 plan.⁽³⁶⁾ There was what seems to have been a very acrimonious meeting in March 1856 when two of the local preachers were offered reinstatement 'if they give a pledge

that they are satisfied with Methodism as it is, or should their views change they will either keep them to themselves or leave without disturbing the peace of the society', (37) which one accepted and one refused. After that there were no minutes of any quarterly meetings of the Wesleyan local preachers until 1864.

In contrast, very soon after 1850 the Cleckheaton Reformers had become a well-organised local circuit, although the matter of their long-term policy and their relationship to the national Reform movement remained uncertain until 1860. This explains why delegates were despatched to meetings of both the U.M.F.C. and the Wesleyan Reform Union, but there was clearly a very strong disinclination to return to any connexional system, different as it might be from the one they had just left. However, it would appear that from time to time feelings ran high among the Reformers, and in 1859 Samuel Chadwick published Doings of Despotism (38) following an acrimonious quarterly meeting at Heckmondwike in December 1858. Points at issue included Chadwick's stress on the need for the independence of each society within the circuit, and his view that the financial needs of the societies as they built new chapels should take precedence over the appointment of paid ministers. He referred to the need for pastoral work, 'the people who have been scattered by the agitation want looking after and gathering up', but pointed out that pastoral care could be provided by the local members, and Sunday services could be taken by local preachers - 'we are not fast for

1851 to co-ordinate the secessionist societies from the two Wesleyan circuits, and in this area these were vigorous and successful organisations. Although always administratively separate, the two Wesleyan Reform circuits cooperated closely, and both considered and then rejected the possibility of joining the Wesleyan Reform Union.⁽³⁹⁾ The Cleckheaton Wesleyan Reform circuit joined the United Methodist Free Churches in 1860, the Birstall Reformers following in 1862.

The practical outcome of the Reform agitation locally was that for a little over a century, from the 1850s to about the 1960s, every village in the Birstall and Cleckheaton circuits had at least two Methodist places of worship, never far apart and often in adjacent streets. One congregation was a sign of Wesleyan orthodoxy and support for the principle of the pastoral office, the other of Wesleyan Reform origin was an illustration of religious democracy and Free Methodist solidarity.

There were few circuits where the membership rejected the Wesleyan principle of pastoral supremacy more strongly than in this area. At Birstall over half the members were Reformers, and at Cleckheaton almost three-quarters of the members opposed the Conference. What distinguished this group of Reformers from their colleagues in Bradford was the speed and enthusiasm with which they established new places of worship and formed themselves into strong and effective Reform circuits. Table 10/9 illustrates the outcomes of the eventual decisions by both circuits to join the U.M.F.C.

Table 10/9 The Reform Chapels in Birstall and Cleckheaton
which joined the United Methodist Free Churches

Wesleyan Chapel	UMFC Chapel
Wyke (Common)	1851-1875 (former Wesleyan premises)
Westgate Hill	1851 (Birkenshaw) (Birstall and Spen Ct)
"	1853 (East Bierley) (Birstall and Spen Ct)
Hightown	1851 (Reform Chapel, Free Methodist 1920)
Scholes	1852-1967 (former Wesleyan premises)
Gomersal	1852-1970 (West View)
Heckmondwike	1852-1980 (Reform Chapel)
Littletown	1852 (former Wesleyan premises) (B & S Ct)
Clifton	1854 'Colliers' Chapel' (Brighouse Ct)
Brighouse	1857 (former Wesleyan premises)
Cleckheaton	1858 (former Wesleyan premises) (B & S Ct)
Birstall	1858-1967 (Mount Tabor)
Morley	1858-1969 (Bethel)
Drighlington	1860 (Moorside, Free Methodist 1949)
Churwell	1862-1965 (Mount Zion)
Gildersome	1865-1953 (Zion)
Gildersome Street	1875-c.1925 (Reform Chapel)
Batley	1887-1994 (Talbot Street)
<u>N.B. also</u> Moorbottom	1867 (Broomfield) (Birstall and Spen Ct)
Birkenshaw	1896 (Birkenshaw Bottoms) (B & Spen Ct)

The Reform movement - an overview

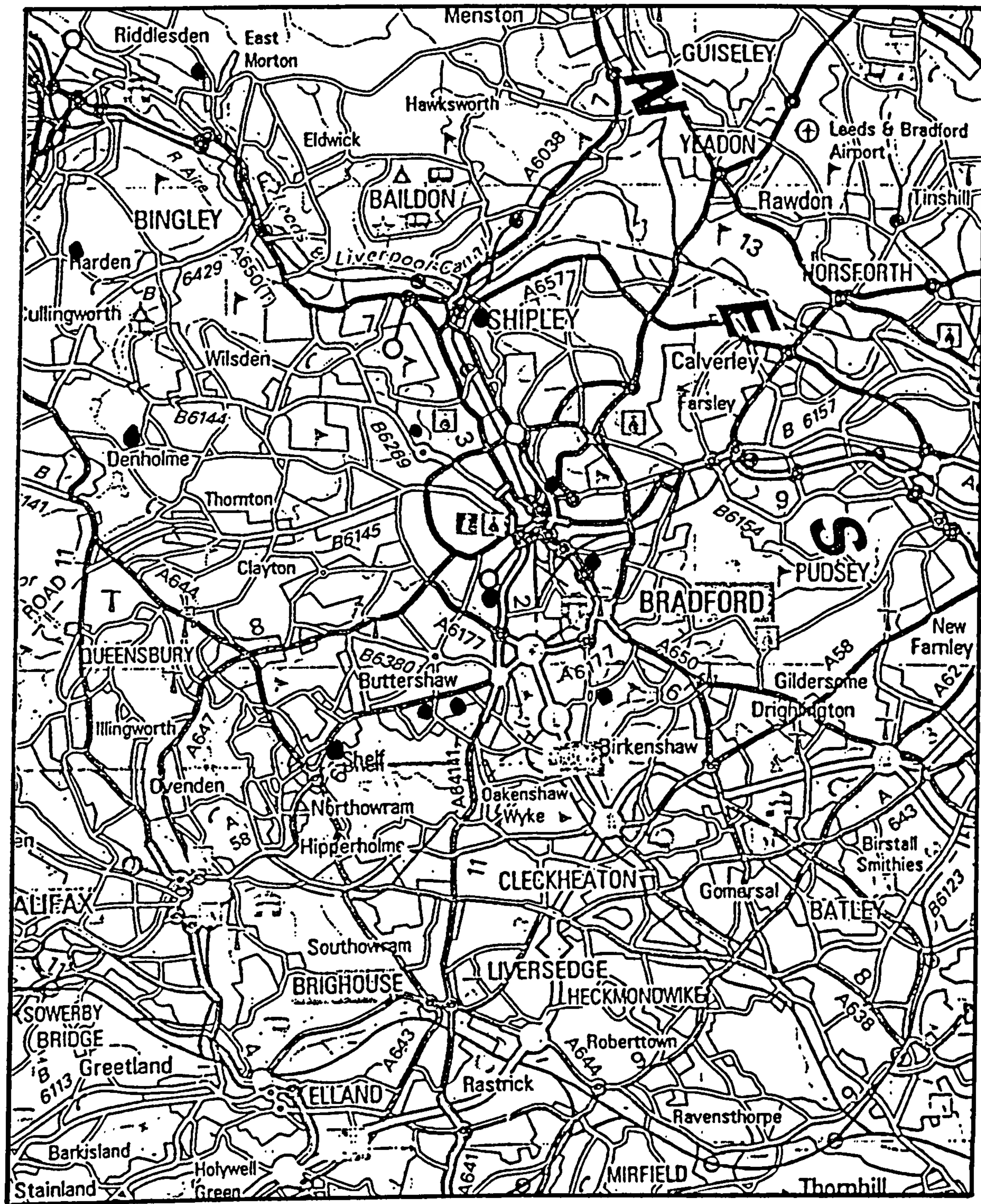
Turning to the wider aspects of the Wesleyan Reform movement, there is no doubt that it led to unexpected and disastrous consequences for Wesleyan Methodism, both locally among the congregations in the Bradford area and nationally. The ways in which the Reformers became established in Bingley and Shipley and in the town of Bradford, have been examined in previous

chapters. The situation to the south of Bradford, surveyed above, was even more problematic for the Wesleyans. Table 10/10 below illustrates the pattern of secessions across the research area;

Table 10/10 Membership changes due to the Reform movement
in local circuits 1848-1852

<u>Circuit</u>	<u>Members in 1848</u>	<u>Gain</u>	<u>Loss</u>	<u>as%</u>
Bingley	1167		228	20%
Shipley	444		138	31%
Woodhouse Grove	533	+30	-	+6%
Bradford West	1714		413	24%
Bradford East	2124		688	32%
Bradford Great Horton	1230		678	55%
Birstall	1724		937	54%
Cleckheaton	772		548	71%
<u>Totals</u>	<u>9708</u>	<u>+30</u>	<u>-3596</u>	<u>37%</u>

Following the loss of a third of their members, the Wesleyans found themselves the oldest and still the strongest embodiment of Methodism, but it was a fragmented Methodism which they now shared with the Primitive Methodists and the numerous Wesleyan Reform congregations made up of their own former members. For both Wesleyans and Reformers there were administrative problems to be overcome, and on both sides the personal feelings of



Map 14. The chapels in the Wesleyan Reform Union

their members demanded a degree of sympathy and pastoral support. In view of the number of groups of friends and families who found themselves divided over the Reform issue, it is surprising that so little evidence remains of animosity between those who remained in Wesleyan chapels and their friends who chose or were obliged to leave them. On the other hand there was no love lost between the expelled Reformers and the individual Wesleyan ministers who had been responsible for their departure from what they saw as their chapels, and disagreements between Methodists on opposite sides of the dispute led very occasionally to physical violence, as at Bowling, Yeadon and Great Horton.

In spite of the widespread disruption of Wesleyan Methodism caused by the Reform movement, not every society in the Bradford area was affected adversely. The increase in membership in the Woodhouse Grove circuit has been examined above, and a small number of other Wesleyan societies appear to have experienced only very minor problems. These include Wilsden near Bingley, and in Bradford East circuit two chapels appear to have survived unscathed, Philadelphia and New Leeds (Southend Street). The chapels at Staincliffe in the Birstall circuit and Roberttown in the Cleckheaton circuit lost very few people, while the handful of members at Oakenshaw in the Cleckheaton circuit remained as they were. But it must be considered significant that only a handful of chapels escaped the agitation out of the sixty in local circuits.

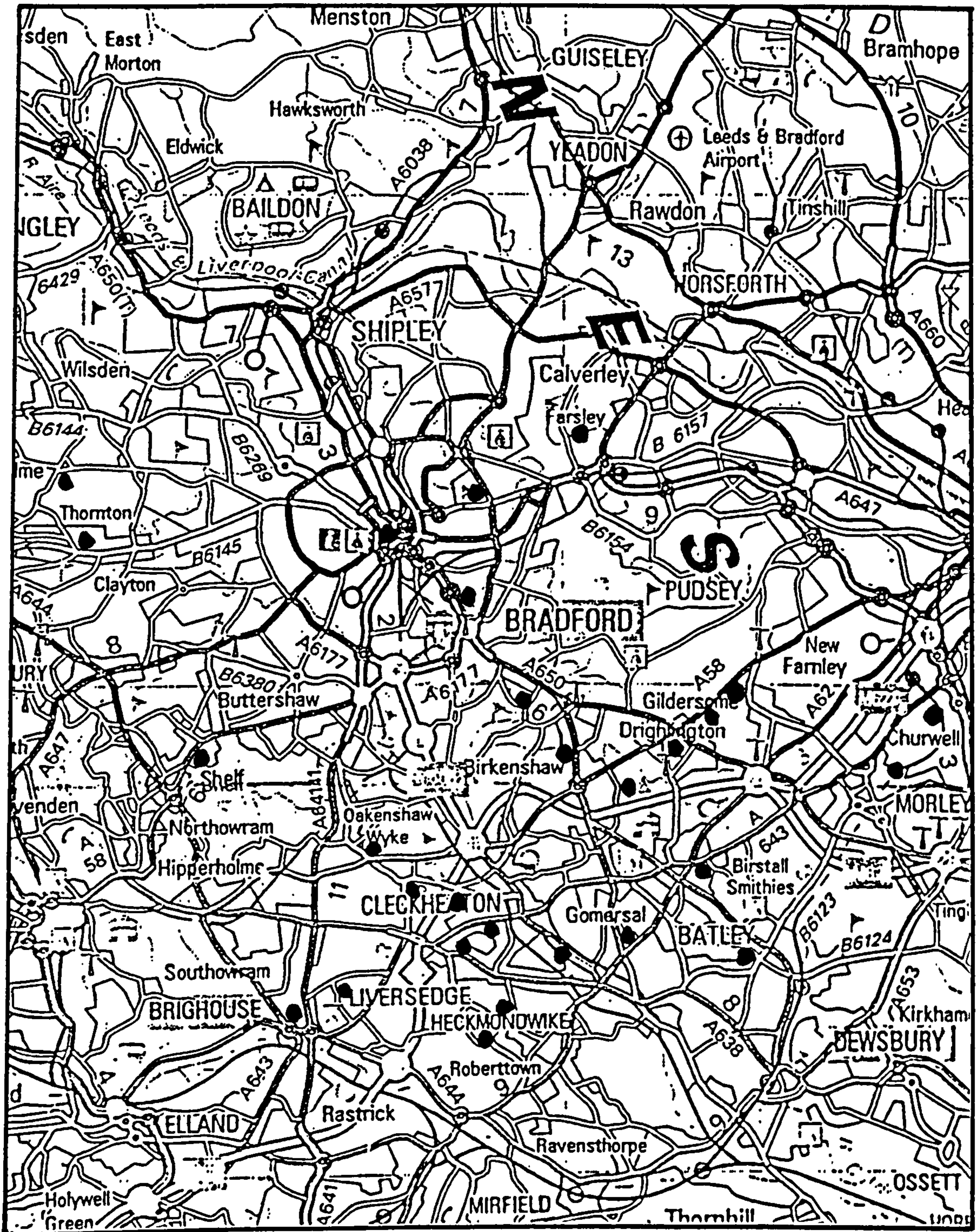
The Reform agitation lasted only a few years, and the

final outcome in terms of church buildings is shown in Table 10/11;

Table 10/11. The Number of Wesleyan and Reform chapels (W.R.U. and U.M.F.C.) in each circuit at the end of the Reform Period, with the original number of Wesleyan chapels in 1848 in brackets.

<u>The eventual number of chapels</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>WRU</u>	<u>WR/UMFC</u>	<u>Other</u>
Bingley (6)	7	3	0	0
ShIPLEY (5)	5	1	0	1(IM)
Woodhouse Grove (6)	6	0	0	0
Bradford West (6)	6	3	1	0
Bradford East (8)	8	2	3	1(MNC)
Bradford Great Horton (8)	7	3	2	1 Cong
Birstall (11)	10	0	11	0
Cleckheaton (8)	7	0	6	0
<u>Total (58)</u>	<u>56</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>3</u>

By the end of the decade both the Wesleyan leadership and the leaders of the Reform movement accepted that a stable new situation had come about, formalised by the formation in 1857 of the United Methodist Free Churches, and in 1859 of the Wesleyan Reform Union. This was not what had been originally envisaged by either Wesleyans or Reformers. The former had hoped that the Reform movement would, like its predecessors in 1796, 1827 and 1835, end in a numerically small and possibly almost welcome loss of a rather extreme group of its members.



Map15. The chapels in the United Methodist Free Churches

Instead the members who left the Connexion included many of the leaders and a high proportion of the local preachers on whom the Wesleyans had depended for most of their services. As the UMFC continued to increase in numbers from the 1860s to the 1890s, there was a move to establish more Free Methodist societies which led to the opening of five new chapels by the U.M.F.C. long after the Reform agitation had ceased to be a factor in denominational thinking.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The opening of these chapels indicates the continuing vigour of Free Methodism at the time, although no new societies were created locally by the United Methodists between 1907 and 1932.

The Reform movement, like other nineteenth-century conflicts which were seen as vitally important matters of religious principle at the time, has now been almost totally forgotten. There are still a small number of local chapels in the Wesleyan Reform Union,⁽⁴¹⁾ but all the former Wesleyan Reform congregations which joined the U.M.F.C. have been part of Methodist circuits since 1932, and have been absorbed into Methodism in exactly the same way as the former Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist congregations.

Neither side wanted conflict after 1849, and in the end neither side gained from it. Wesleyan Methodism suffered a major loss of members, and the Reformers were obliged to start again to build new places of worship. In retrospect, it is difficult to disagree with Sir Henry Fowler, who claimed that 'The Disruption of 1849 was a gigantic blunder on both sides.'⁽⁴²⁾

Notes

1. A measure of the local support for Reform was that ten of the eleven Wesleyan chapels in the Birstall circuit had a Wesleyan Reform chapel opened nearby.
2. In the Cleckheaton circuit five of the eight Wesleyan chapels were actually taken over by the Reformers, who also built one new chapel at Heckmondwike.
3. D.A. Earl, Park Methodist Church, Brighouse, History of the Church from 1791. (Centenary Booklet), Brighouse, 1978, p. 6.
4. E.B. Perkins, Methodist Preaching Houses and the Law, London, 1952, p. 25.
5. Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, p. 498.
6. 'An Old Methodist', An Address to the Methodists in Birstall Circuit, Birstall, 1797, p.5. (WHS Archives, Oxford, Ref 369/A.)
7. 'A Leaflet from Six Birstall trustees regarding the Sunday School Anniversary services in June 1850 to be taken by Rev. James Everett', WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C87/6/34, May 1850.
8. Birstall Chancery Case papers in the keeping of the Birstall and Spen Circuit.
9. Batley News, 14 August 1926.
10. This building was built in 1849 by Barkerite secessionists from the Birstall New Connexion chapel, as their 'Lecture Room'. It became the Wesleyan Reform meeting room and is currently used by the Birstall Young Life Campaign.
11. Birstall Wesleyan Circuit, Trustees' Schedules, 1846-1857, in WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C87/1/36, 1848.

12. Statement on the origins of the Bradford Road UMFC society, retained in the circuit safe.
13. See above, Chapter 7 on the Protestant Methodists, p. 245.
14. Birstall Wesleyan Circuit, Trustees' Schedules, 1846-1857, in WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C87/1/36, 1848.
15. Birstall Wesleyan Circuit, Minute Book of the Quarterly Meetings 1838-1893, WYAS (Wakefield), Ref.C87/1/1. September 1850
16. Ibid., December 1850.
17. Birstall Wesleyan Circuit Account Book 1840-1907, WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C87/1/11, September 1850.
18. Birstall Wesleyan Circuit Schedules, 1846-1857, WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C87/1/36, September 1850.
19. Birstall Wesleyan Reform (Mount Tabor) Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minute Book, 1855-1876, WYAS Wakefield, Ref. C87/2/1, December 1862.
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21. Birstall Wesleyan Circuit, Preaching Plan, February-May 1854, WHS (Yorkshire) Archives, YAS, Leeds.
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24. Chadwick, Notebook, p. 12.
25. Cleckheaton Wesleyan Circuit Schedules 1848-1886, WYAS

- Wakefield, Ref. C25/21.
26. Chadwick, Notebook, p. 8.
 27. Letting Agreement for Cleckheaton Reform Chapel between Samuel Law and 21 Lessees, 1858, retained in circuit safe.
 28. Chadwick, Notebook, p. 20.
 29. G. Howe, Park Methodist Church, Brighouse, Centenary Souvenir Booklet, Brighouse, 1978, pp. 17-19.
 30. Leaflet announcing the opening of the Wesleyan chapel at Hartshead Moor, Scholes, 1890. WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C25/213.
 31. Minutes of the Cleckheaton Wesleyan Circuit Quarterly Meeting, WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C25/1, September 1850.
 32. Bradford Observer, 3 November 1850.
 33. Minutes of the Cleckheaton Wesleyan Circuit Quarterly Meeting, WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C25/1, March 1849.
 34. Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting of the Cleckheaton Wesleyan Reform Circuit, Introductory Note, WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C439/2/1, 1851.
 35. Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting of the Cleckheaton Wesleyan Reform Circuit 1851-1871, WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C439/2/1, May 1860.
 36. Wesleyan Circuit Plan, Birstall Circuit, 1854, lists only 2 local preachers from Birstall, but includes 5 from Dewsbury, 9 from Bradford, 3 from Leeds and 7 from the Sowerby Bridge circuit. Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library, Manchester, Ref. 'Leeds Scrap Book'.
 37. Cleckheaton Wesleyan Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting Minutes, 1836-1864, WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C439/2/20, March

1856.

38. S. Chadwick, The Doings of Despotism, 'being a Report of the Quarterly Meeting of the Wesleyan Reformers of the Cleckheaton Circuit held in the Reform Chapel Heckmondwike on 27 December 1858', Batley, 1859. (Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands University Library, Manchester, in 'Reform Tracts 1856-9').

39. Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting of the Cleckheaton Wesleyan Reform Circuit, WYAS (Wakefield), Ref. C439/2/1, 1858-60, and Birstall Wesleyan Reform (Mount Tabor) Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minute Book, 1855-1876, WYAS Wakefield, Ref. C87/2/1, 1859 - 1861.

40. Three of these U.M.F.C. chapels were in Bradford; Park at West Bowling, Free Street (Mount of Olives) off Otley Road, and Wallis Street at Four Lane Ends. The previously independent North Road Mission at Wibsey also joined the U.M.F.C. The other two chapels were at Broomfield near Cleckheaton, and at Birkenshaw Bottoms, where a Mission Church was established by the congregation at Birkenshaw.

41. The present Wesleyan Reform Union churches in the Bradford area are at Bierley Lane, Central Avenue, Low Moor, Micklethwaite, Muff Field, Shipley and Wibsey (Slack Side).

42. Gregory, Sidelights, p. 546.

SECTION D. BRADFORD METHODISM, POLITICS AND
RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER CHURCHES

The final two chapters seek to ascertain whether members of the various Methodist denominations were different from each other in terms of their involvement in political activities, or in their attitudes towards members of other churches.

The second question was of interest to many Methodists, but was never a matter for serious concern to either the leadership or the ordinary members. On the other hand, many Methodist leaders actively discouraged members from political activities. There were several reasons for this policy; such involvement was contrary to Wesley's ruling on the matter, and it might be detrimental to the member's religious faith, but more crucially there was a danger that political activities by Methodists might damage the image of the movement. This applied particularly in the early years of the nineteenth century, when any suggestion that members were involved in radical politics was urgently denied by the Wesleyan hierarchy, anxious to preserve their precarious claim that all Wesleyan Methodists were loyal to king and parliament.

Were those Methodists most likely to be politically active therefore to be found among the groups which had left the Wesleyans? Were most of them in fact Primitive Methodists? Such matters were never referred to in church or circuit records, and for this reason evidence of significant differences between members of the main Methodist groups is difficult to find, but enough information is available for a survey to be attempted.

Chapter 11

Methodist involvement in political activities

in the Bradford area

Introduction

It is reasonable to suppose that those who became members of Methodist societies changed in their attitudes towards matters of general concern. Elie Halevy's claim that the existence of Methodism was a major factor in preventing political revolution in England is well known, (1) if not universally accepted, and Edward Thompson's suggestion (2) that Methodist influence created a more effective workforce by making its people more amenable to discipline is equally familiar, although this was only one possible outcome of a chapel-based lifestyle which made men at the same time more articulate and more aware of moral and social issues. (3) By no means all Methodist activity was directed to improving productivity, and membership of a chapel could inspire a determination to change aspects of contemporary society which were seen as morally wrong or manifestly unjust, yet the scarcity of information on Methodist participation in politics in the Bradford area is noteworthy.

The basic explanation for this absence of evidence for involvement in politics is simply that as in most aspects of Methodist life, the connexion's attitude towards politics was based on Wesley's stated policy. Anxious that his people avoided political controversy, he introduced a 'No Politics' rule in relation to Methodist preaching and behaviour which continued to inhibit members in their chapels in the Bradford

area as elsewhere. This ruling in effect prohibited involvement in political activity by any of the Methodist groups as an organised body,⁽⁴⁾ so that where Methodists became involved in politics they did so in a purely personal capacity. They may have seen their politics as a practical application of their religious beliefs, but what they did was not usually supported by the leaders of their own denominations, and sometimes it was heavily criticised.

Hugh McLeod states that 'though the clergy tended to determine the official stance of their churches, they did not necessarily speak for the lay membership.'⁽⁵⁾ In practice within Methodism virtually all radical activity on the part of lay members was opposed by the ministers, and although many Methodists may have supported radical activities, only very occasionally were individual members identified as political leaders.⁽⁶⁾ The watchword of the Wesleyan ministerial leadership throughout this period as they struggled to create an image of Methodism untainted by radicalism was 'Fear God, honour the king, and meddle not with those given to change.'⁽⁷⁾ Professor Ward points out the changing role of the Methodist ministers as radicalism led to conflicts with lay members which challenged ministerial authority; 'the itinerant ministry, which only yesterday had been a device for retrieving the lost from the highways and hedges and compelling them to come in, was now being used as a social regulator...it was only too obviously possible to be right with God and wrong with the Methodist preacher.'⁽⁸⁾

It is possible to exaggerate the significance of Methodist involvement in politics, in view of the fact that Methodism was not a large church, and its membership never exceeded five per cent of the population. Although Alan Gilbert has suggested that up to 20 per cent of the 'lower orders' were associated with various chapel communities (9), Henry Rack has pointed out that 'Methodism was neither sufficiently large a body nor sufficiently influential in the middling or lower ranks of society to have a crucial social and political role of any kind.' (10) There is no doubt that some secular political movements made use of terminology and techniques borrowed from the Methodist chapel, and this might have been because chapel members took with them these patterns of organisation when they moved from worship to social action. (11) In organisations which were seen as working for improvement in society the individuals involved would see no conflict between their membership in a Methodist society and their involvement in trade unions, in matters of social concern, or in politics.

To some extent different Methodist denominations became associated with differences in social stratification. The Wesleyans of the second and subsequent generations were progressively more middle-class, (12) and were among those least likely to encourage political radicalism. New Connexion members were generally considered more democratic, if not openly supporters of Tom Paine, but theirs was only a small church, and supporters of the other early secessions were even fewer in number. The strongest Methodist group in terms of their support

for political change were the Primitive Methodists, most of whom were working-class in origin and outlook, and many of them became actively involved in movements to improve the lives of ordinary people. Some members of the small group who left the New Connexion following the Barkerite Controversy, and became known as Christian Brethren,⁽¹³⁾ openly supported the Chartists. The basic question of whether Methodism made its ordinary members more or less radical therefore has more than one answer; those associated with Wesleyan Methodism had accepted a discipline which denied them a part in radical politics, while others in branches of Methodism less controlled by their ministers were free to express their claims for democracy within the limits allowed by the law.

This chapter considers Methodist involvement within the political movements which affected the Bradford area between 1796 and 1857, a period of rapid and widespread change in Bradford during which what was virtually a village grew into an important industrial town. The religious and political activity which took place during the early decades of the nineteenth century can only be assessed against the problems of social order, poverty and public health which were becoming more desperate due to widespread unemployment as traditional hand skills were being replaced by new machinery. The situation faced by Bradford people during the technical advances of the Industrial Revolution have been well documented, and few accounts describe the actual conditions of the very poor more vividly than the contemporary Woolcombers' Report of 1845.⁽¹⁴⁾

Methodists and the social and political life
of the Bradford area

Protests arose early in the nineteenth century over the deteriorating conditions of the textile workers in West Yorkshire. This involved the writing of letters or the holding of meetings until the machine-breaking activities of the Luddites spread to the area from Nottingham and Lancashire.⁽¹⁵⁾

The Luddites were mainly cloth-dressers or croppers, skilled workers thought of as the elite of the textile trades. They were already near starvation level as a result of food shortages following poor harvests, rising prices and low wages when they were driven to adopt desperate measures by the introduction of new machinery which threatened permanent unemployment.⁽¹⁶⁾ Luddite activities in West Yorkshire involved the destruction of cropping frames, and Methodists were divided over this issue; the ministerial leaders of Wesleyan Methodism condemned Luddism, although it is clear that some men active in the Luddite movement came from Methodist families.

During 1812 Luddism affected several local towns, and the movement was particularly active in the Spen Valley, where frames coming from Huddersfield were intercepted and destroyed at Hartshead Moor, and William Cartwright's cropping shop at Rawfolds near Cleckheaton was attacked.⁽¹⁷⁾ This mill stood across the road from the Cleckheaton Wesleyan Chapel, opened in the previous year. It is impossible to know whether any of the Luddites involved in the attack were familiar with that particular chapel, either as members or as casual visitors, as

the details of Luddite membership have remained a mystery as an inevitable consequence of their oaths of secrecy.

Two men received fatal injuries during the attack at Rawfolds, and both died later at the Star Inn at Roberttown. Samuel Hartley was a cropper from Halifax, whose father was a Wesleyan member, and following a procession which included Paineite Republicans his funeral took place at South Parade Wesleyan Chapel prior to burial in the chapel graveyard.⁽¹⁸⁾ Jabez Bunting, then superintendent minister at Halifax, refused to take the service and delegated the task to a junior minister, Mark Dawes, and a memorial service on the following Sunday afternoon, attended by a large crowd, was delegated by Bunting to the disabled revivalist local preacher, Jonathan Saville.⁽¹⁹⁾ The second victim, John Booth, the son of a Huddersfield curate, was buried early one morning at Huddersfield in order to avoid similar crowds at his funeral.⁽²⁰⁾

The Luddites were seen in the Spen Valley as neither heroes nor villains, but rather as victims of circumstances, driven by starvation to desperate attempts to maintain their employment.⁽²¹⁾ Practical support for them at the time must have been widespread in the Spen Valley, as although the number of assailants wounded at Rawfolds is not known, there were reports that 'many are certainly wounded, the traces of blood being heavy in different directions',⁽²²⁾ and yet they somehow obtained medical treatment without being reported to the authorities. Even Frank Peel's investigations failed to trace

the details of how this took place.⁽²³⁾

The links between Luddism and local Methodism have been examined by John Hargreaves ⁽²⁴⁾ in an article which also surveyed the literature on Luddism. He has drawn attention to the events at the executions at York in January 1813 of the men charged with both the attack at Rawfolds and the murder of the mill owner William Horsfall of Marsden near Huddersfield. Two of the three men condemned for the murder of William Horsfall prayed from the scaffold, and before one group of seven men were hanged they and the watching crowd sang together Samuel Wesley's hymn, 'Behold the Saviour of mankind, Nailed to the shameful tree', one of the men announcing the words a line at a time as was the custom in chapels. An officer present at the executions wrote to a local magistrate of his belief that all the men hanged were Methodists,⁽²⁵⁾ a claim denied by Jabez Bunting, who nevertheless acknowledged that six of the seventeen men hanged had fathers who were Methodists.⁽²⁶⁾ It is therefore clear that the Luddite movement locally involved a number of young men of Methodist families, although whether or not they were themselves members of Methodist societies, in the technical sense of receiving a quarterly class ticket, remains uncertain.

The widespread local belief that the two men injured at Rawfolds who later died were not given any help as they lay outside the mill, and were then actually ill-treated at the Star Inn,⁽²⁷⁾ has been seen as the turning point between Luddite attacks on property, particularly cropping frames, and

later Luddite violence directed against individuals. The deaths of the two men were particularly significant because previous Luddite activity after which the perpetrators disappeared back into the community could be seen by the Luddites as successful; the mystique and the threat of further action remained. On the other hand the identification of those involved took away the mystery surrounding their movement and led to the arrest and conviction of other Luddites. Moreover, the identification of the Luddites made it clear that a number of them, although possibly not many, came from Methodist families.

Luddism was only one activity which divided Wesleyan Methodist ministers from many of their lay members, and there were other political situations across the country in which the same separation became apparent. The attitude of the Wesleyan leadership to popular radicalism following Peterloo was indicated by an incident at North Shields. Robert Pilter, the superintendent minister of the Wesleyan circuit there (28) complained to Bunting that William Stephenson, a local preacher, had criticised the Manchester magistrates at a protest meeting in Newcastle, and Stephenson refused to apologise to the superintendent for his conduct or promise to abstain from attending such meetings in future. Pilter's letter to Bunting went to the Committee of Privileges who instructed that Wesleyan Methodists throughout the country should avoid political activities, and this view was repeated in a circular letter sent to every Wesleyan congregation. The Wesleyan statement 'made it crystal clear to the working classes in the

manufacturing districts that they could be radicals or (Wesleyan) Methodists, but not both'.⁽²⁹⁾

Bradford became a local centre of the movement for factory reform due largely to the activities of a local mill-owner, John Wood, who involved Richard Oastler of Huddersfield, originally a Methodist and later an Anglican, and Rev George Stringer Bull, vicar of Bierley.⁽³⁰⁾ The outcome of this agitation was the 1833 Factory Act.⁽³¹⁾ Parson Bull was also a leader of local opposition to plans for a Union Workhouse in Bradford on the grounds that workhouse conditions under the 1834 New Poor Law, particularly the separation of families in the 'Bastilles', were unreasonably harsh and contrary to Christian principles. Also involved as travelling advocates against the New Poor Law were Joseph Rayner Stephens, the expelled Wesleyan minister and John Fielden, the Methodist Unitarian M.P. Speaking at Bradford in 1837 Stephens advocated the obtaining of arms 'for self-defence' in the struggle against the New Poor Law.⁽³²⁾ Similar claims that Englishmen had an ancient right to bear arms were not uncommon at the time, and were repeated by many Chartists. There was clearly only a thin line between claims of a right to carry weapons and an intention to actually use them.

The Reform Act gave Bradford two Members of Parliament; E.C. Lister, an Anglican, and John Hardy, a partner in the Low Moor Ironworks, and Recorder of Leeds. Jack Reynolds points out that voting in the 1832 elections was not determined by party divisions.⁽³³⁾ but after the 1835 election two political

groupings emerged, the Tories in the Bradford Constitutional Association, supported by many Anglicans, and the Liberal Bradford Reform Society, which had considerable support from dissenters.⁽³⁴⁾ At about the same time the Bradford Political Union emerged, led by Peter Bussey who had been active in the 1825 strike of woolcombers. Many of its members later joined the Bradford Radical Association and then like Bussey supported the Charter.

Most men had no vote in parliamentary elections,⁽³⁵⁾ even after 1832, and David Wright's statement that 'religion was as powerful a factor as occupation and social class in providing a basis for political outlook and action'⁽³⁶⁾ in early nineteenth-century Bradford applies less to Methodists than to Anglicans and dissenters. This is because these two groups had a particular relationship, not without antagonism, based originally on events in 1662, while the Methodists, having left Anglicanism at the end of the eighteenth century, occupied a unique position. They had some links with each group, but had no strong disagreement with either. The Methodists did, however, have some influence in elections, and Tony Jowitt points out that in the 1835 election, when the acknowledged non-conformist majority within Bradford was expected to return the disestablishment supporter George Hadfield, the successful candidates were the Whig-Liberal E.C. Lister and John Hardy, then a Tory. The explanation was that while Baptists and Independents made up one third of the non-conformist vote, over half of non-conformists were Methodists, and the Wesleyans were

opposed to disestablishment.⁽³⁷⁾

In 1837 the London Working Men's Association sent a speaker to Bradford to speak on the six points of the proposed Charter, and in the following year the Charter and the Petition were adopted at a meeting with 3,000 present. There were references to achieving the six points of the Charter 'Peacably if we can, forcibly if we must', clear evidence that the Bradford Chartists were divided over the question of 'moral force' and 'physical force'. The latter group⁽³⁸⁾, who claimed to be the majority, spoke of the traditional right to possess weapons, of knives and pikes and muskets and the use of physical force, although surprisingly few of them held to their views when challenged by events.⁽³⁹⁾ Dorothy Thompson's comment was that 'much of the violent language of the Chartist leaders was a style of speech - a rhetorical device which both their followers and the authorities recognised to be a form of bluff.'⁽⁴⁰⁾

In October 1838 a Chartist meeting was held at Peep Green near Hartshead in the Spen Valley, at which 25,000 of the 250,000 said to be present were from Bradford.⁽⁴¹⁾ There were brass bands and flags as groups openly processed to the site, and the meeting began with prayer and a hymn. Feargus O'Connor thanked William Thornton, a former Primitive Methodist local preacher, saying 'Well done, Thornton. When we get the People's Charter I'll see that you are made Archbishop of York'. The event has been compared to the Whitsuntide gatherings held by the chapels and churches,⁽⁴²⁾ and the site chosen for the

meeting, one of several held there within a few years, was in fact well-known locally as the place where the annual Roberttown Races were held.

The Bradford Chartists, many of them former weavers and woolcombers put out of work by new machinery, organised educational and social events in addition to their political activities. At least local two Chartist meetings were held in Methodist premises, at Mount Carmel Independent Methodist Chapel at Little Horton and at Philadelphia Primitive Methodist chapel at Wapping.⁽⁴³⁾ This may not necessarily imply any political support for the Charter by the congregations, as the matter might have been no more than the hiring of the chapel premises for a meeting. On the other hand no Wesleyan minister would have permitted such a meeting, so it seems probable that at least some sympathy for the Chartists existed among these particular congregations. There was a Bradford Chartist Chapel in Ebenezer Street off Vicar Lane,⁽⁴⁴⁾ where the meetings followed closely the pattern of nonconformist services, and where a social life developed not unlike that of nearby chapels.

Firm evidence of Methodists being active as Chartists is difficult to find, and Methodist involvement in physical force activities seems to be even more rare. In view of such slogans as 'More pigs and fewer parsons' the Chartist view of organised religion would appear to have been less than cordial, and this feeling was reciprocated by the Wesleyan Conference, which condemned in 1842 the activities of 'infidels and irreligious

men... charging the sufferings of the community upon the selfish policy of rulers', and in 1848 advised members not to run needlessly 'into the arena of political controversy.'⁽⁴⁵⁾ This did not prevent some Chartists avoiding detection by meeting in small groups in each other's houses and describing their gatherings as prayer meetings,⁽⁴⁶⁾ but it is impossible to know whether or not the same men actually met at other times in genuine prayer meetings. Many Chartist meetings began with prayers and hymns, some of which were specifically Chartist in content, but others were Methodist hymns including some by Charles Wesley.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The merging of nonconformist and particularly Methodist practices and phraseology with Chartist activities was a common feature at many events, and suggests a possible Methodist influence within the Chartist movement.

Robert Wearmouth points out that Chartist Camp Meetings were another example of techniques borrowed from Methodism. Meetings began in 1839,⁽⁴⁸⁾ and were held for several years. He refers to camp meetings at Adwalton, Gildersome Green, Gilstead near Bingley, Morley, Bradford, Baildon Green, Birkenshaw, Bradford Moor, Idle, Wibsey Slack and Castle Hill at Almondbury, all of which were in practice political meetings. Whether or not any Methodists were present is a matter of conjecture. At Bingley there were reports one Sunday morning in 1842 of Chartists drilling on Harden Moor, and Colonel Busfeild's Yeomanry were sent to investigate. On their arrival they found what was described as a Primitive Methodist Camp Meeting taking place, but it would not be difficult to imagine

that the two activities shared the same personnel.(49)

In the Spen Valley, the Cleckheaton area gave limited support to the Charter, but Liversedge and Heckmondwike became centres of physical force Chartists, who met at night in a quarry near Heckmondwike to practise with their pikes.(50) At Birstall the Zion Methodist New Connexion chapel was used for Chartist meetings, but in the Spen Valley their main centre was at Liversedge, where the upstairs rooms of two cottages in Knowler Hill became a Chartist Chapel. There were adult classes and a band of musicians, it was the meeting place for local Chartists, and Sunday services were held there. Peel suggests that many poor families, who at the time avoided the free pews in churches and chapels as they had no suitable clothes, found that Chartist preachers 'were never weary of pointing out that Jesus of Nazareth did not preach a class gospel, nor despised the poor for their poverty, nor did he content himself with promising them only a rest hereafter. Besides feeding them with spiritual food, he ministered to their temporal necessities, healed their sick, and brightened their pathway through life'. Among the preachers at Liversedge was Ben Rushton of Ovenden, at different times a Primitive Methodist and New Connexion local preacher, who preached on 'The Poor'.(51) Frank Peel (46) also refers to Joseph Hatfield as being both a leading moral force Chartist and a Methodist local preacher in the Spen Valley.(47)

Most Chartist activity centred round the three occasions when the Charter was taken to the House of Commons, all times

of economic distress. The first occasion was in July 1839, the second in May 1842, and the last in April 1848. After the first occasion there was said to be a Chartist plot in January 1840 to take control of Bradford, obtain cannon from the Low Moor Ironworks, and march on London to establish a Republic. The scheme was infiltrated if not led by a government spy, and instead of the thousands expected to join the scheme from Leeds, Halifax and Dewsbury, a mere handful of men were finally arrested.⁽⁵²⁾ Following the second rejection of the Charter 'signed by nearly every working-man in the Spen Valley' ⁽⁵³⁾ a strike was called for, and following a Chartist Camp Meeting at Bradford Moor in August 1842 some of the local Chartists became involved in the 'Plug Riots' which involved large crowds marching to the mills in the area around Bradford, Halifax and the Birstall and Spen Valley areas and withdrawing the boiler plugs, thus putting out the fires and temporarily stopping production.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Following the final rejection of the Charter by parliament in 1848, and serious confrontations in Bradford between Chartists and the forces of law and order at the siege of Adelaide Street,⁽⁵⁵⁾ the Chartist movement came virtually to an end. Although the Chartist unrest in Bradford was of short duration and served principally as an expression of their frustration, it led to the town being described as 'perhaps the most outstanding centre of physical force Chartism in England.'⁽⁵⁶⁾

It was during the period of Chartist activity that Bradford was incorporated as a municipal Borough in 1847. Most

of the Liberal and dissenting councillors, aldermen and magistrates either attended Horton Lane Congregational Church or were close friends of those who did.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Although Methodists greatly outnumbered the Congregationalists in Bradford, no Methodist chapel or Anglican church ever had a comparable group of the town's leaders among its membership.

Conclusion

The Methodist involvement in political activities in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Bradford is not easy to trace. These two aspects of the life of the town were self-contained and there were no formal links between them, and it is by no means certain that the few recorded examples were in any way typical. There was no doubt about the involvement in West Yorkshire Luddism of a number of men with a Methodist family background, and among the Bradford Chartists and the members of the other local political organisations there may well have been a number of Methodists. Wearmouth describes some aspects of Chartism as 'politico-religious'⁽⁵⁸⁾, and a few Chartist meetings were held in local chapels, although this may mean only that the trustees had no objection to this particular use of their premises. Hempton emphasises the complexity of the relationship between Methodism and Chartism,⁽⁵⁹⁾ confirming the view that such links tended to be made according to individual convictions.

We are left with very limited anecdotal evidence of Methodist involvement in political activity, and the absence of reliable information prevents any detailed analysis and in

particular inhibits any examination of the extent to which being a member of any one particular Methodist group increased or decreased the probability of political involvement. What is clear is that any such involvement would always be based on a purely personal decision, arrived at regardless of the attitude of the denominational leadership. In most cases any such activity on the part of Methodist members would also be likely to be strongly criticised by the ministers in the local circuit.

Among the minority groups the Independent Methodists seem to have been particularly likely to be involved in political activity, and some of the Barkerite Christian Brethren were known to be closely associated with Chartism, but for the main Methodist groups little can be added to the obvious conclusion that the Wesleyans involved in radical politics were the most likely to face criticism from their church authorities, and the Primitive Methodists were the least likely.

Notes

1. H. McLeod, Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain, 1984, p. 50-52.
2. Thompson, The English Working Class, p.411.
3. J. Rule, The labouring classes in early industrial England 1750-1850, London, 1986, p.164.
4. D.M. Thompson, Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century, 1972, p. 99. The 'No Politics' rule was not unique to the Wesleyan Methodists but common to all the Methodist

denominations, including the Primitive Methodists.

5. McLeod, Religion and the Working Class, p. 45.

6. Isaac Ludlam, hanged after the 1817 Pentridge Rising, was a Methodist local preacher, as was the Dorsetshire Labourer George Loveless, E.P.Thompson, English Working Class, p. 433. A further four of the Tolpuddle Martyrs were Methodists. (An annual service at Tolpuddle to commemorate these men is arranged jointly by local Methodists and the trade unions.)

7. 'Address to the Societies', Minutes of the Wesleyan-Methodist Conference, 1812, p.304, based on 1 Peter 2, v.17.

8. Ward, Religion and Society, p. 91.

9. A.D. Gilbert, 'Methodism, dissent and political stability in early industrial England', Journal of Religious History, 10, 1978-79, pp.381-199.)

10. Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, p. 379.

11. R.F. Wearmouth, Some working-class movements of the nineteenth century, 1948, pp.31-49.

12. T. Koditschek, Class formation and urban-industrial society; Bradford 1750-1850, Cambridge, 1980, p.259. Using information on the social class descriptions of members at Kirkgate Wesleyan chapel who died between 1815 and 1854, Koditschek concludes that over half the members were still working-class by 1850, although 'the proportion of working-class Wesleyans was gradually diminishing as urbanisation proceeded.' In practice the proportion of active working-class members in 1850 may have been far smaller.

13. Earlier groups using the Christian Brethren title were

linked with the Independent Methodists, another group with strong working-class support, but among the Christian Brethren of the 1840s were some who, like Barker himself, moved towards Unitarianism in their religion and supported Chartism in their politics. H.J. McLachlan, G and J Hague, The Unitarian Heritage, London, 1986, p. 70.

14. D. G. Wright and J. A. Jowitt (ed) Victorian Bradford; G. Firth, Bradford and the Industrial Revolution, an Economic History 1760-1840, 1990; and J.A. Jowitt (ed) Mechanization and Misery, the Bradford Woolcombers' Report of 1845, Halifax, 1991.

15. J.L. and B. Hammond, The skilled labourer 1760-1832, London, 1919, pp.257-340.

16. M.I. Thomis, The Luddites, Machine breaking in Regency England Newton Abbott, 1970, p. 55.

17. F. Peel, Spen Valley Past and Present, Heckmondwike, 1893, p. 245.

18. J. Hargreaves, 'Methodism and Luddism in Yorkshire 1812-1813' in Northern History XXVI, 1990, p. 181.

19. Ibid., p. 182.

20. Peel, Spen Valley, p.257.

21. Thomis, The Luddites, p. 66.

22. Hammond, Skilled labourer, p. 305

23. F. Peel, The Rising of the Luddites, the Chartists and the Plug Drawers, Heckmondwike, 1895, reprinted 1968 with a preface by E.P.Thompson.

24. J. Hargreaves, 'Methodism and Luddism in Yorkshire 1812-

- 1813' in Northern History XXVI, 1990, p. 177-179.
25. Thompson, English Working Class, p. 639
26. Hargreaves, Northern History, p. 179.
27. Hammond, Skilled Labourer, p. 307.
28. W.R. Ward, The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1820-1829, 1972, p.21.
29. Hempton, Methodism and Politics, p. 108.
30. J.C. Gill, The Ten Hours Parson, Christian Social Action in the Eighteen-Thirties, 1959.
31. J. Reynolds, The great paternalist, Titus Salt and the growth of nineteenth-century Bradford, London, 1983, p. 37.
32. M.S. Edwards, Purge this realm, a life of Joseph Rayner Stephens, London, 1994, p. 53.
33. Reynolds, Great paternalist, p. 40.
34. Ibid., p. 92.
35. J.A. Jowitt and R.K.S. Taylor (eds), Nineteenth century Bradford elections, (Bradford Centre Occasional Papers No. 1), Bradford, 1979, p. 8. The Bradford parliamentary electorate in 1832 consisted of 1137 men, about 5 per cent of the population, or 12 per cent of adult males. About 6 per cent of these voters were working class.
36. D.G. Wright, 'A radical borough: parliamentary politics in Bradford 1832-41' in Northern History, Vol. IV, 1969, pp. 133-165.
37. Jowitt and Taylor, Bradford elections, p. 11.
38. Peacock, Bradford Chartism, p.28.
39. Wearmouth, Working-Class Movements, p.103.

40. D. Thompson (ed), The Early Chartists, 1971, p. 18.
41. Peacock, Bradford Chartism, p.18.
42. E. Royle, Chartism, 1996, p. 86.
43. Peacock, Bradford Chartism, p.19.
44. Wright, Chartist Risings, p.3.
45. Minutes of the Wesleyan Conferences, 1842 and 1848, cited in Wearmouth, Working -class movements, p.174.
46. Peacock, Bradford Chartism, p. 29.
47. The hymn 'A charge to keep I have' is in the current Methodist hymn book, 'Hymns and Psalms' No. 785.
48. Wearmouth, Working-class movements, pp. 145-172.
49. Ibid., p. 155.
50. Peel, Spen Valley, p. 313.
51. Ibid., p. 318.
52. Ibid., p. 316.
53. Josph Hatfield was not a Wesleyan or Primitive Methodist. He may have been New Connexion or Independent Methodist.
54. Peel, Luddites, Chartists and Plug Drawers, p. 324.
55. Wright, Chartist Risings, pp.37-58.
56. F.C. Mather, Chartism, (Historical Association Pamphlet) London, 1965, p.17
57. Reynolds, Great paternalist, p.119-120
58. Wearmouth, Working-Class Movements, p. 173.
59. Hempton, Methodism and Politics, p. 214.

Chapter 12

Methodists and the other religious organisations

Introduction

The most obvious characteristics of early Methodism were growth and change. The small number of enthusiasts in isolated societies in the 1740s had developed into a number of related denominations with a total combined national membership of almost half a million by the middle of the nineteenth century.⁽¹⁾ Socially they changed from being predominantly working-class into an articulate denomination with aspirations to middle-class respectability. Changes occurred during this period of little more than a century in all churches, but it was only Methodism which developed from a handful of people to the point when its membership far exceeded that of the older dissenting churches.

All this took place against a background of Anglican claims to represent the religious aspects of the unity of society, and non-conformist counter-claims that 'to turn Christianity into a compulsory monopoly was to strip it of its moral appeal, to deny that Christ's teachings were actually practicable, and to bring religion into contempt amongst the more intelligent portion of the population.'⁽²⁾ The denominations were all in competition with each other during the first half of the nineteenth century, with occasional disagreements over specific issues. The friendly relationships between Methodists and Anglicans in Bradford reflected at first their shared history, but this was not to last, and the growth

of Methodism was one of the factors taken into account when the Church of England, facing rapid demographic changes, began to create new parishes in and around Bradford. The work of the ancient parish church was augmented by eleven new churches built by 1851, among them some of the so-called 'Waterloo Churches', financed by parliamentary grants. The aims of this scheme were both religious and social; to strengthen the Church of England's provision in the growing industrial areas, where the old parish boundaries no longer reflected the needs of the population, but also to combat the spread of dissent and particularly of Methodism, which was growing with unprecedented effectiveness in new industrial areas such as West Yorkshire. To many people the growth of Methodism indicated the rejection of traditional attitudes to authority, and threatened the break-down of the social order.

All the denominations experienced change, usually with little interest in each other's situations, although there were protests when Roman Catholics began to worship openly in Bradford after legal restrictions on celebrating mass were first lifted. Among Protestant Dissenters, the Quakers remained a separate and numerically small but influential group within the town. The Baptists in Bradford were another self-contained community with little contact with the Methodists, and like the more numerous Congregationalists they built chapels in new areas as their membership grew. The Presbyterians and Unitarians remained small in number in Bradford, and few of Benjamin Ingham's numerous early societies, taken over by the

Moravians, survived long enough to build chapels, and those that did so appear to have had no particular contacts with Methodism after the middle of the eighteenth century. During the early decades of the nineteenth century some new and comparatively short-lived millenarian religious groups also became active in Bradford, possibly attracting some members from the fringes of Methodism.

Whereas, at least in theory, the Church of England had previously always considered the entire population as its parishioners, it was now clear that in practice each of these denominations had a more or less well-defined role in terms of the social origins of its members. There was also a growing realisation that among the very poor there were large groups of people who had no links with any religious organisation, and there was some local support for secularism.

While the main dissenting groups in Bradford seem to have ignored the Methodists, the divisions within Methodism meant that Wesleyans, Primitive Methodists, and the smaller Methodist groups came to be considered as separate denominations, and despite their common ancestry and their basic agreement on doctrine there is little evidence of any co-operation between them before the middle of the century. It seems probable that their members were as uninterested in each other as they were in the other churches and chapels in Bradford, but during the first half of the nineteenth century the chapels of these various Methodist groups became far more numerous in the Bradford area than the buildings of any other denomination.(3)

Methodism and the other churches

Relationships between Methodists and the Church of England were originally based on the fact that the first Methodist societies were within the Church of England, and attendance at the parish church was taken for granted. John Wesley's own attitudes towards other denominations determined Methodist thinking, and he saw himself as a loyal Anglican as well as the leader of the Methodist people. Wesley saw no conflict in that situation, claiming that 'if ever the Methodists in general were to leave the church, I must leave them'.⁽⁴⁾ His views on the other main religious groups varied during his lifetime, although Wesley's attitude towards Dissenters reflected the traditional Anglican view that religious dissent implied social and political rejection of both church and state.

Relationships between Methodism and the established church became strained by Lord Sidmouth's attempt in 1811 to ban preachers who were not responsible for a specific congregation. This attack on a system that was useful to Dissent and essential to Methodism would have had no effect on the Church of England, but if implemented would have meant the end of both the Methodist itinerant ministers and local preachers. The robust Wesleyan response through their Committee of Privileges indicated the Connexion's newly acquired confidence, and showed how far the Methodists had moved away from the Church of England after Wesley's death. Methodist petitions against Sidmouth's bill contained 30,000 signatures,⁽⁵⁾ and the bill was lost without a division.

Considerable strains were placed on relationships between Methodists and Anglicans by the Tractarian Controversy which began in 1836 with claims for the necessity of an apostolic succession, when Cardinal Newman described Methodism as a heresy.⁽⁶⁾ Later Tractarian influences on ceremonial, worship, preaching and architecture had the effect of emphasising links between the Anglican Church and Rome and so widening the gap between Methodism and the Church of England.

In a move which made comparisons with Methodism more meaningful, and ended the isolation of their separate congregations, the Baptist churches formed the Baptist Union in 1813, and this was followed by the Congregational Union in 1831. During the seventeenth century these dissenting groups 'had won their identity in prison, on the scaffold, at the stake. They had fought their way through persecution to acceptance and even to respectability. They had become a force to be reckoned with.'⁽⁷⁾ Both churches attracted a predominantly middle-class membership, and in many places their services were as well attended as those of the parish churches.

It was understandably therefore the Dissenters who first raised the issues of Church Rates and the disestablishment of the Church of England during the nineteenth century, on the basis that no particular denomination should enjoy special privileges or status. Their main spokesman was the Congregationalist Edward Miall,⁽⁸⁾ but he failed to obtain support from many Wesleyan Methodists because they felt that as establishment strengthened the Church of England this was of

benefit to the churches in general. This view was reflected in opposition to the Anti-State Church Association at the Wesleyan Methodist Conferences.⁽⁹⁾

The Roman Catholic community continued to increase in importance. Still a small minority in 1800, they were widely seen as a potential threat to social order on the grounds that their loyalty to Rome compromised their loyalty to their country. Legislation left them disenfranchised and in no doubt that their religion brought inferior status and restricted rights until the Catholic Emancipation Act was carried in 1829. There was strong and widespread opposition to the Act, and many Methodists expressed their disagreement.⁽¹⁰⁾

The arrival of Irish Catholic immigrants from the 1820s onwards created an entirely new situation for many English communities, including the people of Bradford. The Irish came from a background of extreme poverty in their own country, and in many cases were unable to speak English. They were willing to accept lower standards of housing and poorer working conditions than other workers,⁽¹¹⁾ and Thompson suggests that these immigrants played a necessary part in the Industrial Revolution, specialising in building and other work requiring strength and stamina for which English workers were not suitable, while acknowledging that 'they lacked the Puritan virtues of thrift and sobriety'.⁽¹²⁾ Catholic progress was marked by the payment of a controversial, ^{but, in fact, longstanding} government grant in 1845 to the Maynooth Academy near Dublin, which educated men for the Catholic priesthood,⁽¹³⁾ and the re-establishment of

the Catholic Bishoprics in England in 1850.

There was considerable conflict between the denominations over education, and Government grants were made from 1833 to the Anglican National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, and the dissenting British and Foreign Schools Society. The Wesleyans were then responsible for over 3,000 Sunday Schools but only about thirty day schools, and they supported at first the principle of voluntary schools, believing that education should be denominational in character and in provision. Later they accepted the principle of government aid for day schools, and in 1847 a new agreement was reached under which government grants were available to all schools prepared to accept government inspection, and the same provisions then applied to Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist schools. It was a further indication of their increased status that at the time of the education debate in the 1840s the Methodists took for granted an equal hearing for their point of view in discussions with the government.

The Religious Census of 1851 (14) made clear two basic facts - it proved beyond doubt that attendance at Sunday worship was a minority activity, and it confirmed that the Church of England had in fact retained the allegiance of only half of those who attended worship, the remaining 48 per cent being shared between the main non-conformist denominations and the Catholics (who had less than 2 per cent of the population but 4 per cent of attenders) and other small minorities. In

terms of attendance, the Church of England had 21 per cent of the population within 52 per cent of all the worshippers. The figures for Methodists were 8 per cent and 19 per cent, Congregationalists 4 per cent and 11 per cent, and Baptists 3 per cent and 8 per cent. There was concern that only about 40 per cent of the population attended any place of worship.

All these statistics are subject to certain reservations, but they serve to indicate the overall pattern of worship in England and Wales in 1851. The census indicated a slowing-down in the rate of growth of the Methodist, Congregationalist and Baptist churches, although at the time this was not unreasonably attributed to the completeness of the existing provision: between 1801 and 1851 the Wesleyans had increased their provision of sittings per 1,000 of the population from 18 to 123, the Congregationalists from 34 to 59, and the Baptists from 20 to 42. One fact which was made clear by the 1851 census was that while the Church of England remained the largest single denomination, the second largest group were then the Methodists.

Relationships between the churches in the Bradford area

In every community around Bradford local congregations were inclined to be isolationist rather than cooperative. To some extent this was because each denomination represented certain social and cultural values, and this was probably most marked in dealings between the Church of England and the non-conformists. In Bingley, for instance, where all worship had previously taken place at the parish church, the Anglican

monopoly of worship was broken when the Congregational chapel of 1667 was followed by one at Wilsden, and another at Denholme. Various anecdotes suggest that relationships between the Methodists and Anglicans in Bingley were good during Wesley's lifetime, and he was invited to preach in the parish church, but the Baptists were blamed by Wesley for enticing away many of the Methodists.⁽¹⁵⁾ From the Baptist point of view this was not the full story, as Rev Dr John Fawcett, a Baptist minister, had in 1759 married the daughter of a Bingley Wesleyan leader and local preacher, who was expelled from Methodism for preaching Calvinistic doctrines. Members of his class were also expelled, and in 1762 they obtained a licence to hold Baptist services in Bingley. Ten new members of the cause in Bingley were baptised in the River Aire, and a Baptist chapel was opened at Bingley in 1764.⁽¹⁶⁾ When the Primitive Methodists arrived in Bingley in 1823 they remained quite separate from the Wesleyan congregations which were already established there.

The first place of worship at Shipley was Bethel Baptist chapel, opened in 1758. Some Methodists probably met in Baildon from about 1740, but the Shipley society was not recorded before 1763, when it was part of the Bradford Branch of Birstall circuit. The first Shipley Wesleyan chapel was opened in 1800 within the Bingley circuit, as the Shipley circuit was not formed until 1823, two years after the start of quite separate Primitive Methodist activity in the town. The unimportant status of Shipley before the coming of industry was

emphasised by the fact that local people attended the parish church at Baildon before St Paul's church was opened in Shipley in 1826, and there was no Congregational place of worship in Shipley until Saltaire Congregational Chapel was built by Sir Titus Salt in 1858.

The Quakers, after their earlier successes, remained a small but influential group with meetings held across the area. Their community in Bradford during the eighteenth century included such local leaders as Hustler, Peckover, and Harris. Later in the nineteenth century their spokesman was Priestman. They appear to have had little contact with any of the Methodist groups either in Bradford or in the adjacent villages.

There were exceptions to the typical coolness between the denominations, and Gregory in his study of nineteenth-century Methodism⁽¹⁷⁾ described the religious life of Bradford in the first decade of the century as consisting of three kinds of Methodists; the Wesleyan Methodists who worshipped at the Octagon but took communion at the parish church were 'Church Methodists', the Anglicans, whom he described as 'Methodist churchfolk', met at the parish church, and the Independents 'who were Methodist in doctrine but Congregationalists in polity', worshipped in Horton Lane. Such relaxed convergence of attitude was not characteristic of the relationships between the Methodists and members of other denominations, and was largely the result of the personal influence of Rev. John Crosse, vicar of Bradford from 1784 to 1816.

John Crosse, the son-in-law of William Grimshaw of Haworth, was tolerant towards those of other denominations, and he held weekly services in his home on the lines of a Methodist class meeting. Three young Bradford men who came under Crosse's influence in this way entered the Wesleyan ministry; Samuel Sugden, Benjamin Clough and Joseph Fowler.⁽¹⁸⁾ After the Bradford Octagon was opened in 1766 the Methodists attended Sunday worship there, and afterwards walked to the parish church to take communion. This practice ceased in 1811 with the building of the Kirkgate chapel,⁽¹⁹⁾ but as a reminder of Crosse's warm friendships with the Wesleyans, it was they who paid for the marble tablet in his memory in the parish church.⁽²⁰⁾

The Baptists were active in Bradford from 1710, and they moved to premises in Westgate in 1755, building a Baptist Church there in 1782. Baptisms took place in the Bradford Beck until a baptistry was built in the chapel in 1805. The presence of Horton Baptist College ensured the importance of Bradford to the Baptists.⁽²¹⁾

A division within the Presbyterian congregation in Bradford in 1770 led to most members becoming Unitarian, but others met at the Paper Hall, owned by James Garnett, one of their number, before they built the first Independent chapel in Horton Lane. The Congregationalists became the most prestigious and politically powerful group among the nonconformists in Bradford,⁽²²⁾ and following the town's incorporation as a borough in 1847 the Horton Lane chapel produced six of

Bradford's first seven mayors. Another sign of the importance of Bradford to the Congregationalists was the Airedale Academy in Bradford, where ministers were trained. Despite the Congregationalist membership including so many local political leaders, their overall support in the town was well below that of the Methodists, and by the end of the century their thirty chapels were numerically no match for the hundred built by the various Methodist groups.

In comparing the effectiveness of different denominations, it is necessary to take into account the part played by their clergy and ministers. Anglican clergymen such as John Crosse and William Scoresby who became deeply involved in town affairs, and Rev. Jonathan Glyde, who as minister at Horton Lane Congregational Chapel from 1835 to 1854 was involved in schemes to open Peel Park and St George's Hall and the building of the Borough West Day Schools, were all active leaders in the life of the town. No Methodist minister could ever become involved in leading such schemes because of the short time they spent in each circuit before moving elsewhere.

Following the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, Baptist and Congregational leaders in Bradford mounted what Koditschek described as 'a full-scale attack on church rates.'⁽²³⁾ Five and a half thousand signatures were obtained for a petition, and with Quaker support the raising of the rate was prevented. The situation hardened with the advent of a new vicar, William Scoresby, a former arctic whaling captain. Between 1839 and 1847 he worked hard to improve conditions in

the factories, particularly for children, organised parochial schools and founded the Church Institute, but he caused resentment among the dissenters when he insisted on the payment by them of church rates, on the grounds that as all baptisms, weddings and burials took place in the parish churches it was appropriate for them to be supported by the whole community.⁽²⁴⁾ Because of Scoresby's attitude Bradford became a centre of the church/chapel controversy intermittently until the 1860s. In practice the non-conformists easily outnumbered the Anglicans in Bradford, and when Dr Scoresby insisted on his right to levy a general church rate the non-conformist reaction was to attend the annual vestry meeting in such large numbers that when the rate was fixed they were always able to carry an amendment calling for a delay of twelve months. Later they voted against the levying of a church rate, and in 1842 appointed a nonconformist as people's churchwarden, so ensuring that no rate would be levied.⁽²⁵⁾

Having achieved the victory over church rates, the Bradford Dissenters pressed for disestablishment, on the grounds that 'genuine religious communion was possible only among those who voluntarily chose to participate. At heart, Christianity was a religion of individuals grounded in a private relationship between themselves and their God.'⁽²⁶⁾ and the first meeting of the Anti-State Church Association in Bradford was held in 1847.

The first Roman Catholic priest to openly visit Bradford since the Reformation arrived in 1822, when mass was celebrated

at the Roebuck Inn. When there was opposition the Catholics moved to a building in Chapel Lane until St. Mary's Chapel was opened in 1825. Three years later, following controversy over remarks made by the Catholic priest at St. Mary's, a public debate on 'their respective articles of belief' was held in the Methodist Eastbrook Chapel between a number of Roman Catholic priests and a number of Protestant ministers. The chapel was crowded for meetings over two days and 'both sides confidently claimed the victory'.⁽²⁷⁾ In the next twenty years there was a large influx of Irish Catholics to the town who lived mainly in property near the city centre, but their presence in Bradford caused some resentment, and there were some anti-Catholic riots in the town.

At the time of the 1851 Religious Census the Methodists were the largest single denomination in Bradford, with attendances a third larger than the Anglicans, and their membership also included many industrialists and merchants.⁽²⁸⁾ Koditschek, overlooking the Methodist claim not to be part of dissent, points out that the Wesleyans were 'more successful than the Baptists and Congregationalists in attracting a substantial number from the skilled working and lower middle class' because of their evangelical outreach and 'style of religiosity that was more spontaneous and emotional than that of other dissenters, but was also more disciplined and centrally controlled.'⁽²⁹⁾

During the first half of the nineteenth century there were other less permanent religious groups in the Bradford

area, including followers of Richard Brothers, Joanna Southcott and Prophet Wroe, whose members came from social groups not very different from those attracted to the Methodists. (30) Joanna Southcott gained her followers mainly from among the very poor, and their number grew to many thousands, all of in possession of a copy of the 'seal', a written note promising that at the millennium they would be among the saved. (31)

After Joanna Southcott died in December 1814, a number of new 'prophets' continued the movement, including John Wroe, a wool-comber from Bowling. (32) Wroe made his headquarters in Ashton-under-Lyme, where many of the leading citizens were already Southcottians, before returning to Yorkshire. Edward Thompson claimed that 'the Southcott cult wreaked great havoc in the Methodist camp, notably...in Yorkshire', (33) suggesting that the Methodist groups, although better organised and financed than the millenarian sects, shared with them the emotional appeal of revivalist techniques which satisfied a widely-felt need at a time of political instability and severe poverty. It is not surprising that Methodist records fail to reveal any loss of membership specifically to these sects.

In Birstall and the Spen Valley relationships between Methodists and Anglicans varied. At Birstall parish church the vicar from 1718 to 1768 was Rev. Thomas Coleby, who opposed the early Methodists and was responsible for having John Nelson impressed as a soldier in 1744, although he later became more tolerant towards the Methodists, allowing Wesley to preach in the churchyard in 1766. At the chapel-of-ease at Whitechapel at

Cleckheaton, the curate from 1757 to 1772, Rev. Jonas Eastwood, thought to have been a former headmaster at Kingswood Wesleyan School, was 'an earnest and successful worker in the Methodist cause' (34) who invited Wesley to preach there in 1770.

Because the Church of England had made no provision for the increasing population of the Spen Valley, Rev Hammond Roberson personally financed the building of Liversedge parish church. At the opening ceremony in 1812 he is reported to have spoken scathingly of the Methodists,⁽³⁵⁾ at a time when the Cleckheaton and Heckmondwike chapels were barely a year old, and the Luddites arrested after the attack on Rawfolds mill were still in York Castle awaiting trial. 'According to the present opinion, received by no inconsiderable number of men, any cottage or barn can be converted into a 'chapel', and any forward presumptuous mechanic into a teacher of religion...labourers and unlettered artificers presumptuously take unto themselves the honour of ministering in sacred things..too often the most crude and undigested assertions are delivered for gospel truths, in language disgusting to every sober, and shocking to every pious ear.'⁽³⁶⁾ Turning from the religious dangers to the political ones, Roberson is quoted as saying that 'The principles of the British Constitution and of our religious establishment are so intimately connected and interwoven together, that whatever affects the one bears on the other also. And, unless I am mistaken, it is an obstinate, stubborn fact that a departure from the national form of religion is generally followed by an alienation of the

affections from our civil constitution and government.'(37)

Liversedge church, of which Roberson became vicar, was later to be followed by a 'Waterloo' church at Cleckheaton, and several others in the locality. When a later curate and vicar of Birstall, Rev. W M Heald, attended services at the Birstall Wesleyan chapel in 1832 'as an act of friendship', Hammond Roberson wrote to him 'in severe terms, to point out how misleading such action must be to parishioners'.(38)

In Cleckheaton and Heckmondwike the 'Hyper-Calvinists' among the Independents, who at the time were the strongest denomination in the Spen Valley, had strongly opposed the arrival of the first Methodists in the 1740s. The minister at Heckmondwike, Rev. John Kirkby, was highly critical of the Methodists, and he had many arguments on the subject with John Nelson. (39) Yet by 1827 the Gomersal Congregationalists were lending their premises to the Wesleyans to hold Sunday School Anniversary services before their own premises were built, and in 1850 they extended the same hospitality to the Primitive Methodists.

Conclusion

The changing pattern of relationships between many different Protestant churches in the Bradford area over a period of more than a century gives the overall impression that they moved gradually from being deliberately isolationist, through times of disagreements, towards a position of greater sympathy with each other's aims. The virtual isolation of the Bradford Catholic community from the other churches throughout this time

can be attributed to legal restrictions as well as long-held suspicion of the grounds of both religion and culture in an area with many Irish Catholic immigrants.

Most of the conflicts involving Methodism centred on their relationships with the Church of England, with whom they had the closest historical ties, while the Dissenters, perhaps because of their Calvinist theology, appear to have had little interest in the Methodists at this time. None of the churches accepted the Southcottians or the Wroeites as genuine denominations, despite considerable support for them in Bradford. The key to ending the isolationism of the different denominations in Bradford was eventually their shared sympathy for the very poorest communities in the town. Titus Salt, the Congregationalist mayor of Bradford, drew attention to the problems when he arranged for a survey of conditions in the town in 1849, and the report referred to 'a general ignorance, an ignorance of religious truth, intemperance, Sabbath profanation, neglect of public worship, and infidelity' and concluded that 'a fearful proportion of our fellow-townsmen were living in the neglect of all religious opportunities and ordinances and that there was...much contempt of divine things...a profligacy of life...It is also apparent that the existing efforts put forth by all denominations of Christians taken collectively fall short of the necessities of the town'.(40)

The outcome was the founding of the Bradford Town Mission in the following year, an inter-denominational Christian

organisation designed to improve both the physical and spiritual aspects of life in the slums of Bradford. The Town Mission was responsible for establishing Homes for Unfortunate Females, caring for the sick and dying, holding cottage meetings, working with the Infirmary, the Poorhouse and the Vagrant Office, holding evening classes and opening a Ragged School, holding lectures on 'Social Economy', and distributing tracts. The Town Mission was based on a scheme already operating in London and Leeds, under which a committee of ministers and businessmen employed lay agents to work among poor families. Without formally involving either the churches or the denominations, the scheme went some way towards breaking down denominational boundaries, although in practice not all the churches took part in the scheme. Most of those involved were Congregationalists, but support also came from other nonconformist churches including Quakers, Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists.

Notes

1. Methodist membership nationally in 1851 was 490,000, a figure which did not include the much larger number of adherents who regularly attended services. In comparison, the Church of England then claimed 875,000 Easter communicants who in many cases were not regular attenders every week, and the Roman Catholics had 482,000 regular attenders at mass. Among Dissenters there were 165,000 Congregationalists and 140,000 Baptists.

2. T. Koditschek, Class Formation and Urban Industrial Society - Bradford 1750 - 1850, London, 1980, p. 263.
3. Among 54 places of worship in the Borough of Bradford quoted in the 1851 Religious Census there were 12 Anglican churches, 1 Catholic, 6 Congregational, 5 Baptist, and 24 Methodist chapels.
4. Wesley, Letters, Vol 8, p.58.
5. Hempton, Methodism and Politics, p. 101.
6. The Wesleyan response was to publish 'Tracts for the Times' in reply in 1842.
7. P. Sangster, A History of the Free Churches, London, 1983, p. 142.
8. Edward Miall was a former Congregationalist minister and editor of The Non-Conformist. He was M.P. for Rochdale from 1852 to 1857, and represented Bradford from 1869 to 1874. C. Binfield, So down to prayers, studies in English Nonconformity 1780-1920, London, 1977, pp. 101-124.
9. The Anti-State Church Association, formed in 1844, became in 1853 the 'Liberation Society', or more formally 'The Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control'.
10. Hempton, Methodism and Politics, p. 139.
11. Thompson, The English Working Class, p. 469.
12. Ibid., p.476,
13. Hempton, Methodism and Politics, p. 191.
14. Report on the 1851 Census of Religious Worship, London, 1853.

15. Wesley, The Journal, Vol. 5, p. 180.
16. H. Turner, Ancient Bingley, Bingley, 1897, p. 167.
17. Gregory, Sidelights, p. 7.
18. W. Cudworth, Methodism in Bradford, 1878, p.27.
19. Gregory, Sidelights, p. 7.
20. W. Cudworth, Methodism in Bradford, p. 30.
21. Baptist members in Bradford included the manufacturers Alfred and Daniel Illingworth, Thomas Dewhirst, William Whitehead, Jonathan Thornton, and Briggs Priestley; merchants William Murgatroyd, Thomas Aked, John Godwin and Arthur Briggs, the builder J.A. Illingworth, iron founder John Cole and pawnbroker John Morley. Koditschek, Bradford, p. 257.
22. Congregationalists included Daniel and Titus Salt, John and Richard Garnett, Henry Forbes, Samuel Smith, James Rennie and William Byles. Ibid., p. 257.
23. Koditschek, Bradford, p. 261.
24. The establishment of Civil Registration in 1836 led gradually to the end of the Anglican monopoly of baptisms, weddings and burials. Non-conformists saw this as a victory, although Church rates were not finally ended until 1868.
25. M.C.D. Law. The History of Bradford, London, 1912, p.181.
26. Koditschek, Bradford, p. 263.
27. James, Bradford, p. 237.
28. Among the Methodists in Bradford were Isaac Holden, James Drummond, Benjamin Illingworth, Lodge Calvert, John Rhodes, Edward Onions and the Mitchell brothers, Thomas, Francis and John. What characterised the Methodist congregations was the

mixture of industrialists and working men. Ibid., p. 258.

29. Ibid., pp 259-260.

30. Brothers had followers in Bradford who were led by Zaccheus Robinson, a weaver who had been a Methodist class leader. Fitzwilliam Papers, 1801, F.45a.

31. During 1814 Joanna Southcott believed herself to be miraculously pregnant, claiming that her son would be Shiloh, under whose rule Jerusalem would be rebuilt, 'Satan would be curbed, true religion would flourish, the church would awake...and the world would be made ready to greet Christ at His coming'. G. R. Balleine, Past Finding Out, the tragic story of Joanna Southcott and her successors, London, 1956, p.64.

32. Wroe was baptised in the Aire at Apperley Bridge, and it was announced that he would walk on the water. The Wroeites became known as the Christian Israelites, and thirty towns including Leeds, Huddersfield and Sheffield had Wroeite chapels, but Bradford remained his home and his strongest support came from the town. After 1830 Wroe was rejected by his followers, and he moved to Wrenthorpe near Wakefield until his death in 1863. Balleine, Past Finding Out, p.93.

33. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, p.426.

34. H.C.Craddock, The History of Birstall Parish Church, London, 1933, p. 277.

35. 'An Account of the Ceremony of laying the First Stone of Christ's Church, now building in Liversedge, with the Speech delivered on that occasion by Rev. Hammond Roberson of Healds Hall,' (published by Griffith Wright, Intelligencer Office, New

Street End, Leeds), 1813. This document claims to represent what Roberson said, but does not claim to be a verbatim report, acknowledging that 'several expressions have been altered, and some sentences added, which were not spoken at the time...' It would be interesting to know to what extent the editor changed either the words or the general impression given by Hammond Roberson's speech, which as it stands is extremely critical of the Methodists of the Spen Valley. During Wesley's lifetime the Methodists had worshipped in the parish churches as well as in their own preaching houses and cottage meetings, but after Wesley's death they no longer attended the parish church, which made them suspect in the eyes of many of the clergy. In the circumstances attribution of these opinions to Roberson should be treated with some caution.

36. Ibid., p. 28.

37. Ibid., p. 47.

38. Craddock, Birstall, p. 269.

39. Peel, Nonconformity in the Spen Valley, p. 411.

40. Minutes of the Bradford Town Mission, WYAS Bradford, Ref. 32D80/1.

Chapter 13

Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to examine the causes of the divisions within Methodism which took place during the half century following the death of John Wesley, and to focus on the effects of these divisions on the Methodists in and around Bradford. They were reacting to situations which had taken place elsewhere and affected the whole country, and not only did events take different forms in adjacent towns in West Yorkshire, in practice every circuit and sometimes every chapel had a different story to tell of each division in which it became involved. An adequate amount of primary material has survived, and the availability of a considerable variety of secondary sources has enabled this study to be based on a thorough examination of events among the local Methodists during this period.

Clearly not all of the divisions were equally important overall, and within the Bradford area some movements found very little support while others such as the Primitive Methodists and the Wesleyan Reformers became major groups within local Methodism. Every movement, however, and particularly its people, have been found to be of great interest, each one adding something to an understanding of the early nineteenth-century Methodism of the Bradford area. Their influence on the social and political life of the town, and their relationships with the other mainstream churches, have also been considered.

There were obvious differences between the origins of the

Wesleyans, who remained the most numerous group both nationally and locally, and the events which led to the formation of all the other groups. The Primitive Methodists had roughly half as many members as the Wesleyans, and the denominations which subsequently amalgamated between 1907 and 1932 and became the United Methodists became the third and smallest organisation. Among the smaller Methodist denominations the New Connexion did not receive much support in Bradford, despite their early success in the Birstall and Cleckheaton circuits, before this group was almost eliminated in this part of West Yorkshire by the effects of the Barkerite controversy. The Protestant Methodists and Wesleyan Methodist Association had only a token presence in this area, as had the Bible Christians, while the Independent Methodists established numerous small outposts in West Yorkshire but never played a major role in the county. It has been interesting for the purpose of this study to find some evidence of the presence of virtually all the Methodist groups, although in practice several of these were represented by only one place of worship in the Bradford area.

It has been suggested earlier that a key question to be asked of each division would be 'Could this division have been avoided?' Within Methodism neither side in any of the disputes ever set out with the intention of creating a division, even allowing for the fact that in retrospect the loss of a fairly small number of so-called 'malcontents' in the early secessions caused no problems for the Wesleyan hierarchy. It is therefore conceivable that some at least of the divisions could have been

avoided had there been a sufficiently strong desire to do so before minor local difficulties developed into major national crises. In practice, secessions only took place when feelings ran high, and occurred because both parties felt so strongly, and expressed themselves so forcibly, that rifts were created which could not be healed at the time. Those on both sides of every dispute were not only convinced that they were right and everyone else was wrong, but also that they were on God's side, with the implication that God was on their side, and those involved therefore saw no scope for compromise.

It was this sense of obligation to maintain principles which led Kilham to challenge Conference, and in turn led the Conference to dismiss Kilham in 1796. The secessionists of 1827 and 1835 felt equally sincerely that they were right, as did the members of Conference on both occasions. Bourne and Clowes and O'Bryan would have been very willing to become positive influences within their local Wesleyan circuits, yet the ministers could not accept their independent styles of worship. The Fly Sheets could have been ignored, and the resentment within the Wesleyan membership could have been dissipated rather than being exacerbated by the expulsions of 1849, but all those involved were convinced of their duties and did what they thought right at the time. This, in fact, was what made each division a tragedy for Methodism.

Every one of the divisions within Methodism took place within the fifty years which followed the French Revolution, occurring at a time when all the established attitudes within

society were being challenged, and it was understandable that a longing for self-determination should appear within the spiritual and religious life of Methodist chapels.

It is, of course, possible to argue that had it been possible to absorb certain strong-willed leaders within the Wesleyan framework, none of the divisions would have taken place and Methodism could have retained the stability and continuity of a single broad church. Perhaps if more attention had been paid at the time to the idea of unity Methodism would not have experienced so many 'unhappy divisions', but that would be offering a late twentieth-century answer to a nineteenth-century predicament. On the other hand, there is little doubt that the effects of the divisions became gradually less important during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the unions of 1907 and 1932, in theory at least, returned Methodism to its original united status.

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