

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

Methodism and Society in Central Southern England

1740 - 1851

by

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS

HISTORY

Doctor of Philosophy

METHODISM AND SOCIETY IN CENTRAL SOUTHERN ENGLAND 1740 - 1851

by John Ashley Vickers

The area covered by this study of southern Methodism is determined by the extent of the original Salisbury Circuit and its later offshoots and therefore includes most of Hampshire and Dorset. The growth and distribution of Methodism up to 1851 is examined in relation to the Anglican parish system, the distribution of Old Dissent and the impact of the Evangelical Revival on both of these. The rise of non-Wesleyan branches of Methodism in the 19th century adds a further element to this pattern.

Tracing the proliferation of Methodism within these parameters brings into focus a number of issues in which historians have recently interested themselves; e.g. What is the relationship between the distribution of Methodism and the pattern of Anglican and Dissenting strength and weakness? In what types of parish or community was Methodism most successful, and what factors explain this local success or failure? How far was Wesleyanism affected by the rise of Primitive Methodism, the Bible Christian movement and the successive waves of Methodist reform? What was the relationship between the full-time itinerant ministry and local lay leadership? At what levels of society was Methodism's appeal most successful? The Religious Census of 1851 provides a mass of detailed evidence about the relative strength and distribution of the denominations at the end of the period under review and this is used in conjunction with other local sources to determine the state of southern Methodism at the end of its first century.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BC	Bible Christian
BL	British Library
CRO	County Record Office
CWJ	Charles Wesley, <u>Journal</u>
DNB	<u>Dictionary of National Biography</u>
EMP	<u>Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers</u>
JWJ	John Wesley, <u>Journal</u> (Standard Edition, ed. Curnock)
JWL	John Wesley, <u>Letters</u> (Standard Edition, ed. John Telford)
JWW	John Wesley, <u>Works</u> , 3rd Edition, ed. Thomas Jackson
MAC	Methodist Archives Centre, Manchester
MMS	Methodist Missionary Society
PM	Primitive Methodist
PP	Parliamentary Papers (British)
PRO	Public Record Office
PWHS	<u>Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society</u>
Stamp	ms 'History of Methodism in Hampshire' by J S Stamp
Taylor	ts 'Chronicles of Sherborne Methodism' by J P Taylor
TCHS	<u>Transactions</u> , of the Congregational Historical Society
UMFC	United Methodist Free Churches
VCH	Victoria County History
WM	Wesleyan Methodist
WMA	Wesleyan Methodist Association
WR	Wesleyan Reform

Note: Reference in the text is by author's name and date of publication. Further details are given in the Bibliography.

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1. THE BACKGROUND

1.1 The wider setting

Until comparatively recent years, virtually all Methodist history was written from either a connexional (i.e. national) or a local (and therefore, very often, parochial) viewpoint. Both clearly have their place - but also their limitations. The connexional perspective whether at the popular[1] or the academic[2] level has tended to focus on major personalities and the deliberations of the annual Conference, and to give too little attention to movements and events closer to the grassroots, with easy generalisation and an official perspective as the most obvious results. Local histories, of which Methodism has been remarkably prolific, even when based on a comprehensive range of sources and avoiding serious inaccuracy, have all too often remained blinkered by ignorance of the wider perspectives, and have thereby failed to perceive the full significance of local situations and events, much as though someone lacking a basic knowledge of architectural history were to attempt a guidebook to an ancient parish church.

Some recent studies have succeeded admirably in steering a middle course between these extremes and in combining the two perspectives. These include studies of some general aspect or period of Methodist history, using evidence from a particular locality (or localities),[3] and regional studies based on a geographical area falling somewhere between the national scene and the local church.[4] The two categories are not, of course, mutually exclusive but overlapping; and some of them deal with a much wider denominational spectrum than just the various forms of Methodism.[5]

One criticism that may be made of regional studies, particularly if they are focussed upon a single denomination (or group of denominations) such as Methodism, is that the county or other secular geographical unit is largely irrelevant and - from the denominational

1. E.g. R E Davies, 1963

2. E.g. Davies, George and Rupp, 1965-1983

3. E.g. Liverpool, Manchester and Rochdale (D A Gowland, 1979), East Anglia (Scotland, 1981) and Ireland (D Hempton, 1984)

4. E.g. B Greaves, 1968

5. E.g. D M Thompson, 1969 and J Obelkevich, 1976.

point of view - arbitrary. Partly for that reason, the present study is based, not on a single county or sub-county, but on a region defined by the history to be examined: that part of central southern England which was included in the original Salisbury Circuit of Wesley's own lifetime.(Figure 1:1) The resulting area cuts across county and other boundaries and is more difficult to define precisely (or consistently from one decade to another), but is arguably more significant for our understanding of how Methodism developed and interacted with other forms of organised Christianity in the locality.

It is interesting to note that this self-defining area coincides quite closely with the ancient kingdom of Wessex and with one of the eleven 'provinces' proposed by C B Fawcett in 1919, which he delineates as 'the natural region of which the Hampshire basin is the central area,' and describes as 'a well-marked natural region' despite the absence of any single obvious provincial capital and 'the most distinctive province of the south-eastern half of the English lowland.' [6]

The clearest boundary of Fawcett's 'Wessex Province' is its southern coastline, extending from western Dorset to Selsey Bill and including Portland and the Isle of Wight. North of this 'the limits of the province are so drawn as to include in it the whole of the Hampshire Basin and the lands which slope to it,' with the northern escarpment of the chalk downland as its northern limits. The area forms a broad triangle, with the high chalk plateau of Salisbury Plain as its apex, and almost the whole of Dorset and Hampshire to the south. Geologically, the main contrast is between the heathlands and forests of the coastal area with its poor soils (the most extensive being the New Forest), and the chalk downland and associated clay valleys to the north.[7] The only towns of any size were the coastal ports of Hampshire, with Poole and Weymouth further west trailing far behind; but the hinterland was well provided with small market towns, as well as the two cathedral cities of Salisbury and Winchester.

The eastern boundary of the region can be defined quite clearly in geological terms. The Wealden country north of Petersfield, with its steep escarpment facing east and north-east, drains northwards into the

6. C B Fawcett, 1960 pp 119, 126; cf H Pelling, 1967 pp 125-8.

7. This geological division is particularly clearly mirrored in the development of the coastal missions of Primitive Methodism almost in isolation from the circuits inland. See below, Sections 4.1.4, 4.1.8

Figure 1:1 Central Southern England



Thames Valley and south-east into the Channel. This is the area which earned the nickname of 'the Methodist wilderness.' Further north, between Kingsclere and Aldershot, lies an area of sandy heathland, belonging more to the London Basin than to the rest of Hampshire, and outside our present concern.

Ecclesiastically, the area was divided between three dioceses: Winchester, Salisbury and Bristol until 1836, when Dorset was transferred to Salisbury diocese. Since 1542 it had been a detached part of the Bristol diocese, which added to its isolation and fostered neglect.

Defined in terms of the extent of the Salisbury Wesleyan Circuit and its offshoots, the area differs only marginally from Fawcett's province, which suggests that geographical features were one factor at work in shaping the spread of Methodism locally. Wesleyan Methodism in almost the whole of Dorset and Hampshire can be traced, directly or indirectly, to its source, in the Salisbury society, the earliest to be established in central southern England, or to the Portsmouth society, which originated more or less independently, but was from an early date closely associated with Salisbury. In terms of the 1851 Registration Districts, the area may be defined as:

(a) the five southernmost Wiltshire Districts, plus Pewsey (261) which extends beyond the northern edge of Salisbury Plain[8]

(b) all of Dorset, except the two westernmost Districts of Beaminster (277) and Bridport (278)

(c) all of Hampshire, except four Districts in the north-east: Alton (114), Hartley Wintney (115), Basingstoke (116) and Kingsclere (119).

In addition, two Somerset Districts, Yeovil (319) and Wincanton (320) have a place in the present study as part of the Sherborne Wesleyan Circuit, but they are ignored in statistical tables.

The two Districts in south-west Dorset are excluded because that area was missioned from the west and its Methodist links are with Devonshire. Similarly, Methodism came into north-eastern Hampshire from

8. The society at Pewsey itself belonged to the Hungerford Circuit and its links were with Oxfordshire Methodism to the north. But most of the Registration District belongs in Methodist terms to the Andover/Salisbury area.

the London side, after an earlier unsuccessful attempt to mount a mission from Portsmouth. The south-western corner of Sussex is included in Fawcett's province, but appears here only fleetingly, because of its early links with Winchester Methodism. (The Chichester area later became one of the early Mission stations, which lies beyond our present concern.)

The Isle of Wight (99) has been excluded, apart from incidental references in the earlier part of the study, because, although it became quite a Methodist stronghold and deserves attention in its own right, its geographical isolation set it apart from the rest of the area.

When we reach the 19th century, the launching of the Primitive Methodist missions adds a new complication. Their lines of advance from bases in Wiltshire and Berkshire to the north cut right across the pattern of established Wesleyan circuits. On a much smaller scale, the Bible Christian work did the same from the south-west, so that in dealing with these new arrivals, the geographical boundaries have to be treated more flexibly. My main purpose has nevertheless remained to examine the spread of Methodism within the territory of the original South Wiltshire or Salisbury Wesleyan Circuit.

The century covered by this study was one of increasingly rapid change, an 'age of revolution.'^[9] which, even more than the Renaissance, may be seen as the watershed between the medieval and the modern worlds. Its starting point is set by the formation of Methodist societies in and around Salisbury in the 1740s. Its terminus ad quem is the Census of Religious Worship in 1851, though for certain purposes the perspective has been extended well into the second half of the 19th century.

It was indeed an age of both revolution and rapid development. The so-called 'Industrial Revolution' may be described in either way, but unquestionably brought far-reaching changes to English society. Though its full impact was not at first felt in the south, by 1851 it could no longer be ignored. The somewhat earlier 'Agricultural Revolution' had a more direct and immediate effect on life in the rural south.

Towards the middle of the period the climactic event of the French

9. A R Vidler, 1961; cf K S Latourette, 1959 and McLeod, 1981, Ch 1

Revolution sent its shock-waves through the western world. Its immediate effect in England was negative, and the reaction to it, reinforced by the Napoleonic Wars, put a brake on political and social reform well into the new century. The immediate post-war age was one of economic recession, increasing power and activity of central government, and a savagely repressive judicial system, among other birth-pangs of modern society. The Reform Act of 1832, strongly opposed by most of the Anglican bishops, brought only a limited extension of the franchise, but marked the beginning of a new political era. For better or worse, the future belonged to the people.

Simultaneously with these outward changes, an intellectual and cultural mutation was taking place: from traditional theological and ethical attitudes to a new scientific humanism. 18th Century Enlightenment and Deism gave way to varying degrees of agnosticism and scepticism; while, as a kind of counterpoint to this intellectual climate, a quickening of spiritual life manifested itself first in the Evangelical Revival and then in the renewal of ecclesiastical confidence we call the Oxford Movement.

Chasms were yawning on all sides, over which the liberal theology of F D Maurice and the Christian Socialist movement (both representative of minority groups out of step with the Church as a whole) threw bridges much too slender to have any short-term effect on the course of events.

Meanwhile, beyond the control of any authorities in Church or State, widespread changes were taking place in English society, varying from one part of the country to another. The population of England and Wales doubled between 1801 and 1851, but the average increase in the rural south was well below the national average. Even with above-average increases in some coastal towns (Portsmouth and Portsea (117%), Weymouth and Melcombe Regis (128%) and Southampton (347%)), the increase in the three counties of Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire was only 62.8%.[10] A few of the smaller and more remote villages even registered a decrease, though depopulation over the area as a whole was not as widespread as one might suppose from a reading of Cobbett.[11]

10. Hants, 82.8%; Dorset, 61.7%; Wilts, 38.6%

11. Cobbett, 1967, pp 67, 296, 311 etc. For variations in the size and population of parishes, see pp 30-6 below

Away from the coastal strip, agriculture dominated the economy of the whole region. The rich soil of Blackmore Vale in the north-west made dairy farming a prosperous business. Over in the south-east, in the vicinity of Southampton and Portsmouth were many market gardens. But throughout the central downland areas, sheep-farming predominated. Farms were large and belonged, for the most part, to great estates.

'Both Dorset and Wiltshire contained a high proportion of land owned by great landowners ... In these two counties, only about a quarter of the cultivable land was held in estates of less than a thousand acres. In Hampshire the proportion was larger - about a third; but this was less than the national average of 38.5%. The larger farms in Hampshire were mostly on the chalk downs in the area between Winchester and Basingstoke.'^[12]

The effect of the Industrial Revolution on southern village life was largely negative. Cobbett noted in 1830 the virtual disappearance of such cottage industries as the carding and spinning of wool for broad-cloth. The introduction of machinery had deprived the wives and daughters of the labourers of their employment and driven many families to depend on public relief.^[13] Except on the coast there was little alternative employment, and this kept the wages of the agricultural labourers at a notoriously low level. In the light of their living conditions and near starvation diet, the 'Swing Riots' and the abortive attempt at Tolpuddle to ameliorate their lot were virtually inevitable consequences. Pauperised by the enclosure of common lands, the effects of the Speenhamland system, and the economic depression of the post-Napoleonic years, they were, in Cobbett's words trapped in 'an accursed system that takes the food from those who raise it, and gives it to those that do nothing that is useful to man' - and, in some cases 'transports those who raise this food, because they want to eat enough of it to keep them alive.'^[14] The repeal of the Corn Laws and the awakening of social conscience brought some amelioration in the 1850s;^[15] but agricultural wages remained lower in Dorset and southern Wiltshire than elsewhere.^[16] But the labourers were not the only victims; as Cobbett himself saw clearly enough, their plight was a

12. H Pelling, 1967, pp 126-7

13. W Cobbett, 1967, pp 318-19. Cf J L and B Hammond, 1911, Ch V

14. W Cobbett, 1967, pp 305, 304. For the living conditions of the labouring classes, see F G Heath, 1874, S G Osborne, 1890, R Heath, 1893.

15. Noted by Charles Kingsley in his preface to the fourth edition of Yeast (1859)

16. P Horn, 1976, Ch 6

knock-on effect of the plight of the lesser gentry and the small farmers, who were being swallowed up by the great estates. The 'real yeomen' of an earlier age had thus become 'little better than the drivers of the labourers, for the profit of the landlords.'[17]

Such industry as was to be found in the region was on a small scale and localised. The main centres of the old woollen industry lay to the west. Cottage industries, still giving employment to the families of farmworkers, included pockets of glove- and button-making. There was silk-weaving around Sherborne and at Salisbury, lace-making at Salisbury, Blandford Forum and elsewhere. Stone was still quarried at Purbeck and Portland, but the demand for Purbeck marble had fallen off, and the Portland quarries were to suffer a recession in the 1850s. There were paper mills throughout the chalkland areas of the three counties, and the usual range of rural crafts from hurdle-making to brewing, and from basket-weaving to thatching.[18]

Although the pace of change was slower than in other parts of the country, by mid-century it was accelerating and few aspects of life were unaffected. Two which have a bearing on our main topic call for notice here: forms of transport and communication, and educational provision within the area.

From the middle of the 18th century, the proliferation of turnpike roads made travel considerably easier; but Dorset largely remained a staging post to elsewhere. The first Turnpike Act in the county was for the section of the Great Western Post Road between Shaftesbury and Sherborne (1752). The more southerly route to the West Country, through Blandford and Dorchester, followed four years later. But whole stretches of central Dorset were unaffected, and as late as 1840, the road from Wimborne to Puddletown was no more than 'a collection of narrow lanes winding from village to village.'[19]

Hampshire and Dorset were virtually unaffected by the development of canals which enjoyed so brief a day at the turn of the 18th century. Andover, Salisbury and Winchester were each linked with the sea at Southampton, but plans to extend this network to the Kennet and Avon

17. Cobbett, 1967, pp 270-1, 348, 459

18. J H Bettey, 1977, ch 3

19. C Taylor, 1970, pp 171-2

Canal or to link it with the London system came to nothing. So the chief links with the outside world remained the main roads from London to Portsmouth, Southampton and Exeter (via Andover and Salisbury), until the coming of the railways.[20]

Beginning in the 1830s, the railway network developed quickly. In the south, lines were opened from London to Southampton in 1840 (giving an important boost to the docks there), with branches to Gosport in 1841 and to Salisbury in 1845. The Southampton and Dorchester line opened in 1847, but did not reach Weymouth for another ten years, when the GWR also completed its line to Weymouth from Westbury and Yeovil. Portsmouth was linked east and west, but had to wait until 1858 for a more direct route to London. Meanwhile, the GWR's main line to the West Country (via Reading, Newbury and Taunton) lay well to the north of the area, and its rival, the London and South Western Railway's route via Salisbury, Sherborne and Yeovil, was not completed until 1860. Between these early lines lay wide stretches of countryside, especially in Dorset, still untouched by the new forms of transport, and isolated from the wider world.[21]

Educational opportunities varied considerably throughout the country and within the area now under examination, but were increasing rapidly during the first half of the 19th century.[22] The proportion of day school scholars to population nationally rose from 1 in 17.25 in 1818 to 1 in 8.36 in 1851, though there was a steep decline in the proportion of Sunday scholars during the same period. Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire were relatively well provided with schools: an average of one to 399. But the size, as well as the number, of schools has to be taken into account; and in the days before compulsory schooling, the level and regularity of attendance was another important factor.

In 1851, day school pupils represented 12% of the population of England and Wales. The average enrolment in the south was above this: 13.6% in Dorset, 13.7% in Wiltshire and 14.3% in Hampshire.

Education was an aspect of community life in which the Church had

20. C Hadfield, 1969, pp 160, 162; J H Bettey, 1974, pp 84-5

21. H P White, 1961, chs VI and VII; J H Bettey, 1974, pp 86-8

22. The figures here are from the 1851 Census Report on Education

always had a sizeable stake, and the numbers of denominational schools (including those provided by the National Society and the British and Foreign Schools Society) had been increasing rapidly throughout the first half of the 19th century. By 1851 28.3% of all day schools in England and Wales were provided by one or other of the Churches. In the south, the proportion was slightly higher: 29.6%. Scholars attending church schools represented 6.81% of the population in Dorset, 6.87% in Hampshire and 7.27% in Wiltshire. These were the highest county figures anywhere in England, the lowest being 3.51% in Cumberland.

The most notable feature was the high proportion of Anglican schools compared with those provided by the other denominations. In the three southern counties Anglican schools represented 26.5% of all day schools, with 7.2% of the population enrolled in them, compared with 19.1% and 5.2% nationally. Other denominations trailed well behind this. The Methodists, in particular, had been slow starters in the field of public education, despite their founder's example. The drive to increase the number of Wesleyan schools did not begin until the 1840s and it was too soon for its full effect to be felt. With only 419 schools throughout the country and a mere 15 in the southern counties, the combined Methodist contribution to education was dwarfed by that of the Anglicans, and this may be seen as both a cause and an effect of the relative weakness of southern Methodism. Nor was this compensated by the figures for Sunday Schools, which combined secular and religious instruction. Anglicans reported well over 50% of all Sunday scholars in the south, compared with a national percentage share of 41%. The Methodists trailed in third place behind the other dissenters, with only 15% of all Sunday School scholars, compared with 28.6% nationally.[23]

Even where schooling was available, many children of the poorest families either never attended or did so only irregularly or seasonally, when not required as breadwinners. This and the continuing isolation of village life helped to perpetuate ago-old customs,

23. The national percentage shares were: Anglican, 41.5; Methodist, 28.6; other Dissent, 29.9. Those for the three southern counties were: Anglican, 57.1; Methodist, 14.9; other Dissent, 26.7. In these calculations, Scottish Presbyterians and 'undefined Protestants' have been omitted; Calvinistic Methodists and the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion have been included under 'other Dissent.'

traditions and superstitions. As Thomas and Obelkevich[24] have shown, these, often pagan, elements were mingled with Christian beliefs and practices in the popular religion of day-to-day existence. Many of Thomas's examples derive from these southern counties, and for Dorset in particular we have the evidence of Hardy's novels to fill out the picture. It is difficult to quantify such influences at work at a level where attitudes and assumptions remained mostly unarticulated and left no written records. Only occasionally does it surface within Methodism, as in the case of the 'Conjuror's Lodge' at Chiswell, Portland, in the 1820s.[25]

* * *

The spread of Methodism through southern England took place in the context of the secular developments outlined above, but also in the context of an age-old parish system and of existing Dissent.

The Church of England had emerged from the upheaval of the Reformation weakened in several respects. The severing of any remaining ties with Rome had increased its subservience to the state: the hierarchy remained an arm of the government and the Puritans, though able to overthrow Laud, failed to achieve a lasting autonomy for the Church and were driven into opposition. The 18th century was an age of entrenched Erastianism, in which bishops were political appointees and to be a dissenter was to be politically suspect. (The Wesleyans were not the first to be accused of being crypto-Jacobites.) With Convocation prorogued between 1741 and 1855, it was left to the Government, urged on by a minority of reformers, to tackle the long-standing abuses and weaknesses of the Church's structure. The move towards reform, in ecclesiastical as well as political matters, reached a climax in the 1830s, when state 'interference' fuelled the protest that was to become known as the Oxford Movement.

In reaction against the fanaticism of the previous century, it was also the age of reasonableness, in religion as much as in other matters. In

24. K Thomas, 1971; J Obelkevich, 1976. Cf H McLeod, 1974, p 215: 'In the remoter parts of England ... pre-Christian customs survived in isolation from the state and its priests, and it is unlikely that many people attended any sort of church until the arrival of the Methodists.'

25. See below, p 189-90

particular, any manifestation of 'enthusiasm' was 'a very horrid thing', [26] and this attitude was as characteristic of dissenters as of Anglicans, though there were exceptions in both camps. (It was the age of William Law and Isaac Watts, as well as of Latitudinarianism and Deism.) Doctrinal controversy was commonplace and was at least evidence that religion was still thought to be worth arguing about; but theological and philosophical issues had as little impact on the ordinary parishioner or the man in the meeting-house pew then as now.

A measure of toleration had succeeded the failure to achieve a national church that would comprehend all parties. But even after 1689, the Protestant dissenters continued to labour under serious disadvantages and were banished to the political, social and cultural periphery, while the Catholic minority was even more disadvantaged. The dichotomy between church and chapel, so characteristic of English society throughout this period, was to involve Methodism in conflicting loyalties and a crisis of identity. The world into which it was born, and in which it had to struggle for 'a place in the sun', was already furnished with religious alternatives, as well as the increasing freedom to reject them all.

Initially, so long as Methodism could be seen as a spiritual renewal within the national church, it was the strengths and weaknesses of the parish system which provided both milieu and challenge, quite as much as the widespread indifference of a large proportion of the population. But as the Methodists became more conscious of their separate identity (only belatedly reflected by formal separation, whenever that is dated) and began to move, however tentatively or reluctantly, closer to the other dissenting churches, the local distribution and strength of both old and new Dissent probably became a more potent factor than the parish system in the growth of Methodism. The evangelical movement was never confined to the established church and the quickening spiritual tempo soon manifested itself at least as much outside the Establishment as inside it. Faced by the embarrassed unease or actual opposition of so many of his fellow clergy, Wesley's example and repeated protestations of loyalty had very little long-term chance of keeping his followers within the Church.

26. The phrase was Bishop Butler's, as reported by Wesley in his account of their well-known interview in 1739. (JWJ II 256-7 footnote)

Our survey of the Anglican and dissenting elements in the background of early Methodism will concentrate on those aspects which appear to have had a bearing on its development.

1.2 The Church of England

'The parochial system of the Church of England could hardly have been better designed to resist change.' (Owen Chadwick)

1.2.1 The clergy and their benefices

Economically, as well as politically, the Henrican Reformation had proved a catastrophe,[27] compounded by measures under Elizabeth I which amounted, in Strype's phrase to 'the plunder of the Church'. [28] The result was not only a lowering of the Church's status, but a weakening of its pastoral provision in the parishes; and it was this, as much as the political and theological issues, which fostered the rise of dissent at the local level. Similarly, the persistence of such abuses as pluralism and absenteeism into the 18th century and beyond, was part of the background of early Methodism.

By the later Middle Ages the view of ecclesiastical livings and their presentation as property which could be given or exchanged, and even bought or sold, was commonplace and the abuses to which it led were the frequent targets of reformers. The origin of this is readily explicable in terms of the role of the laity in founding and endowing churches to serve a particular community, often the residents and dependents of a manor. But the dissolution of the monasteries meant that the right of presentation to large numbers of vicarages - perhaps as many as one third of the livings in the country - passed out of monastic hands into the control of laymen, so that the Reformation 'legalized, clarified and exposed' the dominance of the laity which had long existed in the parishes.[29]

Detailed information for earlier centuries is difficult to come by, but by the 1830s, a more comprehensive picture of patronage in the southern counties can be reconstructed (Table 1:1). Around half of the livings were in the gift of private individuals or families, though in this

27. J.J. Scarisbrick, quoted by C Platt, 1981 p 165.

28. C. Hill, 1956, esp. chapter 2.

29. C Hill, 1956, p 54; A.D. Gilbert, 1976, pp 4-6.

Table 1:1 Types of Patronage

	Crown	Arch- bishops, Bishops	Deans, Chapters	Dignitaries etc.	Universities, Colleges etc.	Private	Municipal Corporations	Totals
England and Wales	952 8.9%	1,248 11.7%	787 7.3%	1,851 17.3%	721 6.7%	5,096 47.6%	53 0.5%	10,708
Salisbury	35 8.8%	39 9.8%	44 11.0%	67 16.8%	60 15.0%	154 38.6%	-	399
Winchester	30 7.0%	53 12.4%	15 3.5%	79 18.5%	53 12.4%	197 46.0%	-	427
York	103 11.2%	57 6.2%	61 6.7%	257 28.1%	33 3.6%	397 43.5%	5 0.5%	913

Source: P.P. 1835 XXII: Patronage of Benefices.

respect the number of private patrons in the Salisbury diocese was well below the national average. Salisbury had an above-average, and Winchester a below-average number of livings in the control of the cathedral clergy; while both dioceses had about double the national average of livings in the hands of corporate bodies such as the universities.

When the patron resided locally, the combination of squire and incumbent could be a powerful one. William Heathcote inherited the Hursley estate and a baronetcy from his uncle, and proceeded to install John Keble in the living, to expel dissenters from the farms and cottages on the estate, and to make substantial contributions to the rebuilding of the parish church.[30] In the 18th century it was not unknown for the younger son of the lord of the manor to enter the church and be presented to the family living.[31]

On the other hand, absentee patron often led to absentee parson, and it was a short step from the fact of lay presentation to its widespread abuse. The twin abuses of pluralism and absenteeism, already deep-rooted in the pre-Reformation church, persisted into the 18th century and beyond, despite the criticism of reformers and repeated attempts to legislate against them. They were buttressed by a variety of influential vested interests. Effective reform of ecclesiastical finances would have involved far-reaching changes in society as a whole. The problems were also the more intractable for involving the upper levels of the hierarchy quite as much as the parish clergy; the latter in fact, were, benefiting much less from it. As Norman Sykes has put it, 'Tradition assumed without comment or criticism that bishops must provide first for their relatives and chaplains, before weighing the claims of the inferior clergy of their dioceses, and even the strictest prelates conformed to this standard.'[32]

It is easy - but nevertheless instructive - to illustrate the operation of the system from the careers of a succession of latitudinarian bishops of Winchester. Benjamin Hoadley, bishop from 1734 to 1761, was

30. P.C. Hammond, 1977, pp 20-1. For other examples of the repair or rebuilding of parish churches by the patron or other local landowners, see below, pp 38-45

31. E.g., the Rev. Sir T.B. I'Anson at Corfe Castle (see below, p 93)

32. N. Sykes, 1934, p 213

a notorious example of the political churchman who owed advancement to the favour of those in power. In his case, his able and vigorous advocacy of 'revolution principles' (which delimited the duty of Christians to obey their rulers) in controversy with the High Church party early in the century brought him to the notice of the Whigs, so that after the succession of George I in 1714 he was rewarded with the bishopric of Bangor. He was allowed to retain both his livings, St. Lawrence Jury and Streatham, in commendam, and never visited his diocese, but remained in London as the advocate of extreme latitudinarianism. He was rewarded in succession with the sees of Hereford in 1721, Salisbury in 1723 and Winchester in 1734. By his fellow churchmen he was widely condemned both for his political stance and his virtual deism. As a writer he excelled as a controversialist rather than as a theologian. As a bishop he was notoriously neglectful, except in one respect, his assiduous nepotism. His son, the poet and dramatist John Hoadley, was appointed chancellor of the diocese of Winchester in 1735. Ordained deacon and priest shortly afterwards, he became chaplain to the Prince of Wales and later to the princess dowager. Meanwhile he accumulated a series of benefices, including a prebendal stall and the Mastership of the Hospital of St. Cross, within his father's diocese, almost all of which he was allowed to hold simultaneously and to retain until his death in 1776.[33]

Bishop Brownlow North later in the century owed his rapid preferment to his half-brother, Frederick, Lord North. He was appointed Dean of Canterbury in 1770, at the age of 29 and Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield the following year. He was then translated to Worcester in 1774 and to Winchester in 1781, which he retained until his death in 1820. He and his wife (a well known figure in the 'world of fashion') spent much of their time in Italy, and again he used his position to further the interests of his family. His younger son was made prebendary of Worcester, while a grandson (who abandoned the profligate life of his early years for the greater disgrace of becoming an

33. DNB, xxvii 16-22, cf. Sykes, 1934, pp 135-6. A revealing letter from Hoadley, dated December 4, 1744, in reply to a clergyman commending to him a candidate for ordination, reveals the minimal requirements of that period, but also contains at least a token show or seriousness: 'I persuade myself that, since he has turned his thoughts to our profession, he has been naturally led to such studies, & such books, as are peculiarly fitted to prepare him for so serious & important an undertaking & particularly that he has applied himself to the reading & understanding of the Greek Testament.' (ms at Drew University)

evangelist in the Free Church of Scotland) was appointed registrar of the diocese of Winchester at the age of seven. His forty years as bishop nevertheless saw the first glimmerings of a new age. He was remembered as 'a dignified and generous man' who was popular in his dioceses; during the first two decades of the new century some twenty new churches were consecrated by him in the Winchester diocese.[34]

North's successor, George Tomline, was a protege of William Pitt, who had appointed him as his secretary while at the Treasury in 1783. As both Bishop of Lincoln and Dean of St. Paul's from 1787, he is said to have exercised a strong influence on ecclesiastical patronage. The king himself vetoed his appointment to the Primacy in 1805, but in 1820 he was belatedly given the bishopric of Winchester. Though an uncompromising conservative, Tomline's career does provide one or two early indications, particularly in his writings, of the winds of change that were to blow much more fiercely later in the 19th century. In 1799 he published a work on the 'Elements of Christian Theology' which, though 'without pretensions to depth or originality' was, significantly, intended to counter the ignorance of candidates for ordination at a time long before the first theological college was established. Again, his Refutation of Calvinism (1811), written as part of a campaign against the resurgence of Calvinistic evangelism within the Church, is a reminder of some of the strong cross-currents that were troubling the ecclesiastical mill-pond of the time.[35] But it was his successor, Charles Richard Sumner, who, as bishop from 1827 to 1868, was to see, and often to initiate, many of the changes in the diocese which marked the dawn of a new era. Even Cobbett found cause to praise Sumner for his compassionate attitude to the destitute (J L and Barbara Hammond, 1948, Vol II pp 65-6). He was the first Bishop of Winchester since the Reformation not to be enthroned by proxy.

As one of the richer pickings available, Winchester provides more scandalous examples of ecclesiastical abuse than other dioceses. But parallels in Salisbury and Bristol are not difficult to find. Thomas Secker, Bishop of Bristol (1734-7) and of Oxford (1737-58) before becoming Primate, is a good example of the conflicting interests and attitudes with which we are dealing in this matter of pluralism. The

34. DNB, xli 146-7; cf. VCH, Hants ii 99-100

35. DNB, lvii 14-18

'diligence and attention to business' on which his biographer remarks are substantiated by the evidence of his career,[36] yet at the same time he was as much enmeshed in the system as any. After less than three years at Bristol, he was hesitant about the offer of the Oxford diocese, but was persuaded by Bishop Sherlock, who wanted Bristol for his brother-in-law. While at Oxford, he was also rector of St. James's and a prebend of Durham cathedral, but exchanged these in 1750 for the deanery of St. Paul's (to the regret, it is said, of his parishioners). When in London he regularly attended the daily services at St. Paul's, and took his turn in the preaching and other duties; while during the summer months, when he was in residence at Cuddesden, he preached and lectured every Sunday and 'set an example of devotion and diligence to all the clergy in his diocese'.[37] That such a man should find some degree of pluralism acceptable is significant, as well as more excusable than in most cases.

It would of course be easy to misjudge the Hanoverian Church and its hierarchy by ignoring the circumstances in which they found themselves and applying the standards of a later age. Historians of more recent times have been less than fair on both counts, leaving to Norman Sykes the task of redressing the balance. It was a corrupt system that was primarily at fault, not the individuals who found themselves in it; and the 18th century was not essentially different from preceding ones, except that the emergence of the two-party political system had reinforced an already long-established tradition of Erastianism.

Sykes is able to demonstrate that much of the criticism of the Hanoverian episcopate is one-sided and unfair, and to produce evidence of much energetic devotion to duty in the face of considerable odds: 'For the appreciation of its achievement regard must be had to the difficulties of its situation... In face of the many obstacles of unwieldy dioceses, limited means of travel, pressure of other avocations, and the infirmities of body incident to mortal flesh, the bishops of Hanoverian England and Wales strove with diligence and not without due measure of success to discharge the spiritual administration attached to their office.'[38] Even of Hoadley he is

36. For evidence of his pastoral diligence during his short tenure in the Bristol diocese, see below, p 22

37. B Porteous, 1797, pp 27, 37, 44-9

38. Sykes, op.cit., p 145

able to say that 'it is more important to understand the reason' for his notorious neglect of his diocese 'than to indulge in indiscriminate denunciation'.[39]

Nevertheless, wherever the blame might lie, the symptoms of a corrupt system remained in evidence: lengthy absences from the diocese, inadequate monitoring of candidates for ordination, infrequent and spasmodic administration of the rite of confirmation, and pastoral neglect at various levels. And, in addition, in some cases at least, there remains the evidence of nepotism. Christopher Hill has pointed out the political as well as the economic circumstances of the 16th century which go a long way to explain, if not to justify, such abuses of episcopal privilege. His verdict seems a fair one, applicable to the 18th as much as to earlier centuries: 'The lines between family affection and nepotism, between insurance and simony, were narrow: and we must not judge by twentieth-century standards. Nevertheless, even to contemporaries, some bishops seemed a little too anxious to profit by their opportunities.'[40]

The wide divergence between more valuable and prestigious dioceses such as Winchester and the more remote and less adequately endowed ones was nothing compared to the social and economic gulf between the bishops and the majority of the parish clergy, especially those who were merely curates in other men's livings. Throughout the 18th century, the social distinctions between the higher and lower clergy reflected those of English society as a whole. By the turn of the century, a new understanding of the parochial clergy's place in society was in evidence: 'It was considered that at the bottom of the social pyramid the poor and the uneducated should be served not by an equal but by a priest who had both the education of a gentleman and sufficient independence and adequate resources to do his duty as pastor and ruler of his parish.'[41] This distancing of the clergy from the rank and file of their parishioners coincided with other developments in society such as the widening gap between farmers and their labourers. Change was on the way, but the old order of things lingered on well into the new century.

39. Ibid, pp 135-6

40. Hill, 1956, p 18: Cf the strictures of the Hammonds, 1948, Vol II pp 20-2.

41. Kitson Clark, 1973, p 30

Given the nature of human ambition and greed, the impact of example from high places, and the pressures of inflation, it is hardly surprising that these abuses should percolate the lower ecclesiastical strata. University and cathedral staff were largely supported by parochial benefices, often held in plurality, and with little concern for the quality of pastoral care provided through the employment of a curate. Early in the 17th century the Salisbury prebendaries 'admitted to having at least two benefices each, and they confessed that 'we have been defective, but especially in preaching at those churches where we receive rents and profits'.[42] In the 18th century, the Southampton clergy provide examples at parish level. St. Mary's, Southampton, was held from 1743 until his death in 1776 by John Hoadley, son of the bishop, along with a number of others, including Alresford (1737) and Overton (1746). His successor, Dr. Newton Ogle, who was also a prebendary of Durham, became Dean of Winchester in 1769 without resigning from the living. He was followed by Francis North, another son of a bishop, who (like Hoadley) combined it with the Mastership of St. Cross.[43]

The parish of Holy Rood was served between 1751 and 1824 by three vicars in succession who were also rectors of Church Oakley, near Basingstoke, whereas Dr. William Wilson, who was instituted to the living in 1824, was content to be appointed a canon in 1832.

Cobbett inveighed against parsons who drew the incomes from their livings while allowing the parsonages to fall into decay in their absence, and instanced the Dampiers as one Hampshire family notorious for their pluralism. Of the Rev John Dampier, who held the livings of Wyllye near Salisbury and Meon Stoke in Hampshire, he complained: 'This fellow, I believe, never saw the parish of Wylly but once, though it must have yielded him a pretty good fleece,'[44]

Later generations have found it as difficult to be fair to the parish clergy as to the episcopacy of the 18th century Church, but to do justice to the former we must recognise that it was the age not only of the eccentric Laurence Sterne, but also of Parson Woodforde. While

42. Wiltshire Notes and Queries, i. 17, quoted by Hill, 1956, p 229

43. J S Davies, 1883, pp 349ff

44. Cobbett, 1967, p 327. The Wyllye living was worth £492 and that of Meon Stoke £568.

Sterne was absenting himself from his Yorkshire parish for long periods in London and on the continent, Woodforde and large numbers of country parsons like him were pursuing their undistinguished course in obscure and isolated rural parishes. Their pastoral ministry, by the limited assumptions and expectations of their day, was faithful and well intentioned, marked by benevolence and a down-to-earth piety. 'Country clergy of the type of Woodforde, though they might not conceive themselves as ordained to a priestly office for the offering of gifts and sacrifices for sins, strove to make themselves acceptable ministers of One who went about doing good.'^[45] However far short this might fall of the ideals of contemporary evangelicals or of 19th century Tractarians, the 18th century Church saw itself as a civilising influence, especially upon the lower orders who were always in danger of degenerating into barbarity.^[46] Its efforts to this end were often vitiated, but never entirely thwarted, by the shortcomings of the parish system.

The role of the clergy was always more than just spiritual and ecclesiastical, especially in the rural parishes. Kitson Clark has underlined the importance of their social and governmental roles, especially from the late 18th century on. In particular, as magistrates they were very much involved in administering the Poor Law and inevitably came to be identified by radicals with the oppressive regime of the early 19th century.^[47] According to one estimate, by the 1820s, 25% of all magistrates in England and Wales were members of the clergy. The percentage in Hampshire was only 19, but in Dorset it was 37%.^[48] This led to a long-standing rift between the clergy and their more radically inclined parishioners, and provided an opportunity for 19th century Dissent to identify with the working-class.^[49]

A wider view of the 18th century scene is provided by surviving

45. N Sykes, 1934, pp 270-2, where Woodforde is presented as 'representative of the country clergy of Georgian England'.

46. Cf. Addison (Spectator, 9 July 1711, quoted by Sykes, 1934, p 231): 'It is certain the country people would soon degenerate into a kind of savages and barbarians' but for their coming together Sunday by Sunday for public worship. Addison was not to know that within a century industrialisation would go a long way towards reversing the roles of town and country in this regard.

47. Kitson Clark, 1973, pp xiv, xvii, 30

48. Wade, 1832, p 669

49. Dunbabin, 1974, pp 97, 248

visitation returns, and by Bishop Secker's 'Diocese Book', covering the years 1734-1822. The latter consists of notes on individual parishes, including those of the Dorset deanery, which was part of the Bristol diocese until 1836. It showed a dedication and a vigour that perhaps owed something to Secker's nonconformist origins and upbringing. His biographer remarks on his 'diligence and attention to business': 'He immediately set about the Visitation of his Diocese, confirmed in a great number of places, preached in several churches, sometimes twice a day, and from the information received in his progress, laid the foundation of a parochial account of his Diocese, for the benefit of his successors.' [50]

In Dorset as a whole, pluralism and absenteeism were fairly widespread, and cases where the incumbent 'performs his own duty' were deemed worth noting. Wyke Regis furnishes an example of what was, if not commonplace, then at least acceptable in the 18th century Church. Abraham Davis, whom Secker had noted as 'tory' and 'contentious' in 1735, had at least resided in the parish. His successor in 1753 was permitted to continue living in Windsor 'on account of his wife's health and for the education his boys at Eton'. He paid £40 [51] a year to a curate, Samuel Payne, who continued to serve the parish when the next incumbent, John Cutting, was given permission in 1765 to remain in Bungay, where he was running a school.

The vicar of the adjoining parish of Radipole-cum-Melcomb Regis, John Preston, was resident, but described in 1735 as 'infirm' (he nevertheless continued to hold the living until his death in 1757) and was presented for neglecting his benefice. His income apart from Easter offerings and surplice fees, amounted to no more than £40 a year and even then depended largely on 'contributions'. The Corporation had formerly given him £10 a year, but for several years had withheld this, because (the bishop surmises) he had presumed to vote against their inclinations.

The Weymouth-Melcombe area was clearly untypical of Dorset as a whole, the only comparable dissenting stronghold being Poole, where the Corporation allowed the incumbent (who was also vicar of Hilton, near Milton Abbas) £80 a year and no neglect of the church fabric was

50. B Porteous, 1797, p 21

51. The living was a valuable one, worth £623 in 1840.

recorded.

The undesirable effects of pluralism and absenteeism had long been recognised, but attempts to deal with the situation had proved ineffectual.[52] The stipendiary curate was, for the most part, very poorly paid,[53] and enjoyed neither security of tenure nor prospects of advancement. There was therefore little to encourage him to seek ordination to the priesthood, and many remained indefinitely in the diaconate, even though they might be serving more than one adjoining curacy. The phenomenon of vagrant curates, some of whom had spurious orders, added a further dimension to the problem which faced any conscientious bishop.[54] But none of this was peculiar to the 18th century, and little could be achieved by an attempt to deal with the problem in isolation from other features of the system.

From quite early in the 19th century a mass of statistical and other information becomes available, especially after the establishment of the Ecclesiastical Commission in 1835. The level of continuing pluralism and non-residence can therefore be estimated rather more exactly. Table 1:2 shows the growing tendency for clergy to reside in, or within easy reach of, the parishes they served. In 1810 the proportion of resident clergy in the dioceses of Salisbury, Winchester and Bristol was close to the national average of 43%. By the middle of the century, this average had risen substantially. The improvement in the Winchester diocese, from 47% to 84%, is particularly marked. The general discrepancy between north and south early in the century (exemplified by the figures for the diocese of York) had been largely eroded by 1848, with Salisbury reporting as many resident clergy as York, and Winchester substantially more.

As the 1831 returns indicate, there were some non-residents who lived near enough to be able to fulfil their duties in the parish rather than employ a curate, though no attempt was made to estimate their numbers. A few years later the Ecclesiastical Commissioners proposed three

52. E.g., 21 Henry VIII cap. 13; 28 Henry VIII cap. 13, cited by Sykes 1934, p 215

53. A statute of Queen Anne (13 Anne cap. 11) fixed the stipends of curates between £20 and £50 p.a., and Sykes calculates that during the first half of the century the average was £30-40, rising to £70 later in the century. Lay impropiators were generally recognised as paying the most inadequate stipends. (Sykes, 1934, pp. 206-7)

54. Sykes, 1934, pp 221-4

Table 1:2 Non-residence of Clergy

	1810			1831			1848		
	Benefices	Residents	%	Benefices	Residents	%	Benefices	Residents	%
England and Wales	10,261	4,421	43	10,560	4,649	44	11,611	7,779	67
Salisbury	408	165	40	402	191	48	446	275	62
Winchester	403	190	47	394	202	51	516	436	84
Bristol	259	111	43	252	113	45	-	-	-
York	870	461	53	829	364	44	527	325	62

Notes:

1. P.P. 1812 (255) X 151: Abstract of the Number of Non-resident and Resident Incumbents.
P.P. 1833 XXVII: Clergy Residence: Diocesan Returns for 1831.
P.P. 1850 364: Incumbents and Curates: Abstracts of the Diocesan Returns made for the years 1838, 1848.
2. Dorset was part of the Bristol diocese until 1836 and was then re-incorporated in the Salisbury diocese.
3. In addition to non-residents, the 1831 returns give figures for 'Miscellaneous cases', defined as those who are absent from their cure without either license or exemption, but including some who perform their parish duties.

principles by which the holding of benefices in plurality should be regulated in future: the livings should be not more than ten miles apart; none should be worth more than £500 (with certain exceptions); and no one, except an archdeacon, should hold more than two benefices.[55]

Ten years after the passing of the Pluralities Act of 1838 a return of clergy holding more than one benefice showed that the first of these principles at least was operating in the south. Among the twenty cases of pluralism from Salisbury and the ten from Winchester the only reported exception was in the Salisbury Diocese, where one man was rector of both Winterbourne Thomson and Warmwell, Dorset, twelve miles apart. In this case the population of both parishes totalled only 227 and the two livings were both worth only £430 between them. The returns dealt only with appointments made since the Act, so that there were undoubtedly others surviving from before 1838; but the trend is unmistakable. The parish churches concerned were often no more than one or two miles apart; and the population of the parishes was small - only exceptionally into four figures, and then combined with a small adjacent parish (e.g. Bere Regis (1,700) with Bloxworth (236), and Whitchurch (1,673) with Laverstock (175)). The rector of Chelborough who was also perpetual curate of Halstock, whose twin parishes mustered only 722 souls, underlined the point by reporting the distance between his two cures as '1 mile 5 furlongs 10 perches'.[56] Indeed, some pairs of adjoining parishes were so small that the obvious solution was to unite them under one incumbent. Examples in 1851 are Winterbourne Abbas and Winterbourne Steepleton in Dorset, and Nether and Over Compton near the Dorset-Somerset border.[57]

An excuse commonly given by an absentee incumbent was that his parish had no parsonage. This was one of the first matters investigated by the Commissioners (Table 1:3). In 1818 nearly half of the parishes in England and Wales had either no parsonage or one that was deemed uninhabitable by the incumbent. This in part reflects a shift in what was expected by or acceptable to the clergy. In earlier centuries, the parish priest had been socially and culturally much closer to the

55. P.P. 1836 xxxvi 86

56. P.P. 1849 xlii, 3: A Return of all Clergymen holding two or more benefices ... appointed since the passing of the Pluralities Act.

57. 1851 Ecclesiastical Census, 262/3/10-11; 275/3/16-17; 276/3/10-11.

Table 1:3 Number of Parsonages, 1818-1835

	Fit for residence				Unfit for residence				None			
	1818		1835		1818		1835		1818		1835	
England and Wales	5,417	53%	5,947	56%	2,183	21%	1,728	16%	2,626	26%	2,878	27%
Salisbury	249	61%	286	72%	108	26%	67	17%	53	13%	46	12%
Winchester	250	68%	280	65%	48	13%	42	10%	72	19%	108	25%
York	409	49%	429	48%	173	21%	167	19%	249	30%	298	33%

Sources: P.P. 1818 XVIII; P.P. 1835 XXII.

peasant farmers to whom he ministered, and was therefore likely to be content with a much humbler glebe-house than the parsonages built from the late 18th century on. The Restoration left the parish clergy more than ever open to social influence, so that the 18th century 'was the age of the dependence of the parson on the squire, a dependence which was fundamentally an economic dependence, although it was also in part an economic alliance'.[58] It was common practice for a parson, even when not blatantly absent from his cure, to live in the nearby market town and ride out to perform his parish duties Sunday by Sunday.[59] The gulf between the country parson and the agricultural workers who made up most of his flock was thus widened, and was both cultural and economic. In this, two issues played a significant part: enclosure and the commutation of tithes. By and large, the medieval clergy had been outspoken opponents of enclosure, seeing it as a threat to the interests of the peasants, and this attitude persisted through the Reformation into the 17th century. But 'it is hardly too much to say that [the post-Restoration clergy] concentrated rather on securing for themselves as large as possible a share of the proceeds'.[60] In a very small proportion of cases, the parish priest saw to it that the enclosure act for his parish included clauses safeguarding the interests of the cottagers, but 'It is perhaps not unfair to suggest that while the Tudor Church, almost to a man, claimed what it regarded as justice for the poor, the most, as a rule, that could be offered by the Georgian Church was an occasional suggestion of "charity"'.[61]

Similarly, when times were hard, as they were in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, the parson's insistence on collecting his tithes was a frequent cause of friction between him and his parishioners, and Cobbett had some particularly harsh things to say about the motivation of the clergy in the 1820s.[62] Another was the growing proportion of

58. Hill, 1956, p 351

59. P C Hammond, 1977, p 45; cf J L and B Hammond, 1948, Vol II pp 17-19, where a contrast between the English and the French clergy is drawn.

60. W.E. Tate, 1967, pp 143-8, 151

61. Ibid, p 153

62. Cobbett, 1967, pp 47, 63, 421, 424. Cobbett's antagonism was, in turn, fuelled by his lengthy feud with 'the Botley Parson', a 'ruthless gatherer of tithes' (Ibid p 134). See also Barbara Kerr, 1968, Ch. VIII.

clergy who served as local magistrates, particularly in Dorset.[63]

By 1835 the provision of clergy residences had improved slightly, the proportion of parishes without a parsonage being down from 47% to 43% nationally (Table 1:3). But whereas the Salisbury diocese had made considerable progress in this respect, in the case of the Winchester diocese the percentage of parishes with a parsonage had decreased slightly since 1818. However, both Salisbury and Winchester were much better provided for them than some other dioceses, and again comparison with a northern diocese like York is instructive.

The value of livings varied widely from an exceptional case like the Fenland parish of Doddington, worth £8,000, down to those which provided barely a pittance,[64] and this was one factor influencing the efficiency of the parochial system. Other sources of clerical income were subsidiary to this. With a value of £240, Tolpuddle was by no means the most impoverished benefice in Dorset, but in 1851 the vicar, a nominee of Christchurch, Oxford, recorded that he found the parish 'so miserably poor' that he never asked for, or received, the Easter offerings that were his due. 'There is no endowment of any kind. The expenses are defrayed by a yearly donation of £5 by the Lord of the Manor, the rest by the Vicar.'[65]

In 1836 the value of livings in both Salisbury and Winchester dioceses was above the national average (Table 1:4). It is worth noting that all the dioceses where the livings were substantially below average were in the north, or in Wales; the only exception being Durham, where the average annual net value was given at £360.

Table 1:4 Value of Livings, 1836

	Aggregate Net value	Average	Curates: Average stipend
England and Wales	£2,993,174	£286	£81
Salisbury	£126,826	£322	£81
Winchester	£143,114	£344	£98
York	£214,722	£242	£75

Source: P.P. 1836 XL 25. There are marginal discrepancies between this and the figures given in the Commissioners' First Report, (P.P. 1835 XX) the reasons for which are given in a footnote.

63. See above, p 21

64. P C Hammond, 1977, pp 40-41

65. 1851 Ecclesiastical Census (175/2/7). The vicar was the Dr. Thomas Warren who had shown a somewhat equivocal attitude to the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs'. (J Marlow, 1971, pp. 37, 39, 180.)

The Commission's 1835 Report attempted an estimate of the number of livings in each diocese which called for augmentation. On the basis of population, and ignoring parishes with fewer than 300 inhabitants, they estimated that 19% of parishes in the Salisbury diocese and 24% in the Winchester diocese were deficient, compared with 46% in the diocese of York. (The national average was 28%.)[66] These figures reflect not only the value of livings, but the growth of population, which was much more rapid in the industrial Midlands and the North than in the South.

But so long as an incumbent was free to employ a substitute to fulfil his duties in the parish at a fraction of what the living was worth, anomalies and abuses inevitably remained. The incumbent of Leckford, near Stockbridge, clearly saw no reason to defend the situation when he reported that the living was 'a Prebend, the sinecure rector receiving £441 a year, and the resident Vicar £142'. This was, after all, still far beyond the 10/- [50p] a week on which most agricultural labourers were maintaining their families.

1.2.2 Churches and parishes

By tradition, the parishioners were responsible for the upkeep and repair of the nave. But the care of the parish church itself was materially affected by the patronage system as well as by the residence or absence of the clergy. References to the neglect of the church fabric are fairly common in Secker's Diocese Book, though some repairs and even rebuilding were undertaken during the century. Proper care was most in evidence where there was a wealthy and responsible patron to underwrite it, as in the case of Lord Digby at Sherborne. Any neglect might be attributable not so much to a negligent or absentee incumbent as to the reluctance or positive hostility of the parishioners. Thus at Wyke Regis, to which Weymouth was still attached in 1735, the parish church was 'in very bad repair, dangerous going into it, ... The nave, North aisle, Tower, vestry are ruinous, the timbers rotted, the lead blistered and worn out, the seats infested and rotted with droppings ...' Secker noted that 'they are now mending the S. Aisle, but being chiefly dissenters, do the work unwillingly.'

A very similar situation obtained in the adjoining parish of Radipole-cum-Melcombe Regis, which boasted two Presbyterian, one

66. P.P. 1835 xxii. Cf. the figures given by A.D. Gilbert, 1976, p 102

Baptist and one Quaker meeting-house. 'The whole Corporation and the majority of the town [are] Dissenters.' The church, built in Melcombe in the reign of James I to supplement the ancient parish church at Radipole, was by now 'decayed and weak and kept together by Iron cramps', though the church, churchyard and parsonage at Radipole were reported as 'in tolerable repair'. In this case responsibility for the neglect might be divided between incumbent and parishioners - though it is difficult to see what the former could do without either their support or that of a wealthy patron.

Among the factors highlighted by the Ecclesiastical Census in 1851 was the short-fall in the number of sittings available in churches and chapels in relation to the potential worshipping population. Earlier in the century this deficiency had already been made clear from other surveys, especially in the case of the growing number of larger communities. In 1812, for example, it was estimated that only 37.59% of the population of parishes with over 1,000 inhabitants could be accommodated in Anglican churches and chapels. The deficiency was less acute in the south than in the north, but not uniformly so. In the largely rural Salisbury diocese, the 83 larger parishes had room for 50.66% of the population, which was just over twice the figure for the diocese of York (25.22%). But Winchester, which included Portsmouth and Southampton, had considerably more larger parishes (120), and in these only 31.17% of the population could be accommodated.[67]

As an example which seems in most respects to be typical of the area we may take a comparatively large village like Amesbury. Including the hamlet of West Amesbury, its population of 721 increased by 63% to 1,122 in the first half of the century. Most of the parish belonged to the Antrobus family, of Amesbury Abbey. The living, worth only £141, was a perpetual curacy in the gift of the dean and chapter of Windsor, and the only non-Anglican congregation in the village was that of the Wesleyan chapel, opened in 1820. The incumbent, reporting the number of sittings in 1851 as only 212, noted that this did not include a number of 'large pews belonging to the Richer' and lamented 'the want of Church accommodation for the poor' and its 'most deplorable consequences' - in which he may well have included attendance at the Wesleyan chapel. But it may have been some consolation to him that,

67. P.P. 1812 X 155

while his own accommodation was so overstretched, the Wesleyans were able to fill only half to two-thirds of their seats, even though most of them were free.

The concentration of population and of accommodation deficiency in certain areas is confirmed by the more detailed survey of parishes with a population of over 2,000 in 1818 (Table 1:5). Some of the official figures seem to be highly suspect (see notes to table), but certain general factors emerge quite clearly. Dorset had only three towns of this size, as did the southern part of Wiltshire. The figures for Wyke Regis include the parochial chapelry of Weymouth. This is an early example of the child outstripping its parent and of that shift of population so characteristic of the 19th century generally, with all its attendant problems, not least for the parochial system. Weymouth was a mere 52 acres, compared with the 2,062 acres of Wyke, yet it was in the borough, not the wider parish, that the majority of people lived, although Wyke was to be increasingly affected by the growth of Weymouth as the century progressed.

The twelve or thirteen[68] places in Hampshire (excluding the north-east and the Isle of Wight) include the only relatively large conurbations of Portsmouth and Portsea, Gosport and Southampton. It was in Portsea, the rapidly growing suburb north of old Portsmouth and adjoining the dockyard, that by far the greatest shortage of accommodation was located - the only area, in fact, at all comparable to the situation in London and the new industrial towns of the Midlands and the North. But the deficiency in terms of available sittings as a percentage of the population was high in a number of much smaller places. The short-fall in the Salisbury and Winchester parishes did not, of course, take account of the existence of the adjacent cathedrals. And there is at least a possibility that some returns may

68. The exact figure depends on whether Gosport is counted separately or with Alverstoke. It was still part of Alverstoke parish, but is listed separately in the returns. There is some discrepancy between the population figures in the returns and those in the Census. The latter were 12,212 in 1811 and 10,972 in 1821 (the decrease being mainly due, no doubt, to the ending of the Napoleonic War). The 12,000 given in 1818 as the population of Gosport presumably duplicates the 12,219 given for Alverstoke. The number of sittings given must also be treated with some caution. In the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census, Holy Trinity, Gosport was given as seating 2,279, but St. Mary's, Alverstoke only 600 (and described in the Gosport return as 'comparatively small and nearly two miles distant from the Town'). However, even if we take the combined population of the parish as being only 12,219 and the number of available sittings as 5,000 (2,300 at Alverstoke and 3,000 at Gosport), this would still leave the parish among those in which less than 50% of the population could be accommodated.

Table 1:5 Parishes of over 2,000 with accommodation
for under 50%, 1818

	Population	Sittings[3]	% of Population
(a) <u>Winchester Diocese</u>			
Alverstoke[4]	12,219	2,300	19
Boldre[5]	5,665	2,720	48
Chilworth[6]	5,000	200 (no return)	0.4
Christchurch[7]	3,480	1,300 (1,070)	37
Eling[8]	3,282	700	21
Gosport[4]	12,000	3,500	29
Minsted[9]	2,017	680 (500+500)	34
Portsmouth	8,000	2,800	35
Portsmouth Dock- yard and Portsea	33,464	4,000	12
Ringwood[10]	3,500	1,400 (1,506)	40
Romsey	5,000	1,000 (1,831)	20
Southampton St. Mary	2,541	777 (2,500)	31
Winchester St. Maurice[11]	2,110	360	17
(b) <u>Salisbury Diocese</u>			
Downton	2,600	1,200 (900)	46
Salisbury St. Edmund	3,252	980 (1,250)	30
Salisbury St. Thomas	2,217	1,000 (no return)	45

Table 1:5 continued

	Population	Sittings[3]	% of Population
(c) <u>Bristol Diocese: Dorset Archdeaconry</u>			
Blandford Forum	2,425	800 (1,318)	33
Melcombe Regis	2,985	1,100 (1,833)	37
Wyke Regis[12]	3,000	1,000	33

Notes:

1. Source: P.P. 1818 XVIII No. 1. Population and Capacity of Churches and Chapels in all benefices or parishes wherein the population amounts to or exceeds 2,000 and the churches and chapels will not contain one half.
2. Only those places within the area of this study are included above.
3. Sittings: Figures in brackets are the sittings reported in the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census.
4. There appears to be duplication here. See footnote on p 33
5. Including Lymington and Brockenhurst.
6. See footnote on p 38
7. Including Holdenhurst.
8. Including Ower.
9. Lyndhurst included in the population figures, but not in the sittings.
10. Including Harbridge.
11. Including St. Mary Calendar.
12. Including Weymouth.
13. For the provision of new churches in the parishes listed above, see Table 1:8.

have under-estimated seating capacity in order to strengthen the case for enlargement or an additional church, e.g. Blandford Forum and Melcombe Regis. Romsey, with its 80% deficiency, is listed as having accommodation for only 1,000 worshippers, compared with 1,831 seats in the Abbey as reported in the 1851 Census.[69] At Christchurch, on the other hand, the seating in the priory was reported as more commodious in 1818 than in 1851: 1,300 seats as against 1,070. Both Romsey and Christchurch were extensive parishes (7,662 acres and 24,640[70] acres respectively). Only two fifths of the population of Romsey lived in the town, and at Christchurch fewer than half were in the borough itself. The Christchurch return in 1851 notes that 'the congregation consists principally of persons living in the town'. The widely scattered population helped to mask the extent to which the great churches of these two towns were no longer adequate, should all the parishioners take it into their heads to worship at the same time.

There were other parishes even more extensive, with the population scattered in a number of settlements. The figures for Boldre include the adjacent parishes of Lymington and Brockenhurst, where the shortage of accommodation was much less acute.

Table 1:6 New Forest parishes

	Acreage	Population 1811	Accommodation 1851*	Sittings as % of population
Boldre	11,950	1,914	c.400	21%
Lymington	2,377	2,641	c.2,000	76%
Brockenhurst	2,980	641	392 (enlarged 1832)	61%

*i.e. number of sittings reported in 1851, but excluding those in district chapels built since 1818.

Boldre alone was by far the largest of these three parishes, and its parish church could hold less than 5% of its widely scattered population. Similarly Eling, another parish on the borders of the New Forest, extended to 18,459 acres, excluding a further 7,920 acres of New Forest which were extra-parochial. Downton, just over the Wiltshire border, included the outlying hamlets of Redlynch, Woodfalls and Hamptworth and the perpetual curacy of Nunton-with-Bodenham. But the first improvement in parochial provision was in 1837, when a

69. It should be noted, however, that this figure included an unspecified number of 'school seats' and the incumbent added a note to the effect that 'many of the seats are useless; it being impossible to hear in them'.

70. Excluding 345 acres of water.

district chapel was built at Redlynch; and by then the Baptists, the Wesleyans and the Primitive Methodists had all gained a foothold in that part of the parish.

Missing from the 1818 survey are a number of extensive parishes with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants; but these too presented administrative and pastoral problems, if the population was widely dispersed. It was such parishes as these, as well as the urban suburbs, that saw the building of additional churches and the creation of 'administrative districts' quite early in the 19th century. Corfe Castle was a parish of 8,000 acres, with a population in 1801 of 1,344, many of them living in outlying settlements such as the hamlet of Kingston and the isolated farmsteads scattered around the heathland in the north-east. To serve them, a chapel of ease was built in the 1830s at Kingston and the parish schoolroom was used for worship at Bushey. (See Table 1:8 below)

John Keble's parish of Hursley extended to 10,493 acres and included a number of outlying communities. The administrative district of Ampfield was carved out of parts of Hursley and Braishfield parishes and a chapel was built there in 1841. At nearby Otterbourne, whose living was annexed to the Hursley vicarage, a new parish church was built in 1839.

Owslebury in the parish of Twyford became a district chapelry with its own endowment in 1832, and twelve years later the Consolidated District of Colden Common was formed out of Twyford and Owslebury parishes, and was provided with its own church, though the population was only around 600.

Canford Magna (16,000 acres) included the tithings of Parkstone and Longfleet, into which the population of Poole was beginning to spread,[71] and chapels were consecrated in both these places in 1833. By comparison, East Stoke was relatively small (3,273 acres), but was described by the rector in 1851 as being 'very extensive, including a great deal of uncultivated land'. Consequently, 'the population [was] much scattered. Some portions are separated from the main body of the parish by intervening parishes. The inhabitants of these portions are for the most part precluded from attending their own parish church.'

71. As a result, Canford grew from 1,894 to 4,065 inhabitants between 1801 and 1851, an increase of 115%, well above the average for the area.

Here was a different problem, which the rebuilding of the parish church in 1829 did little to solve. The population of East Stoke was small as well as widely scattered - only 630 in 1851 - and it was therefore unlikely that any additional chapel would be feasible, though a dissenting 'house group', or even a nonconformist chapel, might come into existence in such circumstances. Even a comparatively small parish like Weyhill (1,888 acres), included hamlets as much as two or three miles from the parish church. Only those who were both able-bodied and exceptionally devout were likely to travel that far with any regularity. The problem was aggravated if, as at Froxfield, the parish church happened to be in one corner of the parish, so that many found it easier to get to Privett or Hawkley.[72]

Size of parish, especially when related to population and its distribution, was one of the factors likely to have a bearing on the prospects for dissent. In 1812, the average size of parish in England was 5.14 sq.m. In the West Riding it was over 13 sq.m., whereas in the south the parishes were below the national average: 4.98 sq.m. in Hampshire, 4.35 sq.m. in Wiltshire and only 4.18 sq.m. in Dorset.[73] The average population of parishes in England and Wales at this period was 954. In the rural south it was well below this figure: e.g. in the Salisbury diocese parishes averaged 715, compared with 1,236 in the diocese of York. The average for the Winchester diocese (1,295) is inflated by the concentration of population in a minority of urban parishes, notably in Portsmouth and Southampton. Without these, the figures would be comparable to those for Salisbury.[74]

This shortage of church accommodation, especially in the newer and rapidly growing urban areas, was a problem that was recognised quite early in the 19th century. Indeed, church leaders were so preoccupied with it that they were slow to realise other hindrances to the effective mission of the church, such as the need for more, and better equipped, clergy and the growing indifference, if not hostility, of

72. Noted by the incumbents in the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census (273/3/8; 118/3/2; 112/2/4). Cf. Hampreston (271/2/6), where the rector noted that one reason for low attendances was that many 'avail themselves of the churches in the neighbouring parishes - they being nearer to their homes'.

73. P.P. 1812 XI: Population Abstract, pp xxviii-xxix. According to A.D. Gilbert, 1976, pp 100-101, the smallest parishes were in the Eastern counties and the largest in the North and North-west.

74. P.P. 1818 xviii: Abstract No. 1

large sections of the population. In the first moves, made as early as 1810, High Church laymen, notably William Stevens and Joshua Watson, were as much involved as the Evangelicals. In 1817 steps were taken to found 'a society for promoting public worship by obtaining additional church-room for the middle and lower classes', though those concerned were anxious not to jeopardise any official moves and the first Church Building Act, passed in 1818, was warmly welcomed and supported. From then until 1856, a major part in the attempt to provide more churches was played by the Church Building Commission.[75]

The first investigations revealed major deficiencies in four areas: the industrial north, London, certain ports and fashionable watering-places (the largest parish in Bath could accommodate less than a quarter of its 20,000 residents). Among the difficulties that hindered attempts both to build new churches and to create more manageable parishes, were the vested interests created by pew rents and the patronage system, as well as the problem of raising adequate funds. There were many legal complications; as Christopher Wordsworth (the brother of the poet) wrote, 'While dissenters are at liberty, and our Church, by its connection with the state, completely tied up and handcuffed by the very increase of population, things must grow worse.'[76]

The Act of 1818 made available £1 million from public funds and provided for a body of commissioners to administer it. In 1824 a further half-million pounds was voted, but in the years that followed increasing financial stringency shifted the emphasis from full to partial grants, with the remaining cost being raised locally or from the voluntary societies. By 1856, when the government wound up its scheme, a total of 612 churches had been built with official aid. The over-all cost was over £3 million, just over half of it from public funds. These new churches provided accommodation for nearly 600,000 extra worshippers.[77]

Attention was focussed initially on parishes of over 4,000 with accommodation for fewer than a quarter of the population. Of these there were none in Dorset or South Wiltshire, and only three in

75. M.H. Port, 1961

76. Quoted by Port, 1961, p 12

77. Port, 1961, p 125 note 3, correcting Kenneth Clark's figures in The Gothic Revival (2nd edn., 1949), p 128

Hampshire: Portsea (including the dockyard), Alverstoke/Gosport and Romsey.[78] By 1821, the population of Christchurch had topped 4,000 and it was listed along with Portsea, among the places 'in which the Board have deemed it expedient that additional Churches or Chapels should be built'.[79] But Portsea was the only parish in this area listed among the twenty-five whose population exceeded the available accommodation by 20,000 or more.[80]

With the help of the Commission's grants, eleven churches were built in Hampshire but none in Dorset or Wiltshire. A total of £39,586 was granted towards the £58,493 expended.

Table 1:7 'Commission on Churches' in Hampshire

		Cost	Grant
1820-22	St. Paul's, Southsea	£17,451	£16,869
1822	Bransgore, Christchurch	£2,649	the whole
1825-7	All Saint's, Portsea	£13,682	£13,023
1829-30	St. John's, Forton	£4,214	£3,731
1838	St. Mary's, Portsmouth	£3,051	£1,003
1839-40	Holy Trinity, Portsea	£3,093	£1,086
1840-41	St. James's, Milton	£849	£150
1843-4	St. Peter's, Southampton	£3,472	£350
1853	St. Luke's, Newtown, Southampton	£3,200	£250
1853	Holy Trinity, Winchester	£4,780	£300
1855-6	Christchurch, Northam	£2,052	£175

The 1851 census returns confirm and fill out this picture (Tables 1:3 and 1:9), reminding us that a variety of other agents, public and private, were at work during this half-century. There was the Church Building Society, whose efforts supplemented those of the Commission and supported the building of several churches in the area.[81] Public subscriptions and the generosity of private benefactors[82] provided others. There were even parishes where the church was rebuilt, or an additional church provided, by the incumbent himself, though in these cases his financial resources, and perhaps his devotion to duty, can scarcely be taken as typical. Notable examples were Samuel Wilberforce during his ministry in Gosport[83] and Henry Deane, vicar of Gillingham

 78. Chilworth is also listed, but apparently in error. Its population was only around 150 in 1818 and static, whereas Millbrook to the south was developing as a suburb of Southampton, though its population increased between 1811 and 1821 only from 1,798 to 2,214.

79. P.P. 1821 X 29: Schedule E

80. Port, 1961, p 33

81. E.g. at Milton (Portsea), Gosport, Hamworthy and Fordington.

82. E.g. at Anglesey (Alverstoke), Bransgore (Christchurch), Hursley, Beauworth, Brown Candover, Durweston, Longfleet, Kingston and Grange (Purbeck) and Tincteton.

83. Newsome, 1966, pp 281-2

Table 1:8 New Churches, 1801-1851

				Seating	Largest congreg- ation
<u>Hampshire</u>					
95/1/4	1838	St. John Baptist, Red Hill, Havant	By private subscription	320	195
96/1/1	1827	All Saints DC [Portsea]	Church Commission	1,739	1,500
	1841	St. James DC Milton	Incorporated Society	300	150
96/2/1	1841	Holy Trinity DC [Portsea]		1,200	1,000
96/3/1	1841	St. Mary's, Portsmouth		1,200	518
96/4/1	1822	St. Paul's ChE, Southsea		1,600	922
97/1/1	1831	St. John the Evangelist, Forton		1,160	1,100
	1844	St. Mark, Anglesey, Add. Chapel	Chiefly by private individual	413	340
	1845	St. Thomas, Elson DC		500	265
97/1/2	1846	St. Matthew, Gosport, Add. Church	Rev. S. Wilberforce/ public subscription/ Church Building Soc.	630	506
98/1/1	1835	Holy Trinity, DC Fareham		1,040	750
98/2/3	1836	Sarisbury, Titch- field DC		440	400
100/1/2	1839	St. Paul's DC, East Boldre		200	128
	1839	St. Luke's DC, Sway		300	179
	1842	Wootton Chapel (formerly dissenting chapel)		120	80
100/2/1	1839	St. Mark, Pennington DC ('much needs enlarging')		280	266
101/1/1	1822	Bransgore, ChE, Christchurch	'Private patronage'	450	300
	1839	Burton, ChE, Christchurch		200	148
101/1/2	1843	St. Mark's High- cliffe, DC		200	175
	1844	St. Peter's Bournemouth		270	270+24
102/1/2	1839	Burley		240	90

Table 1:8 continued

				Seating	Largest congreg- ation
104/3/1	1834	St. Mary, North Eling		535	380
	1844	Marchwood, ChE		[376]	
105/1/1	1828	Holy Trinity, DC		1,233	556
	1850	Newtown Prop- rietary Chapel (formerly WM)	Bought by curate, Frederick Russell	300	300
105/1/2	1846	St. Peter's, All Saints, Southampton		585	540
		St. Paul's Chapel, licensed as ChE		600	386
106/1/2	1850	Schoolroom. Sholing, Hound		60	-
106/2/4		Episcopal Chapel, Bitterne (leased; originally B)		149	110+78
106/2/5	1838	St. James, West End		611	338
106/3/3	1836	St. James, Shirley		1,080	800
109/4/3	1843	Colden Common, con- solidated district		317	120
109/5/2	1841	St. Mark's, Ampfield District parish		310	180
110/1/3	1835	Curdridge		340	125
110/3/1	1829	St. John's Chapel, Shedfield	By public subscription	327	253
	1845	St. Barnabas, Swanmore	By private bene- faction and grants	300	230
110/3/2	1850	Trinity, Newtown, Soberton DC		270	150
110/3/3	1847	Barn Green, licensed room		200	180
111/1/2	1831	St. George's Chapel, Waterloo	By private subscriptions	530	350
113/1/6	1841	Beauworth	By private benefaction	106	100
<u>Dorset</u>					
271/1/11	1829	Verwood, ChE		362	193
	1841	Boveridge ChE		120	74
	1849	St. James, Alder- holt, DC	[by Marquis of Salisbury]	223	116
272/2/1	1833	Longfleet, ChE > DC	By Mr. Ponsonby (Lord de Munby) and parish subscription	600	289
272/2/2	1833	St. Peter's, Parkstone		-	465

Table 1:8 continued

				Seating	Largest congregation
272/2/3	1833	St. Paul's, Poole	By private benefaction	589	-
272/3/1	1826	Hamworthy Chapel	Subscription + Ch. Building Soc. grant	-	60
273/2/1	1833	Kingston, ChE	Earl of Eldon	230	145
	1836	Bushey Schoolroom		144	82
273/3/1	??	Grange Chapel, Steeple, ChE	John Bond Esq.	127	123
273/4/8	c1840	St. Mary, Winfrith Newburgh		130	87
274/2/4	1836	Holy Trinity, Weymouth	Rev. George Chamberlaine, then rector of Melcombe cum Weymouth. c. £10,000	800	659
274/3/1	1840	St. John Baptist, Portland	Subscriptions and contributions (£2,615/14/2)	600	281
275/1/6	1846	Christ Church, Fordington, DC	Private subscription, grants from Ch. Building Socs. London and Salisbury	404	260
275/3/9	??	Toller Fratrum	F.J. Browne	60	20
275/3/12	??	Compton Valence	Robert Williams Esq. [of Bridehead] who also restored Little Bredy	36	40+20
275/4/16	1848	St. John Baptist, Plush, Buckland Newton, ChE	Principal landed proprietors + lay Rector, vicar and others	204	69

South Wiltshire

263/2/1	1837	Redlynch, DC		400	263
267/1/14	1846	Zeals 'additional church'		296	80-90
267/1/17	1813 enlarged 1837	St. George's, Bourton, ChE/DC		400	158

Table 1:8 continued

SUMMARY

	Churches	Seating	Largest Congregation
Hants	40	20,655	14,482
Dorset	17	4,629	2,983
S. Wilts	3	1,096	511
	<hr/>		
Totals:	60	26,380	17,976
	<hr/>		

Source: 1851 Ecclesiastical Census

Abbreviations:

DC District Church
ChE Chapel of Ease

Table 1:9 Churches rebuilt/enlarged, 1801-1851

			Seating	Largest congregation
<u>Hampshire</u>				
96/4/1	1844	St. Mary, Portsmouth	1,341	406
98/1/4	1850	St. Mary Magdalene, Widley	214	158
100/1/3	1832	Brockenhurst (enlarged)	392	360
100/2/2	1831	St Luke, Hordle	1,400	170
101/1/2	1834	Holdenhurst	460	198
102/1/1	1842	St. Paul, Chapel of Ease, Ringwood	270	157
105/1/3	1842	St. Lawrence and St. John, Southampton	511	150
106/2/1	1836	Botley	504	350
108/1/2	1833	West Tytherley	300	156
109/1/4	1806	Micheldever	460	260
109/3/2	1847	St. Thomas and St. Clement, Winchester	by parishioners and friends 960	760
109/3/6	1841	St. Maurice, Winchester	by public sub- scription and £600 government loan 1,113	900
109/5/1	1839	Otterbourne	415	110
109/5/2	1848	Hursley	by private benefaction 510	303
110/2/5	1847	West Meon	500	365
113/2/2	1831	Itchen Stoke	180	66
113/2/8	1830	Northington Chapel (replac- ing Swarraton)	by Lord Ashburton 224	95
113/2/9	1845	Brown Candover (replacing old church and Chilton Candover)	by Lord Ashburton 320	141
118/3/5	1849	St. Mary, Andover	by Rev. Dr. Goddard 1,080	779
<u>Dorset</u>				
268/1/1	1847	St. Mary, Motcombe	-	300
268/1/2	1842	Holy Trinity, Shaftesbury	864	750
268/1/6	1840	Cann	425	250
268/3/2	1841	East Stour	400	168
268/3/3	1840	West Stour	160	61
269/2/1	c1830s	Sturminster Newton	Rev. T.H.L. Fox 738	650+105
270/2/7	1840s	St. Nicholas, Durweston	Lord Portman 210	180+40
273/1/3	1828	Langton Matravers	Subscription and Church Building Society Grant 500	252
273/3/8	1828-9	East Stoke	400	-

Table 1:9 continued

				Seating	Largest congregation
273/3/12	1842	St. Mary, Wareham	by private subscription	800	580
274/2/2	1824	Fleet	Rev. Mr. Gould, vicar	140	100
275/1/3	1845	All Saints, Dorchester		550	389
275/2/6	1850	Tinkleton	Chiefly the two principal landed proprietors	220	130
275/3/2	1850	Bradford Peverell	H.N. Middleton Esq., rate and subscriptions	224	122

South Wiltshire

262/3/3	1851	Allington		50	33
263/1/1	1850	Winterslow		-	-
265/1/3	1845	Wilton	Earl of Pembroke	-	-
266/1/5	1839	Chapel of St. John the Apostle, Charlton		420	220
267/1/5	1847	Kingston Deverill		230	169

SUMMARY

Hants	19	12,054	5,884
Dorset	14	4,731	4,077
S. Wilts	5	700	222
Total		38	17,485 10,183

Source: Ecclesiastical Census, 1851. The figures for Sturminster Newton and Durweston are the only ones where the highest attendance exceeds the reported accommodation. In each case, a number of children are recorded and these are shown separately in the table above. Otherwise, the congregational numbers include children.

for half a century from 1832, whose record included six churches restored or rebuilt, two augmented curacies.[84] Others are to be found at Andover, Fleet (near Weymouth), Weymouth, Buckland Newton and Sturminster Newton. At the latter, the Rev. Thomas Henry Lane Fox had spent £20,000 on rebuilding the parish church and a similar sum on providing church schools. All this, he claimed, had so impoverished him that he had been obliged to mortgage the living for £2,000 to pay off remaining debts and he therefore felt justified in using the census return to read the Secretary of State a patriotic homily: 'Believing the Church and State to be One, Mr. Lane Fox is able to say at this most interesting period of our Church History that he has sacrificed his whole future in the service of the Crown and his Country.'[85]

Not every new church proved to be well situated to meet local needs, especially where the population was growing. A chapel of ease was built in 1833 at Longfleet in the parish of Canford Magna, largely at the expense of Lord de Munnby. It was intended to serve the inhabitants of Longfleet, Parkstone and part of Poole; but on Census Sunday it was less than half full, and the incumbent noted its 'inconvenient situation' as the reason for fluctuating congregations in bad weather.

Tables 1:8 and 1:9 give details of the additional 60 churches and the 38 enlarged or rebuilt in the area between 1801 and 1851. Of these, the great majority of additional churches (40) were again in Hampshire, whereas Dorset seem to have been more active in rebuilding neglected ones. Twelve of the additional churches are designated chapels of ease;[86] in nineteen other cases, (fourteen of them in Hampshire) district chapelries had been established, giving a measure of autonomy from the original parish.[87] Three of the new churches in Hampshire were buildings taken over from the nonconformists.[88]

A determined and sustained effort had thus been made in the first half

84. Kerr, 1968, pp 183-8

85. Ecclesiastical Census, 269/2/1.

86. Including two in Hampshire described as 'additional churches'. There were a number of others whose returns fail to specify their status.

87. See Table 1:8 for details

88. Wootton Chapel, Boldre ('dissenting'); Newtown Proprietary Chapel, Southampton (Wesleyan); Bitterne Chapel (Baptist).

of the century to deal with this particular problem, though not in isolation from others: this was the age of Peel's Ecclesiastical Commission and its reform of the parish system. But the scale of the problem facing the Church is best measured by comparison with the rate of increase in the population and its continuing shift from country to town. While the Church Building Commission was providing its 600,000 sittings, the population had grown by 7 millions. Even when we add the results of parallel efforts, the discrepancy remained a daunting one.

Within the area of the present study, between 1801 and 1851, the Anglicans provided accommodation for over 21,000 extra worshippers, to which must be added any additional seating arising from the rebuilding or enlargement of existing churches. A considerable proportion of these new sittings - something like 7,000 - were in the Portsmouth area, where the population had increased during the same period by 38,870, i.e. by over five times that figure. In 1851, Portsea Island was listed among those registration districts with the lowest ratio of sittings to population. The figure for Portsea Island was 36.9%, only just above that for Sheffield (36.7%); all the other places in the list were either London districts or large industrial towns in the Midlands and North.[89] Despite this short-fall, Portsmouth had achieved considerably more than the country as a whole: nationally, the population had increased by twelve times the number of extra Anglican sittings. Outside Portsea Island and Gosport, in the predominantly rural areas both the rise in population and the improvement in church accommodation proceeded at a much slower pace.

These figures are only one part of a larger picture, and several other features need to be added to complete it. Many churches, of course, had more than one service on a Sunday, and so offered alternative opportunities to those wishing to worship. There was also the contribution of the other denominations, which, in 1851, were reckoned to provide between them almost as many sittings as the Anglicans. Then there was that proportion of the population, including the sick, the elderly and domestic servants, who were not able to attend an act of public worship (though Mann's estimate of 30% was probably too high). Finally, there was the inescapable fact that a considerable number habitually absented themselves not only from the parish church, but

89. 1851 Ecclesiastical Census, Summary Table I

from any other place of worship. While this was most marked in London and other urban areas, it was by no means confined to them.

One final qualification must therefore be added. However far short of the population growth the increase in church accommodation may have fallen, much of what was provided remained unused, both in the villages and in the urban areas: a further reminder that church building was not, in itself, the solution of the Church's problems in an increasingly secular age. The attendance figures for the largest congregation on Census day, 1851, show how exceptional were those parishes where the available seating fell short of demand. The sixty additional churches provided during the first half of the century were no more than two thirds filled at their best attended services; while the surplus accommodation at the thirty-eight churches that had been either rebuilt or enlarged was even greater. The vicar of Andover was presumably thinking in terms of his scattered parish[90] rather than of the number of parishioners who frequented his services when he wrote on his census return: 'two more churches needed in the parish'; even at the best attended service of the day the recently rebuilt parish church would have held three hundred more worshippers than actually came.

1.2.3 Worship and Sacraments

In considering the state of the Established Church, we have been largely concerned so far with the external and the secular, and with what may most easily be quantified, rather than with what is the essence of the Church as a spiritual body. Nevertheless, the size and population of parishes, the quality of their staffing and the adequacy of their premises, and, given its hierarchical structure, the calibre of the Church's leadership, are all factors which bear directly on its success in fulfilling what its members, both clerical and lay, would see as its divinely appointed *raison d'etre*.

Humanly speaking, the Evangelical Revival and, later the Oxford Movement were a response to the failure of the Church to fulfil its mission to the world. The Church of the 18th century had unmistakable failings and weaknesses, whatever the mitigating factors. In reaction against the religious fanaticism of the previous century, its

90. It covered 7,670 acres and included the hamlets of Charlton, Enham Kings (Upper Enham), Little London, Wildhern and others. It completely encircled the parish of Knights Enham (now Enham Alamein). The living was joined with that of Foxcott.

Latitudinarianism was laodicean and moralistic and its impact on the brutality or the debauchery of the age was limited.

One measure of the low ebb to which the spiritual life of the Church had declined in the majority of parishes is provided by the surviving visitation returns and similar material. The notes on Dorset parishes in Bishop Secker's Diocese Book, begun in 1734, were supplemented and up-dated by his successors during the later years of the century.[91] The picture that emerges has clear outlines. Whether served by a resident incumbent or, as in so many cases, by his proxy, most parishes had one service (normally with sermon) on Sundays, usually in the morning but occasionally alternating between morning and afternoon where a priest had two churches to serve; with prayers also on one or two weekdays (usually Wednesdays and/or Fridays) and occasionally on a holy day. The sacrament was administered four times a year, to fairly small numbers of communicants. It was exceptional to find an incumbent like John Hubbock, 'a worthy man and constantly resident' who, in 1752, cared for the twin parishes of St. Peter and Holy Trinity, Dorchester, in addition to his duties as Master of the Free Grammar School. (His predecessor had combined his duties in Dorchester with those of the living at Lytchett Matravers, nearly twenty miles away.) Though living in the school house because the parsonage house was 'only a poor thatched cottage' he 'does the whole duty and preaches twice every Sunday, once in each church alternately, prayers Wednesdays and Fridays and holidays at Trinity, and every Saturday at St. Peter's'. Uncharacteristically, the sacrament was administered on the first Sunday of each month at each church alternately, to between 150 and 200 communicants. With about 230 families resident in the two parishes, this represents a significantly higher than average attendance,[92] though falling short of the frequent communion which Wesley urged on his followers, and still more the ideal of daily communion to which the Oxford Methodists had aspired.

That Hubbock was exceeding the expected and acceptable norm for the parish priests of his day is clear from a note on William Hammond, who was instituted to the living of St. Laurence with Holy Trinity, St.

91. See above, p 22

92. cf. the situation at Epworth earlier in the century, where 'Samuel Wesley held the Sacrament monthly, a frequency much greater than that pertaining in most country parishes in the eighteenth century'. (J.C. Bowmer, 1951, p 19)

Peter and St. Martin, Shaftesbury, in 1765. His predecessor had also held the rectory of Hartington, Somerset, though in due course he became so old and infirm that he could scarcely perform his duties. Hammond was described as 'constantly resident' (the adverb being, presumably, the significant word), and his combined parish had a population of about 300 families.[93] Under his ministry there were prayers and a sermon every Sunday, and prayers on Fridays and certain holidays, and an average of about sixty communicants at the four sacramental services in the year. His bishop's comment is: 'As there are several schools in the town where the masters and mistresses catechise the children, the Ministers have never done it except before Confirmation, the ordinary duty being very great.'

Much the same picture emerges from the visitation returns in the Salisbury diocese in 1783.[94] Out of 93 parishes in South Wiltshire, only 39 had two services a Sunday. The majority had morning services only; but a number of parishes alternated between morning and afternoon because the incumbent had two parishes in his charge. Only twelve parishes reported regular weekday services; but 43 held services on Holy Days, 3 on Christmas Day and 2 on Good Friday.

Only 36 of the parishes were served by the incumbent himself, though in another 11 cases the incumbent claimed to live either in or near the parish. 50 parishes were served by a curate. The remaining 24 parishes represented the incidence of pluralism.

Two of the parishes in Salisbury itself reported comparatively frequent celebration of the sacrament, 18 and 15 times a year respectively. For the rest, five parishes reported 7 or 8 celebrations, five 5 or 6; while fifty-five had only 4 celebrations a year. Of the eighty-six parishes reporting the average number of communicants, only two had three-figure attendances: Downton (a particularly extensive parish with a population of over 2,000 [95]) reported 150 communicants; while St. Thomas's, Salisbury, had over 100.[96] Thirteen other parishes reported

93. Of the four parish churches combined into one parish, one had become a barn, one a dwelling-house, and one was no longer standing.

94. M Ransome, 1972

95. The parish covered 13,221 acres and included several tithings and the annexed parish of Nunton with Bodenham. The population in 1801 was 2,647.

96. No figures were given for St. Edmund's parish or for the cathedral; St. Martin's reported 70 communicants.

more than 30 communicants; twenty-one parishes between 21 and 30; thirty-four between 11 and 20; and sixteen 10 or fewer. The overall picture, in so predominantly rural^{an} area throughout the 18th century, is far from one of Anglican strength and influence, measured by outward conformity to its minimal requirements. The problem was a deeper one than could be tackled - or even, perhaps, understood - by administrators, whether secular or ecclesiastical; and it was one to which, in turn, the early Methodists, the Evangelicals and the Tractarians were to address themselves. A service without a sermon seems to have been universally unpopular (which helps to explain the attraction of the Methodist 'preaching service'); but faced with so many incumbents serving more than one parish, 'bishops generally accepted the compromise of one service with sermon in each of two churches, while discouraging as far as lay within their power the performance by the same person of divine service in three different churches each Lord's Day'.^[97] The neglect of holy days and of public prayers on weekdays generally was widespread, and the observance of Wednesdays and Fridays during Lent proved in general the maximum attainable in rural parishes.^[98]

Sykes's claim that 'In their administration of the sacraments the clergy maintained such a standard of regularity as the prevailing conditions of pluralism and non-residence permitted'^[99] seems hardly borne out by the facts, except perhaps in the case of parishes served by a curate who lacked full orders. For the most part neither popular demand nor clerical inclination conduced to more frequent celebration. He is on safer ground in pointing out that 'the tradition of infrequent Communion was the legacy of the past'.^[100] Perhaps, too, it represented a lingering Presbyterian influence on the post-Restoration Church. If so, it survived into the 19th century. When Henry Moule became vicar of Fordington in 1829, the communion was still celebrated only three times a year; no men, apart from the clerk, the sexton and the vicar himself, ever communicated, and most of the sixteen women communicants expected to be paid for attending. By 1874 conditions in

97. Sykes, 1934, p 238

98. Ibid, p 247

99. Ibid, p 249

100. Ibid, p 250

the parish had changed sufficiently for these things to seem worth mentioning.[101]

1.3. The Dissenters

Although it long remained a minority movement, Protestant dissent has been an essential element in the English religious scene since at least the 17th century. It calls for attention here not only in its own right, but as an important part of the background to the Evangelical Movement and the rise of Methodism.

As in the Established Church, the spiritual life of the dissenting bodies may have been at a low ebb in the early 18th century, but it is important not to overstate the case in the interests of highlighting the evangelical renewal that was to follow. The name of Philip Doddridge alone is sufficient reminder that spiritual and evangelical warmth was still to be found in what would later be called 'Old Dissent'. Doddridge was born one year before Wesley and lived long enough to see the early stages of the Revival, though with mixed feelings. His pamphlet, Free Thoughts on the Most Probable Means of Reviving the Dissenting Interest throws a good deal of incidental light on the state of Dissent in 1730. While questioning the causes, he accepts the fact of its 'decay', and indeed traces it back into the previous century, when Bishop Burnet had asserted that 'the Dissenters had [already] in a great measure lost that good character, that strictness in religion, which had gained them their credit.'[102]

But Doddridge's pamphlet was not only evidence of decline, but a harbinger of spiritual renewal. Along with Anglicans like William Law he helped to prepare the ground for what was to follow. Although his reaction to the early stages of the Revival when it came was a mixed one,[103] some of its features had been anticipated in his pamphlet. In particular, he argued the need for 'experimental, plain and affectionate' preachers who would 'speak as if they were in earnest, in

101. Kilvert, 1938, II 442

102. P Doddridge, 1730, p 7. Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), of Scottish Presbyterian stock, became Bishop of Salisbury in 1689. Doddridge is quoting from his Discourse of the Pastoral Care, 1692.

103. E.g. his letter to the Rev Richard Witton, 8 June 1743, in Doddridge, 1829, IV 253-5. His independent stance, together with his early death, may have contributed to the undervaluing of his influence among later evangelicals. (See, for example, Donald Davie, 1978, pp 138-9.)

a lively and pathetick, as well as a clear and intelligible manner,' and address themselves not just to the 'gentleman, with all his estate, learning and politeness,' but to the 'honest mechanick, or day-labourer, who attends the Meeting from a religious principle.' [104] This was to find fulfilment in both branches of the early Methodist movement, but in Arminian Wesleyanism even more than in Calvinistic Methodism, and most of all in the Primitive Methodist missions of a century later.

The roots of religious dissent can be traced back into the early years of the English Reformation, and beyond. [105] But for our present purposes, we may begin with the formal origins of the new dissenting congregations following the Restoration of 1660. In the first two years of Charles II's reign, about 1,900 parish clergy and others were ejected from their livings under the terms of the Act of Uniformity. The great majority of these were Presbyterians who had hitherto remained within the Church of England. They were now driven to swell the ranks of those Separatists who were already 'nonconformists'; and the Restoration church was thereby purged, or weakened, by the loss of many of its more able and conscientious pastors.

Some of those thus deprived eventually found ways of conforming, but others endured material deprivation as well as spiritual and cultural banishment. Though hampered by the provisions of the Clarendon Code, some found ways and opportunities of continuing to preach, and in some cases gathered a congregation from which later nonconformist churches traced their descent. The incidence of this in central southern England, as one element in the 18th century environment of early Methodism, must now be determined.

The numbers of ejections given by A.G. Matthews, on the basis provided by Edmund Calamy, show a remarkable consistency across the three counties. (See Table 1:10 below). The slightly higher proportion in Wiltshire derives predominantly from the more industrialised areas in the western part of the county, rather than the south with which we are

104. Doddridge, 1730, pp 14, 21. Doddridge was, however, no more an anti-intellectual than Wesley. His criticism was directed at preachers who strove to win the allegiance of the gentry by cultivating 'learning and politeness' at the expense of neglecting or discountenancing the 'people'. (Ibid, p 13)

105. E.g. to the Lollards. See M.R. Watts, 1978, I, 7-8 and references given there.

now concerned. But there were a number of ejections in Salisbury itself and in surrounding parishes, as well as in villages closer to Shaftesbury.[106]

Table 1:10 Ejected clergy, 1660-2

	1660	1662	Totals	%of nat. figure
England	695	936	1,760	-
Hampshire	24	26	52	3%
Dorset	25	26	52	3%
Wiltshire	31	29	60	3%

The relationship between the pattern of these ejections and the rise of dissenting congregations seems to have received little close attention, although in a number of individual cases a direct link can be established. A large part of the difficulty lies in the patchiness of the evidence available and its varying accuracy. But several sources are available, enabling us to plot, at least in its main outlines, the geographical distribution of dissent, if not its relative 'strength', throughout the two centuries following the Restoration. These, emanating either from the Establishment or from the dissenting camp, may be listed with some indication of their nature and limitations.[107]

(i) The 'Compton census' of 1676 was compiled by Henry Compton, Bishop of London, on the instructions of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and was an attempt to determine, parish by parish, the number of conformists, nonconformists and papists. For the Dorset Deanery of the Bristol Diocese only summary totals are given: out of a population (16 and over) of 59,000, it was estimated that 199 were papists and 1,600 (27%) were dissenters.

For Hampshire and Wiltshire, figures are given for each parish; and whatever reservations there may be about their accuracy, these do at least provide a general picture and indicate those places where there were some dissenters. In general, partly because the majority were small villages, the numbers given represent groups of dissenters (often perhaps a single family) too small and too isolated to have much chance of surviving the pressures to conform.[108]

106. A. G. Matthews, 1934, pp xii-xiii, 592-3

107. Most of these sources are used by E.D. Bebb, 1935, Ch 2

108. See M.R. Watts, 1978, pp 491-2. The original ms is in the William Salt Library, Stafford

(ii) In 1690 the Managers of the Common Fund set up to meet the needs of nonconformist ministers deprived of their livings initiated a review of the situation county by county. The enquiry sought information about the survivors of those ejected thirty years earlier and about any others 'under the like circumstances'; it also asked for details of 'settled congregations', defunct congregations, and places where there might be 'opportunities of public service' (i.e. where there was evidence of sufficient sympathy and interest to justify the attempt to form a dissenting congregation). On the basis of the replies received, it has been calculated that in England and Wales as a whole there were some 759 dissenting ministers, 218 of them lacking adequate means of support, and 133 not attached to any 'settled congregation'. In Dorset there were nine (and possibly two others) 'with a competence', and six in need of help; in Hampshire, nine with competence and seven in need; and in Wiltshire, six with a competence and four in need.[109]

(iii) The 'Evans List', 1715-18, was compiled by Dr. John Evans, a Presbyterian minister in London, on the basis of replies to an enquiry initiated by the Committee of the Three Denominations in 1715.[110] It lists under place-names the number of dissenting congregations, differentiating between Presbyterians, Independents, Quakers and Baptists, and in most cases giving estimated numbers of 'hearers'. Many difficulties of interpretation arise, and unfortunately the Dorset returns are again defective in giving numbers for only two places, Lyme Regis and Sherborne. But this matters less in view of the fact that the main value of the list lies in its confirmation of a continuing tradition of dissent in certain places.

(iv) The 'Thompson list', was compiled by the Rev. Josiah Thompson, a Baptist minister in London, at the time of the 1772 'Relief Bill' as an up-dating of the Evans list. Thompson made no attempt to estimate the size of congregations; nor did he distinguish either between Presbyterian and Independent congregations or between General and Particular Baptists, perhaps because at that time the distinction was a blurred one and the situation very changeable. He classifies his

109. A Gordon, 1917, esp. pp 34-5, 100-102, 123-5

110. The original ms is in Dr. Williams's Library, London (MS 38.4). See M.R. Watts, 1978, pp 267-70, 491-508. Daniel Neale's list, dating from the same period, substantially agrees with Evans's figures. (See E.D. Bebb, 1935, p 37; Bogue and Bennett, 1808, II p 98-9)

congregations simply into 'paedobaptist' and 'baptist', ignoring both Quakers and the latest arrivals, the Methodists. On the basis of Thompson's lists, Bogue and Bennett estimated that in 1772 there were in England 390 baptist and 702 paedobaptist dissenting congregations. the figures for central southern England are:

Table 1:11 Dissenting congregations, 1772

	Baptist	Paedobaptist	Total
Hampshire	8 (9)	20	28
Dorset	2	23 (22)	25
Southern Wiltshire	2	4	6

Note: The figures in parentheses are those given by Bogue and Bennett.

Again, the chief value of this list lies in its corroboration of other evidence for a continuing dissenting tradition in certain places; but also of a general decline of Dissent during the middle years of the century.[111]

(v) The value of episcopal visitation returns, although potentially very high, is for our present purpose limited by two factors. For the early part of this period they rarely concern themselves with the existence or numbers of dissenters in a parish; and only a limited and uneven quantity of visitation material has survived in the Winchester, Salisbury and Bristol dioceses. But the Bristol Diocese Book contains notes on Dorset parishes between 1735 and 1778 which confirm the existence of dissenters in Dorchester, Poole, Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, Shaftesbury, and Swanage. The returns for the 1783 visitation in the Salisbury Diocese similarly confirm other evidence of dissent, though suggesting in several cases that its numbers were declining. This applies to the newer groups thrown up by the Evangelical Revival as well as to the congregations of Old Dissent; but here and there we find the Methodists distinguished from dissenters, e.g. at Aldbourne: 'We have no dissenters ... but I believe in one house a journeyman weaver called a Methodist reads to a few people, perhaps ten or a dozen, who all come to church'.[112]

111. Thompson's original manuscripts is in Dr. Williams's Library, London. Details are printed in A View of English Nonconformity in 1773 in the TCHS, Vol. 5 (1911-12), pp 205ff, 261ff, 372ff. See also D. Bogue and J. Bennett, 1808, Vol. III, p 330

112. Edited by M Ransome 1972. A separate return for the parish was made by the vicar who lived in Bath and, from his more distant vantage point, declared more roundly that there was 'no professed sectary or dissenter from the established church' in the parish.

(vi) Some 19th century evidence has retrospective value. Thus, from around 1820, we have the notes on Nonconformist congregations compiled by Joseph Hunter under the heading 'Britannia Puritanica'. [113] These only occasionally differentiate between the various denominations, but they offer further confirmation of the places in which the dissenting tradition had taken root.

Finally, and most comprehensively, there are the original returns from the Ecclesiastical Census of 1851, which include many more recently established congregations. The returns for those originating before 1800 do not by any means always give a date of origin, especially if (as was frequently the case) an earlier chapel had recently been rebuilt. The Census as a whole will be considered more fully at a later point. [114] Here it is sufficient to note the extent to which it supports much of the earlier evidence we have been surveying.

No one of these sources on its own provides a complete and accurate survey of the strength and distribution of early dissent; each has its shortcomings and limitations. But together they offer a synoptic view which may be further corroborated from such secondary sources as Densham and Ogle's volume on the Congregational churches of Dorset. [115]

On the basis of the Evans List, M.R. Watts has estimated the relative strength of the various dissenting bodies in 1715. His conclusions are summarized in the table below, where the figures are percentages, expressing the ratio of 'hearers' to population.

Table 1:12 Dissent in 1715

	England	Dorset	Hants	Wilts
Presbyterians	3.3	5.68	3.53	3.9
Independents	1.1	0.98	2.01	0.64
Particular Baptists	0.74	0.74	0.87	2.95*
General Baptists	0.35	0.35	0.29	0.26
Quakers	0.73	0.39	0.43	0.51

* Predominantly in the cloth-making towns of the west of the county, where (coincidentally or otherwise) Lollardy had been in evidence two centuries earlier.

Source: Watts, 1978, pp 282-3, 509.

From this, whatever uncertainties and reservations have to be taken

113. British Museum, Add. Ms. 24484.

114. See Chapter 5 below.

115. W. Densham and J. Ogle, 1899

into account, certain general features emerge. There is, firstly, the relative over-all weakness of dissent in the early years of the 18th century, at least in terms of numbers.[116] Secondly, compared with England as a whole, the Presbyterians were still relatively numerous in Dorset, the Independents in Hampshire, and the Baptists in Wiltshire (though, again, this mainly reflects the situation in the west of the county). The Quakers were relatively under-represented throughout the three counties, and were to remain a minority within a minority.

Alongside the figures from the Evans List we may set those of David Neal for the number of dissenting congregations at the same date (1715).

Table 1:13 Dissenting Congregations, 1715-16

	Baptist	Others	Total	% of national total
England	247	860	1107	-
Hampshire	9	23	32	3%
Dorset	5	30	35	3%
Wiltshire	4	16	20	2%

Source: Bogue and Bennett, History of the Dissenters, Vol 2, pp 98-9.

In giving these figures, Bogue and Bennett drew attention to the fact that Presbyterians were still in the majority among Dissenters, with nearly twice as many congregations and members as the Independents. English Presbyterianism was, however, on the decline, with many congregations becoming either Unitarian or Independent in the course of the 18th century.

Dissent as a whole was in decline during much of the century, not only in numbers, but in status and influence. The evidence of the Thompson list suggests that by 1773 'the aristocratic and wealthy supporters are very much less numerous, and Dissent for the most part is conscious of having its back to the wall in a long fight against indifference and stagnation'.[117]

One effect of the Evangelical Revival was to reverse this trend and to bring new life to congregations of Old Dissent, at the same time creating new congregations. But the timing and extent of this reversal is more difficult to determine and must, in fact, have varied

116. Cf Everitt, 1970, pp 186-7: 'Despite the claims of both its enemies and its champions, [Old Dissent] seems to have comprised only a small minority of the population.' Also Gilbert, 1976, pp 14-17

117. Bebb, 1935, p 43

considerably from place to place. The figures given by Bogue and Bennett for their own time (1810) are somewhat equivocal (see table below).

Table 1:14 Number of dissenting congregations, c. 1810.

	Baptist	Indep- endent	Presby- terian	Total	% of national total
England	532	799	252	1,583	-
Hampshire	17	26	2	45	3%
Dorset	4	23	5	32	2%
Wiltshire	17	38	2	57	3.5%

Source: Bogue and Bennett, History of the Dissenters, Vol IV, p 327-8

The Presbyterian congregations were by now far fewer than those of the Baptists and Independents. Among the latter the impact of the Evangelical Revival had begun to be felt, as is reflected particularly in the national totals: an increase of around 50% in just under a century. The figures for Hampshire are close to the national average, while those for Wiltshire show an even greater increase. But in Dorset the number of dissenting congregations had declined, perhaps because of the predominantly rural conditions, the paucity of large settlements and the absence of industrialised communities.

By the time of the Ecclesiastical Census midway through the 19th century, the pace had quickened, whether from the impact of the evangelical revival or in step with the population growth, and many villages unaffected by the older dissent now had a nonconformist or a Methodist chapel - or, in a few cases, both. But this later situation will call for more detailed treatment in due course.[118]

How far can a persistent dissenting tradition be traced back from the 19th century to the Restoration settlement? In 1660 and 1662 approximately 1,760 incumbents in towns and villages had suffered ejection and had been replaced by conforming pastors.[119] In only a minority of these places was the dissenting tradition embodied in a continuing congregation, and even there the influence of the ejected minister must often have been an indirect one. Thus the Rev. George Thorne's ejection from his Weymouth living long remained part of the folk-memory of the St. Nicholas Street Independent congregation, but it is by no means clear how far, if at all, the church was 'founded' by

118. See below, Sections 5.2.3 and 6.4

119. A.G. Matthews, 1934, pp xii-xiv; J.T. Wilkinson, 1962, pp 234-6

him. The majority of nonconforming pastors left their parishes and settled elsewhere, sometimes ending up in the comparative obscurity of London. Only exceptionally did they remain in or near their former parish, and in those cases the provisions of the Clarendon Code, and especially the Five Mile Act, made it hazardous for them to preach or teach there, though by no means always were they silenced.[120]

The early history of the Lymington Presbyterian/Independent congregation illustrates this. In 1672, Robert Tutchin, formerly vicar of Brockenhurst and son of the vicar of Newport, IOW, licensed his house at Lymington for worship and himself as a Presbyterian preacher. Both father and son had been ejected in 1662, and Robert had since been preaching in Fordingbridge. In 1690, however, the Lymington congregation was reported as having 'no settled minister.' Then in 1692, John Farrell, began a ministry there which ended with his death in 1698. Farrell, too, had been ejected in 1662 (from Selborne), had lived in Guildford and Farnham, been imprisoned under the Corporation Act, and in 1672 took out a license at Farnham as a Presbyterian.[121]

Another such case was the Rev. Thomas Hallet, rector of St. Peter's, Shaftesbury, and master of the grammar school, who was ejected from the living in 1662 but continued to preach in the town. He was arrested, along with several others, the following year, and was gaoled at Dorchester because he at first refused to pay his fine. He appeared again at the Winter Assizes in 1665, when he was bound over to appear at the next session and in the meantime to be of good behaviour. Later that year we find him at Hilton, an out-of-the-way village between Sturminster Newton and Puddletown. There is no evidence of his returning to Shaftesbury and the Presbyterians there had no meeting-house of their own until 1700.

The Rev. Francis Bam(p)field, vicar of Sherborne, possibly had more direct influence than Hallet on Shaftesbury dissent. He too was ejected in 1662, though he had earlier been an outspoken critic of the Parliamentary cause. The following year he and four others were arrested for preaching at Shaftesbury. He refused to pay his fine and spent nearly nine years in Dorchester gaol, where he and his companions were able to preach daily to townsfolk who came to hear them. When the

120. cf. Bebb, 1935, p 31

121. D A Douglas, 1982

authorities put a stop to this, a 'gathered church' was formed among the prisoners themselves.

Bamfield's subsequent career may be outlined as typical at least of the more persistent of the dissenting clergy of this period. While in prison he became a Sabbatarian Baptist and crossed theological swords with Richard Baxter. He then settled in London and gathered a congregation at Bethnal Green. He was twice arrested in 1682-3 on suspicion of complicity in the Popish Plot, was convicted for refusing to take the oath of allegiance and died in Newgate early in 1684.

In the absence of positive evidence to the contrary we must assume that men like Hallet and Bamfield had only limited influence on the early dissenting congregations in the towns from which they had been expelled. At most, their preaching may have kindled dissenting sympathies in some members of their congregations, and their 'martyrdom' may have put heart into any potential nonconformists they left behind them. But there was no dissenting meeting-house in Shaftesbury until 1700 or in Sherborne until 1709.

The subsequent history of these two congregations followed a basically similar course. In each case the growing influence of Arianism led to decline in the early decades of the 18th century. Then, towards the middle of the century, the cause revived and there was a reaction towards more orthodox evangelicalism. At Shaftesbury, under the pastoral leadership of the Rev. David Jones (c. 1738-1753), the congregation abandoned Presbyterianism in favour of Congregationalism. At Sherborne, the growing heterodoxy of the Presbyterians brought about a split and the opening of the Long Street Congregational chapel in 1757 - though the two congregations were eventually reunited in 1802 in their new 'Union Chapel'. This basic pattern, with similar variations, is paralleled in many other places during the 18th century.[122] Two of the three ejected clergy at Dorchester, for example, ended up in London; while the third, who had been rector of All Hallows since 1629,

122. D. Bogue and J. Bennett, 1808, III pp 318-32, identified three stages in the decline of dissenting congregations under the impact of Arminianism, Arianism and Socinianism, and noted that decline was particularly marked in areas where Arianism was rife (e.g. Devonshire, Lancashire, Cheshire and Warwickshire). Independent congregations were less affected than Presbyterian, and sometimes, on the contrary, benefitted by defections from adjacent Presbyterian causes, especially after 'the old race of good presbyterian ministers' had died out. Horton Davies, (1961, p 98) noting the comparative immunity of the Independents to heresy, ascribe it to the conservatism of the laity and the autonomy of the individual congregation.

remained in the town and became pastor of the Independent congregation, assisted and later succeeded by the ejected vicar of Fordington. Their apparent immunity from arrest or harassment seems to have been exceptional.

When the various sources of evidence are put together, the picture that emerges has a considerable degree of consistency and coherence. The feature that stands out most clearly is the limited number of dissenting congregations that can claim a continuous existence since the later 17th century. In the areas under review, there were just twenty-nine cases, 14 in Hampshire, 11 in Dorset, and 4 in Wiltshire (Table 1:15). All but seven of these cases were in towns with a population in 1801 of more than 2,000.

The only town of this size missing from the list is Titchfield (2,949), where the evidence for an uninterrupted dissenting tradition is more equivocal, and local tradition traces the present High Street congregation only as far back as 1789.[123] In the case of Broughton, by far the smallest place in the list, the evidence is more tenuous than elsewhere, but we know from other sources that there had been a Baptist congregation there from the late 17th century.[124] Two other villages, East Knoyle, near Mere (853) and Cerne Abbas (847) fall into this border-line category; in each case there is some evidence of early Independency.

Alan Everitt has challenged the widely held view that Dissent was predominantly an urban phenomenon.[125] But the evidence from Hampshire and Dorset corroborates Michael Watt's conclusion, that 'Dissent was more urbanised than the population at large.'[126] Some explanation, and even reconciliation, of these diverging views may be possible. Everitt's main supporting evidence is drawn from the forest areas of the Weald, where he finds Dissent to be much stronger than in downland parishes. It is therefore significant that in Hampshire and Dorset chalk downland was more extensive than forest or heathland. Secondly, most of this area had been Royalist during the Civil War,

123. Titchfield: a History, 1982, p 95

124. E.g. the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census return reports that the first chapel was built there 'nearly 200 years ago'.

125. Everitt, 1970, p 185; 1972, pp 16-19.

126. Watts, 1978, p 285

Table 1:15 Places with a continuous tradition of dissent,
1660-1851

Place	Population 1801	Dissenting Congregations	Methodism 1851
Portsmouth and Portsea	14,730	P, I, B	5W, PM, 2BC
Gosport	11,295	I, B(?)	W, WMA
Salisbury	8,410	P, I, B	2W, PM[3]
Southampton	7,629	I, B	W, PM, <BC>
Winchester	6,259	P>I	W, WMA
Poole	4,761	P, I	W, PM
Romsey	4,274	P>I, B	W, PM
Christchurch	3,773	I	2W
Weymouth and Melcombe Regis	3,617	P, I	2W, PM, WR
Andover	3,304	P>I, B	2W, PM
Ringwood	3,222	P>U	W
Sherborne	3,159	P, I	W, PM
Wimborne Minster	3,039	P>I, B	4W, PM
Fareham	3,030	I, B(?)	W
Fordingbridge	2,727	P>I, B(?), Q	2W
Downton	2,647	B	3W, PM
Dorchester	2,402	P>I	W, WMA
Shaftesbury	2,400	P>I	W, PM[4]
Lymington	2,378	P>I, B	IM
Blandford Forum	2,326	P>I	W
Wilton[1]	2,144	P>I	W, PM
Mere	2,091	P>I	PM
Havant	1,670	P>I	W
Wareham	1,627	I, U	<W>, <PM>
Swanage	1,382	P>I	W
Stalbridge	1,245	I	W
Petersfield	1,159	P>I	W(?)
Bere Regis	1,153	I	2W
Broughton	637	B	W

Notes:

1. Wilton was the only place in this list which recorded a decrease in population during the first half of the 19th century. (In 1851, it had dropped to 1,804.) In the majority of cases, the population was rising more rapidly than in southern England generally.
2. Abbreviations used in column 3: P: Presbyterian I: Independents B: Baptists Q: Quaker U: Unitarian >: 'later becoming'
3. The PM chapel and one of the Wesleyan chapels were in the adjoining Fisherton Anger.
4. At Enmore Green, in Motcombe parish, but actually close to Shaftesbury.

whereas Kent was held by the Parliamentary forces. The evidence set out in Table 1:15 therefore supports the view put forward by Tillyard in 1933: 'In parts of England which had supported the Puritans in the Civil War, there congregations would be found in both town and country, and business and farming would be much more strongly represented than the professions. In the rest of England the congregations would be urban rather than rural.' [127]

This state of affairs accords with the general conditions in which Dissent maintained a continuing presence in post-Restoration England. Not only were rural dissenters, except in the more remote and inaccessible areas, subject to greater pressures to conform, but the larger urban populations provided greater opportunities for the gathering of a congregation and the maintenance of a chapel. It was not until the later years of the 18th century that the new wave of evangelical fervour began to make its mark on the rural villages.

127. Tillyard, 1935, p 4; cf. pp 14, 17 where the earlier pattern is protracted into the 20th century.

2 THE SALISBURY CIRCUIT TO 1790

'I am in no haste to multiply or to divide circuits. Most of our circuits are too small rather than too large. I wish we had no circuit with fewer than three preachers in it or less than four hundred miles' riding in four weeks. Certainly no circuit shall be divided before the Conference.' So wrote John Wesley in March 1790, within a year of his death, adding gratuitously: 'If we do not take care, we shall all degenerate into milksops. Soldiers of Christ, arise!'[1]

When the preachers met in Conference four months later, Wesley yielded to pressure and the Salisbury Circuit was at last divided; Portsmouth became the head of a new circuit, with a handful of other societies in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. This was one of five new circuits formed that year,[2] if we include the separation of Jersey and Guernsey for obvious geographical reasons. Leaving aside the Channel Islands, the Salisbury Circuit had the smallest membership of any of those divided, unless we add in the figures for the recently separated Isle of Wight. It seems possible that the Isle of Wight's re-incorporation in the new Portsmouth Circuit was a condition insisted on by Wesley before he would agree to its autonomy.[3]

The growth of Methodism in this part of England had not been spectacular. Until as late as 1758 the societies in Hampshire and Wiltshire were part of the London Circuit, which also included Kent and Sussex.[4] The Wiltshire Circuit formed that year had 941 members by 1766 and was in turn divided into Wiltshire North and Wiltshire South two years later.

The connexion was made up at this time of forty circuits (28 in England and Wales, 4 in Scotland and 8 in Ireland), with a total membership of 26,341 and 99 itinerant preachers. Of the Wiltshire Circuit's 956

1. Letter to Jasper Winscom at Salisbury, 13 March 1790 (JWL VIII 206)

2. Chatham Circuit was formed from Kent (otherwise Canterbury) (570); Diss and Bury Circuits from Norwich (900); Jersey and Guernsey Circuits from a single Channel Islands Circuit (498); and Otley Circuit from Keighley (1,480). Figures in brackets are the reported membership of the circuit before division. Salisbury reported 556 members that year.

3. There were 108 Circuits in the British Isles at that time. Of the 71 circuits in England and Wales, only 18 had fewer members than the Salisbury Circuit. Most of these were in the south, or in Wales; only Whitehaven and Alnwick in the north were smaller. If we add the Isle of Wight to Salisbury's total, making it 706, then 30 circuits had fewer members, and one (Wakefield) had the same number.

4. T G Hartley, 1912, vi-vii.

members in 1768 four-fifths were in the northern section.[5] The membership of the Wiltshire South Circuit in its first year represented only 1.41% of the connexional membership. Substantial increases were delayed until the mid-1780s, and even then did not keep pace with the growth at national level, so that in 1790 the Salisbury Circuit membership had dropped to only 1.1% of the connexional total. (See Table 2:1)

The chief argument for dividing the circuit in 1790 must have been its wide geographical extent and the scattered nature of its comparatively few societies - in fact, an argument from weakness rather than from strength. Until then, the circuit had included the whole of Dorset and Hampshire,[6] as well as the southern part of Wiltshire, and presented a contrast to the proliferation of societies and circuits in other areas such as Cornwall and the north of England.

The decade following Wesley's death in 1791 saw the formation of the Blandford (later renamed the Poole) Circuit in 1794, and of the Southampton Circuit (from Portsmouth) in 1798. But the later proliferation of circuits in this area did not begin until well into the 19th century and even then was slow to develop. (See Figures 3:1 and 3:2)

The original South Wiltshire or Salisbury Circuit, minus the Isle of Wight, provides the geographical unit on which the present study is based.

The most remarkable fact about John Wesley's visits to this part of southern England is the extent to which he ignored it during the first decade and a half of his evangelical ministry. With the exception of Salisbury[7] itself, where he had family connections, and Shaftesbury,[8] the birthplace of John Haime, he did not preach anywhere in the area with which we are concerned until July, 1753, when he twice passed through Portsmouth[9] on his way to and from the Isle

5. In 1769, Wiltshire North reported 814 members and Wiltshire South 200.

6. The Isle of Wight furnishes a minor exception, since it achieved a transient independence in 1787, and again in 1789. It then remained part of the Portsmouth Circuit until 1811.

7. See pp 67-70

8. See pp 73-5

9. See pp 75-80

Table 2:1 Membership figures 1776-1790

	Circuit Membership	Increase/ Decrease %	Connexional Membership[4]	Circuit as % of Connexion
Wiltshire Circuit				
1766	941			
1767	840	-10.7		
1768	956	13.8	26,341	3.6
1769[3]	1,014	6.1	28,263	3.6
Wiltshire South/Salisbury Circuit				
1769	200	-	28,263	0.7
1770	323	61.5	29,406	1.1
1771	277	-14.2	31,340	0.9
1772	278	0	31,983	0.9
1773	340	22.3	33,839	1.0
1774	330	-2.9	37,142	0.9
1775	315	-4.5	38,150	0.8
1776	317	0	40,071	0.8
1777	309	-2.5	*38,274	0.8
1778	301	-2.6	44,859	0.7
1779	307	1.9	*42,507	0.7
1780	331	7.8	43,830	0.8
1781	346	4.5	44,417	0.8
1782	373	7.8	46,331	0.8
1783	386	3.5	*45,955	0.8
1784	385	0	49,167[5]	0.8
1785	380	-1.3	52,431[6]	0.7
1786	430	13.2	58,150	0.7
1787	593	37.9	62,087	1.0
1788	551[7]	-7.1	65,375	0.8
1789	636	15.4	70,305	0.9
1790	706[7]	11.0	71,568	1.0

Notes:

1. Source: Minutes of Conference
2. * signifies membership decreases
3. The circuit was for the first time divided into Wiltshire North (814) and Wiltshire South (200).
4. These totals include Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.
5. The figures for America have been deducted.
6. The figures for Nova Scotia and Antigua have been deducted.
7. In these years the Isle of Wight is shown as a separate circuit but its membership figures (87 in 1788; 150 in 1790) have been included in the totals given above.

of Wight. This neglect is underlined by the fact that, though he also passed through Southampton that year, there is no evidence that he halted long enough to preach there. Thus the earliest Methodist activity in the area, so far as our fragmentary evidence indicates, was largely independent of Wesley himself, though undoubtedly reinforced in due course by his visits and probably encouraged by him more indirectly from a distance.

For the early period, during which the first Methodist societies were formed and the earliest chapels built (or, more frequently, converted from other uses), primary evidence is very limited. Virtually no circuit or society records have survived,[10] though some information about chapels may be gleaned from the deeds.[11] Fortunately, there is partial compensation for this lack of contemporary material in the existence of an early history of Methodism in Hampshire compiled by the Rev. John Sundius Stamp, superintendent in the Southampton Circuit 1826/28. Though never published, this has survived in two manuscript volumes now in the Methodist Archives at Manchester. It draws on early manuscript sources no longer extant, such as Jasper Winscom's diary, and also on oral tradition. Checked against, and supplemented by, other sources where available, this history enables us to get behind the bare statistics and other official facts, to some of the circumstances and personalities involved in the early spread of Wesleyan Methodism in the area.

2.1 Establishing the Base: - the 1740s Salisbury, Wilton, Shaftesbury

The seed from which Methodism in virtually the whole of Hampshire and Dorset sprang was planted in Salisbury in the earliest years of the Methodist movement. This was not a matter of deliberate strategy, but rather an accidental result of personal circumstances. Wesley's sister Martha had married Westley Hall, one of her brother's former students at Lincoln College and one of the 'Oxford Methodists'. Hall was a native of Salisbury and inherited from his parents property at both Homington and Fisherton Anger. About the time the Wesley brothers

10. For example, there are no Quarterly Meeting minutes for the Salisbury Circuit before 1895, or minutes of the Church Street Leaders Meeting before 1899. Virtually all records of the Portsmouth Wesleyan Circuit were destroyed by wartime bombing.

11. In the case of chapels no longer in existence, copies of the deeds are in most cases in the close rolls of the Court of Chancery.

embarked for Georgia, at the end of 1735, he became curate at Wootton Rivers, near Pewsey. His widowed mother-in-law, Susanna Wesley, lived with them both there and at Fisherton during the next two years, and both Charles and John in turn visited the family on their return from Georgia.[12]

Described by Tyerman as 'a man of agreeable person, pleasing manners, and good property', for a time Hall showed signs of being caught up in the incipient revival and of throwing in his lot with the Wesley brothers. In the spring of 1739 he was in London, lent them his support in opposing a 'French prophetess' who was disturbing the Fetter Lane society, and spoke out against the Moravian tendency towards 'stillness'. [13] Before long, however, he had swung to the opposite extreme and his continuing association with the Wesleys' society at the Foundery became an increasing embarrassment to them. He was, in fact, to prove both highly unstable and a flagrantly unfaithful husband.

Early in the 1740s [14] he returned to Fisherton, preached on Harnham Hill and elsewhere, and formed a society. The stables and coach-house of the Green Dragon at Fisherton were fitted up as a preaching-place. However, though he had by now broken any close ties with the Wesleys, at this stage he was, like them, still loyal to the church. As Wesley wrote in 1747:

'About six years ago you removed to Salisbury, and began a society there. For a year or two you went with them to the church and sacrament, and simply preached faith working by love. God was with you, and they increased both in number and in the knowledge and love of God.'

Hall's society, therefore, still had affinities with those established by the Wesleys; but this was not to last. Wesley continues:

'About four years since [i.e. 1743], you broke off all friendship with us; you would not so much as make use of our hymns, either in public or private, but laid them quite aside, and took the

12. CWJ 21 Feb 1737; also March, July, Dec. JWJ 28 Feb 1738 + June.

13. 'Stillness' or 'quietism' ... (a form of spirituality in which human initiative or effort is deprecated and reduced to a minimum, in order to depend entirely on the divine grace) G.J. Stevenson, 1876, p 370, quoting Adam Clarke, says that he became in turn a Moravian, a Quietist and a Deist. Cf. JW's more circumstantial account, below.

14. James Akerman, superintendent of the Salisbury Circuit, in a letter to the WM Magazine, (1836, pp 51-4) on the rise and progress of Methodism in Salisbury, quotes from 'an account before me' and gives the date of Hall's return as 1741. This manuscript seems to have disappeared, and without further knowledge of its provenance it is impossible to determine whether it confirms, or merely derives from, John Wesley's 1747 statement quoted below.

German [i.e. Moravian] hymn-book in their stead ...

'About the same time you left off going to church as well as to the sacrament. Your followers very soon trod in your steps, and, not content with neglecting the ordinances of God, they began, after your example, to despise them and all that continued to use them, speaking with equal contempt of the public service, of private prayer, of baptism, and of the Lord's Supper ...'

A catalogue of further doctrinal and moral lapses follows.[15]

The final break between Hall and the Wesleys was long delayed and is not easy to date or document. This was partly because of the unpredictability of Hall's attitudes and behaviour, and partly because of John Wesley's reluctance to write him off irrevocably, for his sister's sake. As late as July 1746, he found himself quite unexpectedly invited to preach in Hall's Fisherton chapel, though by now he had learned to be deeply suspicious of his brother-in-law's motives: 'Was his motive only to grace his own cause? Or rather, was this the last gasp of expiring love?'[16]

Hall himself, whatever his faults, remained energetically unrepentant and even enjoyed a degree of local success, though this may have had something to do with his flagrant infidelities in an age when the popular appetite was not yet fed by the gutter press. A correspondent in the Gentleman's Magazine towards the end of 1747 reported that 'by an uncommon appearance of sanctity, joined with indefatigable labours in the field and house preaching' he had drawn 'multitudes of the meaner sort, both of Dissenters and the Established Church, to attend him'. But on 28th October 'he took leave of his corrupted flock, and had the impudence to justify his infamous conduct from the case of Elkanah (1 Sam. 1 : 1-2) which he largely expounded.'

Hearing that Hall was in London, Wesley went to Salisbury ('this uncomfortable place') and gathered the evidence which he summarized in the letter already quoted. He returned to Salisbury early in 1748, to find Hall was back, but gained access to the house and had some conversation with his sister. Then he set about picking up the pieces. 'I met a little company, gathered up out of the wreck ... and exhorted them to go on in the Bible way, and not be wise above that is written.'[17]

15. JW's letter to Hall, 22 December 1747, printed in JWJ III 325 (JWL II 111-14).

16. JWJ III 246 (23 July 1746)

17. JWJ III 329-30 (26 Jan 1748)

Our only other early source of information on the course of those events is John Furz's autobiography. Furz had already been preaching the 'Methodist gospel' in his native Wilton for some time. Now, though Wesley nowhere mentions the fact, he went over to Salisbury and became the leader of what was left of the Methodist society there. He writes:

'Hearing that Mr. Hall, after all the good he had done, had brought a huge reproach upon the Gospel, I went to Mr. Marsh, to know the truth of it. He said, "He is gone; but he has carried away with him what we have received." We hid ourselves awhile; the world rejoiced and we sorrowed. When the storm was a little over, I went often to Salisbury, and conversed and prayed with some of the poor people. After some time, I was desired to preach in Mr. Hall's chapel. More and more came, till we had a good congregation. Mr. Marsh[18] then took part of the house adjoining to it, for me to live in, and to receive any of Mr. Wesley's preachers that could find time to call. Here I continued about five years.'[19]

In such inauspicious circumstances was the first Methodist society in this central part of southern England formed, just ten years after Wesley's Aldersgate experience. For some years it remained 'very small and composed chiefly of a few old people, who were the butt of derision and contempt to all in the city'. Westley Hall's conduct provided both excuse and opportunities which the 'ungodly rabble' of their detractors and persecutors made good use of.[20] During these years Wesley returned a number of times to 'this uncomfortable place', to lend his support to the efforts to eradicate the seeds of antinomianism from this patch in the widening Methodist field. It was an uphill task, but by 1758 the little company of Salisbury Methodists, who had been meeting for some time in a shop in Greencroft Street and then in Salt Lane,[21] were preparing to build their first preaching house on a site which they acquired in St. Edmund's Church Street.[22] Wesley himself became a trustee of these premises, and of his six fellow-trustees one described himself as a 'gentleman' and one as a yeoman, while the remainder were artisans. (See below, p 115)

18. Probably the Joseph Marsh, dyer, who appears in the Church Street deeds of 1758 and 1759. By 1795 we find his son Daniel among the trustees.

19. 'The Life of Mr. John Furz' in EMP Vol V

20. Memoir of Mrs. Barbara Hunt, who joined the Salisbury society about 1750 as a girl of 14. (WM Magazine, 1815, pp 25-9)

21. WM Magazine, 1836 p 51

22. Conveyance, on a 1,000 year lease, dated 1 October 1758. By the time a mortgage was arranged twelve months later the chapel had been built. Wesley preached in it on 25th September 1759 and declared it to be ('the most complete in England'. 'It strikes every one of any taste that sees it; not with any single part, but an inexpressible something in the whole.' (JWJ IV 355)

This early period also saw the first Methodist activity elsewhere in Wiltshire and in Shaftesbury, twenty miles to the west. In each case, a particular individual was the key factor, in the absence of which other places remained as yet unaffected by the stirrings of Methodism. At Wilton the key figure was John Furz. His account[23] is sadly lacking in precise dates, but in other respects provides insights into the conditions and circumstances in which Methodism began to make itself felt at the local level.

Born in 1717 of parents who were 'honest, but ignorant of true religion', Furz was a sensitive and earnest youth whose adolescence followed a familiar evangelical pattern, involving a long period of spiritual anguish and struggle before he eventually 'found peace'. He was fortunate enough at this stage to find a spiritual companion, one John Kirby, and they began to meet daily, praying for each other and longing for others to know the love of Christ which had become the mainspring of their own spiritual life.

Invited to attend a dissenting meeting in a private house one Sunday evening, Furz was repelled by what he experienced:

'First they ridiculed the vicar, particularly for his covetousness. Next, they drank to one another, and offered the glass to us, but we did not drink. Then they related the fault of the churchwardens and the overseers of the poor; till one read part of the newspaper, which gave occasion to discourse on the state of the nation. At last, one of them read a chapter in the Bible: another, looking at his watch, said "Bless me! It is time to go home. It is past ten o'clock." "But", said one, "we ought to go to prayer first." But they were not agreed which of them should pray. At last, one of them stood up against a back of a chair, spoke a few words, and concluded.'

When Furz himself 'began earnestly to pray that God would awaken them ... they turned about, and stared at me, as if I had been speaking Greek.' Even allowing for the onesidedness of the evidence, the picture which emerges is of a semi-secularized dissent, characterized more by negative reaction to established authority in church or state than by any positive spiritual vitality. If this - and the remoteness of the Church of England exemplified in the sequel - can be taken as at all representative of the state of religion at the time, then the need for the revitalization of English Christianity seems self-evident.

Despite the embarrassment they caused, the two young men were invited

23. EMP Vol V, pp 108-124

back the following Sunday. In the interval, the rumour went around that Furz had preached and was likely to do so again, with the result that a crowd of about a hundred turned up and, despite efforts by the occupant of the house to keep them out, many pushed their way in. After some hesitation, he invited Furz to speak. 'I had no thought of exhorting or preaching to this hour; but now the power of God came upon me, and enabled me to speak from an experimental knowledge of freedom from condemnation.' His text was Romans 8:1 and he was impelled to speak of that salvation which is the gift of God 'by grace ... through faith' (Ephesians 2:8). To an age in which the Gospel had very largely been reduced to the level of moral exhortation against the background of a predominantly Calvinist theology, the reassurance of divine love which had liberated Furz himself from his dread of hell-fire came as something of a novelty. There is no evidence that up to this point Furz had had any direct contact with Wesley, or even with his writings; but this was the message which had moved the miners of Kingswood and Newcastle.

To ensure the protection of the law, the house in which Furz preached was now licensed.[24] He began to preach in his own house also and about fourteen converts met daily for prayer. It became increasingly difficult for the local incumbent, the Rev. Conway, to ignore what was going on. At first he was content to send a servant with a message that he considered Furz to be 'soft in the head', but avoided any direct encounter. Seeing the vicar about to pass his house, Furz says, 'I opened the door, and waited for him. But when he saw me, he drew farther off, and shook his cane at me, and passed by.' Conway's next move was to complain to the Earl of Pembroke[25] that 'there is a young fellow in the town, who, under a pretence of preaching, makes three riots every week, and disturbs all the inhabitants of the town, from one end to the other.' The Earl sent his son, Lord Herbert, with the Mayor and aldermen, to hear Furz preach and determine who was causing the 'riots'. Rumours that they had gone to pull down the preaching-house brought together a mob eager to lend a hand. But after some disturbance, Furz was allowed to preach, having explained: 'My

24. April 1745 at the Devizes Quarter Sessions.

25. Henry Herbert, ninth Earl of Pembroke (1693-1751), known as 'the architect earl' partly because of his improvements to Wilton House. he married late and his son, the future tenth earl, was still in his teens.

lord and gentlemen, I and those that meet with me are members of the Established Church. We meet together every Sunday, before and after Divine service, to make prayer and supplication with and for one another. And I read a portion of Scripture, and explain it as God enables me.'

The Earl's response to the report he received was to instruct the mayor that the next time Furz preached he should afford him the protection of the law by reading the Riot Act. This was done with the desired effect: 'The mob gathered together, he bade them come near, and then read the Act. They quickly shrunk back: but one of them cursed the mayor and said he was a Methodist too. He looked upon me and said, "John, you see I have got a bad character too." I said, "I wish it was true." He said, "So do I; it would be better for me." From this time we had peace.'

As a final ploy, the vicar then arranged for a visiting preacher, the Rev. Joseph Horder, to preach against Methodism. In the Earl's presence, he condemned Methodism as a plague that infected whole families. The Methodists themselves were 'like toads that creep out from under a faggot-pile'. While claiming to be led by the Spirit, they 'look like toads that are crept out of a dung-heap, and croak just like them'. It was such emotive condemnations as this, all too familiar to the 18th century Methodists, which Wesley no doubt had in mind when in his 'Caution against Bigotry' he noted 'how unwilling men are to allow anything good in those who do not in all things agree with themselves' and commented drily that 'it is far easier to despise, at least seem to despise, an argument, than to answer it'.^[26] Furz's preaching, by the standards of the clergy and the gentry, was no doubt uncultured and unpretentious. It is to the Earl's credit that he saw the essential merit in the antics of these 'rude mechanicals' at his gate, though it may well have been his sense of humour as much as his sense of justice that prompted him to invite Horder to dinner and then accuse him of preaching against the government, 'since he was attacking the Englishman's freedom to worship according to his conscience'.

More or less simultaneously, similar developments were taking place at Shaftesbury, under the leadership of John Haime, a native of the town who, like John Furz, was to join the ranks of Wesley's itinerants.

26. Sermon XXXIII, Forty Four Sermons pp 437, 439

Haime later visited Furz at Wilton and preached there for him. The two men found that they had much in common, including a prolonged spiritual anguish (which in Haime's case seems to have recurred throughout his life). Haime was born in 1710, worked for his father as a gardener and for an uncle at button-making, and went through the almost statutory experiences of 'cursing, swearing, lying and Sabbath-breaking', with other darker but unspecified vices added.[27] Bunyan's Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners brought him some respite in his experience of repeated temptation by the Devil, but he never entirely freed himself from the obsessional guilt neurosis which plunged him into prolonged bouts of melancholia. Meanwhile, he had abandoned his wife and children (apparently without either regret or remorse),[28] enlisted in the Queen's regiment of dragoons, and fought at Dettingen (1743) and Fontenoy (1745). In spite of understandable hostility from the army chaplains, he began to preach to his fellow soldiers, formed a numerous society and gained the approval of the Duke of Cumberland himself, who no doubt viewed him as a useful influence on both the morale and the morals of his troops.

Gaining his discharge in 1747, he was accepted by Wesley as an itinerant preacher, but left his circuit in the face of recurring bouts of depression and for a time became Wesley's travelling companion. Some time in the later part of 1748 he returned to Shaftesbury to see his friends and was seized by a conviction that he must preach there. His announcement that he would do so the following Sunday 'in a place at the end of the town, where four ways met' brought together a crowd of three or four thousand, including many from the surrounding villages. His text, Malachi 4 : 1 is sufficient indication that his theme was the urgent threat of hell fire for the unrepentant sinner. A dozen or more were 'convinced of sin' and within a few weeks he had gathered a society of fifty, which soon increased to eighty. Though flung into prison on a charge of causing a riot, he was soon released,

27. One of these unspecified vices may have been 'sheep-stealing'. The Bristol Diocese Book, begun by Bishop Secker, notes that in 1766 the 'principle teacher' among the Shaftesbury Methodists was 'John Haime, a native of the town, by trade a button-mould cutter, who left his home for fear of a prosecution for sheep-stealing ...' (Bristol R.O.: EP/A/2/2).

28. Almost the only clue we have to his wife's role in all this is a tantalisingly cryptic reference to 'poor Sister Haime' in a letter of John Wesley to Jasper Winscom, in 1790: 'I am sure she was a good woman once'. (JWL VIII 236). The inference seems at least to be that she was as much sinned against as sinning.

partly through the intervention of two Quaker sympathizers. He was now preaching several times a week in 'a large room' and there were plans to build a preaching-house. This was perhaps the 'house' referred to by Wesley, when he went out of his way to preach there at the end of July 1750. His Journal account of that visit, and of a second visit he made on his return from Cornwall in September, indicates that hostility was by no means over:

'30 July. The rain made it impracticable to preach abroad in the evening, otherwise the threatenings of great and small would not have hindered. I suppose the house contained four or five hundred people; it was soon filled from end to end. The chief opposers of John Haime were there; but none stirred, none spoke, none smiled. Many were in tears, and many others were filled with joy unspeakable.
'[At five next morning] Several of those who had been the bitterest persecutors were there.

'5 September ... I preached at noon in the most riotous part of the town, just where four ways met; but none made any noise or spoke one word ... Soon after I was sat down, a constable came and said, "Sir, the mayor discharges you from preaching in the borough any more." I replied, "While King George gives me leave to preach I shall not ask leave of the mayor of Shaftesbury."'[29]

A further five visits during the next five years served to establish the little society. In July 1753, Wesley speaks of preaching 'in the new house', though the earliest chapel of which any documentary evidence exists was not built until 1766. In fact, the Shaftesbury society survived despite its comparative isolation, but does not seem to have succeeded in becoming a centre of evangelistic outreach during the rest of the century. A farmer named Jenkins and his son Reuben are said to have been converted during one of Wesley's visits to the town, and to have opened the kitchen of their farmhouse at Donhead St. Mary to the Methodist preachers. But no evidence has been found to confirm this local tradition, and the first chapel at Donhead was not built until 1837. A chapel was built at Motcombe in 1774, but it was not until 1792 that a dwelling house in Gillingham was licensed for public worship.[30] The only other licences traced for this period were for Tollard Royal (1773 and 1786) and Kingston Deverill (1777).

2.2 Outposts - the 1750s Portsmouth, Fareham, Andover

The year in which Wesley preached in the 'new house' at Shaftesbury also saw him visiting Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight for the first

29. JWW III 488, 493-4. On the first of these occasions, Wesley came from Bristol, though he was bound for Cornwall.

30. See below, pp 198-201

time. Significantly, Methodist societies already existed in both places, reminding us that the Methodist movement was a wider phenomenon than has sometimes been assumed. Even John Wesley could not be everywhere at once; and he was not, in any case, the sole leader of the revival. While it often happened that societies were formed as a result of his visits, in many places the reverse was the case: his choice of routes and preaching places was often determined by the existence of a society.

This was not just true of Portsmouth, or of Southern England generally. The first Methodist societies in the wide moorland parishes of the Upper Calder Valley in West Yorkshire sprang from the work of men like William Darney, William Grimshaw and Benjamin Ingham. Wesley came along later and absorbed many of them into his 'connexion', despite Darney's Calvinism and Ingham's Moravian leanings.[31]

Particularly in the early days of the movement, distinctions between the followers of Wesley (whom we may conveniently, though anachronistically, term 'Wesleyans') and those of Whitefield, Ingham and other evangelical leaders (most of whom differed from the Wesleys by virtue of their Calvinistic theology) were fluid and ill-defined. This is exemplified by the little society Wesley found at Portsmouth in July 1753. It had originated from a visit by John Cennick in 1746. Cennick was followed by other Calvinistic preachers, and eventually in 1749 by Whitefield himself. Most, if not all, of this early preaching was in the open air, but at least as early as 1747 societies had been formed at both Portsmouth and Gosport in association with Whitefield.[32] One of the ways in which they anticipated later Wesleyan practice was the small weekly 'subscription', from which they were able to meet the expense of visiting preachers. Whitefield paid them further visits and their numbers grew to the point where, in 1754, they felt able to build a place of worship of their own. This unpretentious building, 'neither ceiled, plastered nor floored', and known as The Tabernacle, was for the first fifteen years served by visiting preachers, and it was here that Wesley preached when he came

31. See E. Alan Rose on 'Early Methodism in the Upper Calder Valley' in the *Bulletin* of the Yorkshire Branch of the WHS, No. 33 (September 1978) p 10

32. A. Dallimore, Vol. 2, 1980, p 152, quoting a list from the [London] Tabernacle Minutes, compiled in 1747

to Portsmouth in 1758.[33]

It is against this background that we must set Wesley's early visits. By the time he first came, in July 1753, Cennick had joined the Moravians, which may have added a further strand to the theological make-up of the group to which Wesley refers in his Journal:

'I was surprised to find so little fruit here after so much preaching. [Was there a touch of professional jealousy in this verdict?] That accursed itch of disputing had well nigh destroyed all the seed which had been sown. And this "vain jangling" they called "contending for the faith". I doubt the whole faith of these poor wretches is but an opinion.'[34]

Wesley preached 'in an open part of the Common, adjoining to the new church' to a large and well-behaved congregation. The sting in his comment on the inhabitants: 'So civil a people I never saw before in any seaport town in England', lies no doubt in the qualifying word 'seaport'. Nevertheless it seems clear that the local citizens taken as a whole impressed him more than did the minority of evangelical Christians in the town. For one thing most of the latter were Calvinists.

These first impressions seem to have been reinforced when he returned to the town three months later. Speaking of those who gathered on the Common to hear him, he says, 'I admired not so much the immense numbers of people as the uncommon decency of behaviour which ran through the whole congregation.' In contrast, he again describes the Methodist society as 'people who had disputed themselves out of the power, and well-nigh the form, of religion', adding that he 'laboured (and not altogether in vain) to soften and compose their jarring spirits'.[35]

Wesley's immediate concern at this point was to form a society of his

33. Griffin, 1840, p 77; H Smith, 1894, pp 11-12. W.D. Cooper, 1973, p 3, following Tyerman, 1878, II. 178, connects the society with the Countess of Huntingdon, but her role seems to have been an indirect one, chiefly through her influence on Whitefield and the other preachers. It is, in any case, too early to speak, as Cooper does, of 'the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion'.

34. JWJ, IV. 74 (9 July 1753). For Wesley's impatience with disputing over 'mere opinions', see J Wesley, 1975, pp 22-3

35. JWJ IV. 83-4 (5-7 October 1753). Wesley's high opinion of the citizens of Portsmouth was maintained. In 1770 he was impressed by their civility and responsiveness and declared them to be 'more noble than most in the south of England'. (JWJ, V. 393; cf VI. 42)

own by identifying and bringing together those who were prepared to accept the Wesleyan discipline. 'After sermon, I explained to them at large the nature and design of our societies [as distinct from those of Whitefield and others], and desired that, if any of them were willing to join therein, they would call on me either that evening or in the morning.' In this way, the first Wesleyan society in Portsmouth came into existence, its members drawn from the ranks of the Whitefieldite society. It was not the first time Wesley had acted this way: in the earliest days of the Methodist movement, in the summer of 1739, he had formed his first society in Bristol, by the same method of separating his own followers from those of Whitefield, and he similarly withdrew from the Moravian society meeting in Fetter Lane, London, taking with him all whose loyalty he could command. Such a method may be variously assessed: on the one hand as blatant proselytism or an assertion of his independence of Whitefield as a leader in the new movement;[36] or on the other, as a bid to rescue a faithful remnant from the snares of theological controversy and moral lassitude. Wesley dismisses almost contemptuously those of the Portsmouth society who remained faithful to Whitefield as 'that shadow of a society, ... without classes, without order or rules, having never seen, read or heard the printed rules which ought to have been given them at their very first meeting.'[37]

If we may suppose that these Rules were taken at all seriously (and Wesley himself usually saw to it that they were), the contrast between Methodist piety and the prevailing spirituality of the Established Church must have been all too obvious. Wesley did not withdraw his followers from parish worship, but rather insisted on their regular attendance. The greater demands made by the Methodists on the parish clergy was a source of embarrassment and friction. When all allowance has been made for excessive evangelical fervour, the facts speak clearly enough for themselves. Those who desired to continue in his 'United Societies' were expected 'to evidence their desire of salvation', not only by 'avoiding evil' and 'doing good', but also by 'attending upon all the Ordinances of God', which included public worship and the Lord's Supper. The 'Directions given to the Band Societies' (1744), spoke even more specifically of being 'at church and

36. See e.g. A Dallimore, 1970, pp 313, 385-8

37. JWJ IV. 83-4. The 'Rules of the Society of the People called Methodists' were first issued in May 1743 over the joint signatures of John and Charles Wesley (JWW, VIII 269-71)

at the Lord's table every week'.[38] In an age when the Sacrament was administered only four, or at most six, times a year in the vast majority of parishes, Methodist demands for weekly celebration, though anticipating the sacramentalism of the Tractarians, inevitably exacerbated relationships with the parish clergy, as in the days of the Holy Club.

It might have been expected that in the light of his two visits in 1753, Wesley would maintain close oversight of the Portsmouth society through further visits. In fact he did not return until the autumn of 1758, and an even longer interval of nine years was to pass before his *next* visit, in 1767. This prolonged neglect of a struggling society may have been no more than an accident of geography, since his normal routes on his preaching tours still did not bring him to this part of the south coast. But it may also indicate some reluctance to cultivate what seemed unprofitable soil. Some years later one of the preachers in the Salisbury Circuit, William Ashman, bluntly refused to go and preach in Southampton with the words: 'We shall do no good. I have been at such places before: they are all dissenters.'[39] This was at least as true of Portsmouth as of Southampton,[40] and Ashman may well have been voicing sentiments felt, if not expressed, earlier on by Wesley himself.

More specifically, Wesley may deliberately have avoided direct confrontation with Calvinism in one of its strongholds, whether from a concern for the peace of Zion or from fear of being discomfited. It is clear that for some years the Wesleyan society remained weak, almost to the point of extinction; while the Calvinists flourished. On his 1758 visit, Wesley had the use of their chapel, the Tabernacle in Orange Street - a fact which reminds us that the doctrinal breach, though real enough, was not at that stage irreparable. However, by 1767 the lines of demarcation had hardened and he was told that the Tabernacle was not at his disposal unless he preached 'the Perseverance of the Saints', i.e. the impossibility of any justified believer falling from grace.

38. JWW, VIII. 274

39. Stamp

40. At the time of Wesley's first visits in 1753, Portsmouth and Portsea boasted three dissenting chapels between them: one Presbyterian (built 1691), one Baptist (built 1704), and one General Baptist (1693, rebuilt 1715). The Tabernacle, Orange Street (built in 1754 and enlarged in 1773) and a Baptist Chapel in White's Row, Portsea (built 1784) were the only additions to these during Wesley's lifetime.

This was one of the main points of difference between the two wings of the Evangelical Revival. To Wesley this was a vital issue, because he saw its close connection with Antinomianism.[41] So he chose to preach in the rented room which the Methodists had recently taken in Warblington Street, though it was too small to hold all who came to hear him.[42]

It is not easy to piece together the fragments of surviving information about how the Wesleyan society had been faring in the nine years of Wesley's neglect, from 1758 to 1767. In 1757 it had consisted of a mere thirteen members - six men (all artisans) and seven women (including a servant and two schoolmistresses). By 1762 the number had risen to 30 and included a clerk,[43] a housekeeper and three 'gentlewomen'. If this indicates any improvement in social status, it was not, apparently, sustained, since the list of twenty new members recorded for 1767 is made up almost entirely of artisans and artisans' wives, plus two labourers. Only three of the names listed in 1757 still appear, all of them women.[44]

Small as it was, the Portsmouth society had already provided one candidate for the itinerancy in the person of John Mason. Born in Hambledon in 1733, he was left an orphan at the age of five and was brought up by an aunt in Portsmouth. At first he was attached to the Tabernacle society, but later went to hear the Wesleyan preachers who had begun to visit Portsmouth. Admitted into membership of the society by James Oddie, he later withdrew, though continuing to attend the preaching services, and after a lapse of five years was re-instated and subsequently appointed a class leader.[45] In the 1762 membership list 'Jo Meason, butcher' appears as both leader of the society and one of four 'band' leaders. His acceptance for the itinerancy in 1764 was a considerable blow to the Portsmouth society, and left it virtually leaderless. His place was taken by William Norman, a journeyman baker

41. See his Predestination Calmly Considered (1752), in JWW X 204-59, reprinted in Outler, 1964, pp 427-72

42. Until then, their only recorded meeting-place was the house belonging to Robert Williams and John Mason in Portsea, licensed on October 18th 1763.

43. William Norman; see below

44. The membership lists no longer exist, but are printed in H Smith, 1894, pp 19-21

45. EMP III. 307-15

from Newport, IOW, now living in Portsmouth and employed as a brewhouse clerk. Norman had more ambition than ability and proved to be tactless and dictatorial as a leader, to such an extent that 'neither preacher nor people could bear it'. One result was that for a time 'the Methodist preachers deserted the place, and came not again until Mr. Wesley re-introduced them'[46] - presumably after his visit in 1767.

Clearly the itinerants stationed in the Wiltshire Circuit found Norman difficult to handle and, like Wesley himself, chose to dodge the issue by giving Portsmouth a wide berth in their extensive travels. As a result, the society dwindled and was torn by internal broils.

Probably with a view to strengthening the leadership in the circuit, in 1769 Wesley sent Thomas Briscoe to Salisbury as Assistant. Briscoe had been an itinerant since 1751 and continued to serve until he superannuated in 1790, within five years of his death. But his successor in 1770, John Cattermole, was comparatively new to the work, subject to bouts of depression and lacking in self-confidence. After travelling only twice around the circuit, he withdrew, leaving the young Francis Asbury to hold the fort. Asbury, who was shortly to prove himself in America, found his powers of leadership, his common sense in a heated situation and his firm loyalty to Methodist discipline put to the test at Portsmouth. He must have known something of the situation from an earlier period of service 'on supply' in the circuit in 1768.[47] Recognising that Norman's despotic manner was at the heart of the trouble, he succeeded where other preachers had failed, or perhaps not even tried, and replaced him as steward, though Cattermole, who by now had settled at Portsea, added to his difficulties by taking Norman's side. Deprived of his pre-eminence, Norman left the society and died the following year. A battle had been won, but the warfare continued for some years and the Portsmouth society remained divided. The decline in circuit membership in 1784, while it may have been connected with outbreaks of persecution, was partly caused by a fresh outbreak of dissention in the Portsmouth

46. Stamp

47. Letter to his parents, 26 October 1768 (Asbury, 1958, III. 3)

society, for which Cattermole again seems to have had some responsibility.[48]

The period of Norman's despotic rule saw the arrival of two newcomers in Portsmouth, Paul Greenwood and Joseph Webb. Both men settled in the town in 1767 and joined the society at a time when it was its lowest ebb. Their presence may well have exacerbated an already troubled situation by posing a threat to Norman's leadership. Greenwood was a convert of John Furz at Fareham who had already been active as a local preacher in and around Bishop's Waltham and Winchester. Webb also had come under Furz's influence, but owed his full spiritual liberation to a sermon of Greenwood's.[49] It is possible that their arrival in Portsmouth at almost the same time was a deliberate move on their part to revitalise the Methodist cause there. One step which may have been designed to weaken Norman's hand was the hiring of a room in Warblington Street, so that the society had somewhere to meet. Webb and a friend (Greenwood?) themselves paid the rent for three years, which may have been a blend of generosity and tactics.[50] A year later, in September 1768, another preaching-house was opened in Bishop Street, Portsea, the area to the north of Old Portsmouth hitherto common land but now rapidly being developed. This was a converted storehouse which was not settled on a body of trustees until 1784, but continued in use until superseded by St. Peter's Chapel in 1800.[51] Portsmouth was thus the first town in the area to have two Wesleyan societies, each with its own preaching-place.

The only other place besides Portsmouth in which Wesley mentions having

48. A letter from Jasper Winscom to Cattermole accusing him of being involved recalls the latter's part in the 1770 troubles: 'Satan raised discord between Messrs Norman and Mial[1] at Portsmouth and tempted you to espouse the cause of Norman and Asbury that of Mial and the society ... Norman was evidently wrong, and Mial was evidently wrong, and in this case who could cure the evil? None but the confidants of those partizans. You were Norman's confidant, you should have endeavoured to reconcile him to Asbury, which would have reconciled him and the society. This you did not do ... Asbury was doing his duty all the while in the best manner he knew how; it is true he needed counsel, but he could not get it at Portsmouth; you, the only person who was capable, had deserted him and supported his opposer.' (Quoted by J.S. Stamp) For Cattermole, see also Charles Atmore, 1801, pp 41-2.

49. 'Some Account of Mr. Joseph Webb' in WM Magazine, 1819, pp 881-8. Webb was one of the trustees of the fourfold chapel deed of 1786 (see where he appears as a gardener. His younger brother Richard, converted under his influence, also became a lifelong member of the Portsmouth society. (Obituary in WM Magazine, 1825, pp 501-2)

50. Stamp

51. The Bishop Street 'room' was licensed on October 12th 1768.

preached during his visit in October 1753 is Fareham. 'On Sunday noon I preached in the street ... Many gave great attention, but seemed neither to feel nor understand anything.'[52] Southerners, he was discovering, were more inhibited in their response to his preaching, especially in public. There was more response of a sort when he returned five years later and managed to gain a hearing from a 'wild multitude', despite a few open scoffers.[53] In the meantime, the preachers had continued to visit the town from Salisbury and, as we have noted, conversions had taken place. There are no surviving records of Fareham Methodism until long after this time. Nine members are listed in 1785 in George Storey's diary, including a Naval Captain; but it is not listed among the places forming the new Portsmouth Circuit in 1790. If a society continued to exist, it must have remained small in numbers; the first chapel was not built until 1812.

Meanwhile Gosport had become a centre of activity, no doubt aided by its proximity to Portsmouth. Wesley was there in 1758 and again in 1774, but does not mention preaching on either occasion. In 1771 the old playhouse was rented and fitted up as a preaching house; but the society appears to have died out and a fresh start had to be made towards the end of 1796.[54]

Both Fareham and Gosport remind us that Methodism did not always 'take', but sometimes died out after a period of precarious survival. The most important factors for success were no doubt a nucleus of local support and adequate leadership. Had men like Greenwood and Webb not moved to Portsmouth, the fate of the Fareham society might have been quite different.

Despite its long and distinguished history, eighteenth century Southampton was a town in decline. Its overseas trade had waned and as a port it took second place to Portsmouth, though for a time it enjoyed a certain popularity as a fashionable resort.[55] But Wesley's neglect of the town, amounting virtually to deliberate avoidance, may have had

52. JWJ, IV 83 (7 October 1753)

53. JWJ, IV 288

54. Stamp. The first chapel, was built in 1810. But neither Gosport nor Fareham features in Myles's 1813 list of chapels.

55. T.W. Shore, 1892, p 241. The population at the 1801 census was only 7,629 compared to Portsmouth's 33,226, though it was to grow during the next half century at twice Portsmouth's rate.

more to do with its reputation as a hotbed of dissent. Although he twice passed through the town in 1753, he does not record preaching there until October 1767. It was not altogether an encouraging visit: 'The wind being so high that I could not well preach abroad, I sent a line to the mayor, requesting leave to preach in the town hall. In an hour he sent me word I might, but in an hour more he retracted. Poor mayor of Southampton! So I preached in a small room, and did not repent my labour.'^[56] Possibly influenced by this rebuff, he did not return for another twenty years, but instead bypassed the town on his journeys between Portsmouth and Salisbury. Partly for this reason, although a house in All Saints parish, was licensed in 1765, it was not until the 1780s that a society was established there.

Meanwhile, the movement was gaining a series of footholds elsewhere.

The Methodist preachers first came into the Andover area in response to an invitation from Francis Hill, a religiously inclined excise officer stationed near Whitchurch. He was introduced to some of Wesley's writings by the parish priest, a Mr. Wilkins, who had been a contemporary of Wesley's at Oxford and spoke approvingly of the devoutness and benevolence of the Holy Club.^[57] Perhaps as one result of this, Wesley himself visited the area in 1759. He preached at Whitchurch in January of that year, and again in September in what he calls 'the new house', a stable in Wood Street adapted for the purpose.^[58] A month later, on his way back from Bristol, he broke his journey almost on the spur of the moment, in Andover: 'I ... determined to try if I could do any good in Andover. The congregation at ten in the morning was small; in the evening, their number was increased, and I think some of them went away crying out, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!".'^[59]

The results of these visits to Andover are far from clear. Wesley returned only once, in November 1760,^[60] when he described his hearers

56. JWJ, V 235 (14 October 1767)

57. Memoir in WM Magazine, 1807 pp 226-8

58. Licensed for worship, 13 July 1759. It was enlarged somewhere about 1780 and superseded in 1811.

59. JWJ IV 356 (25 October 1759)

60. JWJ IV 418 (7 November 1760)

unpromisingly as 'a few dead stones'. Two months after this the house of James Billet in Back Lane was licensed for worship by John Haime;[61] according to local tradition, at some unspecified date a chapel was built at the junction of Shepherd's Spring Lane and New Street.[62]

Wesley's subsequent neglect of Andover is the more notable in view of his continuing visits to Whitchurch, six miles away. He preached there a further six times between 1760 and 1780. In 1779 'many, even of the rich, attended' and a year later, although the chapel had been enlarged, it was too small for his evening congregation.[63]

But the man responsible for following up the opening created by Francis Hill was John Haime who, after some years of spasmodic itinerancy, had settled here rather than in his native Shaftesbury. It was no doubt his presence that brought Wesley so frequently to the village.[64] After Haime's death in 1784, Jasper Winscom retired to Whitchurch and took up the reins of leadership.

2.3 Outposts - the 1760s and 70s - Winchester, Hampshire villages, Purbeck, Chichester

Winchester, as a stronghold of the Established Church, did not offer any very encouraging prospects for the Methodists;[65] yet a society came into existence there at quite an early date, and survived in an alien environment, though with a significantly small membership.[66] It was far from easy in a polarized community for Methodists to occupy the 'middle ground', as Wesley insisted they should. Certainly the Anglicans were unsympathetic, when not actually hostile; while the

61. Licence dated 29 January 1761 preserved at CRO.

62. B.R.K. Paintin, 1951. The site appears to have been incorporated in the new traffic island at the top of New Street. No deeds have been traced and Andover is not mentioned in Myles' list of chapels.

63. JWJ VI 296 (4 October 1780)

64. It is impossible to re-construct the chronology of Haime's life after his discharge from the Army. (See J W Haime, 1970, pp 45-65.) He was in the area by January 1761 and may have been living locally from then on. He is buried in the parish churchyard, and the original gravestone is preserved at Whitchurch Methodist Church.

65. Wesley showed no sign of avoiding cathedral cities in his preaching tours. Of the twenty-four provincial cathedrals, only five are in places where he seems never to have preached (Chichester, Hereford, Lichfield, Peterborough and Southwell) and most of these lay off his usual routes. In some other cases, e.g. Bristol, Norwich and York, he was a frequent visitor.

66. In 1795, Winchester returned only 20 members, compared with 34 at Crowdhill, 43 at Whitchurch and 220 at Portsmouth.

local dissenters found their advances rebuffed, or at least treated with suspicion. But, as at Portsmouth, internal dissention as much as opposition from outside engaged the society's energies and sapped its strength.

Fortunately, in the case of Winchester Stamp provides considerable detail, enabling us to see how one person in particular was, for both better and worse, a key figure in the establishment of Methodism there. His account forms the basis of the following paragraphs.

Jasper Winscom was an ironmonger in Winchester who found little to satisfy his spiritual needs (or, one may suspect, his need for personal identity) in either the Anglican or the dissenting life of the town. Somewhere about 1761 friends lent his wife some Methodist books and Winscom so far overcame his prejudices against what he had heard of Wesley as to read them. To his surprise, he found that their doctrine was that of the Church of England and he decided that the next time a Methodist preacher passed through the town he would invite him to preach there. This did not happen until the autumn of 1762. On two successive occasions Anglican influence thwarted his efforts to find a place where the visiting itinerants could preach. Then Winscom's mother-in-law provided the solution by offering the use of her summer-house, which would hold about twenty people, and early in the new year William Minethorp[67] came over from Romsey to preach there. He continued his visits fortnightly until the following May, and a class, consisting of four members - Jasper and Jane Winscom, Edward Hayes and John Sparrow - was formed. The little group met only on weekdays, attending the parish church on Sunday mornings. So far were they from separating from the Church that they declined an invitation to join in Sunday evening worship with a local dissenting group. Instead they decided to meet on Sunday evenings and read a sermon together, while continuing to attend Morning Prayer at the parish church.

This apparently unobjectionable step led to trouble for Winscom himself. His ironmongery business was a small one. Some of his clients objected to his Methodist leanings (or perhaps to his inopportune expression of them?) and withdrew their custom. He and

67. Minethorp had just entered the itinerancy. He died in 1776. Wesley termed him 'an honest, upright man', 'a good man and a good preacher'. JWL VI 242; cf V 75

his wife decided that if things did not improve within twelve months then they would move to somewhere where a Methodist society was already established - a step which would presumably be to their commercial as well as their spiritual advantage. But well before the period was up, the death of a local dissenter who was in the hardware trade enabled Winscom to buy his business. He began to prosper - a clear indication, to any Methodist of that period, of divine approval and blessing - and before long was able to add haberdashery to his business interests.

The progress of Methodism, on the other hand, was unspectacular. When Wesley preached in Salisbury and Whitchurch in September 1763, he does not seem to have considered making a detour to visit Winchester. Membership of the society grew slowly, but by 1765 it had reached a dozen. Wesley paid his first visit the following year,[68] and from then on came almost annually. In contrast to Winscom's increasing prosperity, the society had not yet broken through the social and cultural barrier and begun to attract the more respectable and middle-class who would later provide its staunchest members. In 1768 Wesley noted that his congregation was made up of people 'as poor ... as I have seen for many years',[69] though three years later he described them as 'genteel and serious'.[70] At the end of 1768 a dwelling house in the parish of St. Maurice was licensed.

The same year saw the arrival in the town of the 12th Regiment of Foot, which included several soldiers who were 'awakened'. Until the regiment left for Gibraltar[71] the following May, its presence gave support and encouragement to the little society. This was to be a recurring motif. The arrival of another regiment in the spring of 1770 led to a further revival of the work. In July 1772, half a dozen soldiers who had been members of the Chatham society turned up for the preaching service, and the five companies who arrived from Chatham in August included several more members and two local preachers. Though such

68. JWJ V 190 (23 October 1766)

69. JWJ V 291 (26 October 1768). There seems little doubt that it was material, not spiritual poverty to which Wesley referred. Any reference to the latter would have been less ambiguous and more scathing.

70. JWJ V 393 (11 October 1770)

71. Stamp gives evidence that their arrival led to the first Methodist preaching there, antedating the earliest Methodist activity in Gibraltar noted by Findlay and Holdsworth, 1922, IV. 418 by over twenty years.

reinforcements were, in the nature of the case, transitory, they were none the less welcome. A meeting for soldiers was started on Wednesday evenings and at the Quarterly Meeting of the Wiltshire South Circuit held (significantly) in Winchester on New Year's Day, 1773, the host society reported an increased membership of 24, divided for the first time into two classes. Perhaps in response to this development, premises described as a 'preaching house' in a 'lane leading from High Street to Lower Brooks' were licensed on January 27th.

About this time - and perhaps because of the growing strength of the society - local hostility came to a head. There had been some spasmodic disorder among 'the lower orders of the people' around 1770. As elsewhere, this may have been instigated by those in secular or ecclesiastical office, but at least the disturbances were firmly handled by the local magistrates. In spite of this, popular hostility to the Methodists erupted again at the beginning of 1773. Stamp's account, complete with Methodistic embellishments, is the only surviving account of what happened:

'For some time the rabble of Winchester had manifested a disposition to disturb the peaceful proceedings of the small society of Methodists in this city. But on the evening of Sunday the 31st of January the mob gave the public to understand that they intended to achieve something more mischievous than they had hitherto been able to effect. Earnest prayer was made to God both in public and private ... The congregation assembled at 5 o'clock, their usual hour of service, when a vast mob breathing nothing but threatening and destruction approached within twenty yards, and then began to differ among themselves, withdrawing to some neighbouring field to settle their disputes in pugilistic combats; so that the Society enjoyed the ordinance of religious worship in peace.'

However the trouble was not yet over; and in March the Methodists had to resort to the law for protection:

'Some persons behaved very riotously and indecently on 14th, against whom a warrant was taken out. But on account of the petitions which they and their friends offered, and on the condition of a public acknowledgement of their fault in the newspapers, all legal proceedings were suspended, and from that time peace was restored.' [72]

Such a pattern of events was familiar enough to Methodist groups in other parts of the country. The most significant feature in this case is that it had not, apparently, occurred before this within the South Wiltshire circuit; whether because the Methodist activity was still a recent development, on a small scale and therefore relatively

72. Stamp

inconspicuous, or because the local populace was less inclined to rioting. In fact, the most extensive outbreak of persecution in the area did not occur until ten years later.[73]

This period of tentative and sporadic growth saw a number of other attempts to establish Methodist societies in towns and villages in the area. From the signatories of the applications for places to be licensed for worship, it is clear that throughout the period, and beyond so far as Hampshire is concerned, Jasper Winscom was the person who most actively and persistently took the initiative in this.

For the most part, it was private houses that were licensed. Sometimes[74] this led to the formation of a society and eventually to the building of a chapel. But, especially in the smaller villages, in some cases no permanent cause resulted;[75] while in others, any lingering trace of Wesleyan influence was taken up, often after a long interval, by the Primitive Methodists.

One early case of this is the village of Breamore near Fordingbridge. Here the house of Charles Chubb, the local blacksmith, was licensed by Jasper Winscom and John Cattermole early in 1768. No records of the little 'house group' that met there are to be found, and probably none ever existed, since the group was never a 'society', but only a 'class' attached probably to the Salisbury society. No doubt the blacksmith's own family formed the nucleus, with the addition of such neighbours as were persuaded to join them. Unlike other small and isolated classes, we may assume that this one survived for many years, because within a few days of Charles Chubb's death in 1804 the property was relicensed as a place of worship. Despite this, the lease of the property passed soon afterwards to a William Hall[76] and the name of Chubb disappears from the parish registers. Whereas the 1768 license had been taken out in the name of a group of 'Protestant Dissenters', by 1804 they identified themselves explicitly as 'Methodists'. One of the

73. See below pp 105-7

74. E.g. Fordingbridge (2 houses licensed in 1767), Southampton (1768 and 2 in 1780), Romsey (1770), Basingstoke (1773), Portchester (1775), Nether Wallop (2 in 1780).

75. E.g. Twyford (1764), Titchfield (1767), Down Hurstbourne (1773).

76. Breamore Estate Records. The tenement is clearly shown on the Estate Survey of 1770 and is numbered as Plot 472 on the Breamore Tithe Map. It was demolished in the late 19th century. (Information from Mr. Anthony Light, Fordingbridge).

signatories was Winscom's son Henry; another was Charles Chubb, son of the deceased blacksmith, who had inherited the leasehold property under his father's will. But the blacksmith's family, despite an association with the village lasting several generations, had now dispersed, perhaps because there was limited employment in an estate parish, especially for nonconformists. Charles Chubb the younger had married in 1798, and was living in Winchester where his first three children were born;[77] later he moved to the Portsmouth area and prospered as an ironmonger.[78] With the death of his father and the family's dispersal, the Methodist presence in Breamore ceased. In due course the Primitive Methodists took up the challenge, but not until more than a generation later; and the difficulties they encountered [79] serve to highlight the Wesleyan success in surviving for so long in an alien environment.

Of the other places in which the seeds of Methodism were planted during the 1770s, two were villages midway between Winchester and Southampton, and the others involved the first advance of Methodism into South Dorset and West Sussex.

Crowdhill, on the main road from Winchester to Fareham and Portsmouth, was a mere hamlet in the parish of Bishopstoke. It would scarcely have warranted the attention of the Methodist preachers, but for 'an earnest request' in 1774 from Richard Twynam, a cordwainer,[80] who lived there. The second preacher in the circuit at that time, John Crowle, responded to the invitation; the result was encouraging, and Crowdhill was added to the circuit. For many years Twynam's home was open to the visiting preachers; he served as the local class leader, and was the mainstay of this small and comparatively isolated society, which would hardly have survived without him. By 1795, membership had risen to 34, but in 1827, (after his death) it was down to 10.[81]

77. Charles Chubb of Winchester, silk weaver, appears on the 1799 trust of Union Terrace chapel, Southampton.

78. He was trustee of Green Row chapel (1810) and of St. Peter's Chapel (1811), where his remaining nine children were baptized.

79. See below pp 232, 387

80. He appears among the trustees of the fourfold deed of 1786 (see p 128) and as trustee of the chapel in Union Terrace, Southampton, in 1799.

81. The date of the earliest preaching-place (no doubt small, and perhaps an adaptation of an existing building) is now known. According to the 1851 Religious Census, the 1822 chapel replaced an earlier one which dated from 'before 1800'.

Timsbury lay off the main road to Romsey and was therefore even less likely to attract the attention of the Methodists at this stage. However, about 1777 a shoemaker from Whitchurch, John Woodman, settled in the village. He invited Jasper Winscom to preach on the common one Sunday and a congregation gathered from the surrounding countryside. As a result, fortnightly preaching continued on the common and in Woodman's home.[82]

Before long, opposition arose, led by a father and son named Jewell, who were local farmers. One day, during a weekday meeting at Woodman's house, the younger Jewell and a companion tried to disrupt the preaching by jamming the door and throwing bricks and stones down the chimney. Woodman clambered out through a window in time to recognise the offenders; a warrant was issued and they were bound over to appear at the Quarter Sessions. But a show of penitence and payment of all expenses that had been incurred earned them a reprieve.

This incident, far from bringing Woodman any sympathy in the village, had the effect of turning his neighbours against him and he was forced to leave. Preaching ceased, but the Methodists who came from Houghton to the north formed a small society there. Another less predictable result followed. The event had a sobering effect on Peter Jewell, who began to attend the Independent Chapel at Romsey and eventually became a Methodist. His father too changed his attitude to the Methodists and opened his own home to the preachers.[83] The family remained stalwart supporters for many years, though with one notable exception. The younger Mrs. Jewell was very antagonistic towards the Methodist preachers whom her husband entertained for many years, and did her best to make them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. Matters came to a head in 1801 when Mrs. Jewell, finding one of the preachers seated at table with her husband, flew into a passionate rage and flung a leg of mutton at his head. It was deemed prudent for the visiting preachers from then on to be entertained by Jewell's dairyman, Thomas King, the leader of the Timsbury class. Mrs. Jewell died a few years later, and her widowed husband succeeded in choosing a successor, Mary Ventham, who

82. Woodman's home was licensed on 6 August 1777.

83. No licence has been traced for the Jewell's home, so it may never have been used for meetings. In 1786, the dwelling-house of Thomas Hayes was licensed by Jasper Winscom and others.

shared his Methodist leanings.[84]

During the 1770s there were fresh attempts at Wesley's own instigation, to establish Methodism on the Isle of Wight after a twenty-year interval;[85] and also to make a beginning in Southampton.[86] More important, and more immediately successful, was an extension of the work from Salisbury into the Isle of Purbeck over forty miles to the south-west. Again, circumstances which led to this development were largely fortuitous (or 'providential' in terms of the categories used in early Methodism - the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive), and a coherent account of them can be pieced together.

In the spring of 1774 William Kent, a London stationer from High Holborn whose family worshipped at West Street Chapel and the Foundery,[87] called on Jasper Winscom at Winchester while on his way to Corfe Castle on business. Winscom asked him to look into the prospects for gathering a society there, and in particular to call on the local postmaster, Mr. Ingram, and a carpenter named Luther. Kent's report was encouraging: there was a 'dearth of the Gospel' in the area and Methodist preachers would find a welcome. John (or Jonathan) Crowle, the junior preacher in the circuit, lost no time in going down from Salisbury. He preached in the open air at Corfe Castle and also at Swanage, where he gave out a hymn and then 'preached with much freedom, without any annoyance from the multitude'.[88] Several societies were formed and later in the year Wesley himself paid them a visit.

The circumstances leading to that visit are enshrined in local legend, which tells how a woman from Swanage, Mary Burt,[89] complete with a baby in arms, and two companions named Webber and Collins, hearing that Wesley was expected at Salisbury, walked the 40 miles there to beg him

84. See p 411

85. See further, pp 97, 112

86. See below pp 107-10

87. For William Kent and his family, see G.J. Stevenson, 1872, pp 550-2

88. Obituary of John Marsh of Swanage, who was present on the occasion (WM Magazine, 1833, pp. 602-3)

89. See J.S. Simon, 1870, pp. 12-13, quoting the memorial tablet in Swanage Methodist Church. Robert Burt and Mary Cole, both 'of this parish', were married at Swanage on 5th December 1771. She was about ten years older than her husband. Their first child, Mary, was baptized on 23rd October 1774, just one month after Wesley's visit. (This raises some questions as to the accuracy of the local tradition.) Two sons were later baptized, in 1776 and 1778. (Swanage parish registers)

to visit Purbeck. So on a calm, mild evening in October he preached in a meadow at Corfe Castle 'to a deeply attentive congregation gathered from all parts of the island' and met the little society, 'artless and teachable, and full of good desires', though most of them were still in their spiritual infancy. Corfe was a royal peculiar in the gift of the Bankes family[90] and the incumbent of that time, who held the living for over half a century from 1748, was the Revd. Sir Thomas Bankes I'Anson, a member of the I'Anson family of New Bounds, Tonbridge with whom Wesley was acquainted (though mainly, it would seem, with his father, Sir Thomas I'Anson, who had died in 1764, and with his younger brother John).[91] How much time or attention the rector gave to his cure is difficult to say. His mother's family home, Kingston Hall, was in the parish, but his duties as Prebendary, Sub-dean and Precentor at Wells must have taken precedence. From the marriage registers it is clear that he regularly published banns and conducted marriages in the parish between 1754 and 1764; but from December 1764 on, these duties were sometimes performed by curates. During 1774, the year of Wesley's visit, I'Anson himself was in residence at least in February, May and October, but a curate, William Taylor, conducted the marriages recorded between 15th February and 3rd May. The latest entry in I'Anson's name is on 3rd February 1785. His ecclesiastical leanings, if any, are not on record.

After preaching again at 5 the next morning (in the dark?), Wesley paused to examine the castle ruins; then went on to Langton Matravers and Swanage.[92] At Langton there was already a little society; 'but I did not find any among them who knew in whom they had believed'. At Swanage, the society already numbered thirty or forty, but apart from one family whose members 'seemed really to enjoy the faith of the gospel ... few others ... appeared to be convinced of sin'. Wesley was not given to accepting disciples uncritically, but insisted on a searching examination of those who sought membership of his societies, and a regular review of their spiritual progress. In view of the fact that his Journal was not a private diary, but a record prepared for

90. Sir John Bankes (1589-1644) was the royalist attorney general and privy councillor whose wife, as Wesley notes, defended Corfe Castle against the parliamentary forces.

91. For the I'Anson family see H.J. Foster in PWHS V 230-7

92. Until the more direct route was opened, the only road from Corfe to Swanage lay through Kingston and Langton Matravers.

publication (in this case some five years after the event), his critical comments, however perceptive, may seem unduly frank. Nor did he spare the itinerants who had pioneered the work: 'I fear the preachers have been more studious to please than to awaken, or there would have been a deeper work.' Wesley was clearly disappointed by what he found, though the inhabitants of this Dorset backwater seemed 'plain, artless, good-natured and well-behaved' and he concluded that 'if the labourers are zealous and active, they will surely have a plentiful harvest'.[93]

Two years after this visit, Wesley went some distance out of his way to preach again at Corfe Castle, but not, apparently at Swanage.[94] The Purbeck Methodists were otherwise left to survive without him and in spite of their isolation. Until the Morden society was formed in the 1780s, their nearest Methodist neighbours were probably at Weymouth, where a society seems to have been meeting from about 1776 on.[95] There was no society at Blandford until about 1789, at Poole until 1793, or at Wimborne until the turn of the century.

Finally, this period saw an effort, with less permanent results, to extend the circuit eastwards across the Sussex border.[96] West Sussex was virtually untouched by Wesleyan influence during Wesley's lifetime; but early in the 1770s Benjamin Cheverton, a shopkeeper from Nyetimber, Pagham, heard that Methodist preachers were regularly visiting South Mundham and began to attend the meetings. Because his wife was severely crippled and unable to accompany him, he invited the preachers to Nyetimber. Fortnightly preaching continued for several years. Eventually, through his business activities, Cheverton came in contact

93. JWJ VI 41-2 (11-12 October 1774)

94. JWJ VI 126 (5 September 1776). His only other visit to Swanage was a chance one in 1787, when the ship on which he was returning from the Isle of Wight was caught in a storm and took refuge in Swanage Bay. 'I found we still had a little society here! He preached in the Presbyterian meeting house. (Ibid VII 311)

95. The origins of Weymouth Methodism are particularly obscure. Wesley refers to preaching 'at the new house in Melcombe' in September 1776 (JWJ VI 126) and local tradition identifies this as the Old Guildhall or Assembly Room in the yard of the King's Head Hotel, St. Edmund Street. Myles lists the Melcombe chapel as 1778. There are no other firm facts to go on.

96. This information, long forgotten locally, is preserved in an appendix to Stamp's history, Vol. 2. Benjamin and Ann Cheverton appear among the members of the Wilton society in George Storey's diary, 1784-5. Their son, Henry Young Cheverton, became a Wesleyan minister. Ann Cheverton remarried after her husband's death and there is a memoir of her in the W.M.Magazine, 1834 pp 726-35

with Winscom and the Winchester society and about 1781, after his wife's death, married Winscom's niece, Ann Young, and settled in Wilton. This no doubt terminated the visits of Methodist preachers to Nyetimber, and perhaps to the Chichester area as a whole. But in 1790 Robert Carr Brackenbury, the Lincolnshire squire who had become an itinerant, visited Chichester and, finding it to be a godless place despite its ecclesiastical status, began services in an auction room.[97] In the Portsmouth circuit account book, Chichester makes a fleeting appearance in 1793-4 with a contribution of 11s.5d. to circuit funds in the Michaelmas quarter.[98] But the more permanent establishment of Methodism in the Chichester area dates from a decade later than this and was one of a number of home missionary ventures which lie outside our present survey.

2.4 The Last Decade - Winchester, Sutton Scotney, Southampton

The decade leading up to 1790 and the division of the circuit was one not of unchecked advance, but of consolidation and even retrenchment, against a background of both overt hostility and internal tensions. Membership nevertheless increased from 346 in 1781 to 706[99] in 1790, mainly in the second half of the decade, and despite decreases in the years 1784-5 and 1788 (which were years of continuing increase in the connexion as a whole).[100]

In the absence of any circuit records for the period, it is difficult to achieve an over-all view of what was going on. The preachers were still based in Salisbury, from where they took turns in travelling around the circuit. The Isle of Wight remained a problem because of the difficulty of sustaining the work there until a preacher could be spared to reside on the island. The impression that the Salisbury society was enjoying a comparatively placid existence after[101] its

97. Joseph Sutcliffe, ms 'History of Methodism', Vol. 3. 1203 (MAC)

98. Quoted by Stamp. The original has since disappeared.

99. This figure includes 150 for the Isle of Wight, which was only temporarily separated from the parent circuit.

100. See Table 2:1

101. Nevertheless, Salisbury felt the impact of Thomas Webb's preaching even before Winchester, and the effects persisted. In October 1780 Wesley noted 'the fruits of Capt. Webb's preaching' in the Salisbury society: 'some awakened, and one perfected in love'. (JWJ VI 295). Three years later the flame Webb had kindled 'is not yet gone out' (ibid p 452).

initial vicissitudes and that the initiative had largely passed to the Hampshire end of the circuit may be no more than a reflection of the fact that our main source of information derives from Southampton.

There is evidence of tension between Salisbury and Portsmouth, e.g. on the desirability and practicality of an Isle of Wight mission, and in 1784 the smouldering embers of the earlier dissention in the Portsmouth society broke out in fresh disputes. The effects of personal animosities were inevitably felt elsewhere in the circuit, as members took one side or the other. Winscom's sparring with several of the itinerants was a part of this pattern. On the other hand, the outbreaks of persecution may have strengthened, rather than retarded, the societies. Finally, we shall note the belated establishment of a society in Southampton, after more than one false start.

The diary of one of the itinerants, George Storey, provides a close-up of the day-to-day life of the circuit in 1784-5.[102] The circuit membership stood at 380, divided among fifteen societies, with Salisbury and Portsmouth between them accounting for almost half the total:

Sarum	90	Fareham	9
Wilton	17	Portsmouth	85
Chalk	9	Newport	28
Morden	23	Winchester	32
Swannidge	15	Witchurch	26
Dammerham	6	Houghton	14
Timsbury	5	Winterburn	12
Crowdhill	9		

Chalk is identified by the membership lists as Broad Chalke, where a dwelling house had been licensed in March 1783. Winterbourne was one or other of the string of villages along the Bourne valley north-east of Salisbury. From the absence of Shaftesbury from the records of this period we must assume that it was for a time part of the North Wiltshire Circuit. Southampton is a more obvious omission, reminding us that a permanent society had still not been established there.

For practical purposes, the circuit was already divided into two sections, based on Salisbury and Portsmouth, together with the Isle of Wight which, for obvious reasons, was attached to Portsmouth. The two Dorset societies, Swanage and Morden, were visited from Salisbury. The pattern of the itinerants' activity is reflected in an early preaching

102. Storey's diary and notebook is now in the William R. Perkins Library at Duke University, Durham, N.C.

plan preserved in Storey's diary. From this, coupled with the daily diary which Storey kept during his two years in the circuit, we can reconstruct much of the pattern, though only occasionally are weekday appointments noted.

	Mr. Moon	G.S.	Mr Wadsworth
Oct 31	Sarum	Isle	Ports
Nov 7	Sarum	Ports	Isle
14	. . .	Sarum	Isle
21	. . .	Sarum	Isle
28	. . .	Ports	Isle
Dec 5	Sarum	Isle	Ports
12	Portsm	Isle	Sarum
19	Isle	Ports	Sarum
26	Isle	Sarum	Ports
Jan 2	Isle	Sarum	Ports
9	Isle	Ports	Sarum
16	Ports	Isle	Sarum

With rare exceptions the three itinerants seem to have confined their attention on Sundays to the three societies at Salisbury, Portsmouth[103] and Newport. (The only exception in Storey's case during his two years in the circuit, was a Sunday in August 1784 spent at Swanage.) The remaining societies were visited on weekdays. Even Winchester, with four more members than Newport, was still left largely in Winscom's hands. In the early days, Winscom had conducted all the services at Winchester, but from 1770, on Wesley's instructions, he exchanged from time to time with preachers from other places in the circuit. Storey's diary suggests that these were other local preachers, and only rarely, if at all, one of the itinerants. An occasional entry indicates that Winchester and Crowdhill, and perhaps other village societies, were visited by the itinerants in the course of travelling between Salisbury and Portsmouth, and lends some weight to Wesley's fears that the itinerant system was already tending to settle into urban semi-mobility, as Asbury had found to be the case when he arrived among the American Methodists.

By 1784-5, the Isle of Wight was receiving extended visits. For many years the attention given to the island by the itinerants had been intermittent and reluctant. This was partly because of the difficulty of the crossing, especially in the winter months. But there was also reluctance in the circuit - and particularly at Salisbury - to meet the expenses involved. The circuit stewards looked upon the mission as unlikely to be self-supporting financially and therefore a further

103. The two societies, at Portsmouth and Portsea, are treated as one in the pages of Storey's diary.

drain on their limited resources. Wesley was present in October 1775 when the Quarterly Meeting at Salisbury heard that the society established in Newport twenty years earlier, largely as a result of his own visits, had died out. He himself presented the case for a fresh start and offered to underwrite it; but his offer was not immediately taken up.

The next move was taken, not by itinerants, but by Winscom, who prolonged a business trip to the island in order to preach there on the following Sunday. The itinerants remained divided on the prospects of success, but at the Conference of 1776 a fourth preacher was allocated to the circuit on the understanding that the Isle of Wight be provided for. But the venture foundered once again largely through lack of support within the circuit, and it was not until 1779 that a fourth preacher was again stationed in the circuit and the Isle of Wight mission got properly under way.[104]

During the time of Storey's stay in the circuit, one or other of the three itinerants seems to have been always on the island. Normally, Storey spent two Sundays in a row there; but on one occasion at least he preached there on five successive Sundays and appears to have spent the whole five-week period - from January 13th to February 15th - on the island. This followed a month spent there by the senior preacher, John Moon, as the preaching plan above shows. The difficulties of crossing to and from the island in winter months may have been one factor; but it is tempting also to see here a result of Wesley's insistence that the Isle of Wight must be given due attention. If so, it marks a sharp change of attitude since he had written in 1779, 'Ours are travelling preachers; therefore I cannot consent that any one of them should remain for a month together in the island,'[105] and it was an exception to his general concern for the principle and practice of itinerancy.

The difficulties that beset the early days of Methodist work on the Isle of Wight remind us not only of the interplay of personalities and differing viewpoints within the circuit, but of the extent to which Methodism was established, and continued to be sustained, on a 'shoe-string' budget, relying predominantly on the contributions, if

104. Stamp, 1775-79

105. Letter to Winscom, 14 January 1779 (JWL VI 334)

not of the poorest classes, then those of slender means. Any idealised concept of steady advance in the face of hostility, though containing important elements of truth, has to be abandoned in favour of one of a struggle for survival despite limited human and financial resources and some internal tensions and rivalries. That some societies did survive long enough to take root and become more firmly established is the more remarkable in the light of the real circumstances.

Financial constraints were particularly troublesome. The preachers' allowances were barely more than adequate, especially where a wife and family were involved; and their expenses were moderate. Yet it must often have been difficult for the societies to meet their commitments and tempting for them to default. In 1776 the rumour went round that the larger societies were carrying the main financial burden and some resentment was expressed, especially in Salisbury (where the opposition to the cost of the Isle of Wight mission was also strongest). But an examination of the figures showed that, on the contrary, the village societies were contributing 1/- [5p] a head, but Portsmouth and Salisbury only 8d [3p] a head each quarter. It was agreed that all societies be asked to send 1/- a head, so that the work on the Isle of Wight could continue, but the following quarter the two main societies still sent only 8d a head. Offers from three individuals to make up the deficit came too late to save the Isle of Wight mission. Joseph Pescod, who was working there, received his board but no quarterly allowance, and, after the matter had been referred to Wesley himself, he was transferred to another circuit.[106]

* * *

In 1780 there were signs of new spiritual life in the Winchester society, especially among the younger members of the congregation. The American War of Independence brought fresh companies of soldiers to the town, where a prisoner-of-war depot was set up; once again their presence led to increased attendances at the preaching services and to some conversions. The climax came in 1783, during an extended visit by Thomas Webb and Robert Carr Brackenbury. Brackenbury was a Lincolnshire squire who later entered the ranks of the itinerancy and pioneered the Methodist work in the Channel Isles and in Portland. But on this

106. Stamp, 1776

occasion he played second fiddle to the more picturesque figure of Captain Webb, a regular soldier who had been wounded in 1759 at Montmorency while serving under Wolfe and had played a significant part in the establishment of American Methodism before returning to England.[107] Though he never became an itinerant, Webb made a number of preaching excursions from his Bristol home, and one of these, in September 1783, brought him to Winchester. The ground had been prepared by the preaching of a discharged soldier, James McAdin, who concentrated his attention on the work at the barracks. For over a week both Webb and Brackenbury preached both indoors and in the open-air, several individuals were 'convicted of sin' and some conversions followed. A typical case, illustrating something of what lies behind these stock terms of evangelical piety, is that of Mary Edridge Hayter. During Webb's closing prayer after a preaching service at the Barracks, she became 'deeply convinced of sin and cried aloud for mercy'. With several others in the same state, she followed the preacher to Winscom's house, where in an impromptu prayer meeting 'God was earnestly besought on their behalf'. Several conversions resulted. Wesley's categorization of hymns for those 'praying for repentance', for 'mourners convinced of sin', for 'believers rejoicing' and so on,[108] was no arbitrary catalogue, but grounded in the experience of the early Methodists.[109]

One result of the military involvement was that the Winchester society played an inadvertent part in the spread of Methodism overseas. Back in 1769, the posting of the 12th Infantry Regiment to Gibraltar had led to the first Methodist preaching on the European mainland. Now one of Webb's converts, Corporal Thomas Miller, when posted with his regiment to Jersey, wrote to Winscom urging the need for a preacher in the Channel Islands. The letter was forwarded to Wesley, and Brackenbury, who was with him at the time, volunteered to go.[110]

A more practical result of Webb's mission was that a larger and more convenient preaching-house than the one in which they had been meeting

107. See E. Ralph Bates, 1975

108. In A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists, first published 1780.

109. Stamp gives details of other such conversions during Webb's Winchester mission.

110. See R.D. Moore, 1952, p 18

since 1773 was needed. The Conference of 1785 gave its approval for the building of a chapel. It was not easy, however, to find a suitable building or site. Probably there was some reluctance, as elsewhere, to sell to the Methodists in the face of public disapproval. Several possible sites were rejected as unsatisfactory, partly because Winscom and his fellow leader, Edward Hayes, were both of a contentious nature and found it difficult to agree with each other. Eventually, Winscom took matters into his own hands and bought a semi-derelict property on Silver Hill. Wesley went down to preach at the opening service in November 1785, but was not impressed by the congregation who 'seemed to be mere sticks and stones'.^[111] It was licensed in the new year as a 'chapel newly converted from the dwelling house of John Horner'.

Significantly, Edward Hayes was not among those who signed the application for the chapel to be licensed.^[112] One of the first to join the Winchester society, he had withdrawn from membership in 1776, but continued active in its affairs and exercised considerable influence on some of the members. His leanings towards 'mysticism' led to extravagant claims to visions and special revelations, more characteristic of the Swedenborgians than of the Methodists. His case reminds us how difficult it was for Wesley to lead his followers along the narrow path between the lifeless formality of so much 18th century religion and the 'enthusiasm' which the age of reason so rightly mistrusted.

After Winscom's retirement to Whitchurch in 1787, Hayes, though still not a member, took his place as society steward. Before long, apparently as part of a personal vendetta, he had excluded two local preachers, one of them Winscom's son Henry, from membership. The society was split, and the dispute spread to Salisbury. Eventually, a disagreement between him and his fellow steward provided an opportunity for the Assistant, William Thom, to replace them both; but that he should have held office for so long is indicative of the fluid state of Methodist discipline at the local level in these early years.

The Silver Hill chapel was to prove a cause of protracted trouble to

111. JWJ VI 127 (24 November 1785). The footnote is wrong in locating this first chapel in Parchment Street.

112. These were James and John Ould, John Austin and Jasper and Henry Winscom (the first appearance of Winscom's son, who was to be increasingly active in Winchester after his father's move to Whitchurch, and elsewhere in the Portsmouth Circuit).

the Winchester society, and to give Wesley cause for regret that he had lent his support, both personal and financial, to its acquisition. The venture cost £400 in all, of which £50 was collected locally and £100 was lent by Wesley.[113] Winscom himself, who had taken it upon himself to make the purchase and arrange for the premises to be adapted to their new purpose, was left with a debt of £250, part of which he raised by personal loans.[114] For years the society struggled with this debt, and in 1788 Wesley cancelled the £100 still owing to him as the only way of enabling the society to meet its commitments. In addition, there was trouble over the legal title. Winscom had executed a bond securing the chapel to the Conference, [115] but after Wesley's death he claimed possession of the property on the grounds of the substantial debts still outstanding. There were lengthy and acrimonious exchanges between him and the circuit preachers, one result of which was that the society more than once found itself shut out of the chapel for weeks at a time. In 1796 they solved the problem by returning to their former premises;[116] and in 1810, they eventually relinquished all claim to the chapel.

Winscom was a source of trouble in other ways. As a man of firm convictions and much energy, he was a natural leader within the restricted circle of local Methodism, but he clearly lacked the sensitivity and tact (not to mention the power of self-criticism) to be a successful one. What might have been acceptable in a traditional hierarchy merely aroused resentment and opposition within the context of the Methodist societies, where even Mr. Wesley's paternalism did not go unchallenged. Winscom's career seems to have been a series of collisions.

That he was not motivated merely by animosity towards the itinerancy is

113. See his letter to Winscom, 13th September 1785. (JWL VII 289)

114. There was a certain amount of income from the letting of part of the premises that had been turned into tenements, and also the former preaching room. This, with the seat rents and the proceeds of an annual collection just about equalled the £12:10s:0d [£12.50] required to meet the interest on the loans.

115. Wesley's advice in 1786 to have the property 'transferred to five or more trustees on the Conference plan' (JWL VII 345) was never carried out because of the continuing debt.

116. They do not seem to have found a more permanent solution until they moved to premises on the corner of Parchment Street and St. George's Street in 1816. (There is an earlier deed conveying a leasehold site on the north side of High Street in 1813, but it is not clear whether this relates to the same property.)

indicated by his open criticism of Mr. Churcher, the Southampton steward, for being negligent in his duties. Nevertheless, he does seem to have chosen to cross swords particularly with the circuit preachers, and so many instances occur that we may posit suspicion of, or hostility to, the authority vested in them by Wesley himself as likely motivation.

We have already noted his criticism of John Cattermole for his part in the dissentions at Portsmouth.[117] On that occasion, at least, he may have been justified. Stamp adds a number of further instances in which he was critical of, or at loggerheads with, the itinerants. One of his bitterest clashes was with Francis Wrigley, the Assistant in the circuit in 1781/2. As a faithful disciple of Wesley, Wrigley 'had imbibed very high notions of that subordination which he thought inferiors [e.g. laymen] should manifest towards superiors in office [e.g. itinerant preachers]'. Winscom, on the other hand, 'looked upon superintendents and helpers [i.e. the itinerants] as literally servants of a circuit : persons who should cheerfully perform all the drudgery which a levelling and democratic quarterly meeting might suggest.'[118] These quotations are couched in language coloured to some extent by later controversy over the exercise of authority within Wesleyan Methodism. This issue was to come to a head after Wesley's death and to resurface many times during the following century. Winscom's clash with Wrigley anticipated and exemplified the later controversy.[119] Though brought up within the Anglican tradition, in this respect at least he was clearly a dissenter at heart. The issues involved were wider in other senses, too: they were social, economic and political as much as theological. We may perhaps see Winscom not only as a spokesman for the Methodist laity (or part of it), but as a shopkeeper and small businessman voicing the frustration and aspirations of the emerging middle classes in the face of the traditional structures of society.

The immediate cause of disagreement with Wrigley was a young protege of Winscom's who believed himself called to preach. Wrigley judged him to

117. See above, p 82

118. Stamp

119. In fact, he played a minor, and local, part in it when the time came. In 1795, when the Kilhamite controversy was coming to a head, Winscom added his voice to the demand for a greater measure of democracy in the connexion.

be very unsuitable and the argument grew more and more heated until Dr. Coke was drawn into it as peace-maker. Predictably he took the itinerant's side and wrote to Winscom:

'I doubt not, if you had travelled,[120] but you would have been the Assistant of a circuit yourself, and I firmly believe you would not have approved of another person's upholding a preacher as such, whom you thought improper to be one. But the main argument and a most important one it is, is the necessity of union between the preachers, for the prosperity of Zion, and this union cannot be established or supported without a regular subordination.'[121]

These were the views which were to find their fullest expression in the next century in the high Wesleyan doctrine of the 'pastoral office'.[122]

In 1787, Winscom became highly critical, both privately and in public, of the preacher stationed in the Isle of Wight, Thomas Warwick. This provoked a letter from Wesley which, while it implied that he was still disposed to back Winscom's judgment, insisted that he should go to the Isle of Wight and confront Warwick with the criticisms.[123] Whether this happened is not recorded, but evasiveness was not among Winscom's failings.

In all this, Wesley himself must bear a measure of responsibility, since he clearly had confidence in the man and encouraged him more than in retrospect seems justified. This is nowhere more clearly illustrated than by Winscom's brief flirtation with the itinerancy. He had retired from business in 1787 and settled in Whitchurch. A letter from Wesley in the following May clearly implies that he was prepared to become an itinerant and makes a quite incredible suggestion:

Dear Jasper,
It seems to me the most proper Assistant for the Sarum Circuit (only do not talk of it yet) will be Jasper Winscom. I am convinced the person whom I had intended for it is not the proper person.[124]

In the event, although Winscom did become an itinerant, Wesley had

120. I.e. 'served as an itinerant preacher'.

121. Letter from Dr. Thomas Coke to Winscom, 3rd June 1782, quoted by Stamp.

122. See J.C. Bowmer, 1975, esp. pp 198-228

123. Letter of 6th March 1788. (JWL VIII 42-3) Whatever the immediate outcome, Wesley stationed Warwick in the Bristol Circuit the following year and he continued to serve until he superannuated in 1799.

124. Letter of 28 May 1788 (JWL VIII 61)

second thoughts and made William Thom the Salisbury Assistant. Winscom, as one of the other four preachers in the circuit, had special responsibility for the Isle of Wight, in succession to Thomas Warwick of whom he had recently been so critical. The following year the Isle of Wight again became a separate circuit, with Winscom in charge of it. Then he was appointed to the Oxfordshire Circuit for one year. But after this taste of itinerancy, he retired once more to Whitchurch and disappears from the Stations, though, as we have noted, the Winchester society had not yet seen or heard the last of him.

Stamp's judgment on Winscom is that 'a more censorious and fault-finding man never existed'; and if that seems too sweeping or one-sided a verdict, there does seem to be justice in his diagnosis that Winscom was a man more given to amending than to keeping the rules, who frequently came up with new schemes and was inclined to criticize those in authority if they hesitated to adopt them.

We turn from internal to external troubles. Sutton Scotney, a hamlet in Wonston parish midway between Winchester and Whitchurch, illustrates the almost incidental way in which the smaller village societies came into existence and the kind of reaction they evoked. A young woman named Sarah Strange kept house there for an uncle. In January 1785 she was 'convinced of sin' at a preaching service in Whitchurch. On her return to Sutton Scotney she began to speak of her experience to others. Their reactions were predictably varied. Soon after this, a young man from Whitchurch decided to settle in the village and set up as a tailor, in order to initiate Methodist preaching there and to provide a meeting-place for a society. This he did, and the house of a widow named Elizabeth Hawkins was licensed for worship on March 10th. This was all so tentative and informal, that at the outset it had no official backing from the circuit, the itinerants were not involved, and the meetings were conducted by local preachers from Whitchurch and Winchester.

The first hostility seems to have been provoked by the announcement that, in addition to weekday meetings, preaching services were to be held on Sunday evenings. Threats to pull down the preaching house quickly escalated into violence. One family in particular seemed to be the trouble-makers though they quickly became the nucleus of a larger group, and behind them stood the real cause of the trouble, one of the principal farmers in the parish, James Wickham. He was seen to incite

the mob to fresh violence, encouraging them by a supply of strong beer. Windows were broken and other damage done to both the preaching house and the Methodist tailor's lodgings. Some of the Methodists were beaten with sticks and further violence was threatened against them and the visiting local preachers. Winscom himself was among those from outside the village who came at considerable risk to give their support to the beleaguered society. The ordeal went on for over two months and reached a climax on Sunday 24th March, when Elizabeth Hawkins' house was attacked after dark and seriously damaged; though the rioting went on well into April and was only brought to an end by repeated recourse to the law.[125]

The role of the magistrates and the local constabulary in all this is of considerable interest and illustrates how precarious was the administration of justice and the maintenance of order in the 18th century. The victims' first line of defence was the local justices of the peace. All too often, the Methodists, indeed Wesley himself, had found these gentlemen either indifferent or actively hostile to them. But here the local magistrates seem to have done what they could. When appealed to, they first issued warrants against those responsible for the damage and violence, and bound them over on payment of damages and promises of good behaviour in future. But the trouble-makers were openly contemptuous of the law and its powers, and the promises were quickly broken. When an Andover JP was appealed to, he unhesitatingly granted a further warrant, declaring that he would deal rigorously with the culprits. But when the warrants were delivered to the local constable, he treated them with contempt and threw them on the ground, where one of the rioters stamped on them. However, on discovering the possible consequences of his action he had second thoughts, served the warrants and brought the accused before the court. The only effect this had was to provoke the mob to fresh defiance and renewed violence. Twenty or so of them got together and signed a paper declaring their opposition to all law and justice and their determination to drive all Methodists out of the parish.

With limited powers and few sanctions to fall back on, the constable was clearly in a difficult position, and could not look to the magistrates for much more than moral support in the face of popular

125. J.S. Stamp gives a lengthy and detailed account from a letter of Winscom to Wesley, together with extracts from witnesses' depositions.

defiance. The tithing man, to whom he tried to pass responsibility for keeping the peace, was even more powerless and, understandably, each time trouble was brewing, managed to be away from home on business. At the height of the trouble a new constable, who was sympathetic towards the Methodists, was sworn in and did his best to calm the situation, but with no success; and the next time the rioters gathered outside the preaching house, he received a number of blows in attempting to disperse them.

When the violence again showed signs of increasing, further warrants were issued and seven of the mob were bound over to appear at the Quarter Sessions. Wickham and another farmer named Pain(e), who were widely known to be the real fomenters of the disturbances, stood bail for the accused men. This did not prevent the trouble continuing, and even growing worse, in the interval before the case was heard. But the convictions obtained had the desired effect on the rest of the Sutton Scotney mob, and the local Methodists at length gained a measure of peace.[126] However, the Sutton Scotney society did not long survive, and the village was eventually missioned by the Primitive Methodists.

The most important new development during this decade was undoubtedly the belated introduction of Methodism into Southampton in 1787. That there had been earlier abortive attempts during the twenty years in which Wesley by-passed the town is indicated by the registration of preaching places that can be identified as Methodist. The earliest of these was probably a house in All Saints parish in 1765.[127] Further licenses in 1777 and 1780 seem to reflect continuing sporadic attempts on the part of Jasper Winscom, whose signature appears on each of the applications. The two houses registered in 1780 belonged to members of the Fay family and it is they who represent the key to eventual success in 1787.

From the church register we can trace the connection between the Fay family and the Above Bar congregation back as far as 1689. Stephen and Hannah Fay were received into Church Fellowship in 1766, but although

126. A price had to be paid, nevertheless. The attorney representing the Methodists failed to apply for costs and left them with a substantial debt to be met. See Wesley's letters to Winscom, 17 June 1786 and 30 September 1788 (JWL VII 334, VIII 96)

127. The house of Richard Taylor, licensed on 16th April 1765 by Barnabas Thomas and Joseph Webb. Thomas was one of the earliest itinerants, of whom we know very little (see EMP IV 49). Webb was converted at Fareham; see above p 82

Stephen became precentor at the chapel there is no record of his being brought into full communion.[128] Hannah had been a Methodist before her marriage and her husband was therefore sympathetic towards the new movement. Early in 1787 Adam Clarke passed through Southampton and renewed his acquaintance with the family, whom he had known in London. At 7 o'clock on the Sunday morning he preached, apparently in the Fay's house, where he was staying.

Later in the year Wesley too passed through Southampton and, though staying only two nights before embarking for the Channel Islands, he preached three times in 'Mr. Fay's schoolroom'. [129] This visit, though it was a result rather than a cause, no doubt heartened the small society that had been formed. One member of his 'small but deeply serious congregation' was a neighbour of the Fays, John Morse. His prejudice against Methodists was swept away, not so much by Wesley's preaching as by the impact of Wesley's personality and his cordiality when they were introduced. Morse became a leading member of the society, together with his wife who had been brought up among the Methodists at Whitchurch.

Although the Fays at first encouraged the Methodist group that now began to meet regularly, they remained on its fringe, their main allegiance being to the Above Bar congregation. The Methodists were a small and unpretentious company, drawn from the poorer classes. Though some had attended the Above Bar chapel, none were members there. The Morses had worshipped mainly at the parish church since coming to Southampton. Several of the others had previous Methodist associations: Richard Norris at Winchester, Zechariah and Elizabeth Thomas at Bath, Jane Batten at Timsbury. The latter was in service and brought two of her fellow servants, Jane Sainsbury and James Fry, into the society.

The group first met at the Thomas's home, though this does not seem to have been registered; then in a house in East Street, rented by Morse and furnished with the help of a loan of ten guineas from his employer. This arrangement, however, did not last long and early in 1788 the hostility of those living nearby forced them to move to a disused auction-room in Hanover Buildings. Here they continued to meet

128. Their three daughters were all baptized in the Above Bar chapel; and one of them, Hannah, was received into full communion in 1795 after her marriage. Both her parents were then dead.

129. JWJ VII 309-10 (9th-10th August 1787)

unmolested for the next four years, perhaps because the person who rented it to them was one of the town constables.

There was at first some reluctance on the part of the itinerants, or more specifically the Assistant William Ashman, to support the new society. When asked to arrange for regular visits from the itinerants, including himself, he at first refused, saying, no doubt with the Above Bar Independents particularly in mind, 'We shall do no good. I have been at such places before: they are all dissenters.' One of his colleagues, John Pritchard, was the first to preach out of doors in the town and did so without any opposition. Ashman himself aroused interest and amusement by his eccentric appearance. He was very stout, with a broad red face, which he chose to surmount with a red night-cap, so that he quickly earned the nickname of 'Bishop Blaze' among the local youths.

As the society though still very small developed a life of its own, relations with the Above Bar congregation became strained. The Fays in particular disapproved when the Methodists began holding their own meetings at the same time as the Independents. They no doubt had hoped that the group would attach themselves to their chapel and support its Sunday evening services,[130] even if they continued to attend their parish church in the mornings. One of the younger Methodists, James Fry, who had frequently attended the Above Bar chapel, applied for membership there, but after several interviews with the minister and deacons he was turned down because they were not convinced of his theological orthodoxy. Since the pastor, William Kingsbury, is credited with 'liberal spirit and unsectarian views',[131] it does not appear that Calvinism was the main issue at stake in this case. It is interesting to note that Fry not only was warmly welcomed by the Methodists, but soon became both a leader and a local preacher among them. Between the older Dissent and the Established Church there was not much growing room for the Methodists. They were still a small and unpretentious group and could hardly afford to be very selective.

Moreover, their ranks were already being depleted in one way or another. One member named Walker fell into bad company and was

130. William Kingsbury, pastor from 1764 to 1809, introduced the practice of Sunday evening worship, the first in Southampton.

131. Samuel Stainer, 1909

eventually hanged for forgery. Another, a blacksmith named Hensford, had several of the more well-to-do members of the Above Bar congregation among his clients and was persuaded to dissociate himself from the Methodists. When before long he got into difficulties, was sentenced to transportation for buying stolen goods, but died on his outward voyage, his fate was probably seen by his former Methodist associates as a clear demonstration of the working of providence. Some of those who left the society put about such slanderous rumours as that the class money and money collected at services was spent on spirits for the preachers and stewards; and there was criticism of the way in which accounts were kept.

A turning point seems to have been reached in 1791 when Kingsbury abandoned his suspicion of the Methodist preachers and showed a readiness to accept them as fellow-workers.[132] This was perhaps a recognition that Methodism had come to stay. The society now had a membership of 70, divided into four classes, and was about to move into larger premises in the shape of a scaffold loft opposite its meeting place in Hanover Buildings.[133]

Among the places in which new ventures were undertaken during this decade, we find houses licensed for Methodist preaching at Hursley, Houghton and Romsey in the Winchester area, Basingstoke and Odiham in the north, and at Winsor and Newbridge near Southampton. Again, not all of these led to the formation of a society or the building of a chapel. At New Winsor, a settlement on the edge of the New Forest in the extensive parish of Eling, James Fry, accompanied by his fellow servant Jane Sainsbury, faced a hostile mob, having placed himself strategically with his back to a tangled thicket through which no one could get at him. He was able to complete the open-air service, but although a house in the village was licensed the venture was soon abandoned. Redbridge was then a bustling village in the same parish, a centre of shipbuilding and of trade in coal, corn and timber, but with no place of worship. The first preacher to visit it took his stand under the shelter of a large tree, and was interrupted by one of the churchwardens of the parish, who denounced him and his fellow

132. The claim that he opened his pulpit to both Wesley and Coke (Stainer, 1909) is refuted by Stamp. Certainly, Wesley cannot have preached at Above Bar 'frequently' as Stainer asserts.

133. This was licensed on 14 November 1793.

itinerants as 'the pests of the country and the scum of the earth'. Here, too, the preaching was soon given up. The progress of Methodism was by no means an uninterrupted advance.

By 1785 there was also a well-established society of 23 members at Morden, west of Poole, though as yet they had no preaching place other than their own homes.[134] This was probably an offshoot of open-air preaching at Lytchett Matravers, by James Perfect, who had come to the village in 1775, when he was an itinerant in the North Wiltshire Circuit. Three years later, while stationed in Salisbury, he returned to the area, probably on his way to or from Swanage. 'A blessed revival broke out, and a Society was formed.'[135] The home of Elizabeth and William Lodge was licensed for preaching,[136] but by 1784 the society had apparently died out and we find the Lodges, though still living at Lytchett, listed among the members at Morden.[137] Apart from Swanage, this remained the only society in south-eastern Dorset until Poole was 'opened up' in the following decade.

2.5 Retrospect and Evaluation, 1790

2.5.1 The Itinerants

'I am well-nigh tired of [the Salisbury Circuit]. I have had more trouble with this circuit than with ten circuits besides.' [138] In the light of our survey so far, this verdict in Wesley's last letter to Winscom is scarcely surprising. The circuit had had its share of problems both internal and external, and had given Wesley ample cause for anxiety and concern. In some respects it may be seen as exemplifying the growing pains of the new movement. Internally, as we have seen, the membership growth lagged behind other areas, and the societies remained widely scattered and comparatively isolated from one another. At the time of its division in 1790, the circuit had only three purpose-built chapels, plus nine or ten other buildings converted

134. A succession of houses were licensed in the closing years of the century. The first chapel was not acquired until 1846.

135. W.M. Magazine, 1893, p 273

136. Dorset Quarter Sessions, 5 October 1779.

137. Diary of George Storey. The Lytchett society was re-established in the 1790s. In 1795 it had 19 members. A chapel was eventually bought in 1824.

138. Letter to Winscom, 28 August 1790 (JWL VIII 236)



for preaching.[139] Nor were the itinerants beyond criticism, at any rate if judged by Wesley's high standards. Externally, relations with both the Established Church and with Dissent - old and new - presented their own problems, some of them characteristic of the region, others stemming from local circumstances.

An earlier letter to Winscom furnishes a glimpse of what Wesley expected of the itinerants:

'What shall we do with the Salisbury Circuit? I do not like it at all. It is all wrong. A faithful Preacher should never spend above two nights together at one place. And all the Preachers shd. regularly follow each other thro ye whole Circuit. Consider how this may be done and send your plan to
Your affectionate Brother,
J. Wesley'[140]

Clearly, in Wesley's mind the itinerants were to be lay evangelists, not surrogate parish priests; though it was perhaps inevitable that in an age when the liturgical and pastoral functions of the parish system were widely neglected the Methodist preachers should increasingly assume these other roles, and even come to prefer them to their original calling.[141]

There were at this period four preachers stationed in the circuit, and their base was still Salisbury, from which they set out in turn to travel round the societies. Their reluctance to include the Isle of Wight, at least until someone could be spared to be based on the island, is understandable. Even after the division, Joseph Sutcliffe found the Portsmouth Circuit an unusually extensive one: 'It was then [1790] a primitive round[142] comprising the whole of the Isle of Wight and extended to Whitchurch, but twelve miles from Newbury, thence following the streams to Southampton, crossing Crowdhill to Portsmouth, and after[wards] to Chichester ...'.[143]

Much has been written, and with justice, about the heroic dedication of

139. See Table 2:2

140. Ms letter to Winscom, July 24, 1781, at MAC (MAC JW 5.94); PWS XIX 68-9

141. It is significant, nevertheless, that it is still normal Methodist usage to speak of someone, whether minister or layman, being 'appointed to preach' at a particular service, rather than to 'conduct a service' or 'lead the worship'.

142. An early alternative term for a circuit, especially in the north of England.

143. Joseph Sutcliffe, ms History of Methodism Vol. 3 pp 1202-4 (MAC)

the first generation of Wesley's preachers and the almost intolerable conditions in which they laboured. What must also be recognised is that, though they were hand-picked by Wesley himself, by no means all of them proved equal to the task or succeeded completely in fulfilling their high calling and Wesley's equally high expectations. The incidence of those who withdrew from the ranks after a comparatively short time is witness not only to the demanding nature of the itinerant life, but also to their forgivably human limitations. Of the thirty-five preachers stationed in the undivided Wiltshire Circuit between 1758 and 1768, at least seventeen withdrew sooner or later from the itinerancy or, in one case at least, were expelled. Of the four stationed in the circuit in 1765 - the first year in which the preachers' stations were published - Richard Henderson, the 'Assistant', [144] had been an itinerant since 1754, but withdrew in 1771 and is described as 'introspective'. Two of his colleagues, Richard Walsh and Thomas Simpson withdrew in 1773 and 1784 respectively. In the following year, Thomas Dancer left the itinerancy within his first year; while his colleague, James Stephens, was expelled in 1772. William Orpe (1767) withdrew after one year.

This pattern continued in the Salisbury Circuit after 1768. We have seen how John Cattermole abandoned his post in 1770 after only a few weeks as Assistant. [145] One of the 1778 itinerants, ironically named James Perfect, was expelled in 1785 for 'gross [but unspecified] immoral conduct'. [146] These failures, however numerous, highlight the devoted and often heroic service of a succession of preachers. In the case of those who were married, the cost to their wives and families can only be guessed at; but John Haime's wife [147] was not alone. Both the rigours and the tensions of the itinerancy are illustrated by an incident in 1775. [148] The Assistant that year, Francis Wolfe, while travelling round the circuit, was summoned back to Salisbury to nurse

144. i.e., the senior preacher (later known as the 'Superintendent') appointed as assistant to Wesley and responsible to him for the administration of the circuit.

145. See above, pp 81-2. Cattermole became a schoolmaster and appears in the 1785 membership lists under Portsmouth.

146. Stamp, 1778

147. See above, p 74

148. Stamp, 1775. According to the Minutes of Conference, Ashman was stationed in Bristol, and as Stamp himself notes, it is not clear how he came to be in the Salisbury Circuit at this time.

his sick wife. One of his colleagues, William Ashman, refused to take his preaching appointments for him, although his wife was dying, saying that it would cost less to engage a nurse. Ashman's own eccentricities have already been noted.[149]

2.5.2 Chapels

(a) Architecture

The itinerants were first and foremost preachers and evangelists, though as with Wesley himself, pastoral and administration functions quickly resulted from this. Similarly, Wesley intended the meetings of his societies to supplement, not to replace, the liturgical and sacramental worship of the parish church; and this had its effect on the pattern of Methodist worship and therefore on its architectural setting.[150] The earliest Methodist meetings took two main forms: the preaching service (whether indoors or out) and the class meeting. This, quite apart from financial considerations, made it more appropriate for the Methodists to adapt existing buildings to their use, rather than build 'chapels' from the outset. (Significantly, Wesley's London headquarters for half a century was a refurbished cannon foundry.) This was, in Gilbert's phrase, the 'conversionist' phase in which the emphasis was on the expansion of the movement through the evangelistic endeavours of both itinerants and local laymen. Accommodation was a subsidiary consideration and more often than not was of a temporary nature.[151]

Wesley also insisted, with considerable success in the face of strong pressure, that the Methodists should not meet in 'Church hours'. As late as 1788 he wrote to Winscom: 'If all our society at Portsmouth or elsewhere separate from the church, I cannot help it. But I will not. Therefore I can in no wise consent to the having service in church hours ...'[152] He also preferred the designation 'preaching-house' to any other description, though the term 'chapel' gradually replaced it. When building rather than adapting became more common, Wesley's preference for the octagonal plan was prompted not only by Dr. Taylor's

149. See above, p 109

150. See J Bishop, 1950 pp 78-84, 100-102

151. A.D. Gilbert, 1976 pp 53-8

152. Letter of 16 July 1788 (JWL VIII 72)

meeting-house in Norwich, but by its advantages in terms of capacity and audibility.[153]

Of the three preaching-houses built in the circuit during Wesley's lifetime we have regrettably little detailed information. None of them has survived, though in the case of Salisbury and Shaftesbury Methodist premises still occupy the original sites (considerably enlarged, in the case of Salisbury, by the purchase of adjacent plots).

In the two decades since the building of the original Room in the Horsefair, Bristol, no more than a dozen or so preaching houses had been built throughout the country. But 1759 seems to have marked the beginning of a new phase, with as many as six or seven chapels being built, mostly in the north.[154]

The Salisbury chapel, built in 1759, immediately after the formation of the Wiltshire Circuit, thus belonged to the first generation of Methodist preaching-houses, and remained the most prestigious building venture of the Salisbury Circuit throughout its undivided existence. The site was obtained in October 1758 on a 1,000 year lease from two local citizens, one of whom, William Westcott, maltster, was the father of one of the trustees. Within twelve months the chapel had been built, and the trustees, finding that they had a deficit of £200, raised this sum by mortgaging the property to Mr. Joseph Elderton. It is regrettable that we know so little about its style or furnishings, beyond Wesley's commendation of it as 'the most complete in England'. The 1759 deed of mortgage describes the property simply as 'a place of worship and also two messuages in the front thereof'. No further details seem to have survived, and the chapel was entirely rebuilt in 1810.

Even less is known about the design or furnishings of the preaching houses built at Shaftesbury in 1766 and at Portsmouth in 1788. The Shaftesbury chapel was licensed on 15th July 1766 as a 'new erected house belonging to James Higgins'. It was not conveyed to a body of trustees until February 1769, when James Higgins, baker, appears as one

153. G W Dolbey, 1964 pp 101-3

154. There is more work to be done on this earliest period of Methodist chapel building. The evidence is fragmentary and sometimes unreliable. Perhaps for this reason, Dolbey concentrates on architecture and Benson Perkins on legal aspects. For a more general treatment, see L F Church, 1948, Ch II.

of them. Again, an adjoining 'tenement or dwellinghouse' was included in the conveyance. Like the Salisbury chapel, the property was leasehold, and the lease was not redeemed until 1893. Nor was the original deed of conveyance enrolled in Chancery until nearly a century after the chapel was built,[155] by which time another chapel (1827) had long since taken its place on the site. The Oyster Street chapel, Portsmouth, was opened by Wesley in 1788 and replaced the Warblington Street room that had housed the Portsmouth society since 1767. It was known as the 'Green Rails' chapel after a public house which formerly stood on the site. Wesley describes it as 'neat', 'well situated near the midst of the town' and with 'three well-constructed galleries'. [156] Our only other description of it comes from the pen of the auctioneer who handled its sale in 1810, when it was replaced by Green Row Chapel, and who declared it to be 'a building most eligibly situated, and excellently adapted for a large storehouse or extensive warehouse'. The basement consisted of 'a spacious cellar, perfectly dry, and contiguous to the Town Quay'. [157] Whether these commendable features are evidence of architectural worth may be doubted. The fact that the chapel seems never to have been licensed for worship, and that no enrolled deed can be found in the Chancery records, supports the view that it may have remained the property of Joseph Webb, who is named as the vendor in 1810. [158]

A variety of buildings were adapted for Methodist use in these early years, ranging from theatres at Gosport and Poole or the old Assembly Room in the yard of the King's Head at Melcombe Regis, to tenements or cottages, as at Wilton and Corfe Castle. The rented room in Warblington Street served the Portsmouth society for twenty years; and the Winchester society existed in what seem to have been similar premises until they moved to the ill-fated Silver Hill chapel in 1786. The Methodist group in Southampton had particular difficulty in finding a permanent home. Again, it is clear that even as late as 1788 they were thinking in terms not of a place of worship so much as a meeting place

155. PRO: C. 54 1862 42.7

156. JWJ VII 424 (11 August 1788)

157. Similarly, the Bishop Street premises used by the Portsea society from 1768 to 1800 had formerly been a storehouse and had a cellar underneath it. (Lease of 30th September 1768, recited in the deed of conveyance of 1786.)

158. Hampshire Telegraph, 17 September 1810, p 2

for the society; initially, the members continued to attend either their parish church or the Above Bar Chapel. Forced to leave the rented house in East Street by the hostility of neighbours, they rented an auction room in Hanover Buildings; and after three years moved to a scaffold loft opposite. In this they were fortunate in finding sympathetic landlords. The auction room belonged to one of the town constables. In 1791 he was put under pressure by a prospective tenant, who was a Roman Catholic and refused to take a lease on an adjoining property unless he gave the Methodists notice to quit. Although he acquiesced, their landlord agreed to their continued use of the room until they had found another home. The uncle of one member of the society, a bricklayer named Richard Sims, heard of their plight and offered the use of his scaffold loft at the same rent, despite further objection from the Catholic tenant opposite.[159]

The most detailed description of premises converted to serve as a Methodist preaching-house is of the earliest chapel in Swanage, clearly remembered by the local historian W.M. Hardy from his boyhood, when it had become a builder's storeroom. Hardy's aunt had been present in 1787, when Wesley declined to preach in this room, preferring the more spacious Independent chapel. It continued in use until 1807. Reached by a passage between the houses in Purbeck Place opposite the New Inn, it was a first-floor room at the top of a flight of steps and measured only 14 feet by 12 feet.

'In the middle was a beam about four feet six inches above the floor, so that those who wanted to go to the other end of the room had to bend their heads under the beam. The roof sloped in on each side, leaving a ceiling about five feet wide in the centre, and about six feet six inches off the floor. There was an old leadlight window, about four feet by three feet, in the south gable end.'[160]

It is hardly surprising that Wesley should have found it inadequate, just as elsewhere he abandoned the society room for the open air and the prospect of a larger audience. The Silver Hill chapel at Winchester was spacious by comparison, though occupying a site no more than 40ft. by 24ft.[161]

159. Stamp, 1787, 1791

160. W.M.Hardy, 1910, p 80

161. A later deed (4 September 1907), now held by the City Council, gives the dimensions of the site and confirms that it later belonged to the Baptists.

(b) Finance

The problem of financing the building of chapels was one which faced the Methodist people from the outset and became an increasing concern to Wesley in his later years.[162] The usual method of raising funds was by public subscription coupled with the collections at the opening services and other such occasions. Sometimes, as at Silver Hill, Winchester, part of the property was let. Regular weekly offertories were still very much in the future, and although both Anglicans and dissenters were accustomed to raising funds by the renting of pews, it is not clear how early this practice was adopted in Methodism.[163] (No 18th century evidence for the practice has turned up in this area.) It is therefore hardly surprising to find Methodist premises being mortgaged soon after erection or conversion as a means of covering the cost incurred. Few of the trustees had substantial material resources, though, unlike the Primitive Methodist trustees of the 19th century, even fewer, if any, could be classed as 'poor'.

The problems caused by the cost of the Winchester chapel have already been mentioned. Of the £400 incurred, Jasper Winscom personally advanced £250. A year after the opening, Wesley was advising Winscom on the clearing of the debt and urging that the chapel should then be 'transferred to five or more trustees on the Conference plan', but without the expense of an attorney: 'You have the form of conveyance in the Minutes, which anyone may transcribe.'[164]

There is no evidence, however, that the property was ever settled upon trustees, and this would explain why the deeds were never enrolled in Chancery. While the debt remained, Winscom was the legal owner, with the disastrous results already noted. In July 1787, nearly two years after the opening, Winscom executed a bond in which he undertook to indemnify the Wesley brothers and the Conference to the extent of £800 if he failed to transfer the chapel to them once the debt was

162. See e.g. his letters of 13 March and 3 April 1790 (JWL VIII 206, 210-11)

163. Wesley's objection in December 1787 seems to have been not to the actual renting of pews, but to their appropriation by those who rented them for their sole use.(JWJ VII 349-50)

164. Letter to Winscom, 23 October 1786 (JWL VII 345)

cleared.[165] An endorsement on the back of the bond acknowledged a payment of £55 on behalf of the Conference on the day it was executed; but there is no record of further repayments. The consequence was that the Conference eventually had to relinquish its claim to the property.

The Portsea society faced similar problems over its room in Bishop Street. This was held on behalf of the society by William Norman [166] and Peter James Price of Gosport. Early in 1769 they mortgaged the property to William Pike, who was already renting the cellar under the preaching-room, for the sum of £300. Ten years later the interest payments were in arrears and Wesley was urging Winscom 'to get the mortgage out of Mr. Pike's hands'. [167] The reference may be to Pike's son who had inherited his father's property about that time; perhaps he was less sympathetic and co-operative than his father had been. Whatever the problem, it was solved by the property being purchased by Thomas Coke, who eventually, in 1786, conveyed it to a body of circuit trustees.[168] Thus secured, the room continued in use by the Portsea society until 1800, when they took over St. Peter's Chapel in Daniel Street.

(c) Legal Issues

As the development of Methodism led to the acquisition of more and more properties, two legal issues had to be resolved. The first was the relatively straightforward one of protecting both preaching-houses and preachers under the provisions of the Toleration Act. The other was the more complex issue of legally securing the chapels and the rights of the preachers to use them, especially after the death of John and Charles Wesley.

The Toleration Act of 1689 was designed to give relief to bona fide dissenters from the penalties of the Conventicle Acts of 1664 and 1670.[169] Initially, Wesley insisted that its provisions did not apply

165. The text of this bond is given in Stamp, 1787. The bond gives £400 as the amount due to Winscom, despite the fact that Wesley's loan of £100 had not been repaid and was eventually written off. (Wesley to Winscom, 30 September 1788, JWL VIII 96)

166. See pp 80-1 above

167. Letter to Winscom, 14 January 1779 (JWL VI 335). Smith, 1894, pp 25-6, 33

168. See below p 128

169. For the effect of these Acts on 18th century Methodism, see articles by John S. Simon in PWS XI 82-93, 103-8, 130-7

to the Methodists: 'It relates wholly to "persons dissenting from the Church". But we are not the men. We do not dissent from the Church. Whoever affirms it, we put him to the proof.'[170] In this he was, at least in the early years of the movement, by no means disingenuous, though the case became harder to maintain as the century progressed. But once the protection of the law became necessary in the face of violence, his argument involved him in a legal dilemma. By 1750, the first breach in his entrenchment had been made -- by friends, not enemies, of the movement: 'The reason why we refused for several years to license any of the places wherein we preached was this. We supposed it could not be done without styling ourselves Dissenters. But the Recorder of Chester showed us this was a mistake, and procured a licence for Thomas Sidebotham's house in that county, although he ... professes himself a member of the Established Church. Since then we have licensed the house at Leeds and some others.'[171]

The friendly intervention of the Chester Recorder no doubt explains why the New Room trustees chose to register the Bristol premises at the Chester Quarter Sessions in 1748.[172] From this period on, Wesley seems to have accepted, however reluctantly, the need for registration, though he did his best to discourage his followers from describing themselves as '(Protestant) Dissenters'. he also insisted very firmly that the courts had no power to refuse a license under the Toleration Act. The Methodists need not apply, cap in hand, for their chapels to be licensed, but had only to notify the clerk to the court to comply with the Act.[173] As late as 1787 he discussed the matter with the lawyer William Clulow, who advised him 'that it was the safest way to license all our chapels, and all our travelling preachers, not as dissenters but simply "preachers of the gospel"; and that no Justice, or bench of Justices, has any authority to refuse licensing either the house or the preachers.'[174] What he described with some justification as 'that execrable Act called the Conventicle Act' continued to serve

170. 'A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion' (1745), addressed to Bishop Edmund Gibson, in J. Wesley, 11, 1975, p 180

171. Letter to Mrs. Gallatin, 19 July 1750 (JWL III 42; J Wesley, 1982 p 432)

172. E.B. Perkins, 1952 p 15, quoting the original certificate, still extant.

173. See e.g. letters relating to the registration of the new chapel at Exeter in January 1779, (JWL VII 336-7)

174. JWJ VII 339

as a rusty weapon in the hands of the opponents of Methodism until its eventual repeal in 1812. Within twelve months of his death, Wesley wrote with fierce indignation to the Bishop of Lincoln protesting at the way in which the Methodists were being hounded in his diocese for falling between the meshes of the Conventicle and Toleration Acts. He could still claim that 'the Methodists in general are members of the Church of England, ... hold all her doctrines, attend her services and partake of her sacraments'. They had, in effect, been refused licenses to worship God 'after their own conscience' and then punished for having no licence.[175] Shortly after this, an incident in which one of the itinerants was arrested and fined for preaching while on his way to attend the Conference in Bristol caused Wesley to write to Wilberforce suggesting that he might bring the matter to the notice of the Prime Minister, William Pitt, with a final indignant protest on the matter: 'Now, sir, what can the Methodists do? They are liable to be ruined by the Conventicle Act, and they have no relief from the Act of Toleration! If this is not oppression, what is? Where, then, is English liberty? The liberty of Christians?'[176]

The task of tracing the development of preaching-house registration in a particular area is complicated by the variety of courts to which the 1789 Act permitted recourse. Would-be registrands (Wesley, as we have seen, refused to term them 'applicants') had the choice of the episcopal registrar, the archdiaconal registrar or the clerk to the county quarter sessions. Surviving records of these courts vary from place to place, and even the certified lists of registered buildings submitted to the Registrar General in 1852[177] are incomplete, for earlier years at least. A further difficulty lies in the fact that in many cases the denominational affiliation of those registering a building was not stated. The Act required nothing more specific than the phrase 'Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England', though even that said more than Wesley was happy to assert, as we have seen. Unfortunately for our purposes, other groups beside the Wesleyans sometimes refrained from identifying themselves fully. Besides such

175. Letter to Bishop Prettyman Tomline, 26 June 1790 (JWL VIII 224-5)

176. Letter to a Member of Parliament (almost certainly William Wilberforce), July 1790 (JWL VIII 230-1). For the continuance of trouble up to the eve of the repeal of the Act, see John S. Simon in PWHS XI 130-7

177. These are now at the PRO, Chancery Lane; Class Number RG31

late arrivals as the Plymouth Brethren and the Catholic Apostolic Church mentioned by Welch,[178] the Dorset Quarter Sessions records provide examples of chapels registered for groups of 'Protestant Dissenters' who can be identified from other sources as 'Independents'.[179]

Conversely, the registration in 1778 of a house in Prince George Street, Portsea, was on behalf of a group of 'Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England' who are specifically described as 'Independents'; yet their Methodist identity is clear from the names of the signatories.[180] This is the only local example of a phenomenon occasionally noted elsewhere.[181]

A crop of 'Presbyterian' registrations in the Purbeck area in October 1774 almost certainly refer to Wesleyan preaching-places. It is significant that they occur just one week before Wesley's visit[182] and are for the three places at which we know from other sources Methodist societies had just been formed: Swanage, Corfe Castle and Langton Matravers. Other details provide indirect corroboration. The Swanage property licensed belonged to a Joseph Collins. One of Mary Burt's two companions on the walk to Salisbury was named Collins, and a Joseph Collins appears in the earliest surviving membership list for Swanage, dated 1795.[183] Similarly, the property registered at Corfe Castle belonged to the William Ingram to whom Winscom had directed William Kent earlier in the year as an informant and probable sympathiser. It stood in Well Court, at the rear of a house known as Havillands still standing in West Street, and was almost certainly the

178. Edwin Welch in *Journal of the Society of Archivists* Vol. 3 p 117

179. E.g. at Maiden Newton (1798), Verwood (1802), Upwey (1810)

180. Jasper Winscom, David Grange and William Ban(n)ister. Winscom's name is sufficient evidence in itself. Bannister's name occurs again in conjunction with Winscom's in the registration of a house in 1783 and one in Odiham in 1786.

181. e.g. at Maldon, Essex, and at various places in north Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire (PWHS XVIII 17; XXIX 55) Frank Baker, 1970, p 198, cites examples in Lincolnshire.

182. Dorset Quarter Sessions, 4 October 1774. For Wesley's visit, on 11th-12th October, see pp 92-4 above

183. R. Pearce, 1898, pp 150,151

property conveyed to Wesleyan trustees by Thomas Coke in 1786.[184] The Corfe society seems to have died out[185] and the property to have been sold (though no deeds for this period have survived to confirm this). In 1815 an Independent chapel was built on the site, which in turn became a British School in 1835. The date and location of the different Wesleyan premises reported in the 1851 Census are not known. The Langton society probably also died out, reappearing as a class attached to the Swanage society in 1806, or possibly earlier.[186]

The conclusion that these 'Presbyterian' registrations were, in fact, Wesleyan is almost inescapable; but we can only speculate as to the reason for their misleading description. Purbeck was still a remote and largely self-contained area in which the Methodist movement had hitherto remained no more than a rumour of distant events. The inhabitants of 18th century Purbeck could hardly be expected to discern the doctrinal resonances which have led to the formation of the United Reformed Church in our own time. They would be more aware of externals, such as organisation; and from the point of view of church government the Wesleyan connexional system had more in common with Presbyterianism than with Independency.

The majority of early Methodist registrations, in fact, use the phrase 'Protestant Dissenters' without more specific indication of identity. The wording of certain early licenses more directly reflects their reluctance to be bracketed with the old dissent. In the license for a stable in Wood Street, Whitchurch, 1759, the words 'dissenting from' have been deleted and replaced by 'belonging to' (the Church of England), presumably to assert the continuing Methodist loyalty to the Church. Similarly, in the case of a house at Ripley registered in the same year, the form of registration as originally submitted to the diocesan registrar spoke of 'a Society of Protestants, commonly called Methodists', which was altered, presumably by the registrar, to read, 'a Society of Dissenting Protestants' without the final phrase. The

184. See below, p 128. The property is described as 'situate in the back part or in the yard on the west side of a Messuage called Havellands Great House'. The name derives from the De Havelland family who owned it up to about 1760. Local tradition says that Wesley preached from the flight of steps on the south side of the courtyard.

185. It appears nowhere in the membership lists for 1795-1806, printed in Pearce, 1898, pp 149-89

186. 'Serrels Barn' was licensed for use by the Wesleyans at the beginning of 1801. According to local tradition, Wesley had preached in the barn on his visit to the village.

earliest Methodist certificate for Andover (1761) is 'for a congregation of Protestant Dissenters to meet for exercise of religion and John Haim Pastor' [sic]; and 'Protestant Dissenters' is by far the commonest nomenclature found until the last decade of the century. Apart from those noted above, the earliest Hampshire registrations in which the applicants identify themselves explicitly as Methodists are for Merstone and Calbourne on the Isle of Wight in 1786, and in both cases the word 'Methodist' has been scored through. There are no further specifically Methodist applications until 1794, after which they become more frequent, especially from 1800 on.

The handful of 18th century Methodist registrations at the Dorset Quarter Sessions reflect much the same pattern. In 1766 the Shaftesbury chapel was registered simply for use by 'dissenting Protestants'. But by 1779 the society at Lytchett Matravers was prepared to identify itself as 'dissenting Protestants called Methodists'; and from then on, specific identification became normal (e.g. at Stalbridge, 1786, Blandford, 1789, Southwell, Portland, and several other places in 1792).

On the other hand, isolated examples of the reluctance to be deemed 'dissenters from the Church of England' crop up as late as 1854, when the offending phrase was struck out of the certificate for Wesley Chapel, Arundel Street, Portsmouth.

The following examples may be cited as typical of the Methodist applications submitted within the Salisbury Circuit during the first half of the period under consideration in this chapter. The first is of interest as one of the earliest registrations anywhere in the country. It bears the marks of a homespun document concocted by a local Methodist group, probably without legal consultation but with Wesley's advice and inclinations in mind. Its eleven signatories, headed by John Furz, must have made up a large part of the Wilton society at that early date. Avoiding any reference to Protestant dissent, they appear to have persuaded the Devizes magistrates to accept them simply as a group of 'his Majesty's Protestant subjects':

April 21st 1749

This is to Certify to his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Wiltshire at their General Quarter Sessions of the Peace to be held at the Devizes in and for the said County on Tuesday the 23rd Day of this Instant April: That We whose names are here written with divers others of his Majesty's Protestant Subjects resideing in or near the Borough of Wilton in the County

aforesaid Do desire and intend to Assemble together for Religious Worship at the Dwelling House of Joseph Young situate within the said Borough of Wilton and pray that the same may be recorded and a Certifficate thereof Given according to the Act of Parliament in that Case made and provided.

An application made more than twenty years later to the episcopal registry at Winchester is more typical in its wording, though not yet specific in its identification of the group concerned:

These are to certify whom it may concern that we whose names are under written being Protestant dissenters have appointed the dwelling house of Charles Chubb situated in the parish of Brimmer [Breamore] in the County of Southampton & diocese of Winchester as a meeting place for the exercise of the worship of Almighty God & desire the same to be registered in the Bishop's Court & a copy thereof granted to us as the Statute made in that case directs. Witness our hands this 27th day of January in the year of our Lord 1768.

Jasper Winscom
John Catermole[187]

Welch notes an increasing preference throughout the 18th century for registration with the ecclesiastical authorities rather than the Quarter sessions, and attributes this to the practical consideration of convenience. This is borne out by the virtual absence of any Methodist registrations at the Hampshire and Wiltshire Quarter Sessions in the second half of the 18th or early years of the 19th centuries. The vast majority of Hampshire registrations, including those for the Isle of Wight, and all but one of those for southern Wiltshire were at the appropriate diocesan registry.[188]

Dorset provides an exception in this respect, apparently for reasons of ecclesiastical geography. Until 1836 the county was an isolated part of the diocese of Bristol; thereafter it reverted to Salisbury. As a result, we find a steady flow of dissenting registrations at the county quarter sessions from 1703 on, and a much smaller number recorded by the diocesan registrar. From 1815 on, these are supplemented by a certain number, chiefly from the south-east of the county, registered in the archdeaconry of Dorset.

The 'sound and dependable legal settlement' of the Methodist properties was another problem which exercised Wesley's mind throughout most of

187. Original in Hampshire CRO. Minor variants in spelling and punctuation have been corrected. The writing appears to be that of Catermole, one of the itinerants in the circuit that year.

188. The only exceptions in the case of Hampshire are, significantly, premises in Portsea Island, (one in 1811, two in the 1840s), which were registered at the Portsmouth Quarter Sessions. None of the premises registered at the Southampton Quarter Sessions can be identified as Methodist. The one exception in Wiltshire was a dwelling-house in Maiden Bradley, registered in 1794.

the period under review. It comprised a threefold question: how to secure the buildings in perpetuity for the use of the Methodist societies; how to ensure that Wesley's role as leader continued to be exercised after his death; and how to safeguard the purity of the Methodist doctrines proclaimed from the pulpits. The solution lay in the development of a model deed for all Methodist properties, coupled with a legal declaration which established the existence and authority of the Methodist Conference after the founder's death. The latter was effected by the Deed of Declaration of 1784; the former emerged from a series of trial-and-error experiments.[189]

The details of this development lie outside our present purposes, except in so far as they provide the necessary background to, and are illuminated by, events in the Salisbury Circuit. This in turn is limited by the small number of Methodist-owned properties within the circuit.

The most obvious and most immediate problem arose from the private ownership of a preaching house, as the case of Silver Hill chapel in Winchester dramatically illustrates. It was for this reason that Wesley urged the transfer of the premises to a group of trustees 'on the Conference plan' as soon as possible.[190] Silver Hill illustrates the potential problem wherever premises were acquired or built by individual initiative, as happened at Shaftesbury, where the chapel, built by James Higgins in 1766, was not conveyed to trustees until three years later.[191]

One unusual feature of the earliest deeds of the Salisbury chapel is that they bear the signature of John Wesley himself, heading the list of appointed trustees.[192] The other six were all local residents. William Westcott Junior claimed the status of 'gentleman'; another described himself as a 'yeoman'; the rest were artisans: a tucker, a tailor, a carpenter and a shoemaker. The property was purchased 'to

189. E.B. Perkins, 1952, p 19. Perkins provides the relevant background for the following paragraphs, but needs to be supplemented by a closer examination of the earliest deeds to which we still have access.

190. Letter to Winscom, 23 October 1786 (JWL VII 345)

191. Oyster Street, Portsmouth, may have been a similar case (see p 116 above).

192. The conveyance of the leasehold from Joseph Marsh and William Westcott Senior, dated 1st October 1758; and the deed of mortgage, dated 29th September 1759.

the intent that a building might be erected ... for a place of public Christian worship for the use of the congregation of the people called Methodists' (here, at least in embryo, was the development from 'preaching house' to 'chapel'); and there was provision for the nomination of new trustees whenever two of them died or rendered themselves 'unfit for the purposes herein mentioned', by the survivors and 'the majority of the members of the congregation'. (Whether a distinction between 'members of the congregation' and 'members of the society' was intended is not clear. Under the provisions of the later model Deeds, this task became the prerogative of the circuit quarterly meeting.)

These provisions are interesting in that they differ in some important respects from those of the 1746 deeds for the Bristol 'New Room' and the Kingswood preaching-house. The latter were drawn up with legal advice and in due course formed the basis of the earliest model deed, printed in the 'Large Minutes' of 1763. They left the responsibility for the renewal of the trust solely in the hands of the surviving Trustees, not as at Salisbury to the trustees and members conjointly. Nor was there any requirement that the Salisbury trustees should reside within forty miles of the chapel, as in the case of Bristol and Kingswood. (Such a clause would, of course, have excluded Wesley himself from the trust.) It is interesting that there is no evidence of any subsequent attempt by Wesley to bring the Salisbury deed into line with the policy approved by the Conference, as he had done, for example, in the case of the Manchester chapel.[193] The original Salisbury trust was not, in fact, renewed during Wesley's lifetime, and by 1795, when it was enlarged to ten, only two of the original trustees were alive.

The question as to who should exercise control over the preaching-houses and the admission of preachers to their pulpits came to a head in the 1780s, in particular at Birstall in Yorkshire, where there was a confrontation between the trustees on the one hand and Wesley and the Conference on the other. The occasion was the rebuilding of the chapel and the drafting of a new trust deed. Wesley insisted that the appointment of preachers must, after his death, be in the hands of the Conference, not of the trustees. The latter for their

193. See Perkins, 1952, p 36

part clearly believed that unless they retained this power they would not be fulfilling their legal responsibilities. The Birstall chapel became something of a cause celebre and a test case which engaged the attention of the Conference in 1782 and was not resolved until the autumn of the following year.[194]

A similar issue arose at nearby Dewsbury in 1788.[195] In the interval, Wesley and the Conference had been busy clarifying their minds on what was at stake and had employed Thomas Coke in an endeavour to ensure that all the preaching-houses throughout the country were 'settled on the Conference Plan', i.e. in accordance with the model deed of 1763. As part of this campaign, in 1786 no fewer than four preaching-houses in the Salisbury Circuit - at Portsea, Wilton, Corfe Castle and Newport, IOW - were conveyed to a body of new trustees. (The Shaftesbury and - as we have noted - the Salisbury chapels were not involved.)[196]

One unusual, if not unique, feature in this case was that all four properties were conveyed by a single deed to one body of trustees drawn from all parts of the circuit except Dorset. (Three were from Winchester, headed predictably by Jasper Winscom; six from Portsmouth or Portsea, one from Bishopstoke and one from Stubbington; three from Salisbury and one from Wilton; five from the Isle of Wight.) It is difficult to believe that this widely scattered group can ever have met, despite the provision that any trustee who went bankrupt or went to live more than forty miles away (from an unspecified point in the circuit) was excluded from office.

This deed, however unusual, clearly reflects the influence of both the 1763 model deed and the more recent Deed of Declaration, especially in the clause permitting 'John Wesley and all others appointed by him ... and after his death those appointed by the yearly Conference declared and established with a Deed Poll' to preach in the chapels, 'provided they do not preach any other doctrine than is contained in John Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and the four volumes of sermons'.

194. For the Birstall chapel case, see Vickers, 1969, pp 53-56, and the sources listed there.

195. See Vickers, 1969, pp 56-8

196. This deed dated 19th January 1786, has survived only in the enrolled copy in the Chancery records at the PRO (C54. 26 Geo III 10.8)

2.5.3 The distribution of Methodism in relation to social and ecclesiastical conditions

The number of societies established within the Salisbury Circuit up to 1790 (Table 2:2) is too small to permit more than the most tentative generalisations about the factors influencing their distribution. We can do little more than note certain apparent pointers, whose validity we can begin to determine only as the range of evidence, both civil and ecclesiastical, increases in the new century. This is true of Methodism's relationship with the general social milieu, and also of its interaction with both the Established Church and Dissent.

(a) General

By no means all of the villages where the seed of the 'Methodist gospel' was scattered proved receptive and fruitful ground, even when, as in the case of New Winsor and Newbridge,[197] they were outlying communities which might have been expected to provide favourable conditions. The comparative lawlessness of a border settlement worked in more than one direction. One important factor seems to have been the presence of sympathetic supporters, whether individuals or families, in the community, who could not only accommodate the society in its early days but provide a nucleus of members, and often the local leadership needed for survival.[198] The support of outsiders, whether they attempted to settle in the village[199] or merely visited it,[200] was more likely to prove an irritant and to arouse hostility. The removal of key figures was usually crucial for a village cause.[201] This is further illustrated by examples from the closing decade of the century. At a hamlet called Brick Kilns, between Twyford and Crowdhill, a society was formed in 1795, meeting in the home of Richard Laishley, a brick-burner. But preaching ceased there

197. See pp 110-11 above.

198. E.g. the Chubb family at Breamore (pp 89-90 above) and Richard Twynam at Crowdhill (p 90 above).

199. E.g. John Woodman at Timsbury (p 91 above) and the unnamed tailor at Sutton Scotney (p 105 above). Jasper Winscom's retirement to Whitchurch is an exception explained by several factors: the size of the community, the pioneering work of John Haime, and Winscom's own forceful personality.

200. E.g. Winscom and others at Sutton Scotney (p 106 above).

201. E.g. Greenwood and Webb from Fareham (pp 82-3 above) and Benjamin Cheverton from Nyetimber (pp 94-5 above).

Table 2:2 Societies and preaching-places, 1740-1790

	First known preaching	Society (or class) formed	First preaching house
Salisbury	c. 1741[1]	1748[2]	1759
Wilton	R:1745/JW:1752		1780
Shaftesbury	1748/JW:1753		1753/1766
Portsmouth	1746[3]/JW:1753	1753	Portsmouth 1767 Portsea 1768
Fareham	JW:1753	by 1785[4]	1812
Gosport	JW:1758	?/1796	1771
Andover	JW:1759/R:1761		
Whitchurch	1759/JW:1759		1759
Winchester	1763/JW:1766	1763	1785
Stalbridge	JW:1766		
Breamore[5]	R:1768		
Tollard Royal[5]	R:1773		
Crowdhill	1774		1822
Swanage	1774/JW:1774	1774	?
Corfe Castle	1774/JW:1774		by 1786
Langton Matravers	1774		1842
Lytchett	1775/1778		1824
Matravers			
Weymouth	JW:1776	c.1776[6]	1776
Kingston Deverill	R:1777		1825
Tisbury	c.1777	by 1785[4]	1815
Houghton[7]	R:1779, 1786	c1777?	1833
Broad Chalk[5]	R:1783	by 1785	
Damerham[5]		by 1784	
Winterbourne		by 1784	
Sutton Scotney[5]	R:1785		
Southampton	R:1765(?)/1777 JW:1787	1787	1791
Romsey	R:1770, 1787 JW:1766	1813	
Blandford		c. 1789	(1818?)/1833

Abbreviations:

JW John Wesley's first preaching visit
R Registration under the Toleration Act

Notes:

1. By Westley Hall
2. By John Wesley
3. By John Cennick; Calvinistic
4. In 1785 membership lists
5. Eventually missioned by the Primitive Methodists
6. But not in 1785 membership lists
7. Taken over by the Associationists

when Laishley moved to Southampton.[202] Two years later Richard Dodd opened a school at Hursley and provided a meeting place for the Methodists. But after four years, because the school was not prospering there, he moved to Titchfield and Methodism went with him.[203]

Where there was no sympathetic individual or family to form the nucleus of a society, it was common for the first preaching to be in the open air, but for various reasons this was a temporary phase,[204] and the licensing of a room in someone's house normally followed. The newly formed society thus had at least a minimal protection and privacy for its meetings, until it was sturdy enough to acquire or build a chapel.

Closer examination of the comparatively late and hesitant establishment of a Wesleyan society in Southampton suggests several factors that were probably at work and will serve to introduce the remaining sections of this chapter. For some years the Southampton society lacked a leader, or leaders, of sufficient social status, and consequent independence. As we have noted in the case of the village causes, this could prove a vital factor. The first Methodists in Southampton were, as we have seen, socially very humble: many of them domestic servants. As such they were something of an exception to the norm. As Gilbert notes, 'personal and domestic servants, who made up about 10 per cent of the total work force at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, provided almost no Evangelical Nonconformist members or adherents'.[205] Such evidence as survives seems to justify our assumption that this had been largely true of Methodism a generation earlier. Thus Clive Field, arguing that 'the proletarian influence of the eighteenth century movement has been grossly exaggerated', concludes that 'although three-quarters of the early members were manual workers, unskilled toilers [among whom domestic servants must be classed] were heavily out-numbered by

202. Stamp, 1795

203. Stamp, 1797, 1801; Titchfield licence dated 29 June 1801. Significantly, the Methodists had licensed houses in both villages in the 1760s (Twyford in 1764 and Titchfield in 1767), but in each case the work lapsed until Dodd's arrival.

204. Wesley was anxious that 'field preaching' should not be dropped. As he wrote in 1784: 'I am glad our preachers at Portsmouth do not coop themselves up in the preaching-houses. The work of God can never make any considerable progress but by field-preaching.' (JWL VII 224) Joseph Sutcliffe also found the Southampton society reluctant to take to the open air.

205. A.D. Gilbert, 1976, p 67

artisans'. [206]

One reason for the paucity of leadership in the early years of the Southampton society's existence may have been the lack of a strong artisan element in the town's population, as compared with Portsmouth. The older dissenting tradition represented by the Above Bar membership roll - if less clearly reflected in the wider social spectrum of its congregations - drew support from the lower middle class shopkeepers and small businessmen. Under the revitalizing influence of William Kingsbury's extended pastorate, it left little room for the Wesleyans to appeal with any success except among the lower orders. Social inferiors who manifested an access of religious fervour were hardly likely to find themselves warmly welcomed either at the parish church or in the dissenting meeting-house. The Methodists thus began from one of the lower rungs of the social ladder, but quite soon showed a tendency to gravitate upwards. By 1799, a decade or so after the society was formed, the trustees of their new chapel in Canal Walk (who were, of course, not a representative cross-section, but indicated the upper socio-economic level of its membership) were predominantly artisan, with the addition of a schoolmaster and a yeoman farmer. (The latter, Richard Dodd of Sarisbury and Peter Jewell of Timsbury, are, however, a reminder that only five of the thirteen trustees came from Southampton itself

(b) Relations with the Established Church

Throughout this period we must not lose sight of the fact that Wesley clung to his initial concept of the Methodist people as an ecclesiola in ecclesia, a leaven within the existing churches, especially the Church of England. However far from that they might drift in reality in the strong cross-currents of the day, this remained his ideal; and his personal influence continued to the end to encourage them to remain within the Church. In practice, this meant continuing to attend the worship at their parish churches, especially on Sunday mornings, and receive the sacrament from the hands of the parish clergy, even if they considered them, morally or evangelically, unworthy of their calling. Inevitably, reluctance to comply with this increased as the years passed. More and more of those drawn into the Methodist orbit had little or no previous contact with the Church; some were of dissenting

206. C.D. Field, 1977, p 216

background. Many incumbents were, for their part, embarrassed or scandalized by what they considered to be at best well-meaning but deluded people;[207] while the normal fare offered by the parochial system seemed to many of the Methodists to provide an inadequate spiritual diet. So, though the 'Church party' remained influential among Wesleyans even after Wesley's death, the drift apart continued and eventually was institutionalized.

Although Wesley had a number of sympathisers and supporters among his fellow clergy, even some of the evangelicals were uneasy about his free-lancing attitude to the parish ministry and his Arminian theology. Though excluded from many Anglican pulpits, he was offered the use of some parish churches, especially in his later years. But there seems to have been no case of this happening within the territory covered by the Salisbury Circuit. [208] On the contrary, where need and opportunity arose, we find him setting aside any residual prejudices or scruples and accepting the use of a local dissenting meeting-house, where there is little doubt that on grounds of convenience as well as ecclesiastical inclination he would have preferred to use the parish church, had that been on offer. In 1764 he made a serious bid to unite the evangelical clergy with whom he was acquainted by writing to about fifty of them. Only three replied - and, more significantly, for our present purpose, not one of the recipients lived in central southern England.[209]

(c) Relations with Dissent

More detailed consideration of the interaction between Old and New Dissent, and between Dissenters and Wesleyans, is postponed to the final section of this study, where it can benefit from an extended time scale and a wider range of evidence. At this stage, any observations must accordingly be no more than provisional; but as with Methodist/Anglican relationships, features of the period up to 1790 serve at least as pointers.

207. Cf. M Ransome, 1972, p 7

208. He came nearest to it in Winchester, where a church was offered him, but then the key was found to have been mislaid (JWJ VI 453 (10 Oct 1783))

209. Most had parishes in the Midlands and the North. The only 'southerner' was the Rev. Vincent Perronet of Shoreham, Kent. See JWJ, V 60-66 (19 April 1764) and PWHS XII 29-34.

The presence, or absence, of a well-established congregation belonging to one or other branch of the Old Dissent was clearly a factor likely to affect Wesleyan prospects.[210] So too was the existence of a vigorous congregation of the new evangelical Dissenters, who were increasingly in evidence towards the end of the century. In a locality as populous as Portsea Island, both Old and New Dissent were sufficiently in evidence to serve as an initially inhibiting factor to Wesley and his local supporters; but co-existence soon followed.[211] Few other towns in the area were large enough to accommodate new religious groups without direct rivalry or threat to existing loyalties. The presence of a reinvigorated Independent congregation under the leadership of William Kingsbury at the Above Bar Chapel clearly hindered the Wesleyan attempts to gain a foothold in Southampton;[212] and the same will be observed at a slightly later date in Romsey.[213] Though specific evidence is lacking, it is likely that the presence of Old Dissent similarly delayed the establishment of Methodism in Poole, Christchurch, Dorchester and perhaps Weymouth, together with a number of smaller places. But the case of Shaftesbury reminds us that it was not necessarily or universally so; while Gosport serves to suggest that as the century progressed the new evangelical fervour which manifested itself both within existing dissenting congregations and in the emergence of new ones was a more significant factor than the mere existence of a long-established dissenting meeting.

At Shaftesbury the Old Presbyterian Meeting traced its origins to the ejection of the Rev. Thomas Hallett junior in 1662. By 1690 it was at a low enough ebb for its minister, a Mr. Eastman, to be listed as one of those in need of financial support from the Common Fund.[214] But the first meeting house was built in Muston's Lane early in the new century. By the 1720s the cause was in decline through the increasingly prevalent influence of 'Arianism'. When it again revived, in the 1730s, it was as an Independent congregation - a transition

210. See Table 1:15 for details of congregations of the Old Dissent in the area.

211. See above, pp 76-80

212. See above, pp 108-10

213. See below, pp 178-9

214. A Gordon, 1917, p 34

paralleled in many other places.[215] It enjoyed a period of success during the ministry of the Rev. David Jones, from 1738 or earlier. During his pastorate a Methodist society was formed by John Haime, with the first Methodist chapel being opened in 1753, the year he left. Densham and Ogle suggest that one reason why he had no immediate successor may have been the success of the Methodists in drawing away some of his congregation.[216]

In a town of not much more than 2,000 inhabitants, whose three parish churches could accommodate at least three quarters of the population,[217] and where there was at least an element of vociferous popular hostility to evangelical activities,[218] Methodism could only advance at the expense, at least in part, of the religious alternatives on offer.[219]

In Gosport, which was virtually an extension of Portsmouth and Portsea, the only major conurbation in the area, Anglican provision was far less adequate. The original parish church of St. Mary, Alverstoke, long since inadequate for the growing population and well away from the centre of the town, was supplemented until the 1830s only by Holy Trinity, built in 1696. Here was the nearest equivalent in this part of southern England to a situation that was commonplace in parts of the industrial north. It was aggravated by the incumbency of the vicar of Holy Trinity, the notorious Richard Bingham, from 1807 to 1858.[220] No serious remedy was attempted until the arrival of Samuel Wilberforce as rector of Alverstoke in 1840.[221] Although much larger than many Hampshire boroughs, Gosport was not an incorporated town and this gave freer rein to the spirit of religious independency - and bigotry.[222]

215. A variation of this pattern of events is illustrated by the case of Wimborne, where the slide into Arianism in the Presbyterian Chapel, opened in 1709, eventually led to a schism and the opening of a Congregational chapel in 1757. In 1802 the two causes embodied their reconciliation in the building of a new chapel with the name of 'Union Chapel'.

216. Densham and Ogle, 1899, pp 227-42

217. In 1851 the total Anglican sittings reported were 1,694 for a population that had risen since 1801 from 2,433 to 3,073.

218. See above, pp 74-5

219. E.g. at Swanage and Wimborne.

220. J.R. Capper, 1972, pp 5-9

221. See D Newsome, 1966, pp 281-2 and p 38 above.

222. L.F.W. White, 1964, pp 106-7

Again, as at Shaftesbury, the Independents traced their origins back to 1662, but their cause took on a new lease of life with the arrival in the town of the Rev. David Bogue in 1774. This young Scot combined vision with energetic application, and academic ability with powers of organisation and leadership. He became a nationally recognised leader among the evangelical dissenters and was involved at the turn of the century in the launching of a succession of interdenominational ventures such as the London Missionary Society, the Bible Society and the Religious Tract Society. Locally, he established a seminary for the training of young men for the Independent ministry, whose most celebrated student was the missionary David Livingstone.[223]

In terms of a largely 'unchurched' population there was, in the case of Gosport, plenty of scope for Wesleyan pioneering. But their first venture, symbolized in the opening of the converted playhouse in 1771, seems to have been abortive, faced as it was by an established Independent cause under new and galvanising leadership; and there is no evidence of further activity in the town until 1796.

If the presence of Dissent, old or new, could be an inhibiting factor, when the Methodists did succeed in establishing a cause their arrival could have adverse effects on other local congregations, as we have noted in the case of Shaftesbury. The Rev. John Morrison was pastor of the Independent chapel at Swanage from 1757 to 1785. A note among the manuscript collection of Joseph Hunter describes the state of affairs in 1774, the year in which the Methodist preachers first came into Purbeck:

The congregation is about 120, but poore, and scarce raise Mr. Morrison, who is growing old, more than £16 a year for himself and wife and even that is in danger of being diminished by the attachment of his hearers of late to the Wesleyan Methodists.[224]

Novelty was no doubt one of the attractions. By the time John Wesley found himself returning for an unscheduled visit to the town in 1787, Morrison had retired and been replaced by a younger man, William Sedcole, who gave Wesley the use of the chapel. His pastorate, from 1785 to 1806, was a period of further decline, some of it presumably due to the Methodist alternative, although it was many years before the

223. DNB

224. BL Add. Ms 24484

Wesleyan membership figures rivalled those of the Independents quoted above. In 1806, there were still only 59 members in the Swanage Wesleyan society.[225]

Similarly, in the 1780s, the Independent congregation at Wimborne lost some of its members not only by a Baptist secession but also by the counter-attraction of a newly-formed Methodist group.[226]

However, in this case the adverse effect of the Methodist arrival may have been short-lived. Despite both set-backs a new Independent chapel was built in 1788, though the membership remained small. There is no confirmatory evidence of Methodist activity in the town until the beginning of the new century.

225. Robert Pearce, 1898, Appendix, pp 187-8

226. Densham and Ogle, 1899, pp 385-99

3. FROM THE DEATH OF WESLEY TO 1825

3.1 The dawn of a new era

The half century up to 1790 had been for the Salisbury Circuit a period of tentative beginnings. The development of Methodism in southern England lagged well behind most other parts of the country. But by the closing decade of the century it was poised for advance, and as the new century dawned there were signs of a quickening of the pace. One favourable factor was the very small extent to which southern Methodists were affected by the tensions and divisions which began to disturb the Connexion almost as soon as Wesley was dead. During the period now under review, the first schism took place, with the formation of the Methodist New Connexion in 1797; while early in the new century, the Bible Christians and Primitive Methodist movements, as well as the growing strength of Anglican Evangelicalism, showed that the 18th century revival had not yet spent itself. But the schism had little or no impact on this area; the new movements, from their bases in the West Country and North Midlands, were only just beginning to move into the area by 1825 and will engage our attention at a later stage.

An issue which faced the connexion with some urgency soon after Wesley's death was that of the administration of the Lord's Supper. There were two opposing factions in this and other related matters. The 'Church Methodists' or 'Old Planners' were already the minority party, but an influential one, since they included many trustees and members of comparative substance. Their desire was to avoid any developments that would further widen the gap between the Wesleyans and the Church of England, of which they were still theoretically a part. The 'New Planners' on the other hand were eager to formalise a separation that had been gradual but was already in many respects a reality by 1791. Wesley had fought a protracted rear-guard action on this issue, strongly encouraged and supported by his brother, who suspected the motives of the itinerants. In 1788 there had been renewed pressure at Portsmouth to have services in Church hours. Wesley protested in reply: 'If all our society at Portsmouth, or elsewhere, separate from the Church, I cannot help it. But I will not.' [1]

1. Letter to Jasper Winscom, 16 July 1788 (JWL VIII 72)

So for the time being the Portsmouth societies had to be content to receive the sacrament only when Wesley or Coke[2] visited them or at their parish churches. But Wesley's death severed the last effective tie with the Church, and in most places his movement had already, for all practical purposes, ceased to be an ecclesiola in ecclesia. The fourth of the five stages, as delineated by Bowmer,[3] by which the sacrament came to be administered in Methodist chapels, had already begun. Bowmer dates it from the 1784 ordinations, though it is arguable that this should be 1788, the year in which Wesley ordained Alexander Mather for the British work. The Conference after Wesley's death understandably vacillated and sought tentative solutions to a problem that could so easily have split the connexion. But in 1793 it was decided to grant limited permission for administration in those societies where there was 'unanimous desire' for it. This decision was confirmed, though in more cautious and negative terms, the following year. The Minutes for 1794 list the places where permission for the administration of the sacrament had been granted. For Salisbury and Portsmouth circuits these were very few:

14. Salisbury Circuit: Salisbury, Blandford, Poole, [Tarrant] Monkton
15. Portsmouth Circuit: Portsmouth, Newport

The most unexpected of these is Tarrant Monkton, a village society with no chapel of its own. Otherwise, the most notable features of the list are the missing names, e.g. Winchester, Andover, Shaftesbury, Weymouth and Portland. The clamour to receive the sacrament from the hands of the circuit preachers was a muted one in this part of the south. Some members probably still looked to the parish church for the sacrament, though there is little positive evidence to support this supposition.

The second issue facing the orphaned connexion in the 1790s was the demand for greater democracy in its government and organisation. On the one hand John Wesley had made increasing use of lay helpers in a wide variety of roles from class leader and local preacher to itinerant, and had thereby tapped a neglected reservoir of latent abilities. On the other hand, so long as he lived, benevolent

2. E.g. In September 1786, the ship in which Coke was sailing to the West Indies was driven into Portsmouth harbour and gave him the opportunity to preach and administer the sacrament to the local society. (T Coke, 1816, p 77)

3. J.C. Bowmer, 1961, pp 12-13

autocracy was the order of the day, and lay leadership was exercised within firm limits laid down by him. In particular, the Conference was, both legally and actually, restricted to full-time itinerants, Mr. Wesley's 'assistants' during his lifetime and subsequently heirs to his authority. The increasing demands for other laymen to be involved in legislation and administration at every level of the connexional structure found their main spokesman in Alexander Kilham and led to the formation of the Methodist New Connexion in 1797.

Henry Smith[4] writes of Kilhamite agitation making an impact on Portsmouth 'as early as 1792', but the evidence he adduces is inconclusive and probably misconstrued. Kilham, he says, 'had visited Hants with Mr. Brackenbury and had shown of what spirit he was'. But this was the briefest of visits, en route to the Channel Islands, and had taken place as early as 1783. There is no evidence to support the suggestion that it gave rise to any later agitation. Similarly, he points out that William Thom was in charge of the Salisbury Circuit from 1788 to 1790, but does not indicate on what he bases his further statement that Thom 'left behind the seeds of disaffection'. The issue which Smith specifies as a source of contention at Portsmouth was the administration of the sacrament by the preachers, not the wider one of lay representation in connexional affairs. The two were obviously related; but it was the latter which was the focal point of the Kilhamite agitation, and in the absence of positive evidence we must assume that Smith was reading too much into the few facts available to him. Certainly, if the agitation and controversy of these years immediately following Wesley's death made any impact on this part of southern England, it left no lasting trace. The Methodist New Connexion was confined to the industrial Midlands and the North.

Circuit proliferation

The quickening pace of southern Methodism may be gauged, in a very general way, by the proliferation of circuits during this period. This may be most simply expressed diagrammatically. (See Figures 3:1 and 3:2) With the removal of Jasper Winscom in 1787, the Winchester society lost such pre-eminence as it may still have enjoyed. The leadership had in any case already passed to Portsmouth, where the societies were more numerous and more vigorous than elsewhere in Hampshire. This was

4. H Smith, 1894, pp 37-8

Figure 3:1 Hampshire Circuits 1790-1825

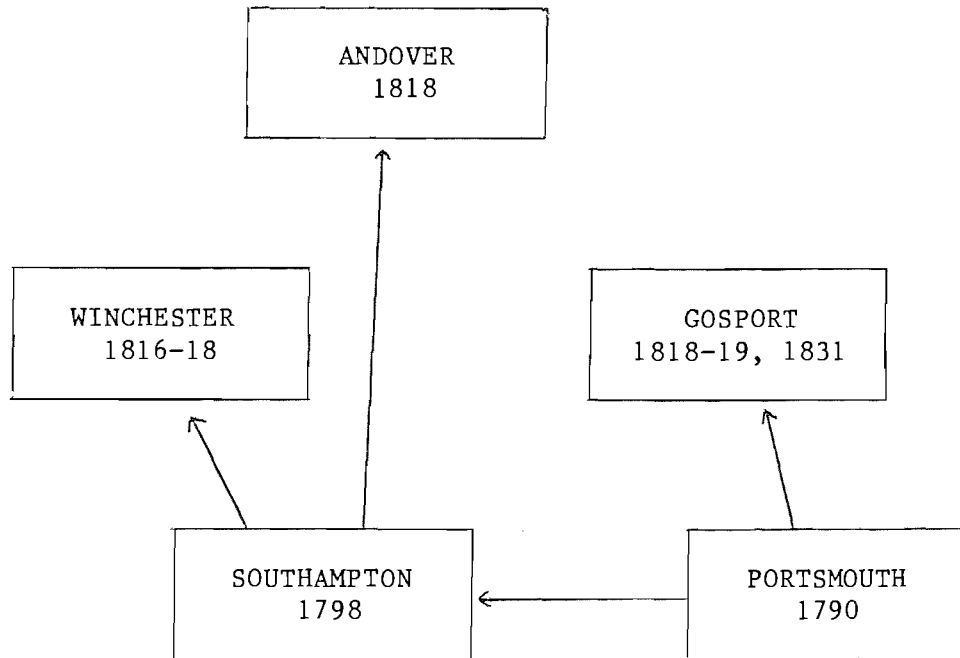
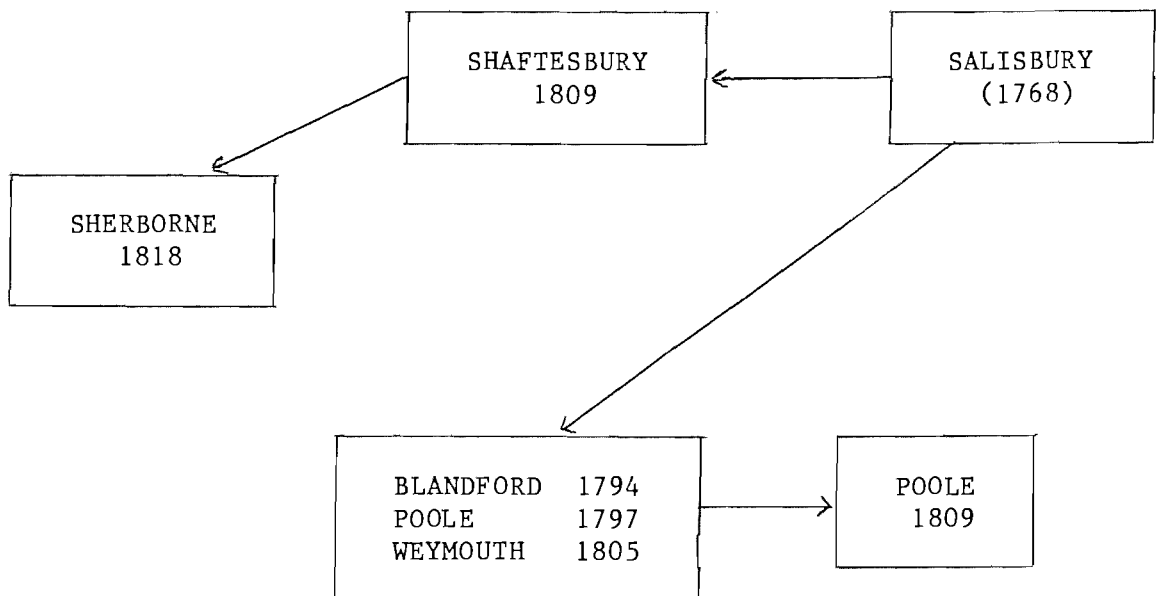


Figure 3:2 Dorset Circuits, 1790-1825



formally recognised in 1790 by the creation of the Portsmouth Circuit.

Salisbury, though for many years the head of the circuit, lacked its Jasper Winscom and does not seem to have shown any very positive evidence of evangelistic vigour. The spread of Methodism into Dorset derived from initiatives originating elsewhere: at Shaftesbury from the work of John Haime; in Purbeck from Jasper Winscom; at Portland and, to a lesser extent, Poole, from Robert Carr Brackenbury. The society at Salisbury seems to have had little to do with any of these developments; nor, for that matter, were they conspicuously active nearer home, in the villages of south Wiltshire. By 1790, the Salisbury and Wilton societies were still the only ones in that part of the circuit apart from one or two village classes, e.g. at Broad Chalk. Salisbury had become a solid, respectable congregation; Wilton was a much smaller and more struggling one. Neither seems to have been a centre of Methodist advance.

Before the end of the century, the Southampton Circuit had been formed from Portsmouth, and the Blandford (or, as it was successively termed, the Poole or Weymouth) Circuit from Salisbury. In 1809, further Dorset circuits came into existence: Poole separated from Weymouth and Shaftesbury from Salisbury. Nine years later, Shaftesbury gave birth to the Sherborne Circuit, so that by 1818 Dorset Methodism was divided into four circuits, covering the south-east and south-west, the north-west and north, with the north-east still nominally under the aegis of Salisbury, but in fact largely untouched as yet by Methodist influences. Similarly, in Hampshire, Gosport and Andover achieved circuit status in 1818. The latter was comparatively isolated and vulnerable, while the former reverted to Portsmouth after only one year. Winchester, which became the head of a circuit in 1816, also proved too weak to maintain its independence and after two years was reunited with Southampton; it did not regain its circuit status until 1862. The Isle of Wight having enjoyed a brief premature independence (in 1787-8 and 1789-90) remained part of the Portsmouth Circuit until 1809.

As Table 3:1 shows, the division of circuits followed no clearly discernible pattern in terms of membership numbers. The establishment of the Sherborne Circuit with a mere 90 members was hardly an auspicious beginning; yet it survived and grew where others such as Winchester (1816-1818) proved unable to maintain their independence. A

combination of external factors, such as comparative isolation from the parent circuit, and positive internal factors such as vigorous local leadership, seems to be the key to any explanation of the facts. To test this supposition we shall examine each of the circuits individually.

Two adjacent areas lie outside our present study. Methodism in Bridport and the villages of the extreme west of Dorset was linked with that of South Devon to the west, and had little if any contact with Weymouth. To the north of the area, the Methodist circuits in Berkshire, in North Wiltshire and Somerset developed quite independently of what was going on to the south of them, except that for many years the Yeovil society belonged to the Sherborne Circuit (and indeed, was the largest society and head of the circuit in all but name).[5]

Table 3:1 Division of Circuits in relation to membership 1790-1825

Circuit division	Date	Membership of parent circuit		Membership of new circuit
		Before	After	
Salisbury/ Portsmouth	1790	556	238	430[1]
Salisbury/ Blandford[2]	1794	300	262	190
Portsmouth/ Southampton	1798	745	510	180
Salisbury/ Shaftesbury	1809	560	400	230
Weymouth/Poole	1809	530	183[3]	300
Portsmouth/IOW	1810	930	920[4]	260
Shaftesbury/ Sherborne	1818	485	365	90
Southampton[5]/ Andover	1818	280	352	190

Notes:

1. Including the Isle of Wight, reunited with Portsmouth after one year of independence.
2. Known successively as Blandford Circuit (1794-7), Poole Circuit (1797-1805), Weymouth Circuit (1805-9).
3. Including 22 'non-residents'.
4. Including 70 'non-residents'.
5. Including the figures for Winchester, reunited to Southampton after two years of independence.

3.2. The Evangelical Revival: its wider impact

Despite this continuing proliferation of Wesleyan circuits and the increasing number of village societies, there remained parts of the area in which Wesleyanism long remained unrepresented. In contrast to

5. It did not gain separate circuit status until 1862.

the industrial Midlands and the North, southern Methodism was still thinly and unevenly distributed. This provided both the opportunity and the justification for the Primitive Methodist and Bible Christian missions, which were focused, at least initially, on places where there was either no Wesleyan society or an ineffectual one.[6]

But the situation was more complex than this. Long before the arrival of Primitive Methodist and Bible Christian missionaries in the south, the Wesleyans had launched their own 'home missionary' ventures, though these barely touched the area with which we are concerned. Furthermore, both Anglicans and Nonconformists were beginning to respond to the need for rural evangelisation, despite continuing reservations about Methodism.

Within the Church, Evangelicals were on the increase: 'By the end of the eighteenth century there were probably 300 Evangelical clergymen [in England], perhaps as many as 500'.[7] As in 1764, however, few of these were to be found in central southern England. Where there was an Evangelical incumbent, as in Downton, Midhurst and Yeovil[8] during the early years of the new century, the effect was usually to inhibit Methodism and delay the formation of a society. This was both a result and a symptom of the fact that, despite Wesley's intentions, the movement had become more a rival than an adjunct to the Established Church.

The first important indication of change did not come until 1827, with the appointment of Bishop Sumner to Winchester,[9] and the effect of his appointment was not only to initiate long-needed reforms within the diocese, but to intensify the rivalry between Anglican and nonconformist evangelicals. But throughout the period, local initiative bore fruit in the shape of new chapels of ease and proprietary chapels.[10] However inadequate in terms of response to the growth and shift of population, their efforts bear witness to an awareness of the need.

6. See below, Section 6.3

7. John Walsh, 'Methodism at the End of the Eighteenth Century', in Davies, George and Rupp, 1965, p.291

8. See below, pp 148, 213, 392-3

9. See above, p 17

10. See above, Section 1.2.2

For the Nonconformists, the turning-point came rather earlier, though how far back into the 18th century we can trace it depends on our ability to distinguish between old and new Dissent. The Societas Evangelica, established in the 1770s and re-organised in 1795, was an early indication of the quickening of evangelical life among the dissenters. But the revival gathered momentum in the 1790s, which saw an upsurge of millennialism in the wake of the French Revolution and a flurry of missionary activity both overseas and at home.[11] Independents were particularly affected, but the Baptists also played a part; while the Wesleyans, not yet ready to identify unequivocally with the nonconformist camp, and for the moment preoccupied with internal stresses and choices, held aloof.

David Bogue's academy at Gosport was one local symptom of this revitalisation of Dissent. Like the earlier Hoxton Academy and Lady Huntingdon's college at Trevecka, it provided the dissenting congregations with a supply of fervently evangelical pastors from the 1780s on. Moderate Calvinists in their theology, they had opportunities for formal training which the Wesleyan preachers at that time lacked. But Calvinist and Arminian were one in their quickened spiritual fervour, their 'zeal for souls' and many of their methods. In the case of the first two of these factors, it is difficult to distinguish the influence of the Wesleys from that of Whitefield or other leaders of the Evangelical Revival; but methods of evangelising are more specific and concrete, and the debt of Dissent to Wesleyanism can be more clearly discerned.

Under the influence of their evangelical pastors, whether trained at Gosport or elsewhere, some of the dissenting chapels in the towns became the base for missionary activity in the neighbouring countryside; village congregations were formed, and in some cases chapels built with their moral and financial support. A number of examples can be identified in the returns of the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census. For example, in Dorset Winterbourne Kingston chapel was a protegee of the Blandford Independents; Broadstone, Hamworthy and (probably) Parkstone Chapels originated from the Independent Chapel at

11. R H Martin, 1978, pp 169-84. In the space of the decade, at least three societies were launched to promote foreign missions: the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the London Missionary Society (1795) and the Church Missionary Society (1799). Methodist overseas work had its formal beginnings in 1786, though the first steps toward an organised Wesleyan Missionary Society were not taken until 1813.

Poole; and Studland and Langton Matravers were missioned by the Independents of Swanage. Alderholt Chapel in the parish of Cranborne owed its existence to the initiative of the Fordingbridge Independents; while the Damerham chapel was associated with 'Ebenezer' Chapel at Cripplestyle and under the care of the same minister, Samuel Williams. In Hampshire, the East End congregation at Boldre was linked with the Lymington chapel, and the Independents of Havant fostered a chapel on Hayling Island. But the most notable example is that of the long-established Above Bar congregation in Southampton. The Independent Chapel in Romsey was an early offshoot; but at the time of the census in 1851 it was supporting at least two causes, at Bitterne and Pear Tree Green, Itchen, through the employment of a lay agent, Richard Laishley. None of these examples was quite the equivalent of a Methodist circuit; nevertheless, by imitation of the circuit system they acknowledged its effectiveness as a unit for local evangelisation.

The earliest and most notable example, however, originated outside the area altogether. It was both an imitation of Wesleyan methods and a response to the absence of Methodism from a particular area - the Hampshire-Sussex border, later to be known as 'the Methodist wilderness'.^[12] Long before any attempt by the Wesleyans to colonise this difficult territory, the Village Itinerant Society had chosen it as the location for one of its early missions.^[13]

This Society was established in 1796 by John Eyre, editor of the Evangelical Magazine and secretary of the London Missionary Society founded the previous year. It was, in fact, part of the same outburst of missionary zeal which brought the London Missionary Society into existence; like the latter, it was intended to be undenominational, but the Wesleyans and Baptists held aloof, the Evangelical clergy were increasingly wary of itinerant ministries, and the Society was soon looking only to the Independents for support.

In April 1797, David Bogue took the initiative in calling together ministers and laymen of various Independent churches to consider a 'Plan for promoting the Knowledge of the Gospel in Hampshire'. His

12. The name originated with W.W. Pocock in 1885 and appears as 'the Methodist desert' in the Methodist Recorder of 16 May 1901.

13. Records of the Village Itinerant Society are found among the New College MSS now at Dr. Williams's Library, especially MSS 41, 44 and 54

intention, clearly, was to complement what had been begun by the Village Itinerant Society with the support of local congregations. The outline of his scheme begins with a statement of its design, which is 'to make the Gospel known in those towns and villages which are at present destitute of it, by opening places for worship, and introducing the preaching of the word', and the means envisaged are:

- '1. The labours of neighbouring ministers.
2. Missionary labours of ministers through the country. It is recommended to every minister to make a Missionary tour in the course of the year.
3. Itinerant preachers, if they can be obtained.
4. Gifted brethren in the different churches, to pray, read the Scriptures, and give a word of exhortation.
5. Prayer-meetings and conferences, in which the people will be assisted by the neighbouring churches.'

The need to which the Hampshire Independents addressed themselves was identical to the one spelled out by a similar society also founded in 1797 by the Baptists of London 'for the Encouragement and Support of Itinerant and Village Preaching':

'It is very affecting to think that in this country, though highly favoured with civil and religious privileges, the inhabitants of many villages are destitute of an evangelical ministry ... We should not forget many myriads at home who have scarcely anything pertaining to Christianity, besides the name - who are profoundly ignorant, if not notoriously profligate and profane ... Multitudes of people in this country, being unacquainted with the true principles of Christianity, have no experience of their salutary tendency to relieve the distressed conscience, to sanctify the depraved heart, to meliorate the conduct.'

Within weeks of its formation in May, 1796, the Village Itinerant Society was organising a mission in response to 'the destitute situation of the inhabitants of a vast part of Hampshire, Surrey and Sussex'. By mid-August, their first missionaries, Griffin and Church, were at Haslemere and Petersfield. Griffin had visited Midhurst, but died of smallpox within a few weeks of his arrival, leaving William Church to hold the fort for several months until two new preachers

14. The Missionary Magazine, 1797, pp 257-60. (Quoted in S.R. Maitland, 1837, pp 136-43) In the same year the Magazine reported similar initiatives in Dorset, Kent, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, Berkshire, Westmorland, Wiltshire, Bedfordshire and Warwickshire. The need to join forces to promote such evangelisation lay behind the formation of County Unions by the Independents at this period. (See B. Nightingale, n.d., pp 18-19, 23-4)

15. 'Address' of the Baptist Society, quoted in Ivimey, Vol IV, 1830, p 68ff. Cf the quotation from the Wesleyan Missionary report of 1808, p 152 below.

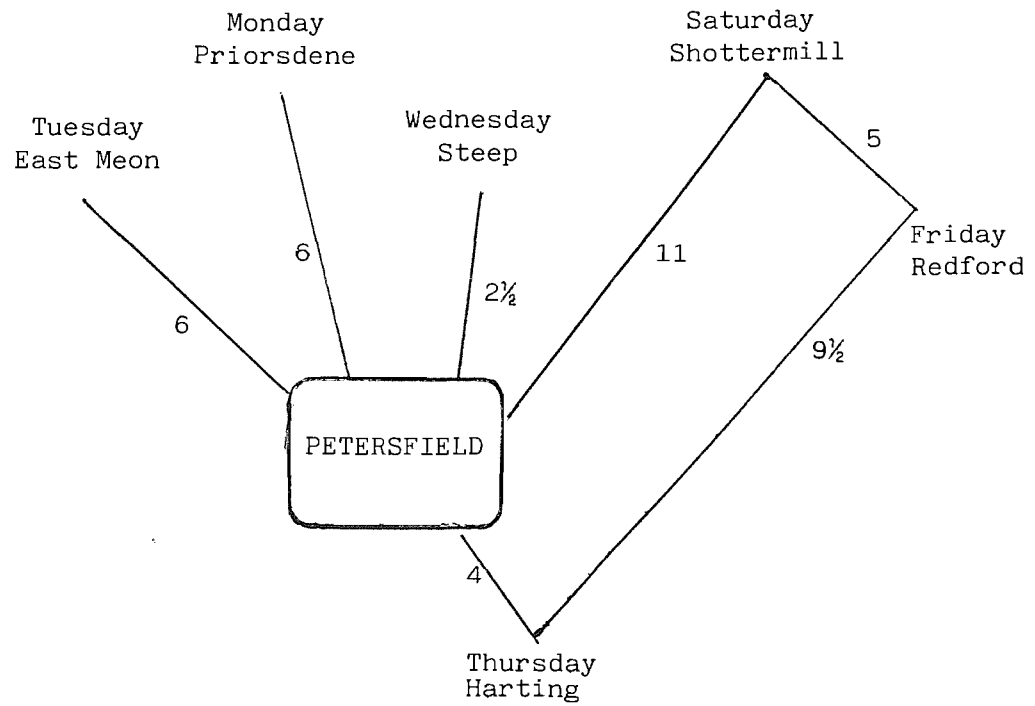
arrived.

Eyre's initial advice to Griffin was that since Midhurst already enjoyed 'Gospel preaching' in the parish church,[16] he should concentrate his attention on places where the Gospel had not been preached. He ended on a note of caution: 'This can only be accomplish'd gradually, & by the assistance of serious Friends ... There is a great difference between Zeal & Rashness. Persecutions are frequently rais'd by Indiscretion, which might have been avoided by a prudent gentle conduct ... The most obstinate are often won by our Patience amidst opposition & our good Conversation in Christ.' The Dissenters thus distanced themselves from the more extravagant emotionalism associated with the early Methodist movement and from the kind of frontal assault on ungodliness which would later characterise the Primitive Methodist 'ranters'. Otherwise there was a marked similarity to the Methodist itinerant system. Early in 1797 Church sent to Eyre a diagram describing what he called his 'little circuit' (see Figure 3:3). The figures represent milages. An almost identical 'plan' was adopted by one of his successors, Richard Denham, but the parallel with the Wesleyan system was far from complete in every detail.

Some months after beginning work in his 'circuit' Denham, reporting rather guardedly to Eyre on the prospects of establishing any permanent work around Haslemere, struck a tentative note that would have been anathema to John Wesley: 'I have given the people a hint of forming them into Societies and they seem to approve of the Plan; perhaps that may be the means of uniting them together, and making them more zealous for the increase of their numbers.' To Wesley this would have been putting the cart before the horse. The mission nevertheless bore some lasting fruit: societies were established and chapels acquired or built at Harting (1800), Petersfield (1801) and Haslemere (1804), thus

16. There had recently been a change of incumbent at Midhurst. After a ministry of nearly forty years, Francis Atkins was succeeded in 1796 by Richard Lloyd, who held the living until 1834. Lloyd was an Evangelical deeply suspicious of schismatic enthusiasm (see the trenchant criticisms of illiterate itinerant preachers in his *Christian Theology* (1804), pp 262, 373-5, 376-8, and the tensions between him and evangelical dissenters laid bare by his refusal to support the organisation of a branch of the Bible Society in Midhurst in 1817). If he was responsible for the 'gospel preaching' reported by Eyre, this may have been an inhibiting factor to the non-Anglican evangelism. The Village Itinerant Society left Midhurst alone after Griffin's initial visit. The Wesleyans registered a room for worship in 1815, but this had no permanent result, and the present Midhurst society traces its roots only to the later 19th century.

Figure 3:3 William Church's 'little circuit', 1797



Notes:

1. Source: New College Ms.41; letter of 7 February 1797
2. Figures are milages.

anticipating later Wesleyan attempts to occupy the same territory. All three were still in existence as Independent chapels at the time of the 1851 Census.

How far was this new evangelistic spirit and activity a measure of Wesley's success in making Methodism a leaven in the other Churches? At this point the distinction between Methodism and the Evangelical Revival becomes a crucial one. Methodist historians have too often in the past treated the two as synonymous, thereby giving the influence of Wesley and his followers more credit than was due to them. Although Wesleyan techniques and forms of organisation were adopted by others, the Evangelical Revival was a wider phenomenon than the Methodist movement, and we must be careful not to overestimate Methodism's influence on the rest of English Protestantism. At most, the rise of Methodism was a spur to others who felt the same spirit of revival that was manifesting itself increasingly throughout the Churches as the new century dawned.

The attitude of both Anglicans and Dissenters remained equivocal towards Methodism even when they were busy emulating it. If most Anglicans were bewildered and repelled by Methodist emotionalism and its irregularities, the Dissenters were equally dismissive. Coomer attributes their hostility to a variety of causes: unease at its Arminian appeal to the masses and its over-emotionalism; disapproval of the use of unqualified lay preachers; reaction to Wesley's autocratic rule and his known dislike of the dissenting tradition, despite the Puritanism in his own background.[17] Whatever the reasons, Doddridge's guarded welcome to the Methodist movement continued to be representative of the dissenting attitude at least until the days of Bogue and Bennett, who praised 'their persevering efforts to call sinners to repentance,' but concluded that 'the want of competent knowledge in the great body of their preachers has nourished error and enthusiasm among the people.'[18] As the 19th century progressed, Nonconformists found themselves more in sympathy with the newer branches than with the original Wesleyan body, whose continuing aloofness reflected the attitude of their Anglican founder.

17. Coomer, 1946, pp 109-15

18. Bogue and Bennett, Vol IV, 1812, p 392. For Doddridge, see p 51 above.

* * *

By the turn of the 18th century, though the Wesleyans had not entirely abandoned their evangelistic outreach in favour of pastoral consolidation, the original impetus of Wesley's movement had diminished, partly through preoccupation with problems of polity and partly through financial constraints. Local initiatives continued, largely (as the survey of Wesleyan circuits below will show) thanks to the more energetic and fervent local preachers. At connexional level, too, there were new ventures in evangelism, but these were very largely due to the enthusiasm of one man.

Home, as well as overseas, missions had been in the mind of Dr. Thomas Coke from the time in the 1780s when he had issued his first missionary appeals. His Address to the Pious and Benevolent in 1786 had specified the Gaelic-speaking parts of Scotland and the Channel Islands as among the 'various parts' of the so-called Christian nations that were 'still buried in the grossest darkness'. Twenty years later he was involved in moves to send missionaries to a number of areas in England where there seemed to be both the need and the opportunity for a further extension of the work.[19]

The first home missionaries appeared on the Stations for 1805, attached to existing circuits. Four of these (Manchester, Liverpool, Preston and Sheffield) were in the north, and therefore, almost by definition, not in areas where Methodism was least represented. The fifth was at Warminster and attached to the Bath Circuit. The Conference of 1806 put these Home Missions on a more regular footing, appointed eight missionaries, all to rural areas, including one to 'the country in the vicinity of Bradford, Wiltshire', and instructed that they were 'to be respectively under the direction of the neighbouring Superintendants'.

There were, however, no appointments as yet to either the Salisbury Circuit or any of its offshoots, and it could be said that the new missionary thrust was closely linked to areas of existing strength, rather than an untethered venture into new territory. This was no doubt tactically sound, even if it left the areas least influenced by Methodism still untouched. The first missionary appointment to central southern England was in 1808, when Thomas Newton Jun., was attached to

19. See Vickers, 1969, pp 304-5

the Weymouth Circuit, probably to work in the Poole area, which became a separate circuit the following year. (The other appointments that year were mostly in the eastern counties and the West Country, and were to places actually designated 'Missionary Circuits'.) Similarly, the appointment of a missionary to the Isle of Wight in 1809 was a move towards designating the island as a circuit in its own right and separating it from Portsmouth in 1811.

It was not until 1811 that further attention was given to parts of the rural south where Methodism had not yet taken root. In that year a missionary was attached to the Shaftesbury Circuit, in addition to the two other circuit preachers, and a Chichester Mission was formed.[20] The Farnham Mission, previously part of the London District, was placed under the direction of the superintendent of the Southampton Circuit, an arrangement likely to be vitiated by remoteness alone: the rubric was not repeated in subsequent years.[21]

As with the expansion of overseas missionary activity, it is doubtful whether any of these home missions would have been attempted, much less sustained from year to year, without the enthusiasm and determination of Dr. Thomas Coke. His views were summed up in the missionary report for 1808: 'Out of the eleven thousand parishes which England and Wales contain, perhaps one half of them seldom or never hear the gospel. In numerous small towns, villages and hamlets, a very considerable part of the inhabitants attend no place of worship whatever, nor once think of entering a religious edifice, except when marriages, baptisms or funerals occur. It is among people of this description that our missions have been chiefly established.'[22]

Within a few years of his death, however, these mission circuits were to be seen in a rather different light, as 'so many millstones hung about the neck of the Connexion, through which it has been sinking every year. And even in a spiritual sense, few of them have been very prosperous.' This was the verdict of Jonathan Crowther in his Thoughts upon the finances or temporal affairs of the Methodist Connexion ... written just before the Conference of 1817. Crowther was an experienced preacher, having entered the itinerancy in 1784. Two years

20. See below, p 170

21. See below, pp 176-7

22. Quoted in S Drew, 1817, p 323

after his Thoughts were published he was elected President of the Conference. His judgment was therefore one that deserved serious attention. He laid the blame, not on 'any want of integrity or zeal in the Doctor,' but on 'a flagrant want of judgment, economy and prudence' in the supervision of these circuits, which were overstaffed in proportion to their membership and an unwarranted drain on the Contingent Fund.[23]

Such were the circumstances and the prevailing climate of opinion among Wesleyans early in the 19th century, which engendered a sense of frustration among those who became the founders and early leaders of movements like Primitive Methodism, Tent Methodism and the Bible Christians, and also more isolated individuals such as James Crabb,[24] Harry Noyes of Thruxton[25] and William Sanger of Salisbury[26] in the area with which we are concerned.

3.3 The Circuits in 1825

An over-all view of the Wesleyan circuits in 1825 can be extracted from the Marriott collection of preaching plans, now at Drew University, Madison, N.J. These cover virtually the whole of the British connexion and therefore permit significant comparisons to be made. (Table 3:2)

Of the nine[27] circuits which had developed at this stage out of the former Salisbury Circuit, four had three ministers and four had two; but Andover had only one to look after its 17 causes and 214 members. Table 3:2 attempts to rank them in terms of their geographical extent, measured in terms of the number of preaching places and their distance from the circuit town (column 10a). The picture is modified if the staffing of each circuit is taken into account (columns 3 and 10b). Andover, with its single minister, then becomes the most demanding circuit, though again the picture is different if the ratio of ministers to members is taken as the key factor (columns 8 and 9). Portsmouth, which was geographically the most compact of the circuits, then rises from the foot of the table to its head, and a new ranking

23. Crowther, 1817, p 16

24. See below, pp 179-80

25. See below, pp 183-4

26. See below, p 165, 277-9

27. Including the Isle of Wight, which had three ministers. This circuit is ignored in the remainder of this section.

Table 3:2 Extensiveness of Circuits, 1825

Circuit	Year of Origin	Ministers	Local Preachers[1]	Preaching Places	Chapels	Furthest Preaching Place	Members	Members per Minister	Index of Geographical Extent[2]	
									(a)	(b)
Southampton	1798	3	21	23	12[3]	Mitcheldever, 20m	486	162	201	67
Salisbury	1768	2	27	29	16[4]	Chitterne, 15m	615	307	178	89
Poole	1809	2+1[5]	21	22	8[6]	Edmondsham, 14m	530	212	202	81
Weymouth	1794	3	13	19	4	Winterborne Houghton, 18m	420	140	159	53
Shaftesbury	1809	2	13	22	7	White Cross, 16m	500	250	156	78
Andover	1818	1	16	17	7	Basingstoke, 19m	214	214	114	114
Sherborne	1818	2	13	16	2	Wincanton, 10m	230	115	92	46
Portsmouth	1790	3	14	13	6	Petersfield, 15m	1,040	347	39	13

Notes:

1. Local preachers on trial are not included.
2. Index of geographical extent:
 - (a) the sum of the distances in miles from the circuit town to each out-of-town preaching place;
 - (b) the figures in column (a) divided by the number of ministers. (N.b. Where two adjacent places are coupled together and treated as one preaching appointment (e.g. Stoke and Wonston in the Southampton Circuit) these are counted as one.)
3. Eleven places marked with a 'C', plus King's Somborne, known from other sources to have had a chapel by this date.
4. Fourteen places marked with a 'C', plus two others, Idmiston and Pilton.
5. Poole was the only circuit in this area to have a supernumerary minister, James Alexander. (The six names listed as 'supernumeraries' on the Salisbury plan as preaching 'occasionally' appear to have been retired local preachers.) For the purposes of calculation, I have counted him as half a preacher in this table.
6. Seven places marked with a 'C', plus Binegar.

order emerges.

Table 3:3 Circuits in 1825: Staffing

Circuit	Number of members per minister
Portsmouth	347
Salisbury	307
Shaftesbury	250
Andover	214
Poole	212
Southampton	162
Weymouth	140
Sherborne	115

The ratio of ministers to members may go some way towards explaining the apparent neglect of the outlying societies in the Portsmouth circuit.[28] What is less easy to account for is the comparative over-manning of the Southampton and Weymouth Circuits and, most markedly, the recently-formed Sherborne Circuit.[29] It is tempting to see these staffing levels as a function of the ability to pay the ministerial stipends. This was probably a significant factor in the case of Southampton and Weymouth, but the case of the Sherborne Circuit was rather different. Here was a real growth point, as the Conference of 1823 recognised by appointing a second minister despite local inability to meet the cost unaided.[30] This made it possible to extend and consolidate the work in and around Yeovil. Similarly, Andover did not long remain a 'single station', but in this very year, 1825, was given a second minister, despite having the smallest circuit membership in the area. Though this had no immediate effect (the membership in 1831 was down slightly, from 214 to 207), the following two decades were a period of steady advance, despite the arrival of the Primitive Methodists.[31]

Whatever the basis of computation used, Portsmouth Circuit with its three ministers, its high proportion of urban chapels, and its limited extent[32] but high membership figures, stands out as the exception in

28. See below and Section 3.3.2.

29. The connexional average was one minister per 205 members in 1801. This fell slightly during the first half of the century to one minister per 229 members in 1845. (J Kent, 1978, p 227)

30. See below, pp 212-3

31. Membership rose to 292 in 1841 and 373 in 1851; then a steady decline set in.

32. The furthest preaching place was Petersfield, 15 miles away, an isolated cause which briefly gained circuit status in 1826, but disappeared again in 1836. (In 1851 it was in the Guildford Circuit.)

a predominantly rural area. Salisbury remained more typical of the area, with the highest number of chapels and other preaching places, despite the periodic creation of new circuits.

One apparent consequence of the variation in staffing is the wide range of patterns of ministerial deployment (Table 3:4). As Rogers found to be the case in Lincolnshire,[33] the full-time circuit preachers concentrated their attention on the well-established preaching places, which in most cases already had a chapel of some kind. In each circuit between one third and one half of the preaching places had no Sunday services conducted by ministers, but were served entirely by local preachers. On the other hand, the Weymouth chapel never saw a local preacher in its pulpit, though it had three services on Sunday; nor did Brackenbury's Portland chapel. Similarly, the morning and evening services at Salisbury were conducted entirely by ministers, though laymen were often appointed to take the afternoon services.

The number of places where the sacrament was administered and the frequency of administration varied widely. The former seems to have been limited by the location of the chapels - though by no means every chapel had even one sacramental service. Thus, in the Salisbury Circuit, sacramental services were held in only five of its sixteen chapels; and in Andover Circuit, in two out of seven. Weymouth, on the other hand, had the sacrament not only in its four chapels, but in two other places, Owermoigne and Dewlish. Portsmouth, Poole and Shaftesbury Circuits, with one or more sacramental services at each of their chapels, and none elsewhere, seem to represent the norm; as does Sherborne Circuit with the sacrament administered only in Yeovil and Sherborne, where its two chapels were situated.

There is some correlation between the frequency of the sacramental services and the ratio of ministers to preaching places in a circuit. In the Andover Circuit with its single minister, responsible for 17 societies, the sacrament was administered only once in 22 weeks at Andover and at Whitchurch. Yeovil and Sherborne, with two ministers, had the sacrament twice as often as this, i.e. once a quarter. A quarterly sacramental service seems to have been the custom in the

33. Alan Rogers, 1979, pp 336-42: 'In the early years of the century the salaried ministers preached in very few of the rural chapels of the circuit ... For many years, the ministers monopolised the Louth pulpit to the almost complete exclusion of laymen; and their duties extended to only a limited number of other centres.'

Table 3:4 Patterns of Sunday Worship, 1825

Circuit	No. of Preaching Places	No. of Chapels	No. served only by ministers	No. served only by local preachers	No. of services a Sunday			No. of chapels with sacrament
					1	2	3	
Salisbury	29	16	1	11	13	13	2	5
Portsmouth	13	6	0	7	3	5	5	6
Southampton	23	12	0	9	11	9	3	11
Weymouth	19	4	2	7	7	5	2	6
Poole	22	8	0	11	12	8	2	8
Shaftesbury	22	7	0	14	12	9	1	7
Andover	17	7	0	9	11	7	2	2
Sherborne	16	2	0	6	13	2	1	2

chapels of the Weymouth Circuit; but the main chapels in the Salisbury, Southampton, Poole and Shaftesbury Circuits had two a quarter. The comparatively compact and well-staffed Portsmouth Circuit had the most frequent administration - five times in 19 weeks in the Portsmouth and Portsea chapels, and four times in two other places, besides a number of love-feasts.

Love-feasts occur on the plans of the Portsmouth, Weymouth, Poole and Andover Circuits, though with varying frequency. With two in 22 weeks, the Andover chapel had twice as many love-feasts as sacramental services. Portsmouth chapel had two love-feasts in 19 weeks, one of them on Good Friday, but more frequent celebrations of the sacrament. No love-feasts are mentioned on the Salisbury,[34] Southampton, Shaftesbury or Sherborne plans; nor are Watchnights or Fast days. In fact, only Portsmouth Circuit still observed a quarterly Fast day and had occasional Watchnight services in the two town chapels. These services had all been characteristic features of 18th century Methodism, but the over-all impression is that by 1825 they were in widespread decline in this part of England. The Love-feast, a Methodist borrowing from the Moravians, had commonly, though never universally, been a monthly event, with men's, women's and 'general' love-feasts alternating.[35] But 'by 1780 ... the quarterly, half-yearly, or annual general love-feast was in most places the only survival ... Throughout most of the nineteenth century, from the evidence of circuit plans, love-feasts continued to be arranged quarterly, though this was increasingly restricted to the leading churches only.'[36] This general picture is largely confirmed by the local evidence in 1825.

Nor was the Love-feast in any sense a lay version of, or substitute for, the Lord's Supper. Whatever congregational participation, e.g. in the form of testimony, may have survived, the Love-feast invariably coincided with a ministerial appointment.

Some indication of the direction in which matters were developing during this period is provided by a comparison of Weymouth Circuit preaching plans for 1825 and 1829-30. By the latter date, Dorchester,

34. Dredge, 1833, pp 42, 63 refers to Love-feasts held in private homes at both Salisbury and Alderbury about ten years earlier; but these would not feature on the Circuit plan.

35. See F Baker, 1957, pp 9-14, 41-3; L F Church, 1949, pp 237-42.

36. Baker, 1957, p 41

having acquired a regular preaching-place, had joined Weymouth and Portland in having only ministerial appointments, except for one Sunday in the quarter when the third minister was at Bere and Bere Heath. The villages of Owermoigne and Dewlish had lost the occasional ministerial appointment (and therefore also the sacramental service) which they had enjoyed in 1825. This left fourteen village societies and classes to be served on Sundays entirely by local preachers.

How far was the situation in these southern circuits typical of the connexion as a whole? Hempton sees 'the decline of rural itinerancy, the virtual disappearance of the circuit horse, the financial reliance on big urban chapels with their wealthy clientele' as the result of the economic recession that followed the Napoleonic Wars.[37] It is possible to trace this trend much further back than this suggests; but the collection of 1825 plans leaves us in no doubt that the picture at national level was very similar to that in the south. An examination of the first twenty circuits represented in the collection (which is arranged alphabetically), shows that none had churches served exclusively by ministers; but elsewhere there was a significant number where the pulpit of the main church (or occasionally churches) was never occupied on Sundays by local preachers. These were usually places where Methodism had been established long enough to gain a degree of respectability - and in some cases, perhaps, a share in the relative sophistication of the local community. The examples include Bath, Exeter, Liverpool (both Mount Pleasant and Leeds Street chapels), Durham and Leicester.

In virtually every circuit, on the other hand, many village causes were served entirely by local preachers. In 191 of the 398 places listed in the sample of twenty circuits no ministers were appointed to preach on any Sunday. Nor was this necessarily counter-balanced by weekday appointments. Devonport (one of the few circuits whose preaching plan included weekday appointments) had two main churches, Morice Street and Windmill Hill, at which the services were conducted predominantly, though not quite exclusively, by the ministers. Of the other eight preaching places, only one had occasional ministerial appointments; the remainder were served entirely by local preachers. Yet of these seven, only one had regular ministerial preaching appointments on the weekday

37. D Hempton, 1984, p 110

plan.

The only preaching plan in this area which gives details of weekday as well as Sunday appointments is that for the Portsmouth Circuit, where once again the restricted sphere of ministerial activity is highlighted. At two places in the town served on Sundays entirely by local preachers (Union Road and Greenwich Place) ministers were planned to take weeknight services. But none of the outlying places (Titchfield, Stubbington, Ewer Common, Portchester and Petersfield) had ministerial appointments on either Sundays or weekdays, and one is left wondering when and how pastoral oversight was exercised.

We must remember that many places which feature on these early plans were no more than classes, associated, at least in theory, with one or other of the larger societies in their vicinity. If for no other reason, pastoral oversight, symbolised by the distribution of the quarterly class ticket, required at least an occasional ministerial visit. Nevertheless, seen from this grassroots level, the pastoral office looks rather different from the theory propounded at connexional level by men like Jabez Bunting and Richard Watson.[38]

The over-all impression given by the circuit plans as a whole, and confirmed by other evidence, is that the initiative for pioneering new places and establishing new societies had largely passed, whether by deliberate policy or by default, to the local laity, while the circuit ministers gave themselves to the task of consolidating existing causes. Certainly, in the years since Wesley's death, reduction in the size of circuits had been accompanied by decreasing mobility on the part of the preachers. By 1825 the 'itinerant system' had already been modified within the Wesleyan connexion, though it survived in the non-Wesleyan offshoots, especially the Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists, as one token of their attempted return to their 18th century roots. This general impression may be tested and illuminated by an examination of the development of individual circuits and their pattern of life.

38. See especially, J C Bowmer, 1975. It is not entirely unfair to suggest, on the basis of Dr. Bowmer's study, that although responsibility and authority were seen as two sides of the ministerial coin, it was the latter which was the chief concern of pastors and members alike during the first half of the century. The power of admitting and expelling members seems to have loomed much larger than the need to nurture them.

3.3.1 The Salisbury Circuit: Table 3:5

Despite spawning a number of new circuits, Salisbury remained the head of the largest circuit in the area, measured by the number of chapels and other preaching places, the number of local preachers, or the geographical extent of the circuit. Only in the matter of membership was it outstripped by Portsmouth Circuit.

Apart from Salisbury itself, no society in the circuit came anywhere near treble figures, although Winterbourne Gunner, the next in membership order, had had a dramatic increase to over 100 during the revival ten years earlier. Membership of many of the village groups was in single figures, making the Methodist population a thinly scattered one.

Until the turn of the century, the Salisbury area, as we have seen, showed little sign of spiritual vigour or evangelistic fervour. Measured in terms of membership or chapel building, the situation was a relatively static one, with the growing points elsewhere in the circuit.

Some glimpses of the state of things at this time are to be gleaned from the life of James Crabb, the son of a Wilton clothier who, like John Furz two generations earlier, became an itinerant. Crabb was converted in 1791 at the age of 17 and became a local preacher the following year, despite the disapproval of his father and of the Salisbury shoemaker to whom he was apprenticed. As he himself commented, the Wesleyans were still 'a sect despised and everywhere spoken against'.

Crabb preached his first sermon in a chalk-pit at Coombe. As a local preacher, he found himself walking up to thirty miles on a Sunday to keep his appointments, and he equipped himself against bad weather with an 'oil-lawn umbrella'. He records preaching, among other places, at Hannington, Ford, Broad Chalke, Barford and Whiteparish. At the latter were 'some very judicious hearers', among them the local schoolmaster, who gave the young man considerable help and encouragement.

Having bought himself out of his apprenticeship, he was accepted by the Conference of 1794[39] and became an itinerant, but his short ministry

39. His biographer says 1795, but his name is on the 1794 Stations under Portsmouth (also the following year).

Table 3:5 Salisbury Circuit, 1825

Chapels: 16 Other preaching places: 13 Total: 29
 Ministers: 2 Local Preachers: 27 Members: 615

Place	Membership 1822[1]	Earliest known preaching	Date of chapels, if any	Times of services
Salisbury	283	c.1748	1759/1810	10:30, 2:30, 6
Fisherton	-	R 1795	1825	2:30, 6
Wilton	27	R 1745	1780/1804	10, 2, 6
Stapleford	(1823:8)		c.1820	2, 6
Netton	7		1812	2, 6
Amesbury	44	1805-6	1809	10, 6
Chittern	-		?	2, 6
Cholderton	13			5:30
Idmiston	14	R 1807	1818	6
Winterbourne [Gunner]	50	R 1809	1822	10, 6
Broughton	15		1819	2, 6
Winterslow[2]	6	R 1802	1810	2, 6
Pitton	16	1801	c.1805	10, 2, 6[3]
Aldbury	10	R 1815	c.1825[4]	2, 6
Landford	11			10, 2
Downton	32		1814	10, 6
Wood Green	(1823:5)			6 (alt)
Warminster Green[5]	(1823:6)	R 1815	c.1826	2, 6
Charlton	7			2, 6
Damerham	9	by 1784 R 1809		2
Teffont [Magna][6]	11	R 1812		6
[South] Newton	13	R 1807	1812	2
Ford[7]	(1823:13)	R 1794		2
[West] Grimstead	6	R 1813	1819	6
Stratford[8]				2
Farley	5	R 1772		2 (alt)
Netherhampton				10 (alt)
Whiteparish		R 1793	1826	2 (alt)
Dean				2 (alt)

Abbreviations:

R Registration under the Toleration Act
 alt alternate weeks

Table 3:5 continued

Notes:

1. Membership figures recorded in the Circuit Local Preachers Meeting minutes. For a few of the village societies, no members are listed under 1822, but figures are given for 1823.
2. The Winterslow chapel was at Shrippe, an isolated part of the parish of Idmiston.
3. Two services each Sunday: morning and afternoon alternately.
4. From the 1825 circuit plan, there appears to have been a chapel at Alderbury. The 1851 Census return says 'about 1826'.
5. At Redlynch, where earlier registrations are found for 1810 and 1812.
6. A chapel was built at some stage, but was sold in 1850 to the Primitive Methodists.
7. Ford was bracketted with Hurdcott throughout much of the 19th century, following a resolution of the Local Preachers Meeting in 1839.
8. Probably Stratford-sub-Castle; possibly Stratford Toney.

was interrupted and eventually terminated by ill-health. In 1796 he was appointed to the Salisbury Circuit. Poor health may have contributed to his despondent impression of the spiritual state of affairs in his native circuit, but the picture seems basically trustworthy: 'My spirits were much cast down', he wrote, 'to see at what a low ebb the Gospel was ... I have now gone round the Salisbury Circuit, and my grief is that I have not found more genuine piety among the people.' What he found lacking may be indicated in his rather more explicit reference to the Stalbridge society:[40] 'O my dear Father, how deplorable is this place! I could hardly get a word out of my mouth in preaching or in prayer. Lord, I fear there are no praying people here. I know not that I ever had such a time. Some people's religion seems to consist in finding fault with others.' At Shaftesbury, on the other hand, he had a congregation of 1,000.[41]

His native Wilton is an example of how difficult it could be for the Wesleyans to establish a permanent foothold in such places.[42] Despite the earlier work of John Furz and the existence of a preaching-house in 1784,[43] there seems to have been no Methodist society in the town in the 1790s. During one period of convalescence at home, in 1795, Crabb preached for the Baptist minister. When he again retired to the town, two years later, he hired a room in the house of one of his father's foremen and gathered a little society together. Within a year his congregations were large enough to prompt the building of a chapel at his own expense. Soon afterwards he married and became a partner in his father's business. When this collapsed in 1804 and he was declared bankrupt, the chapel, which he had mortgaged for £200, was sold to the Wesleyans, who had already been supplying the preachers. The Wilton society was by now well enough established for half the trustees to be local men and its history from then on was an uninterrupted one.[44]

40. For Stalbridge, see the Shaftesbury Circuit below.

41. He gives an exact figure, 1,006 - which suggests more than a guess, though how anyone could have counted them accurately, even indoors (it was January 6th), or how they could all have got in remains in question.

42. For other examples, see Chapter 2 *passim*

43. See above, pp 71-3, 124, 128

44. John Rudall, 1854. Indenture of 1st October 1804 (PRO: C 54: 45 Geo III 1.10). Rudall makes only veiled reference to the collapse of the family business. Crabb moved to Romsey, opened a school, then in 1822 began an independent mission in Southampton. See below, pp 179-80

The first major advance occurred in the early years of the new century and came from a different quarter. In 1805 at Thomas Coke's instigation the Conference appointed a number of home missionaries to work in areas so far untouched by Methodism. Warminster was one of these. For two years the mission was associated with the Bath Circuit; then, in 1807, the Warminster Circuit gained independent status. Meanwhile, at the end of 1806, after three months as superintendent of the Bath Circuit, George Highfield proposed the setting up of a mission in the area between Warminster and Salisbury.

There is no indication that the Salisbury Circuit had any share in this initiative. But from about 1810 onwards, an increasing number of private houses were registered for worship in the villages around Salisbury, and in some cases at least chapels were opened, e.g. at Pitton (1805), Amesbury (1809), Winterslow (1810) and South Newton (1812). The key figure in this fresh impetus was William Sanger Junior, whose father had been a trustee of Church Street, Salisbury since 1795 and was remembered for his exemplary conduct both as a tradesman and a Christian.[45] The son makes his first appearance as a trustee at Amesbury in 1809, when he is described as a leather cutter, and in 1811 he signed the application for the registration of the rebuilt Salisbury chapel. It was he who initiated the application on behalf of the 'Shreppel Chapel' at Winterslow in 1810 and subsequently for several other villages. By 1812 he had begun to describe himself as a gentleman, and a steady flow of registrations under his signature continued until 1829. He continued to appear as a Wesleyan trustee until the opening of the Fisherton chapel in 1826, but long before that had begun to show an increasing independence of the circuit, with consequences that will need to be examined later.[46]

External indicators such as membership and chapel buildings do not necessarily coincide with the quickening of spiritual fervour. But there is evidence that towards the middle of the second decade of the new century revival broke out in the circuit. George Gellard, who came to Salisbury as superintendent minister in 1813, found about two hundred of the members - i.e. something like a third - to be labouring under a conviction of sin, but without any 'sense of the pardoning love

45. He died in 1820, having been a member at Salisbury for over fifty years. (WM Magazine, 1821 p 538)

46. See below, pp 277-9

of God'. He began to urge the class leaders to encourage the search for 'the blessing of justification' (i.e. the realisation of God's forgiveness) and to meet the local preachers for regular study of 'our doctrines', in particular, 'a present, a free and a full salvation'. As a result, congregations increased, a revival broke out, spread through the circuit, and was sustained for over twelve months, reaching one climax in the spring of 1815 and another at Christmas.

Wilton, he reports, was a place where 'it does not appear that there had ever been any remarkable revival of religion among our people' and 'our congregation and society were both small'. But the quarterly love-feast was held there on Boxing Day and about sixty conversions were recorded. At Winterbourne, seventy 'professed to have found peace with God' in three weeks and membership of the society leapt from nineteen to over a hundred - though ten years later, it was down to fifty. Amesbury experienced a similar revival, and when a circuit love-feast was held on Easter Monday, 1816, around a thousand people attended, including some from the Southampton and Shaftesbury circuits, and the meeting went on from 5 o'clock until midnight. Gellard calculated that over 400 members had been added to the societies during this period of sustained fervour, plus about a hundred young people who were affected by it. However, the circuit membership, which stood at 550 in 1811, had returned to the same figure by 1821.[47]

A more mundane development during this same period was a move by 'many of our principal friends' to begin adult schools both in Salisbury itself and in the surrounding villages. £60 was subscribed towards the cost of renting rooms and providing books, and soon there were some three hundred men and women learning to read.[48]

3.3.2 The Portsmouth Circuit: Table 3:6

Though comparatively compact in extent, especially after 1798, the Portsmouth Circuit had by far the largest membership in 1825. This clearly had much to do with its location in the largest concentration of population in central southern England. The only comparable conurbation, Southampton, had less than a quarter of the population of the combined parishes of Portsmouth and Portsea, although in the first

47. For Gellard's account of the revival, see W M Magazine, 1816, pp 462-5, 632-5. See also James Dredge, 1833, pp 43, 119-20.

48. Ibid. p 462

Table 3:6 Portsmouth Circuit, 1825

Chapels:	6	Other preaching places:	7	Total:	13
Ministers:	3	Local Preachers:	14	Members:	1,040

Place	Earliest known preaching	Date of chapels, if any	Times of services	Weeknight services[14]
Portsmouth		1811[1]	10:30, 2:45, 6:30	Mon, Wed
Portsea		1800[2]	10:30, 2:45, 6:30	Tue, Thu
Gosport		1771[3], 1810[4]	10:30, 2:45, 6:30	Tue
Fratton			10:30, 2:30, 6, 6:30	Mon (alt)
Greenwich Place[5]				Thu (alt)
Union Road[6]			6:30	Mon (alt)
Hardway[7]			10:30, 2:30, 6	Thu
Fareham[8]	1763	1812	2:30, 6:30	Wed (alt)
Titchfield	R 1767, 1801[9]		2:30, 6	
Stubbington	1811[10]	1858	3, 6	
Ewer Common[11]			6	
Portchester	R 1775/1803[12]	1826		
Petersfield		1826[13]	10:30, 2:30	

Abbreviations:

R Registration under the Toleration Act
alt alternate weeks

Notes:

1. Green Row chapel, built to replace the 'Green Rails' chapel in Oyster Street. Later renamed Pembroke Road. Sold 1919.
2. St. Peter's Chapel, Daniel Street, bought from a break-away Anglican group to replace the Bishop Street room. Enlarged 1810. Replaced by the Queen Street Hall, 1913. Survives as part of Whitbread's brewery.
3. The old playhouse was rented for a time and fitted up for preaching.
4. Between Middle Street (now High Street) and South Street. In 1818 Gosport attained circuit status for one year, then reverted to the Portsmouth Circuit until 1831.
5. Not traced in the Portsmouth area. Possibly in Gosport.
6. Part of the present Commercial Road, between Edinburgh Road and Lake Road; representing the beginnings of work in Landport.
7. For many years a shop in Chapel Street was used. A purpose-built chapel was not opened until 1868. (Local tradition).

Table 3:6 continued

8. There was Methodist preaching at Fareham in the 1750s or 60s, when Richard Webb was converted. The first chapel was on the site now occupied by the Embassy Cinema, West Street. Its successor (1875) was on the opposite side of West Street on part of the site of the present bus station.
9. The first successful attempt to establish a society resulted from Richard Dodd's move from Hursley to Titchfield, where he opened his school and immediately licensed his house for preaching.
10. Local tradition.
11. An isolated part of Alverstoke, separated from the rest of the parish by two creeks.
12. The first permanent society followed the arrival of A.W. Marblestone in 1803.
13. Chapel in Dragon Street; opened 15 May 1826 (WM Magazine, 1826, p.485). Replaced 1871 by a chapel between 'the New Way' (now St Peter's Road) and High Street.
14. It is noteworthy that none of the outlying causes had any weeknight appointments, even of local preachers.

half of the 19th century it was growing at a much faster rate.

For the two town societies, in Portsmouth and Portsea, there was a period of consolidation, improved social status and rapid growth, all reflected in the acquisition of new premises. As the superintendent, Jonathan Barker, wrote in December, 1809: 'We have a good work in the towns of Portsea, Portsmouth and Gosport; the societies are increasing, but alas! our chapels are far too small, the numbers in Society are almost enough to fill our places of worship'. [49] These were the years of prosperity for the naval towns, but with the end of the Napoleonic wars a few years later, much leaner days were to follow, bringing problems for the expansion to which the local Wesleyans had committed themselves.

The society in Portsea, where the main population explosion was taking place, had eventually abandoned its Bishop Street meeting-room and marked its coming-of-age by taking over St. Peter's Chapel, Daniel Street, from a break-away Anglican group in 1800. Enlarged ten years later, it seated over 800. Not to be outdone by this prestigious development, in 1811 the society in Old Portsmouth moved from Oyster Street to a new chapel in Green Row (later Pembroke Road). [50] Although theirs was the parent society, the Portsmouth Methodists seem to have been somewhat overshadowed by their nearby daughter-church; and the debts which they incurred by their move to Green Row, an impeding factor in the life of many Methodist societies, had in their case an almost crippling effect. The aid they received from the connexional Chapel Funds, amounting to nearly £6,000 quite apart from interest-free loans, was said to be larger than that received by any other society. [51] Further developments following the spread of population into the Landport area as the century progressed led, as Cooper points out, to a dangerous spreading of limited resources and the operation of the law of diminishing returns. [52]

In its early years the Portsmouth Circuit was an extensive one, embracing not only the Isle of Wight, but a wide area on the mainland.

49. Letter to Robert Johnson, 2 December 1809. (MMS Archives: Home Correspondence, Box 1 f. 171)

50. See Table 3:6

51. H Smith, 1894, pp 60-1; W G Gates, 1900, p 406. The Daniel Street premises remained comparatively free from debt.

52. W D Cooper, 1973, p 7

James Crabb, who was stationed in the circuit 1794-96, found that it taxed even his indefatigable zeal: 'It was a very extensive circuit; it ... extended as far into the Andover Circuit as within nine miles of Newbury in Berkshire, namely at Baughurst, and within 15 miles of Salisbury to Timsbury. Then in the East of Portsmouth we had what was called a mission, which ran up within little less than 30 miles of London. On this mission we had some tremendously long walks. We took in Chichester, Arundel, then struck across the Sussex downs to Storrington, where we had a kind of Irish cabin to rest at.' He records walking between 300 and 400 miles in one six-week period, and notes in his diary in April 1795 that in twelve months he had walked 1,300 miles, ridden 800 miles and covered another hundred in crossing to and from the Isle of Wight.[53] Here was an embodiment of the early Methodist ideal of circuit itinerancy as set out by Wesley in a letter to Winscom: 'No preacher ought to stay either at Portsmouth or Sarum, or any other place, a whole week together. That is not the Methodist plan at all. It is a novel abuse.'[54] Nor were his brief intervals in the circuit town much less demanding - 'I preached every morning at 5 o'clock, and every evening in the week, besides five times on the Lord's Day when in Portsmouth, exclusive of the seven o'clock prayer meeting, and the meeting of the society for wholesome advice, or a love-feast ...' The ministers in the much less extensive circuit of 1825 were, understandably, quite unable, and indeed unwilling, to match such selfless dedication, and the contrast marks the psychological as well as the administrative transformation of the Wesleyan itinerancy in the generation following Wesley's death. By 1825 the pioneering spirit had largely passed from the Wesleyans to the Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians. It is hardly surprising that Crabb more than once had to withdraw to recuperate his health, or that he eventually launched out on independent ventures for which the Wesleyans were not prepared to lend their support.[55]

A major contraction took place in 1798, with the formation of the Southampton Circuit. Portsmouth was left with only three societies on the mainland, plus those on the Isle of Wight (which finally achieved

53. Crabb's diary, quoted in J Rudall, 1854, p 36

54. John Wesley to Jasper Winscom, 8 November 1788, JWL VIII 104

55. E.g. at his native Wilton in 1798, and even more markedly at Southampton in 1822 (Rudall, 1854, pp 70, 78, 88-96).

independence in 1811). The work was concentrated in Portsmouth and its rapidly growing suburb of Portsea, and in Gosport on the other side of the harbour, but with fresh attempts to extend the circuit inland. These met with varying degrees of success and are therefore only partially reflected in the distribution of the outlying societies in 1825.

At Gosport the society that resulted from the earlier initiative and worshipped in the old playhouse had died out and Methodism was reintroduced in the 1790s. For some years services were held in a large room over stables on the site of the chapel built in 1810,[56] and the local Independents can hardly have felt themselves to be faced by serious rivalry. Conversely, the inhibiting effect on the Wesleyans of David Bogue's ministry at the Independent chapel had already been noted.[57] But once the Wesleyan society was firmly established and had its own chapel, however unpretentious, relations became easier. Towards the end of the Napoleonic period, Gosport was one of several places in which the Wesleyan Missionary Committee conducted a mission among the French prisoners-of-war held on prison ships anchored in the harbour. This was uphill and largely unrewarding work, as the Gosport missionary, William Beal, reported to the committee; but at least it had proved possible, despite doctrinal differences, to co-operate with the students from Dr. Bogue's academy and so avoid duplication or open rivalry.[58]

A similar fresh beginning at Fareham followed in the wake of these developments at Gosport, and the first Wesleyan chapel was built there in 1812. At Portchester a room had been licensed as early as 1775, but no permanent society was established until after the turn of the century, when it resulted from the initiative of a local waterman. The son of a Swedish Lutheran pastor, Augustus William Marblestone had arrived in England some thirty years earlier. He settled in Portsmouth, joined the Methodist society in 1787, was converted and became 'a very active and useful local preacher, generally spending his Sabbaths in going from village to village, preaching to the poor neglected peasantry'. In the case of one village which the circuit

56. Methodist Recorder, 17 August 1911

57. See above, p 145

58. Letter from William Beal to Robert Smith, of London, 3 July 1813 (MMS Home Correspondence, Box 1, 1813 f 9)

preachers had decided to abandon in the face of fierce hostility, it was the courage and determination of Marblestone that reversed the decision and saw a society firmly established there. When he retired to Portchester, where his wife had property, his health forced him to give up preaching around the circuit; but he began to preach in his own home. In due course a hired room was needed to accommodate the congregation; and in 1818 he built a chapel at his own expense, which he made over to the Wesleyan Connexion in 1826.[59]

Other such ventures bore no immediate fruit or were short-lived. Chichester appears briefly in the circuit records in 1794, but without lasting results. In 1797 John Mason, a native of Hambledon retired from the itinerancy because of his health, settled at West Meon and began to visit 'the neighbouring societies'; but again, there is little evidence of any permanent results and it was left to the Primitive Methodists to mission the Meon Valley at a later date.

The same year, 1797, saw an official attempt to extend the circuit much further northwards. It can hardly be coincidental that this followed hard on the heels of David Bogue's 'Plan for promoting the Knowledge of the Gospel in Hampshire'.[60]

For the Wesleyans there was urgency in the need to combat or forestall the preaching of evangelical Calvinism. A fifth preacher was appointed to the circuit that year on the understanding that he and the other junior preacher would concentrate on the countryside to the north-west and the north-east of Portsmouth. The former, which extended as far as the existing society at Crowdhill, was soon handed over to the Southampton Circuit. North-eastwards, the preachers were to travel as far afield as Godalming across the Surrey border; but with their lines of communication stretched so far, it is hardly surprising that after twelve months the Godalming Mission was abandoned as 'unlikely to produce any results'.

Whether the existence of a Petersfield society as an isolated outpost of the circuit in 1825 was connected with either this long-abandoned mission or John Mason's activities around West Meon we cannot now be sure. It was in any case left largely to its own devices, being, it

59. Milner, 1852.

60. See above, pp 146-7

seems, too far away to engage the direct attention of the Portsmouth itinerants. It therefore lost nothing by being made into a separate circuit in the following year. After one further year it was linked with Godalming: but in 1835 the Petersfield and Godalming Circuit disappears from the records. With the very similar work of the Village Itinerant Society on its eastern flank[61] and a pocket of Independent Methodism to the south, Petersfield remained isolated and vulnerable, and Methodism in that part of eastern Hampshire remained sparse. The makings of what came to be known as 'the Methodist wilderness' were already in evidence.

We have noted the extent to which the local preachers were given the brunt of the rural work in 1825, and this clearly was no recent development. In Portsmouth as elsewhere much of the pioneering was left to local preachers like Marblestone. The work of 'Father Silk', a Portsmouth cheese vendor, took him to many Hampshire villages and provided him with his opportunity to hold open-air preaching services. He is credited, for example, with the introduction of Methodism into Hardway, north of Gosport. Many among his fellow-preachers were labouring men, including Robert Coakes, a dockyard worker, Crampton a Foreman navy and other colourful personalities.[62] It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that by 1825 these men had become more itinerant than the full-time preachers.

3.3.3 The Southampton Circuit: Table 3:7

Despite its tardy and hesitant beginning, within a decade the Southampton society became the head of a separate circuit, celebrating the event by opening a new chapel in Canal Walk the following year (1799). Compared with the chapels opened in Portsmouth in the first decade of the new century, this was a modest building;[63] but it marked an important step forward for the society.

The two preachers stationed in the circuit at this time were both based in Southampton, taking turns to travel round outlying societies, so

61. See above, pp 147-50

62. Henry Smith, pp 48-51

63. It measured a mere 42 ft. by 40 ft., but had a gallery; and it was bought for £447 from a local bricklayer, Thomas Bartlett, who appears to have built it as a speculation. All but one or two of the first Trustees were artisans. It was enlarged and lit by gas in 1823, and replaced by a chapel in East Street in 1850.

Table 3:7 Southampton Circuit, 1825

Chapels: 12	Other preaching places: 11	Total: 23
Ministers: 3	Local Preachers: 21	Members: 486

Place	Earliest known preaching	Date of chapels, if any	Times of Services
Southampton	R 1765 etc.	1798[1]	10:30, 2:30, 6:30
Winchester	1763	1773/1786/1816	10:30, 2:30, 6
Romsey	1766 R 1770	1812	10:30, 2:30, 6:30
Timsbury	c.1777	1815	2, 6
Nursling	by 1806	between 1811 and 1814	2:30, 6
Crowdhill	1774	1822[2]	2:30, 6
Burnett's Lane		1825	2:30, 6:30
Bitterne	1806	1809	2:30, 6
Fawley		1817	2:30, 6
[West] Wellow		1815	2:30, 6
Cadnam		1812	2:30
Bramshaw		1839	6
Hounslow			2:30
Micheldever[3]			10:30, 6
Stoke [Charity] and Wonston			2:30, 6
Worthy[4]			2:30, 6
Houghton & Kings Somborne	R 1779	1833[5]	2:30, 6
Farley [Chamberlayne] & Up Somborne[6]	R 1802	1824 or 26	2, 6
Twyford[7]	R 1764		6
Pucknall			Not given

Abbreviation:

R Registration under the Toleration Act

Table 3:7 continued

Notes:

1. In Canal Walk (later known as Union Terrace); the first purpose-built chapel, replacing the rented scaffold loft in Hanover Buildings.
2. So the 1851 Census, although the deeds are dated 1830. The Census return refers to this as replacing an earlier chapel, but no other evidence of this has been found.
3. Micheldever also appears on Winchester WMA Circuit plans in 1836-7 and 1842. It was later more successfully missioned by the Primitive Methodists.
4. Kings Worthy: The first chapel was built by the Wesleyan Methodist Association, following a secession from the Wesleyans in 1835.
5. Taken over by the Wesleyan Methodist Association.
6. The village was later missioned by both the Wesleyan Methodist Association and the Primitive Methodists, both of whom built chapels here.
7. Later became Wesleyan Methodist Association, which built a chapel in 1851.

that each fortnight one was in residence while his colleague was on the road. The distances involved were modest compared with the Portsmouth Circuit of earlier days, but the demands of the preacher's life were nevertheless considerable, as the plan of their itinerancy demonstrates:

Wednesday/Thursday	Timsbury (at Mr. Jewell's)
Friday	Romsey (at Moses Comley's)
Saturday/Sunday	Winton [i.e. Winchester] (at Mr. Chubb or Poulson)
Monday	Whitchurch (Mr. Haim's)
Tuesday	Laverstoke or Downhurstbourne (Mr. Duck)
Wednesday	Winton
Thursday	Brick Kilns (Mr. Laishley)
Friday	Crowdhill (Mr. R. Twynam)
Saturday/Sunday/ Monday	Winton
Tuesday	Moor Green (Mr. E. Barfoot)
Wednesday	Southton [?South Stoneham] or Titchfield (Mr. Dodd's)[64]

From this and the surviving preaching plans of the period it is clear that the itinerants concentrated their attention largely on the main Societies in Southampton and Winchester. A manuscript circuit plan for 1806 shows that of the seven other preaching places only Crowdhill and Nursling were favoured with an occasional 'ministerial' Sunday appointment, while Whitchurch was left almost entirely to Winscom, who often preached at all three services.[65] In the larger circuit of 1825 the situation was much the same. With three ministers now stationed in the circuit, Romsey had joined the other two towns enjoying the lion's share of their Sabbath-day activities; but of the remaining twenty places, nine were served entirely by local preachers (even though in some cases there was a chapel). The remainder had one ministerial visit a quarter, usually associated with an administration of the Lord's Supper.

The circuit's furthest venture was a mission at Farnham, some 40 miles from base, undertaken in 1810 in response to an appeal from an army surgeon stationed there. John Chettle reported to the Missionary Committee in London that his colleague John Keeling had gone there and found a congregation of about 700, with good prospects in the neighbourhood of the town. Chettle was willing to provide a preacher every other Sunday until the next Conference, if the Committee would

64. Reproduced by Stamp, 1801.

65. Ms plan covering March-June 1806; copy supplied by Mr. E. Alan Rose.

meet the travelling expenses and the rent of the room they had found. 'We have no horse in this Circuit. Farnham is quite out of our way & we are poor and the expense must be considerable for a time.' The Committee agreed, the mission was established with the help of an extra preacher appointed to the Circuit, and was in due course transferred to the Reading Circuit from which it was more accessible.[66]

It might have been expected that Winchester would head the new circuit, if only by virtue of seniority; but any prestige thus conveyed seems to have been outweighed by the continuing weakness of the society there. Overshadowed as it was by the Anglican establishment, it was also beset by internal difficulties, and the continuing problem of acquiring more permanent premises than Winscom's Silver Hill preaching-house provided.[67] Winscom's removal to Whitchurch, though otherwise a welcome relief, left a gap in the leadership which was filled for a time by Charles Chubb of the Breamore Methodist family.[68] He settled in Winchester after his marriage and is listed as the class leader there in 1801.

The membership returns for that year reflect the rapid advance of the Southampton society with its 75 members, compared with 34 at Whitchurch and 21 at Winchester. Four of the remaining eight societies returned double figures: Timsbury (19), Downhurstbourne (14), Crowdhill (14) and Moor Green (17). One factor reflected in these figures was the strong local leadership provided by men like Winscom, Chubb, Peter Jewell at Timsbury and Richard Twynam at Crowdhill.[69]

Despite this, the opening years of the new century saw a steady decline of circuit membership (in which the Southampton society shared) from 220 in 1800 to 160 in 1804, though it had more than recovered by the end of the decade.[70] The new initiatives which this reflects included a further attempt to establish a society in Romsey.

66. MMS Archives, Home Correspondence, Box 1: 1810 f.40; 1813, f.7; 1814, f.11.

67. See above, pp 118-9

68. See above, pp 89-90. Two of his sons founded the firm of lock and safe-manufacturers. Chubb moved to Portsea in 1804.

69. See above, pp 90-1. Jewell was not a class leader, but was still active as a local preacher. As noted below, it was he who eventually took the initiative in re-introducing Methodism into Romsey.

70. See Table 4:1

We have already noted the inhibiting effect of a long-established dissenting tradition revitalised by the new evangelical fervour, as exemplified by the Above Bar congregation in Southampton.[71] The early history of the Wesleyan society in Romsey offers a close parallel, linked at some points with the situation in Southampton.

The Abbey United Reformed Church in Romsey traces its origins back to 1662. In the Restoration period two dissenting bodies existed side by side in the town: a Presbyterian congregation under the care of the Rev. Thomas Warren, the ejected rector of Houghton, and a group of Independents associated with the Above Bar congregation, Southampton. By the early years of the 18th century these had become a single Independent cause, with a chapel of its own and a succession of able pastors. In 1769, towards the end of the ministry of Dr. John Samwell, the membership stood at 23 men and 28 women.[72] In the following year the house of Elizabeth Hickman in Romsey Extra was registered for the Wesleyans by Jasper Winscom and John Catermole, but there is no evidence that this bore any lasting fruit. On the contrary, it was over forty years before the Methodist society was sufficiently established to be able to build a chapel, and in the interval at least three other private houses were registered for their use.

The dates of these abortive registrations seem to be significant. The first, for the house of Elizabeth Hulet 'in what is called the Horse Fair', is dated 11th September 1787, midway through the pastorate of the Rev. John Berry (1780-1794), and two years after the establishment of a Congregational Sunday School. Berry is described as 'a man of great distinction who seems to have made a profound impression on all who knew him,[73] and his subsequent career, both pastoral and academic, lends support to this view. His presence must have made it very difficult for the Wesleyans to establish themselves in the town, with nothing distinctive to offer except their Arminian theology as an alternative to Berry's Calvinism.

Berry's fourteen-year ministry ended in 1794 and there was a two-year delay before his successor arrived. Was it coincidence that the Wesleyans registered yet another house that year, perhaps hoping to

71. See above, pp 107-10

72. Stirling, 1974, pp 5-12.

73. Stirling, 1974, p 15

take advantage of the interregnum? Almost in response to such a challenge, the new pastor, James Bennett, ordained in 1796, was a young man fresh from Dr. Bogue's Academy at Gosport, a stronghold of the new evangelical spirit among Dissenters. Bennett proved a popular and successful preacher who, like his predecessor, went on to a notable career elsewhere. In 1804 a larger chapel was built to accommodate his congregations.[74] Again it may not be coincidental that the Wesleyans completed the building of their first chapel in 1813 shortly after Bennett left Romsey and at the beginning of another period in which the Independents were without a pastor.[75]

These efforts to establish a Wesleyan society in Romsey, in the face of so well-established and vigorous a dissenting presence, were thus tentative and protracted; and even so, might have failed -- or even never have been made -- but for the persistence of Jasper Winscom and Peter Jewell, who successively took the initiative in the town. The premises in Banning Street conveyed to Wesleyan trustees in 1812 belonged to Jewell. He had bought the site several years before and built on it at his own expense a chapel to which the new trustees put the finishing touches.

As further evidence that by 1825 the Wesleyan emphasis was on consolidation, rather than outreach, we may cite the experience of James Crabb. After leaving and re-entering the itinerancy more than once, largely for health reasons, in the early years of the 19th century he settled at Romsey and opened a school there. He continued to preach, chiefly, we may presume, among the Methodists. Eventually, in 1822 he felt impelled to leave the school in the care of his two sons and offer himself to the Wesleyan Conference as a missionary in Southampton. He proposed to take over the assembly rooms recently vacated by an evangelical clergyman, and to hire other rooms in the densely populated Kingsland area and down near the quay. He also urged that a preacher be stationed in Romsey 'to direct his pastoral labours to our society and congregation and to the villages of the New Forest ... which are buried in moral darkness'. The Wesleyan Conference was not only beset by financial constraints, but disinclined to endorse and embrace free-lancing evangelistic ventures, as O'Bryan, Bourne and

74. Stirling, 1974, p 16, 17

75. Stirling, 1974, pp 17-18. By then, however, the Baptists had added to the competition by building their chapel in Bell Street in 1811.

Clowes had discovered. So, although he offered to be responsible for the costs involved and claimed strong circuit support, Crabb's offer was not taken up, and he launched his mission independently.[76]

3.3.4 Andover Circuit: Table 3:8

The Winchester Circuit, formed in 1816, survived for only two years and then reverted to Southampton; but its northern section, centred on Andover, retained its independence. In 1825 Andover Circuit was the smallest unit among those now under review and the only 'single station', being run by one minister, with help from the Salisbury circuit, which sent a minister to preach at Andover one Sunday a month. The survival, however precarious, no doubt had much to do with its comparative isolation and its distance from Southampton. By 1842 it was looking to the Hungerford Circuit for preaching support. And whereas in 1811 eight of the thirteen trustees of the new chapel in Whitchurch came from the Southampton/Winchester area, these had all disappeared by the time the Trust was renewed in 1849 and were replaced by more local men and one from Newbury.

The Methodist societies at Whitchurch and Andover were among the first in Hampshire and their early history has already been outlined.[77] In 1825 they were still the only ones of any size in the circuit. The remainder were small village causes, although at least five of them had chapels. Membership of some of the societies fluctuated considerably. Thruxton remained small after the early years, and the main growth points in the circuit were at Collingbourne Kingston (membership in 1844: 46), Vernham Dean (32), Nether Wallop (31) - all of which had chapels - and Wherwell (20), where a chapel was opened two years later. By contrast, the Andover society had dropped to 23 in 1844, while the Whitchurch society, having outstripped the circuit church, reached 121 in 1840 and remained by far the largest in the circuit, despite a decline to 91 in 1844.[78] But Andover and Whitchurch were the only places at which the sacrament was administered in 1825. In fact, with only a single administration in five months in each of these two places (and those, rather oddly, on consecutive Sundays), the

76. J Rudall, 1854, pp 82-96

77. See above, pp 84-5

78. In financial terms Whitchurch outshone Andover even before overtaking its membership. In 1813 it contributed £2. 0s. 0d a quarter to circuit funds, compared with Andover's £1. 8s. 0d.

Table 3:8 Andover Circuit, 1825

Chapels: 7	Other preaching places: 10	Total: 17
Ministers: 1	Local Preachers: 16	Members: 214

Place	Earliest known preaching	Date of chapels, if any	Times of Services
Andover	R 1761	1780, 1824[1]	10:30, 2:30, 6
Whitchurch	R 1759[2]	1811	10, 2:30, 5:30
Thruxton		1817-18	2:30, 6
Collingbourne [Kingston]		1822[3]	11 or 2 & 6
[Nether] Wallop	R 1780	1819	2:30, 6
Vernham [Dean]	R 1810	1816	10:30 or 2 & 6
Wildhern/Tangley			2:30/6
Wherwell	R 1816	1846	2:30, 6
Overton		1841/42	2, 6
Down Hurstbourne[4]	R 1773	1822[5]	5
Basingstoke[6]			2:30, 5:30
Amport			6
Everleigh			11 or 6
Clatford[7]			6
Penton [Mewsey]			6
Lower Collingbourne[8]			2

Abbreviation:

R Registration under the Toleration Act

Notes:

1. Local tradition, recorded by B.R.K. Paintin (1951) speaks of a chapel at the corner of Shepherd's Spring Lane (now part of the traffic roundabout at the top of New Street), opened 'after Wesley's visit of 1760'. In the absence of other evidence, it seems probable that this was the 'Assembly Room' in the possession of Henry Giles, Collarmaker for which application for registration was made in May 1780 over the signatures of Jasper Winscom and others. The chapel opened in 1824 is now the Salvation Army premises in Winchester Street.
2. Myles, Chronological History (1813) lists a 'chapel' at Whitchurch dated 1759, which may be identified with the 'stable belonging to Thomas Perry in Wood Street' registered by a group of 'Protestants belonging to the Church of England' in July 1750. (See above, p 84) It was enlarged c.1780 and replaced by the chapel in Winchester Street (then known as Brick Kiln Street) in 1811.
3. 1851 Census says '1819' but the chapel was not conveyed to Wesleyan trustees by its previous owner, Harry Noyes of Thruxton, until June 1822. It adjoined the 1914 church to the north.

Table 3:8 continued

4. I.e. Hurstbourne Priors.
5. The 1851 Census gives this date, although the 1825 circuit plan does not indicate the existence of a chapel.
6. A society which, following Wesley's visits to Basingstoke, met in a loft behind the Pear Tree Inn died out and no fresh start was made until 1871. By then the Primitive Methodists had had a chapel there for 24 years. In 1900 Basingstoke was one of the four mission stations brought together to form the Surrey and North Hants Mission. (Methodist Recorder, 16 May 1901.)
7. There is no other evidence of Wesleyan activity at either Goodworth Clatford or Upper Clatford, though both villages were later missioned by the Primitive Methodists.
8. I.e. Collingbourne Ducis, where the Primitive Methodists built a chapel in 1849.

Andover Circuit seems to have been by far the least sacramentally-minded of the circuits. Nor was there any attempt to compensate by holding love-feasts in the village societies.

Precarious finances were not peculiar to Andover Circuit, but are well illustrated from its early account books. Disbursements in the December quarter, 1818, totalled £11. 17s. 11d [£11.90], the greater part of which was made up of eight guineas paid as quarterage to the preacher, William Griffith, and his wife. The balance of 1s. 4d [7p] would have been a deficit had the contributions from the various societies and classes not been augmented by 'private contributions' amounting to 5/- [25p].

The comparative isolation and the nature of the district with its scattered rural settlements made Andover a natural mission area for Primitive Methodism, which came flooding across the Berkshire border within the next decade, taking over several of the villages in which the Wesleyans had made a tentative beginning and reaching many others which they had not yet touched. Less frequently, as at Wherwell, the Wesleyans found themselves in direct rivalry with the Primitive Methodists.[79] Basingstoke remained the most distant society, twenty miles from the circuit town and an outpost that in due course was to look elsewhere for its links.

The opening of their new chapel in Winchester Street in December 1824 was an important milestone for the Andover Wesleyans. As the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine reported, 'The chapel is neat and commodious [neither of which, we may infer, was true of the meeting-room at Shepherd's Spring Lane], and its erection is hailed by the congregation and society of Methodists in this town with feelings of lively gratitude.' The report added that four chapels had been built or enlarged in the circuit during the past year. This was, in fact, the climax of a period of chapel-building in the Andover Circuit, and if there was a key figure in the bustle of activity it seems to have been Harry Noyes of Thruxton, who was prominently involved in the case not only of the new Andover chapel but several others built at this time. He heads the list of trustees for three of these:

79. See Tables 6:14 and 6:21

Vernham Dean (conveyed 16 September 1817)
Nether Wallop (conveyed 19 November 1819)
Andover (conveyed 8 May 1819)[80]

and he was the vendor in the case of two others where he had clearly been acting as agent for the trustees before duly conveying the property to them:

Thruxton (conveyed 12 May 1818)
Collingbourne Kingston (conveyed 24 June 1822).

Almost alone among the predominantly artisan trustees of this period, Noyes aspired to the rank of 'gentleman' (the only other was John Pierce Sweetapple, also of Thruxton, who was trustee for Thruxton and Vernham Dean) and was clearly a man of some means.

3.3.5 Weymouth Circuit: Table 3:9

For four years after the Hampshire societies were formed into a separate circuit, the Salisbury Circuit still included the whole of Dorset. The Methodist societies there were few and widely scattered, but in the south of the county a period of growth was just beginning. To this period belongs the establishment of societies at Blandford and Poole, on the Isle of Portland and in a number of villages. It resulted in the formation of a separate Blandford Circuit in 1794. This was renamed Poole Circuit in 1797 and Weymouth Circuit in 1805, changes of label which reflect the fluid state of affairs in this comparatively isolated corner of the Wesleyan Connexion at that time. Similarly, the separation of a new Poole Circuit from Weymouth in 1809 may be seen as the rather tentative beginning of a period of consolidation. The 1809 division left Weymouth Circuit shorn of all its societies in eastern Dorset, including Purbeck, but with virgin territory to be missioned in the hinterland between Dorchester and Bere Regis. To the West, the south-west corner of the county remained largely untouched by Methodism until preachers found their way across the Devon and Somerset borders in the first part of the 19th century. (Methodism in and around Bridport and Lyme Regis, as part of the Plymouth and Exeter District, still looks westward for its links with other circuits.)

Apart from Portland and the Isle of Purbeck, Weymouth seems to have

80. There had been several years' delay since the society made the first move to acquire the site, and the new chapel was not opened for another five years. (WM Magazine, 1825, p 51)

Table 3:9 Weymouth Circuit, 1825

Chapels:	4	Other preaching places:	15	Total:	19
Ministers:	3	Local Preachers:	13	Members:	420

Place	Earliest known preaching	Date of chapels, if any	Times of Services
Weymouth		1776?[3]/1805	10:30, 3, 6
Portland	1746[4]/1791	1792	10, 6
Dorchester		1825	10:30, 2:30, 6:30
Fordington	R 1806(?)		4
Ower[moigne]	R 1817(?)	1870	10[2], 6
Winfrith[5]/[East] Burton		1836	2[1]
Dewlish		1843	10:30, 2:30[2]
Tolpuddle	R 1810	1818	2, 6
Houghton[6]			2
Bere Heath		1849	2:30
Bere [Regis]	R 1812(?)	1828	6
Preston		1816	10, 6
Wyke	R 1799, 1804	1843	6
Hope Square[7]			8:30a.m.
Chapel Hay		1834[8]	1:30
Alton [Pancras?]			10:30[2]
Charminster	R 1823(?)		6
Tinkleton			10:30, 2[1]

Abbreviation:

R Registration under the Toleration Act

Notes:

1. Alternately, week by week.
2. On alternate Sundays only.
3. On 6 September 1776, Wesley preached in 'the new house at Melcombe'. See text.
4. For Charles Wesley's visit in 1746, see text.
5. Probably at East Knighton, where there was a cob and thatch chapel by 1836. This was not replaced by the Winfrith chapel until 1915.
6. Probably Winterborne Houghton. The Weymouth Quarterly Meeting agreed with Mr. George Lane of Houghton to build a chapel in 1826, but J.S. Simon (1870) speaks of services in a rented building and later in a 'little cottage'. The 'preaching house' reported in the 1851 Census was not a separate building or exclusively used for worship.
7. No other trace of this mission has survived. In 1841, the Primitive Methodists opened a chapel on the north side of the Square. The nearby Congregational Chapel in Trinity Street dated from 1822.
8. Enrolled deed, 26 August 1834 (PRO C. 34 5 Wm IV 199.14). Arthur's 1857 map shows no chapel in the area, but the 1866 Ordnance Survey map marks a Wesleyan School on Union Road at the corner of Queen's Place.

been the earliest place in Dorset to feel the impact of the Methodist movement; though 'impact' may be too strong a word for a locality so remote from the centre of things. It is true that the twin boroughs of Weymouth and Melcombe Regis had a long administrative and commercial history behind them and the port had formerly been a busy one. By the beginning of the 18th century, however, they had long been in decline, though still returning two members of Parliament each. Weymouth's reputation as a watering-place developed in the middle years of the century and was boosted by the visits of George III from 1789 on.[81]

By this time the Wesleyans already had a foothold - though little more - in the town. The date and circumstances of the first Methodist preaching there remain obscure, but when John Wesley preached there in September 1776 he spoke in his Journal of 'the new house at Melcombe', [82] which implies the existence of a society sufficiently well established to rent a meeting place. Local tradition identifies this as the 'Old Assembly Room' in the King's Head Yard at the end of St. Edmunds Street, but the evidence is problematical.[83] Tradition adds that the Methodists later had the use of the Friends' Meeting House in St. Thomas Street. Then in 1805, they rented a site in Conygar Lane (later renamed Lower Bond Street) and built their first chapel. By this time the resort was becoming fashionable. The population of the joint boroughs in 1801 was 3,617, with an influx of seasonal visitors. The new chapel was a plain, galleried structure, about 50 ft. by 40 ft., classical in design, but with gothic windows added at some later date. It seated nearly 500 and was not replaced until the Maiden Street church was opened in 1867.

The Conygar Lane society was still small in numbers, but growing fast at the time the chapel was built: 18 members in 1804 increasing by 1806 to 33, plus a class of 8 at Wyke. This compares with the 92 members

81. During the first half of the 19th century the population of Weymouth was to grow more rapidly than that of any other town in the area except Southampton. See p 6 above.

82. JWJ, VI 126 (6 Sept. 1776.) This was Wesley's only visit and seems to have been part of a detour he made while returning from the West Country to Bristol, apparently in order to preach at Corfe Castle.

83. The earliest registrations that can be identified as Methodist are for houses in St. Mary Street and Maiden Street in 1792 and 1793. A 'room let by Edward Bailey, Gentleman, situate in St. Edmunds Street' was licensed at the January Quarter Sessions in 1797, and this may have been the Assembly Room.

84. R Pearce, 1898, pp 179-87

reported from Portland and the 55 from Poole in 1806.[84] It is the more remarkable that Weymouth should have become head of the circuit in 1805. This may have had something to do with its being more of a focal point than any other town for a circuit which stretched from Poole to Portland, taking in the Isle of Purbeck, but not yet Dorchester; but it was probably also due to the growing social prestige of the town and the cultural level of its members. Though much smaller in numbers, the Weymouth society had as many subscribers to the Methodist Magazine as Portland in 1806, among them a Captain Quick.[85]

Portland can, in one respect, claim even older Methodist roots than Weymouth, going back to a visit by Charles Wesley in 1746. Wesley was on his way from Sherborne to the West Country, but turned south, apparently at the instigation of a quarryman, William Nelson, with whom he was clearly already acquainted. Nelson had settled in Portland in 1743 and one tradition makes him the brother of the Yorkshire stone-mason, John Nelson, who became one of Wesley's outstanding itinerants.

Wesley stayed five days in the island, preached a number of times and left behind a little society of twenty members, 'confirmed and comforted' by his visit.[86] Tradition adds that Nelson continued as the leader of this group until his death in 1770. The absence of positive supporting evidence for this may be no more than an indication of Portland's isolation in those days. Nevertheless, the fact that neither Charles Wesley nor his brother subsequently showed any awareness of the existence of such a group or made any attempt to visit it must cast some doubt on the tradition. Certainly, when Robert Carr Brackenbury began his work there in 1791, twenty years after Nelson's death, he seems to have found no trace of any Methodist society in the island, whatever may have been the case earlier in the century.

Brackenbury came to Portland in November 1791, a few months after John Wesley's death. He had been staying 'in retreat' at Southampton and was 'led' to take the coach to Weymouth, where he took private

85. Ibid. Unfortunately, perhaps because the property was held on lease, we have no information of any Trust for Conygar Lane until 1861.

86. CWJ, 4-9 June 1746 (1849 edition, Vol. 1 pp 415-16; also Jackson, 1841, I 436-7). See also R Pearce, 1898, pp 2-7. Pearce cites the Minutes of the 1746 Conference, where Portland is specifically mentioned as one of the places in the widespread Bristol Circuit of that time.

lodgings. The day after his arrival he met an acquaintance from Frome, who urged him to go over to Portland as a place that was 'all darkness'. Being a man of independent means, Brackenbury was free to launch a mission without first referring his plans to the Conference or waiting for official approval.[87] His companion and assistant was a young man named George Smith. They took a house at Fortuneswell and began preaching there. By the spring of 1792 plans were in hand to build a chapel and a site was bought. Despite delays over the building, preaching started in the new chapel in November of that year; and meanwhile Brackenbury had bought a cottage at Wakeham and begun preaching there too.[88]

Not surprisingly, their chief initial success was among the children, as Brackenbury reported to Jasper Winscom at the end of his first year on the island: 'Though we have no considerable addition to the society, except among the children, yet there are several persons under conviction who, I doubt not, will soon cast in their lot among us. We have about 24 children who meet in class, most of them seem in a measure sensible of their state, and two of them have found peace with God.' [89] In an area almost totally lacking educational opportunities, it is hardly surprising that the Sunday School that was started became a major part of the work and flourished vigorously. Long after Brackenbury's death, his widow continued to encourage and support it from a distance, paying for the annual Sunday School treat and for the gift of a Bible to every scholar to mark the 50th anniversary of the mission in 1841.

By the end of 1792 hostility was beginning to show itself and the Methodists were impelled to appeal to the law. Depositions were submitted to the January Quarter Sessions in 1793, accusing a certain John Newman of causing a disturbance during a service in the house of Matthew Fancy and of calling the worshippers 'black Whitefieldite buggers'. And at the Sherborne Quarter Sessions in April 1794, two Portland labourers, Thomas Newman and John Rodd Jr., were fined £10

87. 'I take the whole expense upon myself, and know not whether the Methodist preachers will be able to find their way here: it lies so remote from all our societies.' (Letter from Brackenbury to Mr. May of Baughurst, Hants, 4 June 1792.) The premises at Fortuneswell and Wakeham remained his private property until transferred to trustees by his widow.

88. Pearce, 1898, ch 5

89. MAC: PLP 12/1/8, letter of 7 November 1792

each on similar charges of abusive and violent behaviour.[90]

The contrast which Brackenbury later drew between 'the simple rustic manners' of the Portland Methodists and the 'more refined manners' of the Stroud society was tempered by a reference to the 'genuine piety' which might 'in some measure compensate for the [social and cultural] deficiency and render what would otherwise wear the aspect of a desert pleasant and delightful as the garden of the Lord.'[91] But the simple fact was that life on the island was bleak and harsh, and death, an inescapable reality in the 18th century, was frequently abrupt and premature.[92] Smuggling and even wrecking were not unknown, as in equally remote Cornwall.

By 1794 the work was sufficiently well established for Brackenbury to leave it in other hands, though he continued his financial support. But difficulties, set-backs and opposition also continued. The geographical and cultural isolation of the island constituted a challenge as well as an opportunity to the Methodist preachers. Superstition was even more common than elsewhere and the Methodist converts were not immune to its influence. One particular example of this occurred in 1816. One of the local Methodists, John Angel, noted in his diary at 'the end of the year 1816 and the beginning of the year 1817, a very great revival of religion'.[93] This may have been connected with the arrival of the Rev. Francis Derry, as junior minister in the circuit, but it is only one side of the picture. Soon after arriving in Portland, Derry examined the Southwell society and found about fifty members who confessed to a belief in (and presumably some degree of involvement in) witchcraft. Derry was clearly either more conscientious or more high-handed than his predecessors[94] and proceeded to expel the offenders, including Charles Whittle, at whose

90. Quarter Session records at CRO

91. Letter to Samuel Woolmer, the recently appointed superintendent of the Weymouth Circuit, 14 October 1806 (Pearce, 1898, p 73).

92. Of 43 deaths between 1819 and 1837 recorded in the Portland Wesleyan burials register, 11 were children under a year old. The remaining 32 range from 2 to 83 years, but are clustered at the lower and upper ends of the range. The average age was 24.5.

93. Angel was a master mariner, lived at Chiswell, and was a trustee of the Fortuneswell Chapel. His ms 'diary' is in the CRO.

94. Though still a comparatively young man, he had been in the itinerancy since 1802 and was no novice.

house the society had been meeting,[95] with the result that it found itself temporarily homeless. The dissidents formed themselves into a separate congregation, took a workshop in Chiswell, which became popularly known as the 'Conjuror's Lodge', as their meeting place, and remained separate for ten years. In 1826 the Rev. James Dunbar effected a reconciliation, though not without some loss of members to the Congregationalists.[96]

Dorchester was to become the head of a separate circuit in 1831, but Methodism there made a slow start, perhaps because of its strong evangelical tradition.[97] There is evidence of a small society meeting in a private room early in the century and suffering petty persecution. In 1825 a sympathiser leased them a loft over a basket-maker's shop in North Square. It was fitted out as a chapel, described at the time of its opening as 'neat', 'in a good situation' and large enough to hold about two hundred persons, and served the society until 1840. But the Dorchester society in 1825 was still only 24 strong.[98]

Several interesting features of the circuit as it existed in 1825 may be noted:

(a) the small number of chapels - at only four out of the 19 regular preaching places on the plan. These were at Weymouth and Portland, where the two strongest societies were found, and in the villages of Tolpuddle and Preston. The Dorchester society was still in its infancy and during this year took a lease on its first house in North Square.

(b) the marked concentration of ministerial attention on Weymouth and Portland. At Weymouth all three Sunday services, and at Portland both Sunday services, were taken by one or other of the itinerant preachers. No local preachers were given Sunday appointments at either of these chapels. Of the seventeen other preaching places in the

95. His house was registered at the January Quarter Sessions, 1792, and is described in 1851 as 'part of a dwelling house fitted up ... from the year 1792 until the erection of the chapel in 1849'. There is no reference to the break in continuity. The registration of the house of William Pearce at the Episcopal Registry in January 1818 was presumably to provide alternative accommodation for the remainder of the society.

96. Pearce, 1898, pp 76-80; Densham and Ogle, 1899, p 217

97. See above, pp 59-60 and Table 1:15

98. E W Young, 1886, p 33; WM Magazine, 1825, p 846. The 1840 chapel was in Durngate Street, and was in turn superseded by the South Street church in 1875.

circuit, Dorchester had ministerial appointments on eleven of the thirteen Sundays in the quarter, but the rest had no more than one or two or, in seven cases, none at all. The latter, surprisingly, included Preston, despite its proximity to Weymouth and the existence of a chapel since 1816.

(c) the infrequency of the sacrament, despite the relatively high staffing of the circuit. Six out of the 19 preaching places had one administration of the sacrament during the quarter, but none - not even Weymouth or Portland - had more than one. The Dorchester society at this time had no sacrament, despite having three preaching services each Sunday. Clearly the love-feast was not seen as an informal substitute for the Lord's Supper, since the only ones arranged were at Weymouth and Portland.

Four years later the preaching plan for the winter of 1829-30 shows a very similar state of affairs, with the Weymouth and Portland chapels served exclusively by itinerants, and Dorchester likewise except for a single Sunday. This one exception enabled the societies at Bere Regis and Bere Heath to have the services of the junior itinerant on one Sunday out of the 17 covered by this plan. Weymouth, Portland and Dorchester each had two administrations of the sacrament within this period, and Bere Regis one. the remaining fourteen places in the circuit had no Sunday ministerial appointments, and therefore no administration of the sacrament, but picked up such weekday crumbs as fell from the table of their richer brethren.

It seems clear that, as elsewhere, the local preachers bore a considerable share of the work outside the well-established town societies, with ministerial attention to the villages being confined largely to weekdays. Laymen were responsible for much of the pioneer work. The villages of Owermoigne and Osmington were missioned from Preston, while preaching began in the fishing hamlet of Southdown as early as 1814, the services being held in a mud and thatch cottage

close to the seashore.[99] Local preachers missioned the Dorchester area as far east as Puddletown, where they met with strong opposition, and also the north-eastern extremity of the circuit, where societies were established at Tolpuddle and Milborne St. Andrew. At Tolpuddle the cottage occupied by one 'Thomas Lovelass' (presumably the father of George and James Loveless) was registered in 1810 as a 'place for the occasional public worship of Almighty God' by the Methodists. The earliest chapel, of mud and thatch, was opened eight years later in the face of local hostility and was rebuilt in 1828 after its walls had collapsed.[100]

3.3.6 Poole Circuit: Table 3:10

For eight years, from 1797, Poole was the head of what had been known as the Blandford Circuit; then, in 1805, Weymouth became the circuit town. Four years later, the circuit was divided and the eastern half reassumed the name 'Poole Circuit', covering an area which included what were later to be the Swanage, Wimborne and Bournemouth circuits. (Blandford had become part of the Shaftesbury Circuit.)

The origins of Purbeck Methodism have already been traced. It is significant that Corfe Castle does not appear in the circuit membership lists for 1795-1806, nor in 1820. It seems clear that, despite the preaching place in Well Court, the society there had died out. (A fresh start was made some time before 1836, when 11 members were reported.) This and the absence of a firmly established society in Wareham[101] left the Swanage society very isolated during this

99. Methodist Recorder, 5 November 1903. Owermoigne appears on the 1825 plan. Cottages were registered for 'Protestant' worship in 1817 and 1818, probably by the Wesleyans. (The earliest registration identified as Methodist was for the house of Benjamin Stickland in May 1837.) Southdown, which lay in a remote part of Owermoigne parish, had afternoon services by 1829, when the house of John Bagg was registered for Wesleyan services at the diocesan registry.

For both Methodism and the smuggling that was rife in the area, see Thomas Hardy's story 'The Distracted Preacher' in Wessex Tales (1888 and preface to 1912 edition). Hardy acknowledges that the story is based on actual events of the late 1820s, though his denouement is fictitious out of deference to popular taste, and in a number of details his narrative diverges from the known Wesleyan practices of that period.

100. Methodist Recorder, 25 October 1906. The chapel was registered on 12th October 1818 at the Bristol Diocesan Registry, and was replaced by the Martyrs Memorial Chapel in 1862. It survives as a barn.

101. At Wareham, a 'stronghold of wickedness', Robert Smith preached on the bowling green, surrounded by a howling mob, but it was a long time before Methodism gained a permanent footing there. (WM Magazine, 1893, p 275) There was a society of 32 by 1820, but this had dropped to 18 by 1836.

Table 3:10 Poole Circuit, 1825

Chapels: 7[1] Other preaching places: 15 Total: 22
 Ministers: 2 Local Preachers: 22 Members: 530
 (+1 Supernumerary)

Place	Earliest known preaching	Date of chapels, if any	Times of Services	Membership
Poole	1789/R 1792	1793	10:30, 2:45, 6	124
Swanage	1774	1807	10:30, 2:30, 6	59
Wimborne	1779/R 1802(?)	1820		
{	1809		10:45, 2:30, 6	32
Colehill	R 1806(?)	1845		
Canford			2:30, 6	15
East Parley			11, 2:30	
{Worth [Matravers]	c. 1820	1836		11
{Langton [Matravers]	1774	1842	2:30, 6	8
{Kingston	R 1798	1862		
{Corfe Castle	1774	1786/1856	2:30, 6	
Creech			6	13
Highwood [East	R 1812[3]	?1812		13
{ Stoke]			2:30, 6	
Binegar		1823		c.12
Wareham	R 1812(?)	?[4]/1851	2:30, 6	22
{[Winterborne]				
{Kingston or		1839		
{Bloxworth[5]			2:30, 6	
{Morden[6]	1784/R 1798	1846		29
Lytchett				
[Matravers]	c.1775/R 1779	1824[7]	2:30, 6	15
Witchampton	R 1799	1811	2:30, 6	29
[Tarrant] Monkton	c.1790/R 1792		10:30 or 2:30	17
Gussage [All Saints/ St. Michael?][8]		1840	10:30 or 2:30	12
Woodlands	R 1801	1805?[9]	10:30, 2:30	65
Edmondsham[10]			10:30, 2:30	3

Abbreviation:

R Registration under the Toleration Act

Notes:

1. Seven places are marked on the circuit plan with a 'C', indicating the existence of chapels. But Highwood, Binegar, and possibly also Gussage All Saints may also have had chapels at this time.
2. A number of the places on this plan were paired, with the same preacher appointed to both (or in one case, to all three) places; but apart from Winterborne Kingston and Bloxworth, where the services seem to have alternated, no place had less than one service a Sunday.
3. A house at East Stoke was registered in 1812, and this appears to be the building 'separate' but 'not erected for a place of worship' reported at Highwood under that date in the 1851 Religious Census.

Table 3:10 continued

4. A 'C' written against Wareham on the 1825 plan appears to indicate the existence of a chapel, but no other evidence of this has been found. At the time of the 1851 Census the building for which a return was made had been used for worship 'upward of two years' only. A chapel was opened in Dollins Lane the following year.
5. No other trace of Wesleyan work in Bloxworth, (which was coupled with Winterborne Kingston). The Primitive Methodists had a chapel there in 1886.
6. The Salisbury Circuit recorded 26 members at Morden as early as 1784. East and West Morden appear in the circuit membership records between 1795 and 1806. Various houses were registered for worship between 1798 and 1802. The 1846 chapel was at West Morden.
7. The deed of conveyance refers to the property as 'a house to be used as a chapel'. It was replaced by a new chapel in 1853.
8. The two villages are only a mile apart. Methodism seems to have begun in Gussage All Saints, where their meeting place is said to have been pulled down by the steward of the Shaftesbury estates. A site for a new chapel was bought at Gussage St. Michael in 1840, with the money paid in compensation. Methodists were reported in both villages in the 1839 Visitation.
9. A 'house in the occupation of John Haskell' was licensed at the Quarter Sessions in July 1801. The chapel listed by Myles under the date 1805 may be the same place. Local tradition says that the earliest preaching place had to be relinquished in 1837, when it reverted to the Shaftesbury estate on the death of its occupant, Joseph Haskell. It would appear that a dwelling house had been fitted out for worship, and that this was the 'chapel' indicated on the 1825 plan. (Wimborne Circuit Centenary Handbook, 1950)
10. Edmondsham was later missioned by the Primitive Methodists. It appears in the 'Ringwood and Fordingbridge Mission' on the Salisbury Circuit plan of 1844 and a chapel was built in 1848.

period.

Apart from Swanage, the earliest Methodist work in eastern Dorset was not in any of the towns, but in the adjacent villages of Lytchett Matravers and Morden. The society that resulted from the preaching of James Perfect in 1778 had disappeared;[102] but the registering of another house at Lytchett, that of Elizabeth Dyett, widow, early in 1792 perhaps marks the beginning of a fresh attempt there. Three years later a society of 19 was reported, including the Lodges. A chapel was built in 1824. Meanwhile a succession of houses were registered in both East and West Morden,[103] but the first chapel there was not built until 1846.

Like Portland, Poole Methodism owed much to the support of Robert Carr Brackenbury, though he was not its pioneer. Methodism was introduced into the town in 1789 by an unnamed stonemason who came to work there. One Saturday he announced his intention of preaching the next day and accordingly took up his position on the outskirts of the town and gathered a congregation by the usual expedient of singing a hymn. Theophilus Lessey, then stationed in the Salisbury Circuit, came down to support the work and a disused theatre down near the quay was taken as a preaching place. This proved quite unsuitable, so the society, though as yet quite small and made up of the 'obscure and poor', set about raising money for a chapel. At first there was difficulty over a site, since the Lord of the Manor, Sir John Webb, was a Roman Catholic and not disposed to support his fellow dissenters.

It was Brackenbury who, arriving from Portland, saved the situation. A site was obtained on a 99-year lease and when progress on the building was halted by lack of funds, Brackenbury took over and completed what the trustees had begun. His name heads the list of trustees in 1793, followed by that of Thomas Bell, a local surgeon. Two of the remaining trustees were Methodist preachers: George Smith, whom Brackenbury had transferred from the Portland Mission, and Richard Gower, of the Salisbury Circuit. The rest were of humble status: a grocer, a

102. See above, p 111

103. The earliest registration traced was for a house occupied by John Butler (who had been a member at East Morden in 1784) in January 1798. The 1851 Religious Census recorded the existence of a chapel at West Morden, dated 1847 'in lieu of others [i.e. other preaching places] which existed before 1800'. The site was conveyed to the trustees in December 1846, but the chapel was not registered until four years later.

gardener, a blacksmith and two husbandmen. Their means were as humble as their status and quite inadequate to meet the cost of building. At the end of 1794, the trustees assigned the property to Brackenbury, who had spent £600 on completing the work. But fourteen years later, Brackenbury wrote off the debt and settled the chapel on a new body of trustees, more than half of whom were Wesleyan ministers from as far afield as London, Bristol and Shrewsbury.[104] An entirely local trust was not formed until 1840.

In 1793, Brackenbury reported that he and William Smith were trying to extend their work to Ringwood, but were meeting with some opposition in official circles. Five persons had been summoned to appear before 'Squire Mowbray', one of the local Justices of the Peace, charged with violently disrupting the Methodist gatherings. The magistrate took the side of the offenders, and William Smith found himself obliged to meet the resulting costs.[105]

Local tradition speaks of a visit to Wimborne by one of the Salisbury preachers as early as 1779. About 1800 a local preacher from Salisbury, John Parsons, came to Wimborne as foreman at a local flannel factory. The preaching services he began came to an end in the face of fierce hostility. The windows of the house in which they were meeting were broken and they were refused further use of it. The same thing happened to a house to which they moved at Colehill. Parsons settled at Woodlands, from where he would walk back to Salisbury for the Sunday services, and eventually returned to live in Salisbury.[106]

But in the meantime a successor to the leadership of the Wimborne Methodists had arisen in the person of Peter Hawke. As a native of Stalbridge, where his parents had entertained John Wesley, he had a Methodist upbringing, but did not experience conversion until 1803. He began to attend Methodist meetings in Poole, but also helped to form a class in Wimborne. As a master at the local grammar school, and later as headmaster of his own school, Hawke was the lynch-pin of the Wimborne society for many years.[107] A house in West Borough was

104. The five local trustees were all tradesmen or artisans. Thomas Bell had disappeared by this time.

105. Stamp, under the date 1793

106. J Dredge, 1833, pp 169-201

107. He died in 1867. His wife was the daughter of the Rev. George Button, superintendent minister of the Poole Circuit from 1817 to 1819.

converted for preaching services in 1808 by knocking two rooms into one, and this was used until Ebenezer Chapel at the north-west corner of the Corn Market was built in 1820.[108]

Among the earliest village causes in the Wimborne area, Tarrant Monkton was missioned about 1790 by a preacher from Lytchett Matravers named Hayter, and prayer meetings began at Witchampton in 1799 in the home of William Bunday. At Witchampton, a chapel was built in 1811 by a local farmer, John Brewer, was conveyed to Wesleyan trustees two years later, together with endowments from which the society continued to benefit for many years. Brewer's obituary records how he had gone to hear one of the first Methodist preachers who came into the area in the 1770s and, in the absence of any local Methodist meetings, attended the Baptist services in Wimborne for some years, but was put off by the minister's uncharitable attitude towards paedobaptists. When Methodist preaching began at Tarrant Monkton, Brewer attended it; then licensed a cottage occupied by one of his labourers (probably the William Bunday mentioned above) and eventually built the chapel. He was remembered for his cheerful disposition and charitableness towards those in need as well as his generosity to the society.[109]

The Witchampton society enjoyed more than its share of good will and support. The Methodists at Woodlands, six miles north of Wimborne, had a rather different experience, but flourished in spite of set-backs. In 1820, with a membership of 65, it was the largest society in the circuit apart from Poole.[110] The first preachers came from Salisbury to the north about the turn of the century and in 1801 a house occupied by John Haskell was registered for preaching. This was probably the building from which the Methodists were turned out in 1837, following the death of Joseph Haskell (John Haskell's son?). The building reverted to the Shaftesbury estate, an appeal to the Earl to allow the society to continue using it was rejected, and the pulpit and other furnishings were also lost. The homeless Methodists eventually built a

108. WM Magazine, 1893, pp 275-6; Methodist Recorder, 28 October 1909

109. Obituary in WM Magazine, 1826, pp 875-8

110. That this figure is not a scribal error is borne out by the fact that in 1836 the membership was still 57, though it had been overtaken by Wimborne and Swanage societies.

chapel on a new site given to them by a non-Methodist well-wisher.[111]

The circuit's two ministers in 1825 were augmented by the presence of a supernumerary minister, James Alexander. He had preaching appointments on all but two of the 26 weeks covered by the circuit plan, mainly in or near Wimborne. It seems likely that he was living in Wimborne and had pastoral charge of that part of the circuit. In other respects, however, he seems to have been more like a local preacher. Although he regularly preached at Canford, Gussage, Woodlands and Edmondsham, which had no visits from either of the other ministers, there was no administration of the Lord's Supper at any of these four places. (This is particularly noteworthy in the case of Woodlands, in view of its membership figures and its chapel.) At Witchampton, where Alexander was 'planned' on three of the Sundays, the other two ministers were each 'planned' once during the period, and in each case administered the sacrament. It would appear that supernumeraries were treated more or less as local preachers and ceased to administer the sacrament.

The Poole Circuit, nevertheless, seems to have been rather more sacramentally inclined than others in the area, if judged by the number of village societies which had an occasional administration. Besides Poole and Swanage, which had four and three sacramental services respectively, four other places had two and two had a single administration.

3.3.7 Shaftesbury Circuit: Table 3:11

Although it had been one of the earliest centres of Methodism in this area, Shaftesbury did not become the head of a separate circuit until 1809, and the old chapel opened in 1766 remained in use until 1827, when it was largely rebuilt. There was little development before Wesley's death,[112] but after 1791 the town society was the centre of a gradually expanding work in the neighbouring villages.

One of the earliest societies in the Shaftesbury area was at Motcombe, two miles to the north-west. Henry Broadway was converted at Shaftesbury about 1771, and returning to his native village began a

111. Your Heritage (circuit centenary brochure), 1950, quoting an old collecting book of 1837. The reference is to the sixth Earl, not to his better-known and more philanthropic son.

112. See above, p 75

Table 3:11 Shaftesbury Circuit, 1825

Chapels: 6 (??) Other preaching places: 16 (15?) Total: 22
 Ministers: 2 Local Preachers: 13 Members: 500

Place	Earliest known preaching	Date of chapels, if any	Times of Services
Shaftesbury		1753, 1766	10:30, 2:30, 6[2]
Motcombe	c.1771	1774, 1836	10, 6[3]
East Stour	R 1796		2
Hunger Hill		1837[8]	2, 6[1]
Sturminster [Newton]	R 1810	1810, 1833	2:30, 6
Hartgrove	R 1819	1824, 1876	10, 2
[West] Orchard[9]	R 1798		6
Ashmore	R 1803(?)	1837, 1855	10:30, 2[1,4]
Fontmell [Magna]	R 1795	1797, 1874	6
Gillingham	R 1792	1824[10], 1874	10:30, 6[5]
Bourton	R 1792	1846, 1888	2:30
White Cross[11]			6
Newtown[12]			2
Donhead [St. Mary][13]	R 1812	1837, 1868	6
Stourpaine	R 1801, 1812	1833, 1853[17]	2:30, 6
Pimperne	R 1809(?)	1847	6[6]
Marnhull		(1799?), 1829[14]	2[7]
Kington [Magna][15]	R 1811		6
West Stour[16]			10, 2[1]
Woolland			2:30, 6[1]
Oakford [Fitzpaine]		1831	6
Shillingstone		1854	6

Abbreviation:

R Registration under the Toleration Act

Notes:

1. Alternately, week by week.
2. Different preachers appointed for the morning from those appointed to take both afternoon and evening services. No ministerial appointments in the morning.
3. No ministers appointed to take evening services. The sacrament administered in the morning only.
4. All morning services taken by one or other of the ministers, although Ashmore as yet had no chapel. Evening services all taken by local preachers.
5. Morning services only on four Sundays in 26 weeks.
6. No service on six of the 26 Sundays.
7. Services only on alternate Sundays through most of the period.
8. The 1851 Religious Census records a chapel at Hunger Hill, dated 1826, but the deed of conveyance is dated 25 April 1837.

Table 3:11 continued

9. Shown on the plan as 'Orchard', but almost certainly West Orchard, in view of the 1798 registration there and the existence of a chapel at Hartgrove, only half a mile north of East Orchard. West Orchard was later missioned by the Primitive Methodists.
10. In Queen Street, opposite the Queen's Head. The deed of conveyance is dated 17 August 1824. (J.S. Simon gives 1832, and the centenary handbook 1838.)
11. Near Penselwood, 1 mile north-west of Zeals, an area later missioned by the Primitive Methodists.
12. Two miles west of Tisbury, where the Wesleyans opened a chapel in 1845.
13. A house in Donhead St. Andrew was registered in 1811, but there is no evidence that anything resulted from this.
14. The date, 1799, given in the 1851 Census return to a chapel in New Street, Marnhull, probably relates to the woolcombing shed belonging to William Lewis and used as their first meeting place by the Wesleyans, rather than to the chapel later built on the same site. The latter was registered as a place of worship in 1829. The chapel to which conveyances dated 1853 and 1857 refer was probably a different property.
15. Two years after the date of the Wesleyan plan, in 1827, the Primitive Methodists acquired a site for their first chapel in the village.
16. Later missioned by the Primitive Methodists, who built a chapel in 1854.
17. The earliest deed traced is dated 13 June 1853 and relates to a chapel 'lately erected'. The trust accounts date from that year. J.S. Simon's date, 1833, is presumably that of an earlier chapel, to which the 1851 Census return also refers.

Methodist society. Within three years he had built a chapel.[113] About 1791, Broadway moved to Gillingham, where he apparently set up as a surgeon.[114] Again, he formed a society, registered his house in St. Martin's Street for religious worship,[115] and built a chapel seating 400. This was conveyed to a body of trustees in 1824.[116]

To the south of Shaftesbury Fontmell Magna was the earliest village to feel the effects of the movement. A 'building occupied by Mr. John Munckton' (possibly the maltster of that name who was one of the trustees of the chapel in 1831) was registered in January 1795. A chapel was built within two or three years,[117] and after the turn of the century, Methodism spread to adjoining villages, largely through the sustained efforts of Arthur Spinney, a blacksmith from Compton Abbas. Beginning in 1811, his house was used for Methodist meetings for half a century,[118] and he also led classes at Hartgrove, Twyford and Fontmell. No chapel was built by the Wesleyans at Compton Abbas until 1863, but meanwhile the Primitive Methodists had opened a small chapel in the parish, in the glove-making hamlet of Bere Knap (1827).

To the south-west the most important early Methodist centres were Sturminster Newton and Marnhull, but the surviving evidence presents a confused picture. Attempts to introduce Methodism into Sturminster Newton as early as about 1780 proved abortive. The preachers were

113. Conveyance of 'new erected house called a Preaching House' to Wesleyan trustees, 29 July 1774. Henry and William Broadway, both yeomen, were among the trustees. In 1828, Henry Broadway was the only survivor of this Trust. The chapel was not registered until 1796, and was rebuilt in 1836.

114. He is so described on the conveyance of the Gillingham chapel in 1824.

115. At the April Quarter Sessions, 1792. At the same sessions Broadway himself was licensed as a 'Dissenting Minister' (i.e. local preacher).

116. Methodist Recorder, 12 August 1909, drawing on the recollections of Thomas Hayter, the circuit's oldest local preacher. The fact that the return for Gillingham Wesleyan chapel in the 1851 Religious Census is missing adds to the difficulty of determining whether the 1836 deed (PRO: C34:7 Wm. IV 206.11) refers to the same property as the 1824 deed (PRO C.34 6 Geo IV 60.6), or to a second chapel. The High Street church was built in 1877.

117. The 1851 Census return and J.S. Simon, 1870, both give the date as 1797, though the earliest surviving deed is dated 7 May 1831, conveying an existing chapel to a body of trustees. Whether this was a resettlement of a preaching place already in Wesleyan use or of a chapel used by some other denomination is not clear. One of the vendors, Samuel Hall of Ashmore may be the trustee of that name of Ashmore Wesleyan chapel in 1856. The other, James Whitmarsh, has not been traced.

118. The Methodist Recorder, loc.cit., says 1814, but Spinney's house was registered for use by the Methodists in October 1811.

subjected to insults, indignities and even threats to their lives. On one occasion they were imprisoned for the night and freed only on the intervention of a sympathetic magistrate. On another, the village fire engine was brought out to saturate both preacher and congregation in the market place. The work was abandoned for a quarter of a century.

The break-through came about 1810. In a fresh attempt to introduce Methodism, the Shaftesbury preachers had hired a small room in 1809. Soon after they began preaching there the Independent minister, discouraged by lack of response, left the district. This both removed a local rival and made available a larger and more convenient room. Congregations increased, a society of twelve persons was formed and the work prospered sufficiently to enable them to build a chapel, opened on New Year's day, 1811.[119] Charles Baverstock, the local miller, was one of its trustees, and the social standing of the other trustees, all of them from the Shaftesbury area, was noticeably higher than that of most earlier trusts; comprising two 'gentlemen', three yeomen, a druggist, a button manufacturer and a plumber and glazier.[120] The Sturminster society shared in the 1815-16 revivals and by 1832, with a membership of 73 found it both desirable and possible to build a small chapel. The description of this second chapel as 'remarkable for its chaste and simple neatness' implies that its predecessor lacked these virtues.

The date and circumstances of the first Methodist preaching in Marnhull are more difficult to establish with any certainty. The 1851 Census return for a chapel in New Street gives its date as 1799, though the earliest registration is dated October 1829; but the earliest known deeds are as late as 1853 and 1857 and probably relate to a different property. Local tradition has preserved fragmentary information. One source speaks of the first Methodist preacher from Shaftesbury, who took his stand at an unspecified date at the crossroads in Burton Street. Among his hearers was a local woolcomber, William Lewis, born in Marnhull in 1779, who offered his woolcombing shed in North Street

119. WM Magazine, 1832, pp 888-9

120. PRO: C.34:5 Geo III 54-5 (5 August 1810), conveying a chapel already in existence from the Rev. James Sydserff, Superintendent Minister of the Shaftesbury Circuit 1809-1810, to a body of Trustees. The most probable explanation is that Sydserff had seized the opportunity to buy the building vacated by the Independent minister, though the building opened on New Year's Day is described in the magazine as though it had been built, not refurbished, by the Methodists.

for Methodist preaching services. The first chapel is said to have been built on the site of the shed and had a gallery where an 'orchestra', which included four of Lewis's sons, led the singing.[121]

Another tradition probably refers to rather later events. Abel Adams, who was employed by the Sturminster Newton miller, Charles Baverstock, as a carter, preached in a number of the villages in the area. At Marnhull he was summoned before the magistrates by the vicar, the Rev. Harry Place, for preaching in an unlicensed house; but when the case was heard his own parish priest, the Rev. James Mitchell, took his side. 'The Chairman [of the bench] asked Abel for his authority for preaching and where were his credentials. The vicar took Abel's Bible and addressing the Bench said, "These are his credentials, sir," and the case was dismissed.'[122]

Sturminster was the centre from which villages further south were missioned. Among the earliest of these were Stourpaine,[123] Okeford Fitzpaine, Pimperne and Shillingstone. But despite its earlier position, however briefly, as a circuit church in the 1790s, Blandford is missing from the list of preaching places in 1825. The evidence suggests that the Blandford society had remained small and eventually died out. In 1795 it had 26 members, but within three years it had dwindled to 10 and remained at that level at least until 1806, being bracketed in the circuit records with Stourpaine.[124] It seems to have possessed no chapel until 1833, but met in a succession of private houses registered as places of worship.[125]

The extension of the circuit westwards into the Sherborne and Yeovil area led to the formation of the Sherborne Circuit in 1818 and will be dealt with later.

121. Marnhull: records and memories collected by the Marnhull Women's Institute (1940); reprinted in The Marn'll Book (1952).

122. Ms notes in the possession of Mr. K Harvey of Sturminster Newton. Charles Baverstock was a member of the first Blandford society until 1805, but had settled in Sturminster Newton by 1810, when he appears as one of the trustees of the new chapel there.

123. A society of 8 members was recorded in 1803.

124. Pearce, 1898, Appendix

125. Registrations at the Dorset Quarter Sessions identifiable as Wesleyan: the house of John Twentymen, 1789; of Benjamin Baverstock, 1809; of John Roles, 1815; and of William Newmans, 1818.

Of the sixteen places with no chapel in 1825, only two (Ashmore and Bourton) had ministerial appointments on Sundays. Ashmore was exceptionally favoured in that, although it had only one service, alternating between morning and afternoon, every morning service was taken by a minister, the afternoon being supplied by local preachers. There was, nevertheless, no administration of the sacrament there. Unusually, the sacrament was frequently in the morning - and invariably so in the case of Motcombe and Hartgrove, where the two ministers took only morning services. There were no love-feasts. Another unusual feature was that local preachers took services at all places on the plan, even the town chapels, in contrast to the situation in the Weymouth and other circuits.

1816 was a year of revival in the Shaftesbury area, as well as in other places as far afield as Salisbury and Midsomer Norton (where as many as 80 and 300 new members respectively were reported in a single quarter). Highly charged emotional scenes reminiscent of the heyday of 18th century Methodism were witnessed at Fontmell. Mark Daniel, the superintendent minister, described what happened at a weeknight meeting there: 'One person was set at liberty while [I was] giving out the first hymn. After sermon I requested as many as were disposed to stop and we would spend some time in prayer. Many so stopped and we continued in prayer, praise and exhortation till 12. Three were justified and I think about 40 appeared in deep distress. Last evening I preached there again and intended to hold a Love-feast after preach[ing], but seeing a number in distress under preaching, I gave permission to all to stay during the Love-feast that were convinced of sin and earnestly seeking the Lord. I suppose a hundred stayed beside the society. The [speaking?] began and the 7th person was stating how God convinced her and she went into the graveyard to pray etc. Then the Divine Spirit was poured out and such a sense of blessed confusion I have not seen for 14 years. I began to pray, but my voice was drowned. I then requested the Local Preachers, Leaders, etc. to go and pray with the distressed persons. Shortly one and another and another were brought into Christian liberty ... Twelve precious souls were brought into union with Christ. When set at liberty, one of the persons engaged in prayer came to me, and I published it aloud, "Another soul has found peace". This had good effect on the mourners.

We continued in this blessed work till near one - it was a meeting indeed!'[126]

Several features of this resurgence of 'primitive' Methodism are worth noting. Clearly, by 1816 it was sufficiently unusual to be newsworthy and to arouse enthusiasm in a superintendent who had been in the itinerancy since 1794 and was therefore far from a novice! The numbers involved show that the Fontmell society had a preaching place considerably more capacious than any of its members' homes was likely to afford; and that the number of 'hearers' associated with the society was large. The emotional distress that accompanied a conviction of sin had been a familiar concomitant of Methodist preaching since the early years of Wesley's evangelical ministry, and the confusion it engendered was accepted as the price to be paid for the 'winning of souls'. Understandably, devout Anglicans had serious misgivings about such mass emotionalism as vulgar and uncontrolled. But they were not alone: Daniel reported that the Calvinists (i.e. Independents) and Baptists spoke scornfully of the Methodist chapel as 'a converting machine'.[127]

It was just at this time that the Bible Christian movement was beginning in North Devon; before long, too, the first 'Ranter' preachers would make their way south, to find that the ground had been prepared for them by manifestations of a fresh spirit of evangelism in the area. Had Wesleyanism been as prepared elsewhere as it seems to have been for the moment in the Shaftesbury circuit to lay aside any misgivings it might have about these fresh manifestations of vigorous, but uncontrolled, spiritual fervour, then the new wine might have been contained in the old Wesleyan wineskins. But the evidence from the other circuits, albeit largely negative, suggests that by the second decade of the 19th century the Wesleyans were for the most part culturally and ecclesiastically as unprepared as the Established Church had been a century earlier for the Evangelical Revival. Even in the Shaftesbury Circuit feelings must have been mixed and by no means all the conversions proved permanent. Nevertheless the second decade of

126. Quoted at length in a letter from the Rev. George D Dermott of Exeter to the Rev. Thomas H Squance in Ceylon. (Original in private hands: Miss J. Robb, Exeter)

127. Ibid

the century witnessed a doubling in membership, from 230 in 1811 to 480[128] in 1821.

3.3.8 Sherborne Circuit: Table 3:12

The Sherborne Circuit, formed in 1818, represented the westerly thrust from Shaftesbury into territory that had never been part of the original Salisbury Circuit. (In contrast, the spasmodic attempts to extend eastwards across the Hampshire-Sussex border had no lasting results, and the Methodist societies subsequently established in West Sussex therefore have no part in this study.)

In 1818 Methodism on the Dorset-Somerset border was still in its infancy, and with no more than 90 members the new circuit was by far the smallest of those under review. But it was growing quite vigorously, so that by 1825 its membership was 230 and a second minister had been added. This increase was sustained until Yeovil became a separate circuit in 1862, though the official figures have to be treated with some caution and do not reveal the whole picture. When John Hawtrey left the circuit in 1828, after three years as superintendent, he reckoned the membership as 400, but his successor, Nicholas Sibly, could find only a few more than the 350 reported the previous year. In Yeovil alone there were some thirty fewer than shown.[129]

The expansion of the circuit meant increased expenditure, and its slender resources were fully stretched. The income in its first quarter as a separate circuit was £11.2s.6d [£11.12]. Five years later, when the request for a second minister was granted, this had risen to £17, which left a quarterly deficit of £6, to be raised by private subscriptions. Only £4 was promised towards the extra cost, but the Conference voted a grant of £60 a year in support.

The appeal to Conference for 'a young man of respectable abilities and ardent zeal' was made on several grounds:

128. This figure includes the 100 members reported from the Sherborne Circuit formed in 1818. The membership almost doubled again in the next decade, then remained stable until the middle years of the century. During this period, it was Sherborne and Yeovil which were the area of growth.

129. Sherborne circuit book (CRO). During Hawtrey's ministry, the Sherborne society had increased from 23 to 71, while Yeovil claimed a total of 118.

Table 3:12 Sherborne Circuit, 1825

Chapels:	1[1]	Other preaching places:	15	Total:	16
Ministers:	2	Local Preachers:	13	Members:	230

Place	Earliest known preaching	Date of chapels, if any	Times of Services
Sherborne	R 1795	1824[1], 1842	10:30, 2:30, 6:30[2]
Yeovil		1824	10:30, 3, 6[4]
Milborne Port		1829, 1866	2:30, 6
Wincanton	1812	1838, 1873	2:30, 6[3]
Long Burton	R 1817(?), 1818	1850, 1878	2:30, 6[3]
Bishop's Down			6
Charlton [Horethorn]	1824	1829, 1861	2:30, 6[3]
Corton [Denham]	By 1823	1860	6
[East] Chinnock		1868	2:30, 6
Preston [Plucknett?]			10:30
Odcombe		1878	2
Halstock			2:30
Blackford	By 1824	1837	2:30
Henstridge	1818	1845	2:30
Glanvilles Wootton	R 1800	1869	2:30
Stoford		1872	6

Abbreviation:

R Registration under the Toleration Act

Notes:

1. In 1824, the Sherborne society furnished a large room in Cheap Street as a preaching place, but it was another 18 years before it built a proper chapel. In 1825 Yeovil was the only place in the circuit with a purpose-built chapel.
2. These are the times shown, but no preachers are indicated for any morning services or for afternoons except on one Sunday.
3. Similarly, no afternoon appointments are shown for Wincanton, nor for Long Burton except on one Sunday, and none at all for Charlton.
4. Morning services only on two Sundays; afternoon services on six of the thirteen Sundays.

- '1. Sherborne needs at present a travelling Preacher every Lord's day.
2. The cause at Wincanton is not likely to rise until it can be visited more often than once in six weeks.
3. In Yeovil there is delightful prospect of extensive good if the cause can be well supplied.
4. Within ten miles of Sherborne there are no less than 70 towns and villages and comprising a population of fifty thousand souls, most of whom have but little more knowledge of God than the Hottentots of South Africa, and whose moral destitution call loudly for Christian piety and the Salvation of the Gospel.'

Allowance must be made for the fact that a case was being argued; but a view of the circuit and its prospects as seen through the eyes of Nicholas Sibly, eight years later, corresponds very closely to this. The area was one of rich farmland and large agricultural villages, remote from any major centres of population, and offering a rich harvest to the 'gospel preacher'. 'The inhabitants have been, by their established guides, left in awful ignorance ... I much doubt whether many of those even now rising to maturity know "the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments". Their neglect of the Sabbath has been notorious, and is still thus in many places.' [130] But the difficulties were correspondingly large: 'Even now [1829] we frequently have no other preaching places than the highways and hedges ... Sometimes, in the face of no small opposition, a cottager opens his door, as a temporary sanctuary; and in a few places we have now a well-built chapel.' [131] Some groups were precarious and short-lived: 'We formed little societies in East Coker, Hayden, Limington and Hasslebury [?], but their goodness has been like the early cloud, and as the morning dews.' [132] A long list of villages which had been 'tried' but abandoned is entered in the circuit records. In some cases the failure was permanent. In others, either the Wesleyans or the Primitive Methodists established a society later in the century and eventually built a chapel. [133]

Sibly summed up the situation in 1831 thus: 'My late colleague, Mr. [John] Henley, was assiduous in outdoor preaching, not only in the villages, but even in every part of this town.' They could claim

130. Ibid, note by Nicholas Sibly, 1831.

131. *WM Magazine*, 1829, p 694. E.g. at Holwell, where preaching began in 1825 and a chapel was built two years later.

132. Circuit book, loc.cit.

133. In the former category: Trent, Stourton Caundle, Cadbury, Haydon, Ryme Intrinsic, Chilthorne. In the latter category: East Coker (1841), Mudford (1845), Sandford Orcas (1864), Limington (PM 1871), Marston Magna (1882).

little visible success so far, but 'the former strong and hostile prejudice is abating'.

A case in point was Stalbridge, which does not appear on the 1825 plan. A society had existed there for some considerable time before the first of John Wesley's two visits, in 1766, and had survived despite the violent hostility of the mob. The local magistrates refused them protection until, on Wesley's instigation, an appeal was lodged in the King's Bench. After lengthy delays, a verdict against the rioters at the Assizes curbed their violence[134] and both in 1766 and 1768 Wesley was able to preach without interference to 'large and attentive' congregations, although local tradition speaks of his being burned in effigy.

It is probable that this early society was the result of visits by John Haime from Shaftesbury. In July 1786 the home of John Hawke[135] was licensed for preaching, but after that there are few traces of the society until well into the new century. Stalbridge is not on the circuit preaching plans between 1820 and 1825, but reappears in 1826. This was due to the initiative of Edward and Thomas Ensor of Milborne Port, who about that time took a lease on an old malthouse and fitted up part of it as a chapel.[136]

Sherborne itself was hardly promising territory for early Methodism. Seat of the ancient bishopric which was moved to Old Sarum in 1075, it had once enjoyed much greater importance. Now it was well away from the centre of things and its population had dwindled. But in the Abbey Church and the school which claimed Alfred the Great among its alumni, it was still a stronghold of the Church. It had, too, a well-established Independent congregation, dating back at least to the early 18th century.[137]

Tradition speaks of Methodist preachers passing through the town and

134. Local tradition preserved a story of Wesley visiting the ringleaders of the mob while they were held in Dorchester gaol. He is said to have persuaded them to change their attitude towards Methodism and obtained their release. This is not substantiated by Wesley's Journal.

135. Father of Peter Hawke, who later settled in Wimborne (p 196 above).

136. It stood on the north side of Guggleton Street (now Station Road), was opened on Good Friday, 1833 and seated about 170. (Circuit book).

137. See above, pp 59-60 and Table 1:15

gathering an audience on Greenhill, but the first firm date is 13 July 1795, when the house of Samuel Whitty, occupied by Joseph Avard, in Long Street was registered at the Quarter Sessions. Another property, described in the Quarter Session records as 'being already a Chapel', was registered in the following year, but the little society broke up when its leading member failed in business. There was an interval of about fifteen years before a fresh start was made. Samuel Leigh spent two years in the Shaftesbury Circuit before sailing as a missionary to Australia in 1814. He visited Sherborne, preached on Greenhill and attended a service in the Abbey Church. But though he called on several people, presumably former members of the society or thought for some other reason to be sympathetic towards Methodism, there was no immediate result from his visit.

Then on Good Friday 1817 a local preacher from Wincanton, William Read, started preaching services in a room near the Black Horse in Newland[138]. Read came to live in the town and a workshop at the western end of Newland was fitted up through the generosity of a well-to-do sympathiser, Thomas Lydiatt,[139] to provide a somewhat more adequate home for the society that was formed. One year later, in 1818, the Sherborne Circuit had its somewhat premature birth.

Methodism was beginning to find friends in the town. A turning point in the society's fortunes occurred in 1821 with the arrival of William Dingley, who brought his Methodist loyalties with him from his native Launceston. The family drapery business prospered, he became a leading citizen and, along with other members of the family, a stalwart leader and supporter of the Methodists until his death in 1883.[140] In 1824 they moved to a somewhat larger room in Cheap Street, taking the furnishings from the Newland room with them. Gradually the aspirations and fortunes of the Sherborne society were raised to a new level, so that it was only a matter of time and financial resources before a more adequate chapel became a reality. As the Rev. John W. Cloake put the matter on his departure from the circuit in 1834: despite the strong anti-Methodist prejudice which still prevailed in the town, 'if we had

138. Probably in the house belonging to Robert Brine registered at the April Quarter Sessions that year.

139. Probably the building belonging to Lydiatt and registered by Reade and others in October 1817.

140. See below, p 422

a decent, neatly modern-built chapel, our congregation would not only increase in number but considerably so in respectability too.' He could already add, not only that there had been an increase in both the society and the congregation during his two years in the circuit, but that 'all things taken into account, there is a fair proportion of respectability connected with our interest in Sherborne'. This assessment eventually found material expression in 1842 in the opening of a fine new chapel in gothic style on a prominent site in Cheap Street. Sherborne Methodism had at last 'arrived'. Milborne Port, a growing industrial village two miles to the west, was in most respects a contrast to Sherborne and presented a much more promising opportunity to the Methodists. But here too the crucial factor seems to have been the timely arrival of leading members who were men of enterprise and substance.

Milborne Port was another ancient borough in decay, which was just beginning a period of new development. Until 1832 it returned two members of parliament, but its long established stocking industry had declined, and in the early 19th century the chief manufacture was dowlas and other coarse fabrics. Then in 1810 glove-making was introduced and ten years later Edward Ensor set up business in the village.

The first half of the century was to be a period of steady growth, with the population rising by 83% from 953 to 1,746 in 1851. Newtown was developed by Lord Darlington in the 1820s, in a bid to gain Whig votes. This, with the arrival of the Ensor brothers, goes a long way towards explaining the founding and growth of a Methodist congregation in the town, despite the existence of a well-established Independent cause.

Edward Ensor and his brother Thomas, who joined him shortly afterwards, were dedicated Methodists. Edward was described by one of the superintendent ministers as 'one of the most zealous kind of class leaders and local preachers that can be desired'. His brother took charge of the Sunday School that was soon a very flourishing concern. Both men quickly became leading figures in the community as well as in the Methodist society and were an invaluable asset to the latter.

The society's beginnings were nevertheless unpretentious. An earlier visit by an unidentified preacher - possibly John Haime - who stood on

a barrel to preach at Cold Harbour was still remembered, but no society was gathered together until about 1820. Its first meeting-places were the home of one of the members, William Pearce, on the Sherborne Road, then that of John Roberts, who had settled in Newtown. Roberts was a carpenter who for the first decade was the leader of the infant society, serving as class leader, first superintendent of the Sunday School and zealous local preacher. It was from him that the Ensor brothers took over the reins when he emigrated to America in 1830. By then the first chapel had been built at Cold Harbour, opened in July 1829. It had cost £218, of which only £43 was in hand, and the debt was increased to £363 by an enlargement only two years later which testified to the growing support of the cause, but also added to the burden carried by the trustees. The debt was not cleared until 1859, a few years before a much larger chapel was built. Even with supporters like Thomas Ensor and William Dingley among the trustees, the society was not immune from financial difficulties.[141]

In 1834 the congregations at Milborne Port were reported to be 'regularly good'. with a considerable number of young people, and the society was 'improving'. But success brought its own problems, as John Wesley himself had found, and the report adds as a caveat: 'During the past year a choir of singers have been introduced to our chapel, which has by no means contributed to the devotion of the congregation nor to the piety of the members.'[142]

In 1825 Yeovil was the only society in the circuit with a purpose-built chapel, built the previous year in Middle Street, and described in the Western Flying Post as 'commodious and elegant'. Methodism had been introduced into the town about 1818 by two local preachers from Sherborne. William Dingley, reminiscing at the opening of the Vicarage Street church in 1870, described the society's earliest home as a little cottage, with the ground floor providing a meeting-place and a bedroom-cum-study above for the preacher.[143] It does not appear on the Sherborne circuit plan until 1822, but the cause then progressed so rapidly that, as well as building a chapel, it soon came to be ranked second only to the circuit church.

141. J P Taylor, 1870

142. Sherborne Circuit Book, 1834

143. R S Anderson, 1970, p 11

This was put down to the stationing of a resident married preacher in the town, which the Superintendent minister in 1831 considered to be the main cause of 'a visible improvement in the regularity and stability of the Yeovil society'. Three years later, however, his successor had to admit to limited success among the 'respectable part' of the population. Yeovil was a large enough town to offer opportunities to new entrepreneurs in religious wares, but the itinerant system, which even in its gradually modified form still differentiated Methodism from other denominations, could be a liability in a competitive market. So John W. Cloak posited two external causes of the 'want of countenance' Methodists experienced in Yeovil: '1. The vicar and his curate are religious men, which is a matter of congratulation to every pious mind; and the consequence is their ministry exercises a considerable influence over the minds of the people. 2ndly. The Dissenters are numerous and influential in that Town: the Independents have a large chapel, the Baptists also, and their ministers are excellent men. There are also in the town a Socinian and Antinomian Chapel.' He then added a third: 'One other main hindrance is the want of a regular Ministry in our Chapel. Having so many places to attend to, we are obliged to plan local preachers too often there on the Lord's Day; and such is the nature of prejudice that we cannot command it.' [144]

Here is the obverse of the general picture that emerges from the circuit plans of 1825. In the case of the Sherborne Circuit there was an ironical situation in that the Sherborne society, though still lacking a proper chapel, enjoyed entirely ministerial appointments with the exception of a single Sunday, whereas a number of services at the Yeovil chapel were taken by local preachers. The exception at Sherborne is interesting in itself. On that Sunday alone there was an afternoon as well as an evening service, and both were taken by local preachers - one of them the pioneer and veteran William Read, the other the prosperous businessman William Dingley. These two laymen between them also conducted five out of the nine services at Yeovil for which local preachers were responsible that quarter. Of the village causes, eight had a single ministerial appointment during the quarter, and the remainder were served entirely by local preachers. Surprisingly, one of these was Milborne Port, though it was no distance from Sherborne

144. Sherborne Circuit Book, 1834

and already had two services each Sunday. And despite this concentration of ministerial attention, neither of the two town societies had more than one administration of the sacrament.

4 THE WATERSHED - 1825-51

The Ecclesiastical Census of 1851 not only provides an obvious and convenient basis for assessing the state of English religion in the mid-nineteenth century, but in itself may be seen as marking a significant turning point in Victorian religion. The first impact of the Evangelical Revival had spent itself, but its influence had broadened out and was being felt in both Nonconformist and Anglican church life. In the latter, the Oxford Movement was beginning to have its own revitalizing influence, which would gather pace as the second half of the century progressed. Wesleyanism had weathered a series of secessions, culminating in the Reform Movement and the Fly Sheets controversy of 1849, and despite a loss of nearly 100,000 members between 1850 and 1855, was poised for further advance in the second half of the century. Meanwhile, the new evangelical movements - the Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians - were sufficiently confident to have entered on a period of geographical expansion which brought them into central southern England.

The quarter century up to 1851 saw a further, more limited, proliferation of Wesleyan circuits, chiefly in the south-western part of the area. The over-all membership in these circuits continued to increase throughout the century by around 1,000 each decade until the 1860s. But the percentage increase per decade (Table 4:1) shows that the rate of growth was decelerating. This deceleration is further underlined when we take into account the changing demands of membership. As Arnold Rattenbury as pointed out, in surveying the statistics of membership over a period such as 1791-1851, we cannot simply assume that we are comparing like with like.[1] Rattenbury's examples are inadequate and his handling of them unacceptably cavalier; but he is right in drawing attention to the fact that the nature and degree of commitment involved in belonging to a Wesleyan Society in 1851 was scarcely comparable to the demands of society membership during Wesley's lifetime. A reduction in spiritual intensity and the basic requirements of membership coincided with declining, not increasing levels of recruitment.

What is more surprising is the fact that membership kept pace with the

1. Rattenbury, 1981, pp 28, 33-4. For other complexities in interpreting membership statistics, see Hempton, 1984, pp 12-13.

Table 4:1 Wesleyan membership increases by decades, 1791-1871

	1791	1801	1811	1821	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871
Southern circuits[2]	668	1,543	2,702	3,788	5,104	5,955	6,870	8,423	8,628
Net increase	-	875	1,159	1,086	1,316	851	915	1,553	205
Percentage increase	-	131	75	40	35	17	15	23	2
Membership as % of population	-	0.5	0.8	0.9	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.2
England	56,605	87,010	135,863	188,668	232,883	305,682	280,054	291,288	319,495
Percentage increase	-	54	56	39	23	31	-8	4	10
Membership as % of population	-	1.0	1.4	1.7	1.8	2.1	1.7	1.5	1.4

Notes:

1. Sources: Minutes of the Wesleyan Conferences; R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley, 1977, Appendix A3.
2. Figures include the Isle of Wight, which until 1811 was part of the Portsmouth Circuit.

population growth in the south for much longer than in the country as a whole. In England Wesleyan membership as a percentage of the population reached a peak in the 1840s and declined from then on. But in the south the decline did not begin for another two decades.

Several factors combined to produce this pattern. The population was increasing more slowly in the south than in other parts of the country. After its slow start, southern Methodism sustained a faster growth rate than the connexion as a whole; and it was much less seriously affected by the disruptions which led to dramatic membership losses elsewhere as successive waves of reform made themselves felt. But there were also fresh outbursts of evangelical fervour which could not be contained within the framework of the 19th century Wesleyanism, notably Primitive Methodism and the Bible Christian movement. These had more impact than the secessions in central southern England, and it is to these that we must turn next.

4.1. The Primitive Methodists

4.1.1. Origins

Primitive Methodism originated in north-west Staffordshire and may be dated from as early as 1807, when the first camp-meeting was held on Mow Cop near the Cheshire border, or more formally from 1811, the year which saw the union of the followers of Hugh Bourne and William Clowes. Their coming together was marked by the issue of the first Primitive Methodist class ticket (though the term 'Primitive Methodist' was not adopted until the following year).

Although the movement's development was accelerated by the expulsion of Bourne (in 1808) and of Clowes (in 1810) from the Wesleyan connexion, it was not so much a schism as a new outburst of evangelical fervour and activity at a time when Wesleyanism had become more cautious and less fervent in outlook and was more and more a prisoner within its own structures. The Camp Meeting issue was more the occasion than the cause of the expulsions: other issues served the same purpose equally well in the case of the Bible Christians in 1815 and the Tent Methodists in the 1820s. It is highly probable in the circumstances that both Bourne and Clowes would sooner or later have separated from the Wesleyans even if Lorenzo Dow had never visited England.

Hugh Bourne, born at Fordhays Farm, Stoke-on-Trent, in 1771, was a shy,

solitary youth, who experienced 'the peace and assurance of saving faith' in 1799. He overcame his reticence sufficiently to speak of his experience to his cousin, Daniel Shubotham. The latter was converted and soon was joined by others in the neighbourhood of Harriseahead where he lived. He and Bourne built a little chapel in a corner of his garden. Bourne became a lay preacher whose personal and intellectual gifts quickly made him an acknowledged leader among the newly 'awakened'.[2]

Meanwhile William Clowes, a young potter from Burslem, had had a similar experience of conversion during a Methodist prayer meeting at Tunstall in 1804. As a result, he became a class leader and exhorter on the Wesleyan circuit plan.[3]

The catalyst which turned these individual experiences into a movement was the visit to England of the eccentric American evangelist Lorenzo Dow.[4] In April 1807 he was in the Harriseahead area and Bourne was present when he described his experience of American Camp Meetings - open-air gatherings for worship and preaching, sometimes continuing for days at a stretch. Such meetings grew out of and were adapted to the primitive conditions of life in the scattered settlements and isolated farmsteads of the eastern American States. The idea was eagerly taken up by the Harriseahead society and, within weeks of Dow's visit, a whole day's praying on Mow Cop was arranged for May 31st. The response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic and a second Camp Meeting was arranged for July. William Clowes was among those from Tunstall who attended these gatherings.

The Wesleyan authorities, however, had doubts about the advisability of transplanting this uninhibited American growth into English soil. At the Conference of that year the matter was raised by the representatives of the Tunstall Circuit, and an adverse verdict was recorded: 'It is our judgment that even supposing such meetings to be allowable in America they are highly improper in England and likely to be productive of considerable mischief and we disclaim all connexion

2. For Bourne, see J.T. Wilkinson, 1952

3. For Clowes, see J.T. Wilkinson, 1951

4. The most detailed study of Dow is by Charles C. Sellers (New York, 1928)

with them'. [5] In the following June the Burslem Quarterly Meeting removed Bourne's name from the membership roll, ostensibly for absenting himself from his class-meeting, but in reality for his continuing involvement with the Camp Meeting. Bourne made no issue of this and withdrew quietly, but others of similar mind joined him and became known for a time as 'the Camp Meeting Methodists'. Similarly, when in 1810 Clowes was also expelled for attending Camp Meetings, some members of his class stood by him and continued to meet under his leadership, becoming known locally as 'Clowesites'. By 1811 the two groups had coalesced and the movement was launched on its separate course.

4.1.2. The Southern Missions

The introduction of Primitive Methodism into southern England was part of the expansion of certain northern circuits to mission the rural counties of the south and south-west. This was, in Kendall's words, 'a period of circuit predominance and enterprise', with very little central control: the Primitive Methodists were at this stage more a confederation of circuits than a fully fledged 'connexion'. [6]

Five different circuits - Tunstall, Shrewsbury, Sunderland, Manchester and Hull - were involved in this southern venture so far from the Primitive Methodist heartlands. The first northern societies had been predominantly rural; and now, in a period which saw a shift of emphasis in the Midlands and north from the villages to the industrial towns, what Hobsbawm calls 'pre-eminently a village labour sect' [7] was producing itself in the rural south. The very choice of such places as Motcombe, Brinkworth, Shefford and Buriton as the headquarters of circuits (and in the case of Brinkworth, even of a district) emphasises the rural nature of these missions. [8]

The developing pattern of this southern mission is complex, known to

5. Conference Minutes

6. H.B. Kendall, 1905, Book II

7. Hobsbawm, 1971, p 137

8. This feature was liable to outlast its usefulness or relevance. When Samuel Turner was sent to the circuit in 1851, he decided to live in the rapidly growing railway town of Swindon, rather than in an isolated village like Brinkworth. The resentment this aroused in the circuit officials was such that they 'seriously contemplated calling in the Bible Christians and severing their connection with Primitive Methodism'. (Aldersgate PM Magazine, 1900, p 771)

us, for the most part, only at one remove. The absence of local records for the early period forces us to rely largely on secondary sources, though some of these, such as Thomas Russell's Autobiography and John Petty's History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion are by men who were themselves involved in many of the events they recorded.[9] Petty in particular draws extensively on early sources no longer available to us.

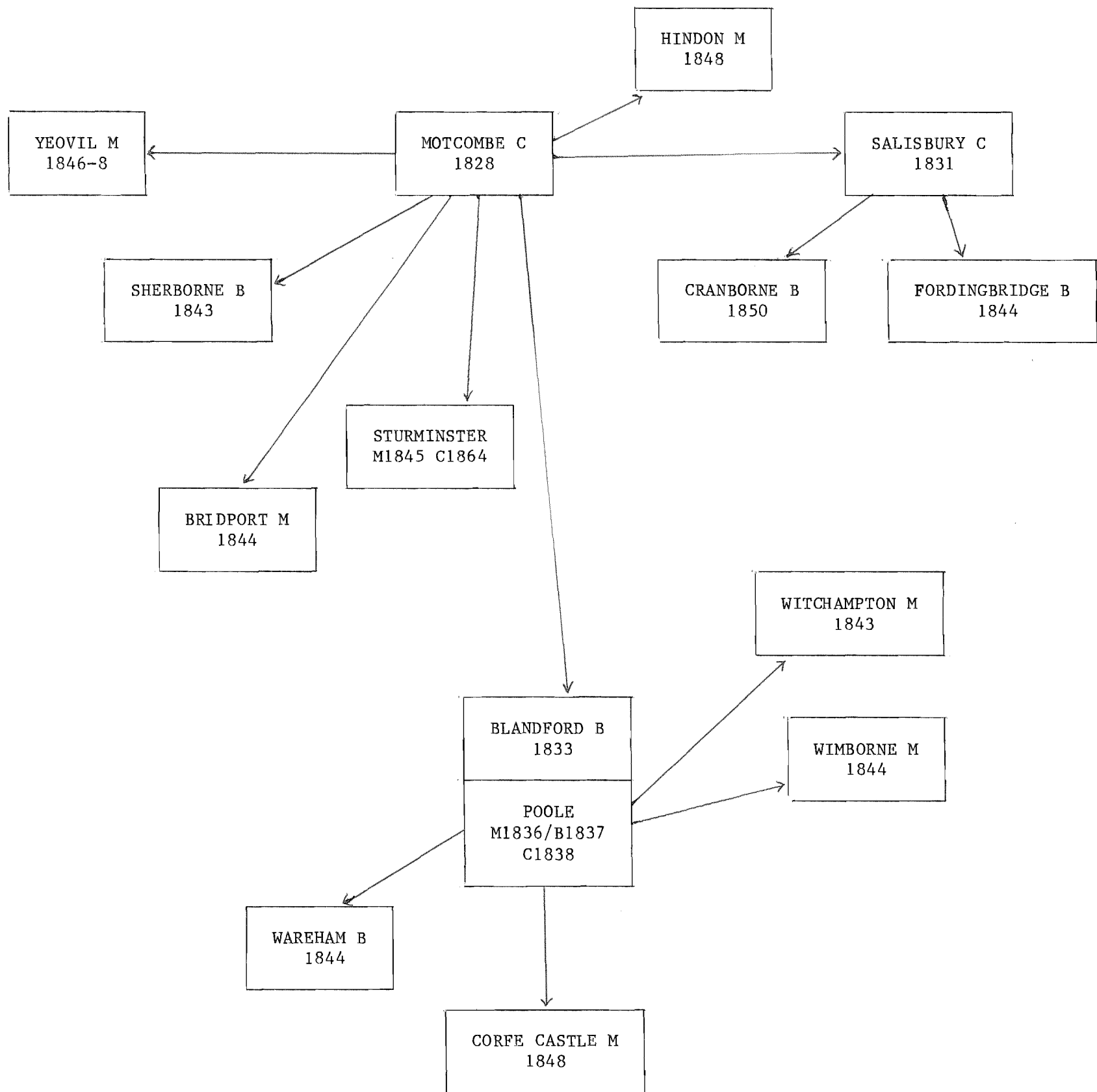
In 1823, the Tunstall Circuit, with some support from the Scotter Circuit in Lincolnshire, launched what came to be called its "Western Mission", to an area hitherto untouched by the movement. It was undertaken by James Bonsor, who proceeded via Worcester and Tewkesbury into Gloucestershire and Somerset. From Frome the work spread eastwards into Wiltshire, where the Motcombe Circuit was formed in 1828.

Meanwhile a parallel initiative by the Shrewsbury Circuit brought Primitive Methodism into northern Wiltshire. The Brinkworth Circuit, formed in 1826, initiated a further thrust through western Berkshire into Hampshire. The Motcombe, Brinkworth and Shefford Circuits became the bases from which the countryside to the south was missioned in the next two decades. The general pattern of this expansion is reflected in the proliferation of missions, branches and circuits. (See Figures 4:1 and 4:2)

The effect of the geography of the region on this development was noted in some detail by Kendall. The extensive watershed of Salisbury Plain was a major factor in separating the lines of advance in the west and east of the area. 'It fell to Motcombe and Salisbury as representing the Western Mission to evangelise the Southern part of Wilts and a large tract of Dorset. To Brinkworth fell the northern division of the country [and Berkshire] ... From the Valley of the Kennet it ascended the northern slopes of the Hampshire Downs, and then following the downward course of the rivers reached Winchester, and finally the New Forest and the low-lying country by Southampton Water.' In this south-easterly advance the village of Shefford, just north of the Hungerford-Newbury road, played a key role. Shefford Circuit became a separate unit in 1832 and was thereafter the vehicle by which Primitive Methodism spread not only through much of Berkshire and Hampshire, but

9. Autobiography of Thomas Russell, n.d.; also Primitive Methodism in Berkshire, n.d.; Petty, 1860

Figure 4:1 Motcombe Circuit and its Offshoots

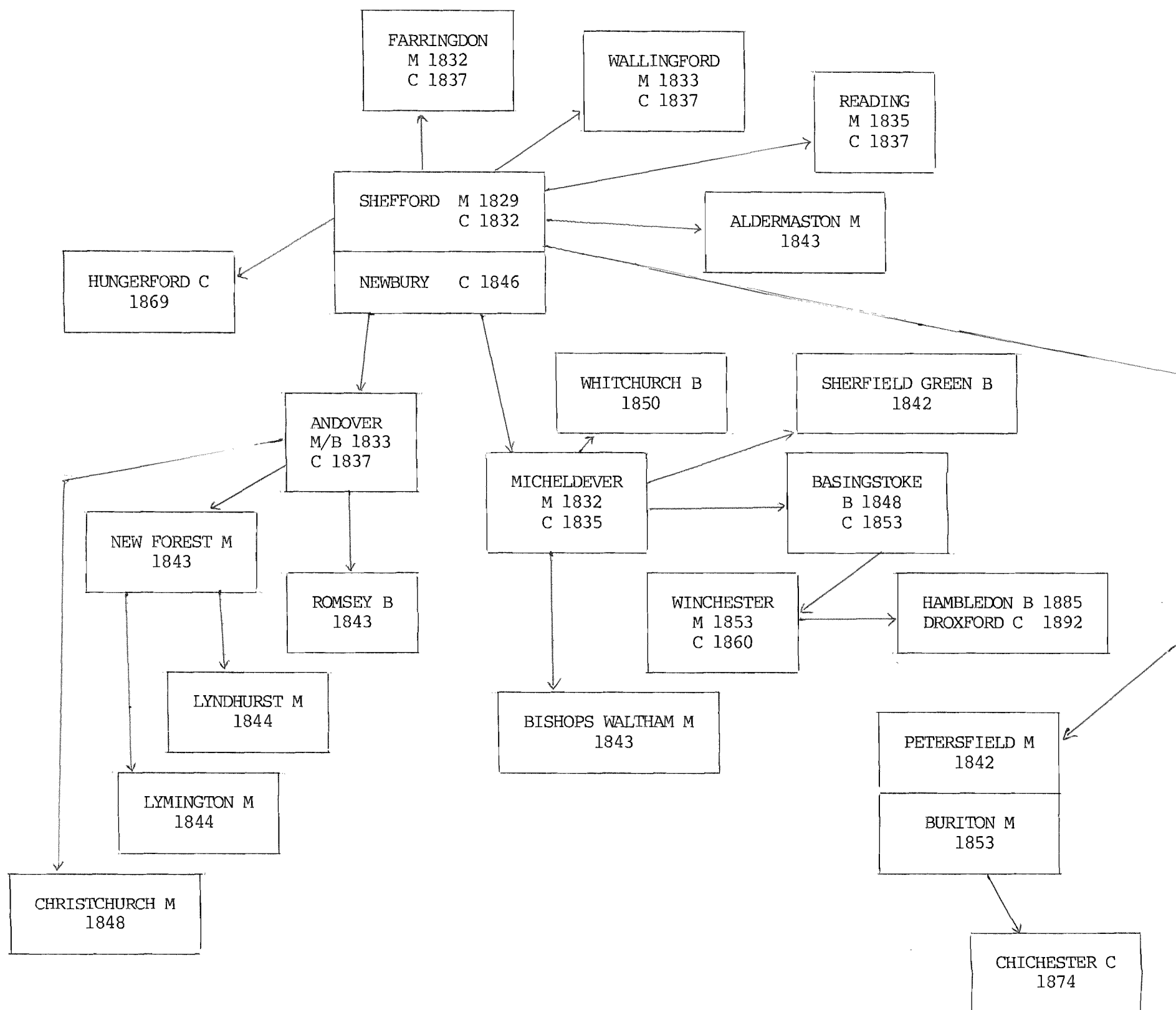


Abbreviations: C Circuit
M Mission
B Branch

Notes:

1. Yeovil disappears after 1848, until the formation of Yeovil and Sherborne M in 1861.
2. Sherborne remained a branch of Motcombe Circuit till 1861; and was then joined with Yeovil as a Mission.
3. Witchampton: Minutes say "Whitehampton".

Figure 4:2 Shefford Circuit and its Offshoots



Sources: Minutes of Conference, supplemented by information from Petty's History.

Abbreviations: C Circuit
M Mission
B Branch

Notes:

1. Shefford: known as the Berkshire Mission, 1829; Shefford Mission and Circuit from 1830; then Newbury Circuit from 1846.

also into Oxfordshire[10] and Buckinghamshire to the north-east. (During the same period, its parent circuit, Brinkworth, was more involved in a westward advance, including Bristol.)

Two further details must be added to complicate this outline. In 1833 the coastal area of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight were missioned by the strong and vigorous Hull Circuit. Ten years later the three missions that had been formed were taken under the wing of the newly organised General Missionary Committee (one of the steps taken towards 'connexionalizing' the denomination) and so remained largely independent of the work to the north of them. Their origin gave these southernmost missions a degree of psychological as well as geographical isolation, which must have inhibited their growth. This was even more true of the Weymouth Mission begun by the Sunderland Circuit in 1834 and taken over later by the Manchester Circuit.

The speed of advance, the zeal and determination of the missionaries, and the precarious hold they established in some areas, are reflected both in the lengthy interval that sometimes preceded the upgrading of a mission to a circuit and by the spasmodic appearance and disappearance of missions and branches during the 1840s, the period of greatest proliferation. In the 1840s, the situation was clearly as volatile locally as it was at circuit level, many villages being 'missioned' with only transient results. (See Table 4:2)[11]

By the time of the 1851 Census, there were six fully-fledged circuits in the area we are examining, plus a number of 'branches' and 'missions'. Some of the latter, e.g. Weymouth, Portsmouth and Southampton, were in many respects the equivalent of independent circuits, returning their own membership figures. (Table 4:3) Membership in this part of the south had risen in two decades from 1,161 to 4,314, an increase of 272% compared with 157% nationally. In the still largely virgin soil of southern England, growth was more rapid than in longer-established circuits elsewhere; and only in four years was the growth rate lower than the national one. (Table 4:4) Even these exceptions may be more apparent than real, due to inadequate

10. As early as 1823 a mission in the Witney area was successfully launched from Leicestershire (Kendall, 1905, I 345-7); but later expansion into the county came from the south

11. One branch and four missions disappear from the Stations after only one year; one branch and two missions after two years.

Table 4:2 Short-lived P.M. Missions and Branches

Year of formation	Name	Circuit	Year of disappearance
1842	Sherfield Green Branch	Micheldever	1842
1843	Aldermaston Mission	Shefford	1844
	Romsey Branch	Andover	1848
	Lymington Mission	Andover	1848
	Witchampton Mission	Poole	1844
1844	Fordingbridge Branch	Salisbury	1846
	Lyndhurst Mission	Andover	1846
1846	Yeovil Mission	Motcombe	1849[2]
1848	Hindon Mission	Motcombe	1849
	Christchurch Mission	Andover	1850
1850	Whitchurch Branch	Micheldever	1851

Notes:

1. The disappearance of a Branch or Mission does not necessarily imply that the work in that area had been abandoned. In some cases, it marks no more than an administrative reorganisation, as when the New Forest Mission was divided after only year into the Lyndhurst and Lymington Missions. These were later attached to the Southampton Branch of Andover Circuit.
2. Probably absorbed into Sherborne Branch of Motcombe Circuit.

Table 4:3 Primitive Methodist membership: Southern Circuits

	1832	1833	1834	1835	1836	1837	1838	1839	1840	1841	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849	1850	1851
Motcombe[3]	275	305	310	410	510	610	440[3]	445	440	540	620	700	703	753	-	814	-	766	767	784
Salisbury[4]	180	250	253	232	240	245	250	288	312	322	380	400	420	450	-	570	-	579	540	485
Shefford[5]	706	1,010	1,500	1,850	2,031	1,979	1,000[8]	1,330	879	742	850	910	980	1,090	-	1,162	-	1,276	1,125	1,177
Micheldever[6]	-	-	-	-	200	240	250	290	320	420	420	420	425	469	-	422	-	437	367	468
Andover	-	-	-	-	-	-	370	390	410	410	440	540	550	650	-	675	-	811	602	635
Blandford/Poole[7]	-	-	-	-	-	-	260	270	282	304	310	350	370	380	-	341	-	360	300	316
Weymouth	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	115	80	85	38	46	-	82	-	90	84	84
Portsmouth	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	31	32	-	45	-	54	72	82
Southampton	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	51	66	-	100	-	-	271	283
Totals	1,161	1,565	2,063	2,492	2,981	3,074	2,570	3,013	2,643	2,853	3,100	3,405	3,568	3,936	-	4,211	-	4,373	4,128	4,314

Notes:

1. Source: Primitive Methodist Minutes.
2. No circuit membership figures are available for the years 1846 and 1848. (The growth rates for the two following years are therefore an average over a two-year period.) Many of the numbers given appear to be estimates, e.g. the rounded numbers for Motcombe and Shefford Circuits in the early years, and must be treated with some caution.
3. Motcombe Circuit: includes figures for the Sherborne Branch and Sturminster Mission. The decrease in 1838 is due to the formation of a separate Blandford Circuit in 1837.
4. Salisbury Circuit: includes figures for the Fordingbridge and Cranborne Branches.
5. Shefford (later Newbury) Circuit: includes figures for the Petersfield Mission. Although Shefford Circuit was largely outside the area of the present study, it was closely linked to the other circuits.
6. Micheldever Circuit: includes figures for the Bishops Waltham Mission.
7. Blandford (later Poole) Circuit: includes figures for the Wareham Branch and Corfe Castle Mission.
8. This decrease is explained by the creation of separate Andover, Faringdon, Wallingford and Reading Circuits in 1837. But the decreases in circuit membership in 1840, 1841 and 1850 have no equivalent explanation.

Table 4:4 Primitive Methodist membership: growth rate, 1832-1851

	1832	1833	1834	1835	1836	1837	1838	1839	1840	1841	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849	1850	1851
England	41,301	48,421	51,877	56,649	62,306	64,277	67,666	70,396	73,990	75,967	78,862	84,660	87,308	86,338	85,500	84,929	87,400	93,344	102,222	106,074
% increase	-	17.2	7.1	9.2	10.0	3.2	5.3	4.0	5.1	2.7	3.8	7.4	3.1	-1.0	-1.0	-0.7	2.9	6.8	9.5	3.8
Southern Circuits[2]	1,161	1,565	2,063	2,492	2,981	3,074	2,570	3,013	2,643	2,853	3,100	3,405	3,568	3,936	-	4,211	-	4,373	4,128	4,314
% increase	-	34.8	31.8	20.8	19.6	3.1	-16.4	17.2	-12.3	7.9	8.7	9.8	4.8	10.3	-	3.5	-	1.9	-5.6	4.5
% of national total	2.8	3.2	4.0	4.4	4.8	4.8	3.8	4.3	3.6	3.8	3.9	4.0	4.1	4.6	-	5.0	-	4.7	4.0	4.1

Notes: See Table 4:3

record-keeping at a time of circuit-fission. Motcombe Circuit's loss of 170 members in 1837-8 is accounted for by the formation of the separate Blandford/Poole Circuit and did not therefore affect the area totals. The case of Shefford, by far the largest circuit locally, was different, since here the losses recorded in the late 1830s were due to its giving birth to independent daughter circuits (Faringdon, Wallingford and Reading) that lay beyond the bounds of the present study. The decreases reported from most of the southern circuits in 1850, on the other hand, had no such explanation, and indicate a decline which did not so much reflect the national trend, as lag behind it at an interval, of three or four years. (This may, however, be a misleading way of stating the facts. The decline of membership in England as a whole as reported in 1845-47, was much less marked than the 5.6% decrease in the south in 1850. Again, it must be recognised that the situation in many circuits remained much too volatile to be reduced with any degree of accuracy to a series of annual statistics.)

4.1.3. The Motcombe Circuit and its offshoots

The Western Mission of the Tunstall Circuit was launched in 1823, with Frome as one of its centres. From there the preachers penetrated eastwards into the countryside around Trowbridge and Shaftesbury. In August 1826 a 'large room' was opened at Enmore Green, near Shaftesbury, and during that autumn there was preaching at Motcombe, Gillingham and elsewhere in the neighbourhood. The work in this north-western corner of Dorset prospered so well that by 1828 Motcombe Circuit was formed, with two preachers stationed there. Later, in the 1840s, a Sherborne Branch came into existence to the south-west, with a Yeovil Mission beyond the county boundary in Somerset.

From Motcombe the missionary activity extended eastwards to Salisbury and south into other parts of Dorset. The preachers first visited Salisbury in 1827, when a small society of 7 or 8 was formed. It may be significant that, after meeting for a short time in the home of a sympathiser, they rented the room in the yard of the George Inn, which had been used by the Tent Methodists four years earlier. [12] In 1831 Salisbury became the head of a circuit. From the circuit accounts kept by Joseph Preston while he was stationed there (1832-34), we can plot

12. 'Room belonging to Mr. Wing in New Street', registered on 5 September 1827 at the Diocesan Registry. For the Tent Methodists, see Section 4.3

the proliferation of small societies, mostly scattered in an arc between the Nadder Valley to the west and the road south to Fordingbridge, with a small outlying cluster on the edge of the New Forest to the south-east.[13] The Salisbury society acquired a home in 1835, when they took over the Wesleyan chapel on the south side of Fisherton Street, but most of the village societies remained homeless for many years.

Preston's account is confirmed by a surviving Circuit Plan for April-July 1836, which lists seventeen preaching places plus the 'Bramshaw Mission' which had weekday services only. Of these seventeen, four places (West Grimstead, Teffont, Bishopstone and Bramshaw) were new since Preston's day; four mentioned by Preston (Woodford, Wishford, Downton and Ower) had disappeared; and seven (Breamore, Minsted, Cadnam, Godshill, West Grimstead, Teffont and Bramshaw) were to disappear by 1844. [14] For the most part, the villages in which the Primitive Methodists were striving to gain a foothold had no Wesleyan - and usually no other nonconformist - chapel. Exceptions to this were Wilton, with a population both larger and less dependent on agriculture than most villages, and West Grimstead, where the Primitive Methodists failed in the face of an established Wesleyan society with a chapel built in 1825. Elsewhere, the earlier unsuccessful Wesleyan work may have prepared the soil for Primitive Methodism. There had been Wesleyans in Damerham since the 1780s, but they remained a small group and in the 1820s were still meeting in private homes.[15] The existence of both Baptist and Independent chapels in the village must have hindered their progress, and it seems that the Primitive Methodists took up the running from

13. For Salisbury Circuit, see Petty, 1860, p. 235, 352; Kendall, 1905, II, 297

14. Within the next four years, three more places had disappeared from the Plan: Charlton, Alvediston and Compton [Chamberlayne]; West Harnham had replaced East Harnham; Laverstock had made a fleeting appearance; and no fewer than twelve new places were listed. (Circuit plans for 1847 and 1848). This pattern continued in the following decade.

15. William Sanger Junior registered a 'chapel' in the Diocesan registry on 23 October 1811, but the nature of this building is not clear, and it is possible that he was acting in a private capacity rather than on behalf of the Wesleyan authorities. The minutes of the Local Preachers Meeting of the Salisbury Wesleyan Circuit record that in September 1828, preaching was transferred from the house of a Mr. Gardner to that of William Lenton.

them, with the result that their first chapel was opened in 1845. [16]

Preston summed up his two years in the circuit thus:

'... We have paid off a debt on the Circuit 4:8:0 [£4.40]. Room debt 1:0:0 bought furniture to the amount of 7:4:4 [£7.22] and left in hand 1:9:5 [£1.47]. Band [?] 64 more members, built one New Chapel. Formed a Chapel Fund and left it £14:18:5 [£14.92] '[17]

His preoccupation with financial details is understandable enough in the circumstances, but is by no means the whole of the picture. Twenty-three places [18] are mentioned in his accounts, representing societies or small groups of converts and supporters. This represents heroic and strenuous labours on the part of the itinerant preachers and courageous determination on the part of the people, almost all of whom were living in severe poverty and at the mercy of their 'betters' in a society that remained largely autocratic and paternalistic. Something of the wider range of events in the circuit can be gleaned from preaching plans. One covering the spring of 1848 announces revival meetings, missionary meetings and sermons, public meetings and public tea meetings, as well as a Quarterly Fast Day (but not the 'protracted meetings', nor the Chapel and School anniversaries which became features later in the century).

The formidable difficulties facing these Primitive Methodist pioneers may be documented from early, if not contemporary, evidence in the case of two societies, at Martin and Woodyates, south-west of Salisbury.

Martin was one of the first places to which the Motcombe preachers turned their attention in the Salisbury area, with encouraging results. Its importance is indicated by the fact that in 1848 the Circuit Committee, which normally met at Salisbury on the first Tuesday of the month, also met at Martin 'when business may require'. Here they were fortunate enough to find a site for a chapel. Cornelius Flemington of Town End was an illiterate labourer, but he owned property in the village and was willing to sell part of his garden to the Primitive Methodists. This was done in June 1829 and the first chapel was built there shortly afterwards. Two of the trustees,

16. Conveyance dated 30 May 1845 enrolled in the Court of Chancery (PRO:C54:1862.39.2). James Shrimpton and William Flemington, both of Martin, played a leading role in this.

17. Original accounts in MAC, (MA 598.4)

18. Or twenty-two, if Wilton is, as it seems, a successor to Ditchampton.

William and John Flemington, must have been related to the vendor, perhaps his sons. Like several other trustees, they were farm labourers; the remainder included a shoemaker, a carpenter, a shopkeeper, a 'farmer and carrier', and one, Cornelius Broadway, describing himself as 'Gentleman', who financed the building of the chapel.

The chapel was at one end of the village, but later efforts to find a more central site were frustrated; so when the congregation outgrew the accommodation in 1844, the building was enlarged and a gallery added. Despite its situation, the chapel was well supported, as was reported in the Magazine for February 1845: congregations were good, and nearly every seat was let; the 'Golden System' had been introduced and £13 was already promised for the chapel anniversary later that year.[19]

Woodyates: The Methodists at Martin were more fortunate than most. In the adjoining parish of Pentridge, the hamlet of Woodyates on the London to Exeter coach road witnessed a fiercer struggle. It lay on the outskirts of an extensive deer forest and many of the inhabitants were foresters and woodmen. Against a background of severe poverty, poaching was common and during the 'Swing' riots West Woodyates Farm was one of the places where a threshing machine was destroyed in protest against the low level of agricultural wages. With the parish church a mile or so away in the valley and a High Church parson comfortably settled there on £300 a year, here were all the ingredients of what has come to be recognised as an ideal situation for Nonconformity to take root and thrive. Yet, paradoxically, there were also formidable obstacles.

The central figure in this situation was Barnard Herrington (born 1813), the oldest son in a family of foresters with a tradition of industry and sturdy independence. [20]

Though uneducated, Barnard learned to read and write and taught himself the elements of mensuration. He succeeded his father as parish clerk and also became the parish constable. His wife was the daughter of a yeoman farmer in the parish. Such a man had, in material terms,

19. PM Magazine, February 1845, pp 79-80

20. The account which follows is based on the written recollections of his youngest son, William, (1857-1941), who himself became a Local Preacher and is still remembered by some in the neighbourhood.

everything to lose by his association with the Methodists, while they had everything to gain from his support.

Somewhere about 1840, a group of Woodyates folk began walking over to Martin for the preaching service, and from time to time one of the preachers would come to Woodyates to preach on the green. Herrington was associated with this company, and was deeply moved by what he saw and heard, though he had not yet experienced anything that amounted, in Primitive Methodist terms, to conversion. At Martin he made the acquaintance of a kindred spirit, William Flemington, a local preacher and leading member of the local Society.

When the onset of winter put an end to the open-air preaching, the Woodyates Methodists found themselves in some difficulty. 'The majority of them were labourers, earning about seven shillings per week; one farmer held three farms - nearly all the place - and was a rigid Churchman. W. Day, the racing gentleman [who had opened a racing establishment on the open downs] insisted on his men attending Church once on a Sunday, on Good Friday, Ash Wednesday and Christmas Day, but beyond that was too busy with things outside religion to interfere very much.' With most of the land held in entail, landowner and parson were in a strong position to keep Dissent at bay.

It was Barnard Herrington who, from his semi-independent vantage point, was able to outflank the opposition and defy the authorities. Discreet examination of a disused smithy convinced him that it could be made to serve as a preaching place. The owner was a woman sufficiently sympathetic to the Methodists to be persuaded to grant them a seven-year lease on the property at 30/- a year, and a builder from a neighbouring village contracted to repair and fit it up as a chapel. The opening service presented a scene of highly-charged emotion, with penitents weeping and crying aloud in their fear of Hell-fire. The misgivings of parson and land-owner could scarcely have had a more convincing vindication; yet, at the same time, to the Methodists it was a dramatic demonstration that God was in their midst, blessing their venture.

The authorities opted for discretion, deciding that if they left well alone, poverty would soon persuade many to withdraw their support. Their hostility was focused on Herrington himself, who continued to serve as parish clerk even after he had become a local preacher. When

the Churchwardens demanded his resignation, he at first refused; but later, 'after some advice and some abuse and much prayer' he changed his mind and relinquished his office, taking most of the church choir with him. A change of incumbent soon afterwards brought a Broad Churchman into the parish, who determined to confront this ringleader of local Dissent on his own ground. We have only a one-sided version of their encounter, from the pen of Herrington's son, whose exultation over a discomfited enemy perhaps owes much to the Psalmist. Nevertheless, there are no grounds for challenging its basic accuracy:

'On a dull November evening [the parson] visited Herrington's cottage and demanded an explanation of his conduct, accusing him at length of the sin of schism by leaving the true apostolic Church. When eventually allowed to speak in reply, he asked the question, "When were you converted?" The parson nonplussed, stammered a reply about his baptism and reiterated that he had come to ask why Herrington had left the Church. Herrington denied that he had done so, since the Church was not the fabric. The parson beat a hasty retreat, saying that he would call again with a book which would make clear what he had been saying, but he never ventured another visit.'

Such an incident could scarcely have occurred anywhere else than in England, and epitomises a great deal of the history of post-Reformation English religion, encapsulating many of the issues and the resonances that have not yet ceased to complicate the ecumenical scene.

Breamore: The difficulty of finding preaching places and, in due course, a site for a chapel is exemplified by the case of Breamore, an estate village north of Fordingbridge, where, as we have seen, a small group of Wesleyans survived precariously until the death of its key member, Charles Chubb senior, in 1804. The first Primitive Methodist preacher to visit the village preached under a tree on August 2nd, 1830. [21] The interval is too great for us to posit any continuity, yet the Primitive Methodist missioning of the village from the 1830s on may well have owed something to a lingering Wesleyan influence. Be that as it may, lacking a Chubb to welcome and provide for them, the Primitive Methodists were for many years unable to obtain any site for a chapel, or even invitations into the homes of sympathetic cottagers. The latter were more than once forced, under threat of eviction, to turn them away. It was not until 1875 that a site was offered to them by the village blacksmith, George Edsall, who was said to be the only freeholder in the parish.[22]

21. Petty, 1860, p 234

22. But see below p 387

4.1.4. Southern Dorset

A month or so after the first preaching at Breamore, another of the Motcombe preachers in response to a request to the Circuit Quarterly Meeting, travelled as far east as Winchester and preached in one of the main streets. 'Some mocked him, whilst others listened to him with attention and interest.' But distance and limited resources prevented the Motcombe Circuit from following up this opening. [23] The later Winchester mission will be noted under the Shefford Circuit.

Meanwhile, the Motcombe preachers had their hands full enough further west, as they extended the work into the southern and western parts of Dorset. This next extension in fact, resulted from weakness rather than strength. The formation of the Salisbury Circuit in 1831 left Motcombe Circuit 'both small and unable to support the two preachers who were labouring in it'. The Superintendent, Richard F. Davies, was therefore sent in the spring of 1833 to open up fresh places, as much to strengthen the circuit's financial base as to extend the mission. Early in May he preached at Henstridge on his way south to the Blandford area, where he preached at Winterbourne Stickland, Hilton, Winterbourne Kingston and Durweston, and soon afterwards extended his labours to Milton Abbas, Ansty, Winterbourne Whitchurch and elsewhere. [24] A 'Blandford Branch' of the circuit was formed, which prospered in the face of severe local opposition to the extent that by the following year, 1834, it was strong enough to support a preacher on its own. Petty gives a glimpse of the strenuous exertions required to achieve this. On what appears to have been a typical Sunday, in May 1833, Davies 'performed an amount of labour which would soon weaken the strongest constitution. In the morning he preached at Ansty to a number of well-behaved persons, who stood still and listened attentively, notwithstanding the wetness of the weather. He preached at Stickland in the afternoon, where some young persons in a carriage attempted in vain to disturb the congregation. At five o'clock he addressed a large congregation at Hilton; and at seven at Abbey Milton. Having walked nineteen miles, and preached four times in the open-air, he felt much fatigued, and was obliged to seek lodgings at a

23. Petty, 1860, pp 234-5

24. Petty mentions 'Hepton', which I have been unable to locate

public-house.'[25]

In 1836, Blandford in turn gave birth to what was to prove an even more vigorous offspring, the Poole Mission, which seems before long to have incorporated the parent circuit. The 'pleasing prospect of success' held out in the circuit report of that year quickly bore fruit. The Mission became a Branch after one year and a Circuit in its own right one year later, and was to spawn three missions and a branch of its own in the 1840s. But the small scale of these pioneer Primitive Methodist ventures is underlined by the fact that the new circuit began with two preachers and only 260 members, with an increase of only 22 members in its first two years. The key factor in the situation, as so often, seems to have been the firm support of one particular individual, in this case a pawnbroker named Isaac Jacobs, who gave house room to the preachers during the first few weeks of their missioning in the town and became the first class leader. They were also fortunate in finding an early, though temporary 'home' for the society in Cinnamon Lane. [26]

The North Street premises which they acquired in 1837[27] were more extensive, but also closer to the Wesleyan Chapel in High Street; and the proximity of a well-established Wesleyan Circuit was certainly one of the handicaps under which the Primitive Methodists laboured here. It was perhaps an awareness of this that motivated their choice of large villages, rather than the towns, as the centres for their earliest circuits. Nonetheless, in a town such as Poole, the potential clientele was much greater than among the dispersed rural population; so that it proved worthwhile to weather the difficulties, in their favour was the fact that this was the period in which Wesleyanism was becoming increasingly middle-class, and their diminishing appeal to the 'lower orders' which resulted from this provided an opportunity for the

25. Petty, 1860, pp 259-60, modernising Petty's spelling of 'Stickland' and 'Helton'. Cf. Kendall, 1905, II 297-8

26. For the Poole Circuit, see Petty, 1860, p 260

27. Article on the circuit centenary in The Poole Methodist, April-June 1936; conveyance of freehold property, 4 October 1844 (PRO:C54:1845:29.1). The first chapel was a small building until recently used as a schoolroom, initially rented for 35/- a quarter, bought for £130 in 1844 and enlarged at a cost of £145. One advantage enjoyed by the Poole society over the rural ones was the active support of small tradesmen and artisans of relative independence. The 1844 Trust was made up predominantly of craftsmen (a shipwright, a twinespinner, a carpenter, two plasterers (father and son) and a mason), together with a grocer, a coal porter, and one claiming the title of 'gentleman'.

Primitive Methodists. This social distinction can easily be exaggerated into a starker contrast than the facts warrant. The working classes did not by any means cease to attend the Wesleyan chapels, though even where they were welcomed, the pew rent system must have sometimes made them feel like 'second-rate citizens', and undoubtedly they would find less and less opportunity to assume leadership roles, except in the smaller rural societies. For their part, too, the Primitive Methodists found it easier to appeal to the more respectable and 'deserving' elements among the poorer classes, and it was only a matter of time before some 'upward mobility' was to be discerned among their members. The absence of extensive membership lists makes it difficult to substantiate these general impressions or to document them with adequate statistics; though something can be gleaned from baptismal registers and the social composition of chapel trusts.[28]

The Weymouth Mission

Contemporary with the development of the Poole Circuit was a separate venture further along the Dorset coast. Weymouth, as a fashionable watering-place, must have seemed a less promising seed-bed for the Primitive Methodist gospel than the depressed seaport of Poole. The Mission there was undertaken in the first instance by the Sunderland Circuit early in 1834 and had a promising start. The two missionaries, John Nelson and George Cosens, met with a cordial welcome and were heard without interruption. This may have had something to do with the appeal of novelty, since Cosens was a West Indian. Paradoxically, they encountered the noisiest and fiercest opposition in the dissenting stronghold of Dorchester.

In Weymouth a small society was soon formed and the assembly rooms rented for meetings. In Dorchester, they were welcomed and encouraged by the local Independent minister, who offered the use of his chapel when the weather should drive them indoors and assured them that there was ample scope for evangelism both in the county town and in many of the surrounding villages.[29]

Initial hostility and obstruction subsided, and in both towns the

28. See below, Section 6.5

29. He estimated that not more than one in twelve of the 6,000 inhabitants of Dorchester were habitual worshippers (Kendall, 1905, II 210)

prospects looked good, until a dispute between the two preachers split the Weymouth society into rival factions and jeopardised the whole venture. The Mission was eventually taken over by the Manchester Circuit and, especially under the leadership of Thomas Russell, regained some of its lost ground. A chapel was built in Hope Square, Weymouth, in 1841.[30] On the island of Portland, a store-house was converted into a chapel at Chiswell as early as 1839. But Dorchester had no chapel until 1876.[31] The circuit remained a comparatively weak and isolated pocket of Primitive Methodism in an environment less congenial to the denomination's ethos than either the rural areas or the larger towns.[32] Its fortunes continued to fluctuate: in 1851 a circuit membership of 85 was reported, and there were new developments on Portland;[33] but two years later, the total was down to 46. The break-through did not come until 1857-8, when a 200% increase of membership from 57 to 172 was reported under the ministry of Robert Pattinson, and the appointment of a second preacher was requested.[34]

4.1.5. The Shefford Circuit and its offshoots

The Berkshire village of Shefford was to prove the most important vantage point gained by the mission launched in the Brinkworth Circuit in north-east Wiltshire and western Berkshire in the spring of 1828, under the leadership of the superintendent preacher, John Ride. But his first target was not Berkshire, but the downland villages to the east and south-east of Swindon. In September he was joined by a new colleague, Thomas Russell. Both men were sturdily built and not easily daunted, and they needed all their physical and spiritual stamina to succeed in what proved difficult terrain.

Two features characterised this mission from the outset and survived into its later days. One was the formidable obstacles placed in their path, and especially the difficulties they encountered in finding

30. Conveyance of site, 17 April 1841 (PRO:1862:55.18)

31. Deed of conveyance now in the possession of the Salvation Army

32. Petty, 1860, pp 260-2; Kendall, 1905, II 210-11

33. In the Census, small groups were reported at Abbotsbury, Chickereall, Coryates and Portesham, but none of these had a separate preaching-place.

34. Weymouth PM Circuit Quarterly Meeting minutes. Kendall's statement that the Poole Circuit 'joined hands with the Weymouth and Dorchester Mission' in 1838 appears to be at variance with both the circuit records and the Minutes of Conference.

places to preach. The local population was sharply divided into two economic and social groups - land-owners and tenant farmers, strongly opposed to any form of Dissent, and especially to the Primitive Methodists, and their impoverished labourers, struggling for survival on six or seven shillings a week. For many of the latter, to welcome the preachers into their homes was to risk both eviction and loss of livelihood.[35] Nor was it difficult for the preachers to identify with their plight. As John Ride wrote: 'I had never before known such violent persecution. The farmers ... threatened to turn the people out of work, and out of their homes, if they either went to hear us preach or entertained us. We had therefore to preach out of doors in many places, and had frequently to suffer the lack of food and lodgings. Some of our preachers had to wander on the Downs all night, after preaching, having nowhere to sleep.'[36]

The second feature was their heroic belief in the efficacy of prayer. The mission was a response to invitations from villagers who had attended the preachers in the Brinkworth area and begged them to 'come over and help us'; and it was launched by a missionary prayer meeting at Wootton Bassett on Good Friday, 1829. This spirit of fervent prayer persisted. A well-known anecdote tells of a crucial break-through, in February 1830, when Ride and Russell crossed the Berkshire border after hours of agonised prayer in a snowy wood, and advanced confidently upon Shefford, north-west of Newbury. Here for once they were quickly offered a site for a preaching-house,[37] a society was formed, and the village became the focal point of the new mission.[38]

The next major advance, southwards into Hampshire, began a year later, in the spring of 1831, with Thomas Russell at its head. His first sermon was preached at Hurstbourne Tarrant, where the rallying cry of the opposition was 'The Church and King; no Ranters here'; and on his way back he preached at Little Down, Linkenholt and Vernham Dean. On what Petty gives as a typical Sunday, he preached at Ashmansworth, Faccombe, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Little Down and Linkenholt, concluding

35. Petty, 1860, pp 217-18, 219

36. Quoted in Petty, 1860, p 219

37. Described as 'square-built, with a low ceiling and dwelling abode above' (Aldersgate Primitive Methodist Magazine, 1900, p 591) it was clearly a very humble building for a 'circuit chapel'.

38. Petty, 1860, pp 219-20

the day with a prayer meeting and the formation of a little society.

In June he was joined by an assistant, one of the Connexion's female itinerants, Elizabeth Smith, who later became his wife. She shared in both the work and the hardship of the mission, and was then transferred for a few months to the newly formed Micheldever Mission, before being moved to Darlaston Circuit. At the beginning of 1832, the Shefford mission became an independent circuit, and in the following September was visited by Hugh Bourne himself, who preached his way from Shefford to Salisbury on a journey to Bristol. With 596 members and two chapels, it was growing rapidly, as the number of new missions it spawned also indicates: Micheldever and Farrington in 1832, Wallingford and Andover in 1833.[39] Its continuing progress is recorded on the Circuit Plan for October 1834 - January, 1835 where the figures in Table 4:5 are given for its various Branches.

Even in the Micheldever Branch, there was clearly a short-fall of preachers available to meet the expanding demand; both itinerants and local preachers must have been fully stretched to fulfil their Sunday commitments, even though most places had only one preaching service a Sunday. This accounts for the number of preachers who were regularly serving another Branch besides their own. Micheldever might seem to be the strongest and healthiest of the Branches, but, as we shall see, 'vigorous weakness' rather than 'strength' might be a more accurate description of its condition throughout the 1830s and beyond.

4.1.6. The Micheldever Circuit

Andover and Micheldever Branches developed side by side during the 1830s. The Mission in the Micheldever area was launched in 1832 and saw its first successes in the winter of 1833-4. On Sunday, May 25th 1834, a camp meeting held on the downs near the Winchester race-course attracted an estimated attendance of 5-6,000, including many who were hostile to the mission. Fervent prayer and the support of an influential citizen of Winchester, a Mr. Topp, were among the factors believed to have helped to avert serious trouble; the event had a considerable impact on the surrounding villages, and in March 1835, a separate Micheldever Circuit was constituted, with 269 members.

Significant of the precarious nature of the mission's base is the fact

39. Petty, 1860, pp 228-9. It was renamed the Newbury Circuit in 1846

Table 4:5 Shefford P.M. Circuit, 1834-35

Branch	Sunday Preaching Places	N u m b e r o f			Prayer Leaders
		Preachers[1]	On Trial	Exhorters	
Home	72	58	4	7	13
Micheldever	33	29[2]	-	4	4
Faringdon	34	15[3]	2	1	7
Andover	33	16[4]	13	8	3
Wallingford	17	6[5]	-	-	9

Notes:

1. 'Preachers' was a comprehensive term, including both itinerants and local preachers. The distinction was less sharp in early Primitive Methodism than it had always been among the Wesleyans, and movement into and out of the full-time work was easier and more common.
2. Plus 6 from the Andover Branch.
3. Plus 15 from the Home Branch and 4 from the Brinkworth Circuit.
4. Plus 6 from the Micheldever Branch.
5. Plus 2 from the Home Branch.
6. Early in 1835 a Reading Mission was added to the Circuit, with 12 preaching places, 4 preachers (plus 3 from the Home Branch), two Exhorters and one Prayer Leader.

that the Micheldever society had no chapel until 1869, and then only on a leasehold site granted by an absentee landlord. Nonetheless, the Primitive Methodists succeeded where the Wesleyans failed to gain a permanent footing. There were a few Wesleyans in Micheldever from early in the 1820s; the group broke away and allied themselves with the Wesleyan Association in 1835, but were never strong. It is equally significant that a scattered village, rather than the county town six miles to the south, should be chosen as the head of the new circuit. No attempt was made to preach in Winchester itself until April 1837, and then the opposition was so violent that, despite some support and protection from the authorities, the attempt was abandoned for some years.[40]

Elsewhere in the circuit, hostility was fierce enough to serve as a deterrent, and there were set-backs: in its first years, for example, the circuit recorded a net loss of 69 members. However, the preachers persisted in the face of opposition, and by the spring of 1839 were able to make a hopeful report: 'The circuit is prosperous. Persecution is abating; villages are opening before us; the work of conversion is advancing; our members are increasing; fresh labourers are rising up; and we have built one chapel.'[41] The 'one chapel' remains something of a mystery. There is no record of a chapel at Micheldever itself before the 1860s, an earlier attempt to acquire a site in 1845 having been thwarted by the local incumbent with the connivance of the principal landowner, Sir Thomas Baring.[42] The earliest traceable chapels elsewhere in the circuit are those at Easton (1840),[43] Barton Stacey (1844) and Whitchurch (1849). Whatever its location, the 'one chapel' reported in 1839 bears witness, however negatively, to the hard, uphill road being trodden by the Micheldever Circuit. Despite this, evangelistic efforts persisted into the 1840s over a wide area, and in some places were sustained for years in the face of persecution and a discouraging response. The wide dispersion of the little

40. Petty, 1860, pp 273, 280-1

41. Petty, 1860, p 284, quoting the Circuit Report for April 1839

42. Petty, 1860, pp. 353-4, quoting the PM Magazine, 1845. See below, p 254

43. The deed of conveyance is dated 2 November 1840. Sabina Chiddy of Easton, widow, gave the land as a site for a chapel and schoolroom 'in consideration of the affection and regard which she hath and beareth unto the members of the Primitive Methodist Connexion residing at Easton'. The first named Trustee, Edward Chiddy, Easton, baker, may have been her son. (PRO: C54: 1862: 139.12)

societies and the ephemeral nature of much of the work can to a large degree be quantified by a comparison of circuit preaching plans. Between the autumn of 1834 and the summer of 1838, the number of places to which preachers were appointed to go rose from 33 to 50. 12 places had disappeared from the Plan during the three-year interval, 26 entirely new places had been added, plus three which in 1834 had weeknight appointments only. Five extra places were listed under the heading of the 'Winchester and Petersfield Mission', but with weeknight meetings only, representing a fresh line of advance that was to prove abortive for the time being. It was not until the 1850s that a permanent foothold was established in Winchester.[44] In the interval, the work had extended into the north-east of the county, where the Basingstoke and Sherfield Green Branches were formed during the 1840s.

An examination of the records of chapel building in the Micheldever area in the mid-19th century shows that very few chapels were built before the 1860s. The extreme poverty of the people and the persistence of strong opposition were no doubt major factors explaining this delay. The pattern is markedly different from that of the adjoining Andover Circuit. At the same time, being unencumbered by chapels and the debts they usually incurred left the Primitive Methodist mission more free and flexible in its response to needs and opportunities as they arose.

Table 4:6 Micheldever PM Circuit: Early chapel-building

1840	Easton	Conveyance of site, 2 November 1840
1844	Barton Stacey	Conveyance of site, 13 April 1844
1849	Whitchurch	Conveyance of site, 17 February 1849
1853	Winchester	Conveyance of Independent Meeting-house in Parchment Street, 20 October 1853; built 1808
1859/ 61	Baybridge, Owslebury	Conveyance of site, 30 September 1859; date on facade, 1861
1864	Stockbridge	Conveyance of site, 18 March 1864
1864	Sutton Scotney	Conveyance of site, 19 March 1864
1865	Preston Candover	Circuit records; no deeds traced
1867/ 1869	Ropley	Conveyance of site, 19 June 1867; date on facade, 1869
1868	Micheldever	Lease, 5 February 1868
1869	Forton, Longparish	Conveyance of site, 15 June 1869

4.1.7 Andover Circuit

An itinerant preacher, George Wallis, was sent to mission the town in the spring of 1833 and preached there on May 5th, supported by

44. Petty, 1860, p. 405. Their first chapel in Winchester was bought from the Independents in October 1853

villagers from Hurstbourne Tarrant, Little Down and Linkenholt, with some disturbance. Opposition, encouraged by local representatives of law and order, escalated on the two following Sundays; but the preaching continued and a town society was formed, with a chapel in East Street opened in 1838. Here the Primitive Methodists had to compete with the Wesleyans, whose society went back well into the 18th century and who had built their new chapel in Winchester Street in 1824.

With Andover as his base, Wallis missioned the surrounding towns and villages. He had, in fact, already tested the ground at Stockbridge, and before the end of May had also preached at Longparish, St. Mary Bourne, Whitchurch[45] and Overton, besides a number of smaller places. By the end of 1834, the Sunday preaching plan for the Andover Branch of Shefford Circuit listed no fewer than 32 places, with two others which had weekday preaching only. Of these, ten (in addition to Andover) were places where the Wesleyans were already at work, though only in five of them (St. Mary Bourne, Vernham Dean, Broughton, King's Somborne and Collingbourne Kingston) was there a Wesleyan chapel at this date.[46] The majority were small and remote hamlets untouched by the Wesleyans.

Andover became a separate circuit in 1837, with 340 members. At that stage it had no chapels, but with no fewer than four itinerants stationed there it was still very much a 'mission'. Within little more than a year, the circuit had built two chapels, at St. Mary Bourne and in Andover itself, but the 'golden age' of chapel building was in the next decade (Table 4:7), perhaps as a reflection of the declining prejudice and hostility in the neighbourhood.

45. Despite its proximity to Andover, Whitchurch became part of the Micheldever Branch

46. The date of the Wesleyan 'preaching-room' in Stockbridge is uncertain, but may have been in use by this time. The Wesleyans withdrew some time after 1851, leaving the Primitive Methodists in the field.

Table 4:7 Andover PM Circuit: Early chapel-building

1838	St. Mary Bourne Andover, East St.	Conveyance of site, 29 May 1838 Conveyance 30 July 1838; 'chapel now erecting'
1843/44 1844/45	Ludgershall Vernham Dean	Conveyance of site, 29 December 1843 Conveyance of 'premises', 28 October 1844
1845	Littledown	Conveyance 7 February 1845; chapel apparently already in existence
1846	Amport Longstock Upper Clatford	Conveyance of site on Sarson Lane, 10 June 1846 99 year lease of land and chapel, 18 August 1846 1851 Census; site and deeds not traced
1847	Facombe Goodworth Clatford Leckford	Conveyance of site, 15 June 1846 Agreement for purchase, dated only '1847'; site and 'building used as a chapel' Conveyance 16 January 1847; 'chapel and premises'
1848	Upper Wield	Declaration of Trust for copyhold site, 20 November 1848
1849	Collingbourne Ducis	1851 Census; site and deeds not traced

Even those chapels that existed were, so far as our information allows us to judge, mostly small and unpretentious, reflecting the severely limited resources of the members rather than any aesthetic taste or lack of it. (Debased architecture came later in the century and was, after all, not so very far removed from the general Victorian vulgarity in aesthetic matters.) Here and there (e.g. at Vernham Dean, Littledown, Longstock, Goodworth Clatford and Leckford) they were able to take over existing premises, either from other dissenting groups or from some individual who had built a chapel for their use on his own initiative. Some village chapels, were built of crushed chalk, probably by the members themselves.[47] The fact that the Leckford Chapel, on the land of a local farmer, was described as 'resting on stones' suggests either that it was a converted granary, or that there was some fear that it might have to be moved to another site. A memorandum added to the deed of conveyance supports the second possibility by stipulating that the vendor, Benjamin Pike shall 'occupy the whole of the seat or Pew on the left side of the pulpit free from Rent or any kind of payment whatsoever, so long as the Chapel remains on the premises of Benjamin Pike aforesaid.' The Littledown chapel was more substantially built, but for what seem obviously prudential reasons the only windows are on the side facing away from the road.

47. The only example to survive, in ruinous form, until recent years was Barton Stacey (1844) in the neighbouring Micheldever Circuit

4.1.8 The Hampshire Coast

The Hull Primitive Methodist Circuit was one of the most vigorously active in establishing a number of widely scattered missions and in 1833,[48] at the suggestion of William Clowes who had just returned from a visit to Southern England, it sponsored three new missions in Hampshire: at Portsmouth and Southampton and on the Isle of Wight. These were all transferred in 1843 to the care of the General Missionary Committee.

The work on the mainland was much more difficult than on the Isle of Wight, where not even the presence of Wesleyans and Bible Christians in considerable numbers seemed to inhibit the Primitive Methodist preachers. In Portsmouth the local response was less propitious: two or three women and a few children were all that William Harland could muster the first time he tried for a congregation in the streets of Southsea. They were more successful in preaching on the Common to the soldiers and sailors, and a chapel was taken in Dock Row, Landport. Open-air witnessing continued, but it was uphill work and 'the Portsmouth Mission [never] yielded fruit commensurate with the labour bestowed upon it'.[49] It retained its 'Mission' status until 1880.

Following the launching of the Isle of Wight and Portsmouth Missions, a fresh start was made in Southampton, where there had been an earlier attempt of which we know nothing except its failure. Harland's open-air preaching attracted a considerable crowd, which took his side against a local constable who tried to send him packing. The Primitive Methodists found a more influential ally in James Crabb, the former Wesleyan itinerant who now had his own Independent mission in the town. They were offered the use of the chapel of his seamen's mission until rented premises were found in Bridge Street. In March 1837 a chapel was built for their use in St Mary's Street by James Wheeler, a local baker, who conveyed the property to a group of trustees three years later.[50] Southampton proved a more receptive field for the

48. The local historian, W G Gates, is wrong in dating the first Primitive Methodist services in Portsmouth in 1849. (Gates, 1900, p. 660)

49. Petty, 1860, p 308. Harland was appointed General Superintendent of the Home Missions when the connexional Missionary Committee was reorganised the following year.

50. Petty, 1860, pp 308-9; lease and release of land with 'all that chapel and buildings thereon erected by James Wheeler', 4 September 1840 (PRO: C.54: 15811: 15, 16)

gospel than Portsmouth; the Mission became a Branch of the Andover Circuit in 1848, and an independent circuit four years later.

4.1.9 A proletarian movement

The first Primitive Methodists were drawn from the working-classes, and the movement remained more proletarian than any other group, at any rate until the rise of the Salvation Army. In the rural societies, where its main strength lay, the agricultural labourers as well as artisans provided much of the local leadership. Even some of the local preachers had had little or no formal schooling. That this could also be true of Wesleyanism is demonstrated by the case of George Loveless, leader of the 'Tolpuddle martyrs', an agricultural labourer who was on the Wesleyan 'plan' as a local preacher. Loveless had taught himself to read and write in the scanty time left to him after his long and arduous working day. But by the 1840s his case was exceptional among the Wesleyans, and for parallels we must look to the ranks of the Primitive Methodist local preachers. The same was true of chapel trustees, where the difference between the largely middle-class Wesleyans and the predominantly working-class Primitive Methodists can be quantified. The Trusts of some of the smaller Primitive Methodist chapels were composed entirely of labourers, some of whom could not even sign their names.[51]

The spread of Primitive Methodism in the rural south coincided with a period of economic depression, social unrest and violence, against a background of desperate poverty. Writing at the close of the century, one of the preachers stationed in Hampshire in the 1840s set down his recollections of those early days in the Shefford circuit and its offshoots. He detailed the abject poverty and illiteracy of the agricultural workers in the 1840s and the gulf between them and their 'betters', including the parish clergy. In contrast, he claimed, the Primitive Methodist preachers were close to the working classes, understood both their physical and their spiritual needs, and ministered to both alike, while acting as a moderating influence on extreme radicalism:

'They visited them in their homes, and conversed with them on religious subjects. They spoke in a language they understood. They partook of their scanty fare. They sympathised with them in their sorrows. In fact they were one with them. In this way

51. See further Section 6.5 below

they secured their esteem and affection and became a blessing to them ... When they were discontented with their condition and their superiors in social position, it was owing to the influence of their ministers that discontent did not take the form of violent and unlawful outbursts.'[52]

Though we have been taught to see the writer's final claim as two-edged, there is ample evidence to substantiate his assessment of the influence of Primitive Methodism on the rural working classes of southern England. Whether we go on to see popular evangelicalism as a substitute for, or an expression of, political radicalism is more a matter of interpretation than of the facts themselves.[53]

As in East Anglia, the most rapid expansion took place in the period following the collapse of the 'Swing' riots of 1830-31.[54] It may well, as Hobsbawm and Rude suggest, have thriven on the desperation and despair which were the aftermath of the riots. But the evidence is by no means unambiguous and leaves the question of the exact relationship between the two phenomena a matter of debate.

The Primitive Methodist membership figures from the south for the 1830s and 40s give very little support to the theory of a positive correlation between social unrest or economic strain and religious revival.[55] (Tables 4:3 and 4:4) It is true that membership increases were much higher in the early 1830s than in later years, reaching an annual growth rate of 36.2% in 1833 and 32.2% in 1834. But this is largely accounted for by the fact that the southern missions had only recently been launched and were still in an expansionist phase. In 1832, southern membership represented only 3.9% of the connexional total. It peaked at 6.1% in 1835, but then fell back and remained consistently around 5% for the rest of the period.

Table 4:8 attempts to compare the distribution of Swing Riots and of Methodism, both Wesleyan and Primitive, in the area. Of the 128 places in Hampshire, Dorset and South Wiltshire where rioting is recorded, only 23 had a Wesleyan society sufficiently well established to have built a chapel; in 11 other places a chapel was built between 1830 and 1851. The Primitive Methodists, who had only recently begun to establish their missions in the area, had only two chapels by 1830: at

52. W. Rowe in Aldersgate PM Magazine, 1900, pp 700-1

53. See Hempton, 1984, pp 74-6

54. J L and B Hammond, 1911, Chs X and XI; Hobsbawm and Rude, 1969

55. E.g. Hobsbawm, 1971, pp 129-30

Table 4:8 Distribution of 'Swing' Riots and Methodist Societies

	<u>Places with Riots</u>				
	Total	With Methodist Societies			
		before 1830		after 1830	
		WM	PM	WM	PM
Hants	67	10	-	5	13
Dorset	23	3	1	4	3
S. Wilts	38	10	1	2	6
Totals	128	23	2	11	22

	<u>Places without Riots</u>				
	Total	With Methodist Societies			
		before 1830		after 1830	
		WM	PM	WM	PM
Hants	152	12		3	10
Dorset	216	16		27	-
S. Wilts	100	9		6	7
Totals	468	37		36	17

Notes:

1. Larger towns, such as Portsmouth and Southampton, and others made up of several parishes, are treated as a single place.
2. The existence of a chapel is taken as the indication of an established society, likely to have some discernible influence on the local community.

Fisherton Anger near Salisbury and at Enmore Green near Shaftesbury. With or without the impetus of political unrest, they were poised for advance at the time of the riots. In any case, whatever might be the case later in the century, the surviving evidence firmly supports the statement of Hobsbawm and Rude that the Primitive Methodists were not 'at this stage very politically minded ... their eyes were fixed on another world'. [56]

It is difficult to discern any correlation between the occurrence of Swing riots and either the existence or absence of a Methodist society. On the one hand, the existence of a society with its own chapel was not in itself sufficient to prevent the rioting from breaking out in a particular community: two-fifths of those places where Methodism was already established by 1830 (25 out of 62) were affected by the riots. The movement which has been credited with saving England from a 'French Revolution' was clearly unable to save a number of parishes from more localized and ephemeral rioting. On the other hand, the growth of Methodism in the villages after 1830, while it may well have profited from the resulting frustration and desperation, had other, more varied causes. Neither economic nor political factors in themselves are sufficient to account for the establishment of new societies. Undoubtedly, the two decades following 'Swing' saw the spread of Primitive Methodism through the rural south. It may be significant that, in terms of new societies, the Primitive Methodists seem to have been twice as successful as the Wesleyans (22 to 11), in places where riots had occurred; whereas in places unaffected by the rioting, the position was reversed (17 to 36). But it does not follow that political unrest was the cause and religious revival the effect. An examination of individual examples suggests rather that the same factors may have been at work in both cases; i.e. that certain types of community were conducive to both political and religious unrest. [57] The larger towns, with their high proportion of artisans and their tradition of civic and cultural freedom, are the most obvious

56. Hobsbawm and Rude, 1969, p 65. cf. p 291: 'The religious revival of the early 1830s was an escape from, rather than a mobilisation for, social agitation'. Also pp 294-5: 'The process by which the hell-and-eternity-obsessed village Ranters of the 1830s turned into the union militants of the 1870s remains in obscurity.'

57. Cf. Hobsbawm and Rude, 1969, p 187: 'A nonconformist congregation in a village is a clear indication of some group which wishes to assert its independence of squire and parson ... It may be that the very existence of such a nucleus encouraged labourers to assert their rights.' Also Hobsbawm, 1964, Ch 3, esp p 31

examples. However, in this area, large towns were exceptional. More significant are the examples of the larger villages, such as Downton and Tisbury, where rioting occurred in a context which included a long-standing tradition of dissent.[58] The extensive parish of Downton, for example, had a Wesleyan society from the early years of the century and would have a Primitive Methodist society within five years of the Swing riots. But it would be difficult to say whether the Methodist presence was any more significant than the longstanding Baptist tradition in the parish (there were as many as four Baptist congregations within the parish in 1851). A village like Sixpenny Handley, described by the local justice as 'a singular place' with 'a wild dissolute population of poachers, smugglers and deer stealers,' was just the kind of place to attract the Primitive Methodist preachers as eminently in need of the Gospel and therefore a challenge to their heroic missionary endeavours. In John Wesley's terms, they were set on going not merely to those who needed them, but to those who needed them most. What from a twentieth century secular point of view might appear as exploitation of material and political desperation, was in their own eyes a response to human need.[59]

4.1.10 Opposition

By the very title of their movement the Primitive Methodists laid claim to having returned to the principles and conditions which had characterized the original Methodism of nearly a century earlier. Some features of the mission to southern England were reminiscent of the early days of Wesley's ministry; in other respects, times had clearly changed.

One such feature was the opposition to any attempt at open-air preaching, now almost entirely abandoned by the Wesleyan itinerants, who had largely become the pastors of established congregations. (The

58. The larger villages whose population had a higher proportion of rural craftsmen, were more prone to local rioting (Hobsbawm and Rude, 1969, Ch 3). These same factors were also conducive to evangelisation, whether by Methodists or others.

59. The origins of the Primitive Methodist cause at Handley remains obscure, but it appears as a preaching place on the Salisbury Circuit plan in 1844, as part of the Ringwood and Fordingbridge Mission. In 1851 the society's meeting place was 'not a separate building' (Religious Census; 271: 1/8), but they subsequently seem to have taken over a dissenting chapel, for which an earlier deed of conveyance has survived, dated 5th February 1834. This suggests the possibility that they may in this case have inherited an existing tradition of local dissent and built on it.

open-air evangelism of John Henley, junior minister in the Sherborne Circuit from 1828 to 1830, was exceptional enough to provoke a favourable comment from his Superintendent in the circuit book.)[60] Hostility to the Primitive Methodist preachers was widespread but not uniformly virulent in these southern counties, and took forms which would have been familiar enough ^{to} Wesley himself.[61] Attempts to deter or silence them took the form of throwing stones, rotten eggs, dirt, dead birds, cabbage stalks, mortar - or virtually any other missile ready to hand; using the local fire-engine to drench them with water (or, at Stockbridge, with blood from the slaughter house); and of setting dogs on them (at Hanging Langford) or even knocking them to the ground (e.g. at Andover).

A variety of means was used to drown the preacher's voice. At Ramsbury, where the opposition was particularly violent and persistent, they rang sheep-bells, blew horns, banged tin-cans and sang 'wicked songs' to disrupt the open-air meetings. At St. Mary Bourne they beat tin kettles, blew horns, fired guns and shouted. At Shaftesbury they rang the church bells; and elsewhere we read of a large drum, a drum and fife, tin horns and even 'artificial thunder' from the Dorchester theatre being used to silence them. Drunken behaviour and swearing were other common means of disrupting the meetings. At Stockbridge their opponents drew a rope around the audience and attempted, though unsuccessfully, to draw them into the river.

The female itinerants were particularly vulnerable in these circumstances and it needed considerable courage and strength of character on their part to endure such treatment. They seem seldom to have enjoyed any immunity by virtue of their sex, though the ringleader of the Ramsbury mob was so moved by the simple, neat appearance and calm demeanour of Elizabeth Smith that he turned on his followers and firmly forbade any of them to touch her. We are reminded again of Wesley's composure in the face of an angry mob and the effect of his looking their leaders in the eye.

These formidable difficulties did not prevent a number of women from taking their place alongside their male colleagues in the early

60. See above, pp 208-9

61. The details that follow are drawn from the lengthy accounts given in Petty, Kendall and the Aldersgate Primitive Methodist Magazine of 1900

missions. Their contribution was a considerable one. In all, at least eighteen women preachers were stationed in these southern missions and circuits in the first twenty years or so, chiefly in Hampshire (Table 4:9). Most of them were young; all but one were single (the exception, Mrs. Elizabeth Wheeldon, had travelled for one year under her maiden name, then returned to the itinerancy for a further four years after her first husband's death). Several (Ann Godwin, Mary Moore, Elizabeth Smith, Elizabeth Wheeldon and Jane Woolford) married itinerants, and so continued to serve in a subordinate role. Harriet Day and Mary Gribble each served for a single year only, and little more is known of them. Eliza Parfet, one of several born within the area, did not achieve even that. The whole of her life gives the impression of someone with little time to waste. Born at White Cross in the parish of Mere, on 1 December 1809, she was converted at the age of 17, placed on the plan as a local preacher later in the same year, and 'called out' to serve in the Motcombe Circuit on 31 March 1828, only to die on August 6th, before her name could appear in the Stations.

Inevitably, those who dared to show any sympathy or to offer support to the preachers were liable to a share in the hostility, and not merely while joining in one of the open-air meetings. Like the Methodists of Wednesbury, nearly a century earlier, the Primitive Methodists of the Micheldever area in the 1830s had their windows broken and their houses damaged, with windows and doors torn out by the mob. Many cottagers faced eviction for the crime of offering shelter to the preachers or permitting meetings to be held in their homes. William Hawkins, a convert at Weston (between Shefford and Newbury) found himself deprived of both home and job for entertaining the preachers, and Barnard Herrington was turned out of home at Woodyates by his landlord, but was granted an estate cottage by the Earl of Shaftesbury.

In such circumstances, it is hardly surprising to find frequent reference to the difficulty of obtaining permission to hold meetings in people's homes and the necessity of preaching in the open-air so long as the weather permitted. Thomas Russell damaged his health attempting to preach out of doors at Lambourn, and was given refuge by a sympathetic villager, but had to walk sixty miles through the snow to Salisbury and back to obtain a licence before he dared preach in the house. His fellow missionary, John Ride, summed up the local situation as 'very dark': 'Persecution prevailed mightily; I had never before

Table 4:9 Women preachers in southern P.M. circuits

	<u>Stations</u>		<u>Biographical details</u>
Jane Aycliffe	Micheldever	1837	1815-37. Died 29 Nov.
Eleanor Brown	Newbury	1847/49	1814-? Emigrated to Australia, 1849
Mary Bugden	Micheldever	1843	
M. Cutler	Motcombe	1832	
Harriet Day	Shefford	1836	Travelled 1 year only
J. Evans	Shefford	1832	
Ann Godwin	Shefford 1832, 1835/36		Travelled 11 years.
	Andover	1839/41	Married Henry Green.
	Micheldever	1842	
Mary Gribble	Shefford	1835	1812-? Travelled 1 year only
Ann Hayes (or Haines)	Micheldever	1835	Travelled 2 years
Fanny Hurle	Shefford	1834	1790-1858. Born Kingston Deverill. Married John Parker.
Mary Anna	Shefford	1833	1809-68. Born Motcombe.
Elizabeth Moore			Travelled 3 years. Married Richard Cordingley, 1834
Eliza Parfet	Motcombe	1828	1809-28. Born Mere.
Sarah Price	Motcombe	1830/31	1807-? Travelled 14 years
	Salisbury	1835/36	
	Andover	1837/38	
	Micheldever	1841	
Elizabeth Wheeldon	Shefford	1832/33	Née Hunt. Married (1) Richard Wheeldon, 1822 (2) Samuel West, 1835. Died 1867.
S. Wheeler	Shefford	1832	Travelled 3 years
Sophia Willis	Andover	1845/47	Travelled 6 years
Ann Woodward	Salisbury	1833/34	1810-? Travelled 7 years
Jane Woolford	Shefford	1835/36	Travelled 3 years. Married William Harvey, 1838

Sources: PM Minutes of Conference; PM Magazine, etc. For most of the biographical details I am indebted to Mrs. E. Dorothy Graham.

known such violent persecution. The farmers in general were much opposed to our community, and they threatened to turn the people out of work, and out of their houses, if they either went to hear us preach or entertained us. We had, therefore, to preach out of doors in many places, and had frequently to suffer the lack of food and lodgings. Some of our preachers had to wander the Downs all night, after preaching, having nowhere to sleep.'[62] In the circumstances, they counted themselves lucky (or blessed by Providence) if they were able to find a barn (as at Ramsbury and Hanging Langford) or a carpenter's shop (again at Ramsbury) in which to meet, especially when their numbers outgrew the cottagers' rooms. The earliest chapels were either acquired from other bodies (like the Wesleyan chapel at Fisherton Street, Salisbury), or built by the members themselves from chalk and other materials locally available (as at Barton Stacey). Occasionally, a well-wisher was influential or prosperous enough to build them a chapel, conveying it sooner or later to a body of Trustees. Several of the early chapels in the Andover Circuit were in private hands before being taken over by the Primitive Methodists;[63] while the site on which their chapel was built at St. Mary Bourne was actually bought from the Guardians of the Whitchurch Union and the parish overseers, a rare case of official connivance.[64]

For the cause of all this hostility we have to look beyond the drunken mobs and their ringleaders to those who encouraged and even suborned them. And though the bulk of the evidence comes, inevitably, from those who were the victims of violence, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the trouble stemmed from something more than idle high spirits or the unregenerate malevolence of the godless, and was instigated by those in positions of privilege and authority. Constables and beadles, local magistrates, the tenant farmers, landed gentry and even the parish clergy stand accused in the records of deliberately fomenting mob violence against the Primitive Methodist preachers and their followers. Barnard Herrington's son, William, a lifelong Primitive Methodist born at Woodyates in 1857, claimed that

62. Petty, 1860, p 219. John Nelson had a similar experience to this in the Weymouth Circuit, when after preaching at a fair, he was refused a bed at the inn where he had previously stayed and could find nowhere to sleep until a friendly miller took pity on him at the risk of losing his tenancy. (Kendall, 1905, p 210)

63. See Table 4:7

64. Conveyance, 29 May 1838

'the bitterest enemies to Village Methodism were the Church clergy. Whenever a Station minister or local preacher set his mind on preaching on a village green, he would always reckon his meanest and bitterest enemy would be the Parson.' His verdict is no doubt coloured by his father's experience, even more than his own; yet the cumulative evidence over a wide area gives it strong support.[65]

Most of the cases of clerical opposition given by Petty come from the Winchester diocese, and raise the possibility of encouragement by the diocesan authorities. The incumbent of one unnamed Hampshire parish threatened to prosecute the preachers as 'rogues and vagabonds', and interrupted one of them, George Watts, ordering his hearers 'to go into their houses and shut their doors and windows'. They were driven to obey him, by the fear of losing both their jobs and their homes.[66]

The Micheldever incumbent persuaded Sir Thomas Baring, 'upon the whole an amiable and liberal-minded gentleman', to intervene at the last moment and prevent the sale of a cottage and garden to the Primitive Methodists as a site for their chapel.[67] This intervention called forth a vigorous protest from a third party, the Rev. William Thorn, of Winchester, an Independent minister who was a sturdy champion of the Primitive Methodists. At Chaddleworth in Berkshire, the parish priest conspired with the local magistrate to trap Thomas Russell into laying himself open to a charge of unlicensed preaching.[68] The involvement of lesser officers such as parish constables, seems to have been at the instigation of their superiors. On occasions, they confessed their misgivings or reluctance to those they were sent to arrest. The Chaddleworth constable, on his way to deliver Russell to the magistrate, showed 'some dislike to the business he had in hand' and admitted 'several parish meetings have been held to contrive how to get you away, and as I live under the magistrate, I may lose my farm if I

65. See above, pp 230-2. For a neutral comment on such criticism, we may turn to the words of Caleb Bawcombe, the leading figure in W.H. Hudson's A Shepherd's Life, based on a real life shepherd from the downland village of Martin: 'We always say that the chapel ministers are good men: some say they be better than the parsons; but all I've knowed - all them that have talked to me - have said bad things of the Church, and that's not true religion.'

66. Petty, 1860, pp 282-3

67. Petty, 1860, p 353

68. Petty, 1860, p 223-4

do not do as I am ordered in this case.'[69] Reluctantly or otherwise, they carried out the orders of their superiors.

The constable at Stockbridge confined himself to forbidding George Wallis to preach and threatening to put him in the gaol; but when this failed he was seen encouraging the mob to drive out another of the preachers, William Fowler, by pelting him with rotten eggs.[70] At Andover constable and beadle joined forces to drag the preachers down the street, with the mob striking at them with a variety of weapons; while on another occasion the beadle pulled the chair from under the preacher, told him 'to be off about his business, and not come brawling and making a noise there', and encouraged the crowd to begin throwing eggs.[71] Sometimes the local constable was content with shutting his eyes to the violent treatment of the preachers. At Winchester, on the other hand, the police gave some protection to the four preachers who made the first attempt to preach there in April 1837, provided them with an escort when they left the town, and appeared as witnesses against some of the mob who were brought to trial. In this case, the magistrates too showed a willingness to maintain law and order and a sympathy with the law-abiding victims of mob violence.[72] But, as always when feelings run high in public places, it is not easy for the authorities to distinguish between the provoker and the provoked, and the charge of disrupting the peace may not always have been as deliberately malicious as the apologists of Primitive Methodism readily assumed.

In seeking some explanation of the virulence of this hostility, we must certainly begin with the prevailing political climate. Just as the hostility towards Wesley and his followers reached a climax in the 1740s and stemmed from the suspicion that they were crypto-Jacobites, so in the 1830s mob hysteria was whipped up by a dread of radicalism in any form. Ever since the beginning of the century, fears that the spirit of the French Revolution might break out on this side of the Channel had increasingly possessed the minds of the English ruling

69. Petty, 1860, p 224

70. Petty, 1860, pp 269-70

71. Petty, 1860, p 269; letter from Ann Turner, to her husband, the itinerant Samuel Turner, April 21st 1845, quoted in Aldersgate PM Magazine, 1900, p 699. She asks his advice on whether the beadle should be charged with assault.

72. Petty, 1860, p 281

classes, hindered even moderate and responsible moves towards political reform, and led to increasing intransigence on the part of the authorities towards any form of protest. Inflexibility led to frustration among those with genuine needs and grievances, and to over-reaction by those in power. The Peterloo 'massacre' of 1819, the aftermath of the 'Swing' riots at the beginning of the 1830s and the 'martyrdom' of the Tolpuddle labourers in 1834 were all expressions of this deep-seated fear of radicalism. There is little doubt that the authorities were deeply suspicious of a popular movement in which working-class preachers harangued their fellows in open-air gatherings and organised their converts into tightly-knit groups - and all this in a countryside still reeling from the agricultural rioting - and ^{prone} to detect subversive tendencies, if not intentions. The 'malicious or misguided persons' who persuaded the Marquis of Downside in the summer of 1830 that the new Shefford chapel 'was built for riotous purposes, and that the peace of the neighbourhood was disturbed by the dreadful proceedings carried on in it' were no doubt apprehensive of impending unrest as much as maliciously inclined.[73] Four years later, John Ride and Edward Bishop visited Micheldever to attend a Quarterly meeting and found notices posted forbidding the missionary meeting they had planned to hold that evening on waste ground in the village. When the meeting began in defiance of this notice, the constable demanded their names and incited the younger men and boys who were present to disturb their proceedings. Shortly afterwards they received a summons from Sir Thomas Baring of Stratton Park, the local magistrate, charging them 'with leading and heading a riotous mob, ... with being armed with bludgeons, and that they did by force and arms put His Majesty's peaceful subjects in fear, that they obstructed the thoroughfare, and [as a final, telling blow] that they were a nuisance.' All this was based on the constable's evidence, and when the case was heard at Winchester in July they had little difficulty in showing that their meeting had been a peaceful one for religious purposes. The charges against them would therefore have been dropped had they not refused to promise never to preach in the open-air at Micheldever again. When the case eventually came before the Quarter Sessions, the constable's evidence was dismissed as fabrication. The preachers refrained from pressing for the case to proceed, chiefly to spare their numerous

73. Petty, 1860, p 226. There was some theft and the destruction of threshing machinery in the parish on November 23rd that year.

friends among the agricultural labourers from appearing as witnesses for the defence and thereby risking reprisals from their employers. The result, nevertheless, was that their innocence of political subversiveness had been established, so that the publicity of the case brought a measure of relief from persecution and of official protection for those engaged in the mission.[74] A further consideration arises from the fact that the persecution was both more fierce and more persistent in Hampshire than in the adjoining counties. Here the social conditions, the size and nature of the majority of parishes and village communities, may have been one of the main factors. The complexity of the issue makes any attempt at quantification or any claim to objectivity suspect. Nevertheless, the larger, more nucleated villages that were characteristic of many parts of Hampshire, the widening gap between rich and poor, the number of tenant farmers dependent on the goodwill of their landlords, and the prevalence of estate parishes in which paternalism was a marked feature, all contributed to the situation we are examining. Petty himself noted, as far back as 1860, the number of communities in which 'the cottages are clustered together in considerable villages containing from three to twelve, or fifteen hundred persons', and quotes one of the early itinerants, Edward Bishop, to the effect that when they began work in the county in 1832, very few of the villages had any dissenting or Wesleyan congregation.[75] This was a feature more characteristic of central Hampshire than of the more scattered settlements of the Wiltshire downland, or the Dorset countryside.

But we are probably justified in drawing a distinction not merely between one county and another, but between different dioceses. Compared with the Dorset deanery and its remoteness from the rest of the Bristol diocese, the parishes of the Winchester diocese came under much closer scrutiny and more direct influence from above, at any rate from 1827 on, when Sumner became bishop. The period in which the anti-Methodist violence was at its worst was, in fact, the decade in which the new bishop was taking firmer control of affairs in his neglected diocese and beginning to attempt both administrative and spiritual reform. In his 'Charge to the Clergy' in 1834, he reviewed the Church's resources for instructing the inhabitants in religious

74. Petty, 1860, pp 275-9

75. Petty, 1860, p 268

matters and advocated the use of such 'expedients' as District Visiting Societies,[76] Bible Classes, Adult Teachings and Cottage Readings (carefully distinguished from acts of public worship).[77] It is difficult not to see this as a response to the challenge of nonconformity, and in particular of Primitive Methodism, which was spreading so rapidly at this time among the lower orders in rural Hampshire. What the Bishop thought of the popular evangelism of the 'Ranters' may be judged by his comments on the prayer meetings being held twenty years later as part of a series of highly emotional working-class missions by an evangelical Anglican chaplain: 'These meetings exhibit all those characteristic features which existed in the corresponding services conducted by Wesley and Whitefield, and still prevail in the so-called Revival Meetings on both sides of the Atlantic.'[78] At the very time when the Primitive Methodists were moving into both Hampshire and Berkshire, the diocese had as its new bishop a man of energetic administrative ability, determined to set its affairs in order. Ironically, he was also the first Evangelical bishop the diocese had seen; by the 1820s the earlier rapport between evangelicals inside and outside the Established Church had dwindled to negligible proportions.

That the preaching of the 'Ranters' was emotionally highly charged and often aroused a fervent response is conceded by friend and foe alike; but that it was politically subversive, except by implication, or, indeed that in the 1830s and 1840s it had any explicitly political content, is a very different matter. The more recent criticism, that it diverted the attention and energies of the working classes away from the radical campaign to redress gross political and economic injustice into spiritual and otherworldly channels, is much nearer the mark than the suspicions and fears of authority. When Samuel Heath first came into the Brinkworth area in 1824, he is said to have been armed with a single sermon - its theme 'the coming judgment'. And the sermon notes

76. There was a 'General Society for Promoting District Visiting' with headquarters at Exeter Hall in the Strand.

77. C R Sumner, 1834. In a subsequent Charge over thirty years later, Sumner noted among the recent innovations of which he approved, the holding of 'Cottage Lectures', previously frowned on as illegal and likely to encourage dissent; also the use of lay readers and Bible women, the provision of mission rooms, special services for the working classes, and Sunday Schools. ('They are the great engine of Dissent, and the seed plot of its numerical force.') (C R Sumner, 1867, pp 46ff)

78. G H Sumner, 1876, pp 374-5

that have survived suggest very clearly that much the same might be said of the local preacher, Barnard Herrington, towards the middle of the century.[79] In sermon after sermon, Herrington's main theme is divine justice and judgment, against the background of the eternal torment of Hell, and with all too little emphasis on the divine love. Still less, in the midst of this orthodox individualistic evangelicalism is any place found for the social or political dimensions of the gospel. Magistrates and clergy and the aristocracy itself could sleep easier in their beds than they realised so far as the impact of Primitive Methodism on the lower orders was concerned - at least, in the short run. The more long-term effects of the gospel on men's expectations and aspirations were another matter.

4.1.11 Support

The Primitive Methodists were fortunate enough to find friends and supporters as well as enemies, though few of them were men of influence or high office. When Thomas Russell was imprisoned at Wantage, his case and the cause of religious freedom were vigorously and successfully taken up by the Independent, Baptist and Wesleyan ministers, and by John Wilkes, the radical M.P. who was secretary of the Religious Protection Society.[80] The Rev. William Thorn, Independent minister of Winchester, championed their cause on several occasions: when Russell and Ride found themselves in the county gaol in the summer of 1834, he visited them and lent them books from his own library;[81] when the preachers first came into Winchester itself in 1837 he arranged police protection for them in anticipation of hostile interruption;[82] and in the 1840s he wrote to Sir Thomas Baring protesting vigorously at his treatment of the Micheldever society.[83] It was a Winchester tradesman, Mr. Topp, 'a spirited man, independent of favours and fearless of frowns', who gave practical support when the first camp meeting in the neighbourhood was held on the downs in May 1834, providing a wagon to serve as pulpit and free provisions at

79. Herrington's sermon notes have survived in private hands. Nowhere is there any hint of any more than individualistic operation of judgment.

80. Petty, 1860, p 225-6

81. Petty, 1860, p. 279

82. Petty, 1860, p 280

83. Petty, 1860, p 353

midday for all taking part.[84]

Robert Tasker, the journeyman blacksmith who became a successful ironmaster at the Waterloo Works in Abbots Ann just outside Andover, though attached to the Congregational chapel, was also a lifelong champion of the Primitive Methodists, giving them his protection and serving himself as a local preacher.[85] His will included bequests to the Wesleyan Missionary Society and the Primitive Methodist society at Newbury, as well as to the Baptists, Congregationalists and others.

At Shaftesbury, Samuel Turner was championed by a philanthropic Quaker, John Rutter, when threatened by the magistrates with imprisonment overnight.[86] But often it was much humbler folk, who risked a great deal to lend their support to the cause: Mr. and Mrs. Wells of Shefford, who were the first to invite Thomas Russell into their home and to offer a site for a chapel;[87] the widow of a Baptist minister at Ramsbury, who gave shelter to Russell and Ride at the height of the violence shown them;[88] and even on occasions some of the unconverted, like those members of William Fowler's audience at Whitchurch in 1833, who turned on an interrupter and 'thrashed him for his rudeness'.[89] But perhaps the most unlikely ally was the local prize-fighter from Coombe, several of whose relatives had found blessing from the preaching of Thomas Russell; he accompanied the preacher to Hurstbourne Tarrant, where his presence was sufficient to ensure him a hearing unmolested.[90]

Later in the century, the Primitive Methodists began to win more and more middle-class support, though remaining more working-class than any of the other Methodist denominations; and they were able to improve their public image, particularly by building larger and more pretentious chapels. Camp-meetings continued well into the present century, though in a more organised and subdued form, so that they

84. Petty, 1860, p 273-4

85. L.T.C. Rolt, 1969, pp 27-9. A religious tract based on his career was published under the title, The Poor Blacksmith made Rich.

86. Aldersgate PM Magazine, 1900, p 526

87. Petty, 1860, p 220

88. Petty, 1860, p 221

89. Petty, 1860, p 271

90. Petty, 1860, p 227

became little more than open-air rallies. In the urban areas of late Victorian England, they found themselves increasingly competing with the Salvation Army and the Anglo-Catholic missions for the allegiance of the Protestant working-class population; but in the more rural areas their predominance continued.

4.2. The Bible Christians

4.2.1. Origins

At almost exactly the same time as the first Primitive Methodist preachers were penetrating into the area from the north, the Bible Christians launched their first missions along the south coast. Eventually, the two movements would overlap, but at first each was in competition only with the existing Wesleyan circuits.

The Bible Christian movement began nearly a decade later than Primitive Methodism and in an entirely different part of the country. But the two movements were similar in origin and had several features in common. Either could be described in words which Thomas Shaw uses of the Bible Christians: 'an evangelistic movement which the parent Methodism could not contain because ... it was not under the control of the authorities'.^[91] The formal origin of the movement can be dated in 1815, with the expulsion of a Wesleyan local preacher, William O'Bryan, from the Stratton Mission in north-east Cornwall. But it had its roots in his earlier experience as an evangelist who found it impossible to confine himself within the geographical and disciplinary boundaries of Wesleyanism. In 1810, despite being turned down as a candidate for the ministry, O'Bryan took upon himself a mission to the countryside around Newquay, which was as yet untouched by Methodism. Failing to obtain official blessing or recognition for the societies he had formed, he nevertheless left them in charge of the Wesleyan itinerants, and set out to evangelize new areas on the western edge of Bodmin Moor, adjoining the Bodmin and Liskeard circuits, and then, in 1814, turned his attention to the border country between Cornwall and Devon. The Stratton Mission had been one of the first fruits of the home missionary initiative launched by the Wesleyan Conference of 1805 at the instigation of Dr. Thomas Coke. The scheme was to send Home Missionaries to areas still largely untouched by the Methodist revival

91. T Shaw, 1965, p 1

with a view to forming societies there which might develop into new self-sufficient circuits. North-east Cornwall and north-west Devon were one of these areas. In the event, the vision which had launched this scheme was hampered by limited resources in a connexion that was in danger of outgrowing its financial and administrative strength; few of the missions became self-supporting, and by 1817 Jonathan Crowther was writing about them as 'so many mill stones hung about the neck of the Connexion'.[92]

It was in these circumstances that the restless evangelistic spirit of William O'Bryan chafed against the restraints and delays of Wesleyan discipline and eventually went its own way. Returning from a fund-raising trip to west Cornwall in the summer of 1815, he found himself suspended from membership in the St. Austell Circuit for absenting himself from his class meeting, and out of favour in the Stratton Mission following a change of superintendent. By the beginning of October he had lost both his membership and his status as a Local Preacher in the Wesleyan Connexion, and a new denomination had been born, represented by the handful of sympathisers who stood by him.

Before long the new Connexion was centred on the home of John and Mary Thorne at Lake Farm in the parish of Shebbear. Their son, James, became O'Bryan's closest ally and supporter, a major influence on the denomination during its formative years, and successor to O'Bryan when the latter severed his connection with the movement in 1829. The West Country remained the heartland of the Bible Christians, and they were never as numerous or as widely distributed as the Primitive Methodists; but a number of missions further afield were launched from the 1820s on. These included missions in Kent (1820), in London (1822), and on the Isle of Wight (1823), which became the base from which the Hampshire mainland was evangelized.[93]

Although O'Bryan's avowed intention at the outset of the movement had been that of filling the Wesleyan gaps, this did not long remain the reality as the Bible Christians spread beyond the West Country. Both in Kent (in the Medway area) and in London (close to City Road Chapel) they found themselves working in localities where Wesleyan societies

92. J Crowther, 1817, p 16. Cf. J.A. Vickers, 1969, pp 304-6

93. Shaw, 1965, pp 25-30

were already well established; and the same was largely true, as we shall see, both of the Hampshire missions and, at the end of the 1850s, of the Portland Mission. With the passage of time, they also became more urbanised, with circuits for the most part centred on town chapels and congregations, with far fewer rural societies like those that were characteristic of the Primitive Methodists. Both of these factors influenced their growth and distribution.

4.2.2. The South Coast Missions

Credit for initiating the Bible Christian work on the Isle of Wight belongs very clearly to a young woman whose courage and dedication more than matched that of the women preachers among the Primitive Methodists. Mary Toms, a native of Tintagel, was brought up among the Wesleyans, but joined the Bible Christians after hearing O'Bryan preach in Plymouth. She became passionately convinced of a call to undertake a mission to the Isle of Wight, a place she had not previously heard of, much less visited. She gained O'Bryan's blessing for her venture, but no support was available from the connexion's Mission Fund and she had to beg the cost of her passage from well-wishers. Sailing from Plymouth at the close of the 1823 Conference, she landed at West Cowes in the middle of Regatta week, found shelter with a friendly Wesleyan family, and on the following Sunday preached in the open-air at East Cowes. Large numbers gathered to hear her the following day, drawn in part by the novelty of a woman evangelist, and she was invited to visit other parts of the island. The need for reinforcements was already obvious. Six weeks later she was joined by Mrs. O'Bryan and Eliza Dew, (neither of whom was an accredited itinerant) and early in October James Thorne arrived from London and formed the first society on the island.[94]

None of these reinforcements remained permanently on the island, but the following year William Bailey, Mary Billing and Mary O'Bryan (William's daughter) were all stationed here.[95] Some time in 1824 Mary Toms married a local man and disappeared from the official stations, though by no means from the scene of activity. Apart from her continuing involvement in the Isle of Wight Mission, she was the

94. J. Woolcock, 1897 pp 17-24

95. Woolcock also names William Strongman, but his official station in the Minutes for 1824 was Chatham.

first Bible Christian to preach in Chichester in 1833.[96]

Two years after establishing this bridgehead on the Isle of Wight, the Bible Christians felt ready to move to the mainland, and two new Missions were formed. Mary Billing was transferred to the Portsea Mission, while Richard Uglow came from the Buckfastleigh Circuit to take charge of the Southampton Mission.

Two notable features of this early work are the prominence of women preachers and their youthfulness. Mary Toms was still a 'young woman' when she arrived on the island, Mary O'Bryan a mere girl of 17. (Their male colleagues were a little older, though still young men in their twenties.) In one respect, these early Bible Christian women preachers more than matched their Primitive Methodist counterparts, since they were sometimes used as the very spearhead of the new missions and worked in comparative isolation, rather than as support troops in association with male colleagues.

The Portsea Mission became known for a time as the 'Portsea and Surrey Mission', an indication that an attempt was being made to extend the work inland. From 1830 on, this northern extension became a separate Farnham Mission and falls outside our present survey, as does the advance eastwards across the Sussex border and the formation of a Chichester circuit in 1834. The Southampton Mission had a more chequered history, dying out after three years, and reappearing again only in 1840 as the Botley Mission, from which Southampton was eventually re-missioned.[97] These missions were at first listed as part of the London District, but in 1826 a Portsmouth District was formed.

Numerically, these missions made a hesitant start, and membership did not quicken pace until the 1840s,[98] as the figures in Table 4:10 show. At Portsmouth there was a faltering in the mid 1850s, whereas Southampton after its abortive start, showed more steady growth from the 1840s on. But the membership totals in all cases remained relatively small, despite an overall rise in proportion to the figures

96. J and H Vickers, 1979, p 10

97. From 1854-64 it was known as the 'Botley and Southampton Circuit', and then became once again the 'Southampton Circuit'.

98. Except for the Surrey Mission, where a quite different pattern emerges: a rapid initial growth, followed by steady decline throughout the rest of the century

Table 4:10 Bible Christian Membership: In decades

	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
Connexional total	6,650	11,353	13,324	16,866	18,050	21,209	25,769	28,315
Portsea	} 98{	28	186	125	183	363	446	570
Farnham		143	308	211	115	94	86	52
Southampton	-	15	78	119	285	216	305	395
Total: Hants & Surrey	98	186	572	455	583	673	837	1,017
% growth	-	90	208	-20	28	15	24	22
% of connexional total	1.5	1.6	4.3	2.7	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.6

for the connexion as a whole. The Bible Christians had chosen to work in areas where they were for the most part in direct competition with the Wesleyans and increasingly, as time went on, with the Primitive Methodists (see Table 4:11) and this made their task all the harder.[99] On the other hand, these were the very locations in which there was a concentration of population, and a growth rate well above the county average; so that, despite the presence of rival denominations, the potential was much greater than in the scattered rural areas. That this factor may have made a crucial difference is suggested by a comparison of the relative success of the Portsea Mission with the initial failure at Southampton, where it proved difficult to sustain the outlying causes in the absence of an established society in the town.

4.2.3. The Portsea Mission

Quarterly Meeting minutes and accounts have fortunately survived from the earliest days of the mission, enabling us to trace much of the ebb and flow of its fortunes. By December 1825 Mary Billing had established three regular preaching places: in Landport, Copnor and Southsea. Landport was a developing area to the north-east of Portsea and as a growth area of the town offered better opportunities than the more settled communities of Portsmouth and Portsea, where Anglicans and other nonconformist groups were already at work. The Anglicans did not, in fact, open their first place of worship in Portsea until 1828, but the Wesleyans had had their St. Peter's Chapel in Daniel Street since 1800. They also had a base for further developments in the Landport area in their Oxford Street Sunday School, started in 1805, but it was forty years before they were able to capitalise on this by opening 'Wesley' Chapel in Arundel Street.

Copnor was a transient venture, disappearing from the records in the autumn of 1826. So did Southsea, but only to be replaced by references to 'Bethesda', the chapel in Little Southsea Street which became the centre of the work at the southern end of Portsea Island. Early in 1826, a room was rented at Gosport (referred to from 1828 on as 'Hope Chapel'); and subsequently there are references to Frensham, Hayling

99. The later Bible Christian Mission in Portland, launched in 1857, is an even clearer case of a decision to begin work in an area where the Wesleyans were already well entrenched and the Primitive Methodists had also established societies. See below, pp 427-8

Table 4:11 Early Bible Christian chapels and their rivals

		<u>Other denominations in the area</u>
1. <u>Portsea Mission</u>		
(a) Landport		
'Emmanuel', York Street[1] <u>replaced by</u> Stamford Street	1825	<u>Anglican:</u> All Saints, Portsea, 1828 (District Chapel) <u>Wesleyan:</u> St. Peter's Chapel, Portsea, 1800; Oxford Street Sunday School, 1805 succeeded by 'Wesley', Arundel St., 1845
(b) Southsea		
'Bethesda', Little Southsea Street[2] <u>replaced by</u> Grosvenor Street	1825	<u>Anglican:</u> St. Paul's, 1822 (Chapel of Ease) <u>Wesleyan:</u> Little Southsea Street taken over from Bible Christians, c.1850 <u>PM:</u> 'Jubilee' Chapel, 1861
	1847	
(c) Gosport		
'Hope Chapel' (rented room)	1826	<u>Anglican:</u> Holy Trinity, 1696; St. Matthew, 1846, 'Additional Church' <u>Wesleyan:</u> 1810
2. <u>Botley/Southampton Mission</u>		
Botley		
None	-	<u>Anglican:</u> New parish Church, 1836 <u>Independent:</u> 1806
West End		
'Ebenezer' Chapel	1847	<u>Anglican:</u> St. James's Chapel (South Stoneham parish) <u>Wesleyan:</u> Burnett's Lane, 1826
Bishopstoke		
'Providence' Chapel, Bishopstoke Common	1848	<u>Anglican:</u> New Parish Church, 1825 <u>Wesleyan:</u> Crowdhill, 1822 <u>Independent:</u> Horton Heath, 1820
Upham		
Lower Upham	1851	<u>Anglican:</u> in centre of main village

Table 4:11 continued

Southampton		<u>Other denominations in the area</u>
'Travellers' Lodging House'	1852	<u>Anglican:</u> St. Mary's; Newton Proprietary Chapel, 1850; Holy
Millbank Street, Northam	1854	Trinity: chapelry 1828
<u>probably replaced by</u>		<u>Wesleyan:</u> East Street, 1850
'Jubilee' Chapel		<u>PM:</u> St. Mary Street, 1838
		Also in St. Mary's parish:
		Unitarian c.1845
	1863	Independent 1849

Notes:

1. Built in 1820, but used by the Bible Christians from 1825. Known at first as 'Messiah Chapel', but renamed 'Emmanuel' after they had bought the premises in 1827 (Quarterly Meeting records).
2. W.D. Cooper says "probably built in 1822", but the 1851 Census gives the date as 1825 and it is not referred to by name in the circuit records until March 1827.

Island, Chichester, Curbridge, Selsey, Cosham, Hedge End and West End. The subsequent disappearance of most of these does not usually indicate their demise, but rather the proliferation of new missions, e.g. the Surrey (or Farnham) and Chichester Missions, in the 1830s.

The close association of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight missions in these early days is reflected in the fact that the accounts for the March quarter, 1826, include not only Mary Billing's travelling expenses, but those of Richard Uglow in the Southampton Mission and William Gibbs on the Isle of Wight, as well as those of William O'Bryan, who apparently came in person to view the prospect. From September 1826, the mission's staff was increased to two - a man and woman team until well into the 1830s.

The earliest membership records are those for October 1828, when the mission was again reduced to three centres:

	Membership	On Trial
Emmanuel [Landport]	40	8
Bethesda [Southsea]	22	3
Hope [Gosport]	8	0
Totals	70	11

This modest result of three years' labour in a heavily populated district was scarcely impressive except in terms of dedicated effort. Nor was there at first any dramatic improvement. By 1840 the total was down to 30 (18 at Emmanuel and 12 at Bethesda), with none on trial, but the next decade brought more sustained growth to 157 in 1850, mainly at Southsea, where the opening of a new chapel in Grosvenor Street in 1847 brought a dramatic increase of membership from 16 to 110 in three years. The need 'to build a larger chapel in a better locality', noted in 1845, had been fully confirmed. But the mid 50s saw another sharp decline, especially in 1854, with only a gradual recovery:

	July		October	December	Total
Emmanuel	49	35	37	41	
Grosvenor Street	94	57	57	83	
Totals	143	92	94	124	

The roots of the trouble, as subsequent developments made plain, lay in personal animosities which continued to plague the society long after the period with which we are now concerned.

In view of the figures, it is hardly surprising to find the mission staff reduced to one preacher throughout the lean years of the 1840s and 50s. A request to the 1852 Conference to supply a second preacher 'with a view to afford more itinerant preachers' labours to the Chapels and to enlarge the Mission' met with no immediate response, but the next year a second preacher was appointed to divide his time between the Portsea and Chichester Missions. Following the drop in membership, this arrangement was abandoned in 1854 and Portsea reverted to being a 'single station' for the rest of the decade.

Reports from the Mission make it clear that the difficulties to be faced were not all internal ones. In the spring of 1839, Nicholas Collins reported as second preacher 'that he had had some powerful and delightful meetings in the country part of the Mission'.^[100] But two years later of the two preaching places in town, to which the Mission had been reduced, Bethesda was described as 'very dull', but a 'better report' could be made of Emmanuel Chapel, where the several new members included two drunkards 'brought out of the lowest dregs of society'. 'The attendance at the public service is good, thirteen additional sittings are let.' But the report ends on a more guarded and practical note: 'The mission is however expensive at present, and I see but little view of its being otherwise.'^[101] And a few months later, despite new members in the society, the congregation at Emmanuel had decreased; while the part of Southsea in which Bethesda was situated was described as a 'barren spot' and a 'wicked neighbourhood'.^[102] In such circumstances only determined dedication was likely to persist until the improvement in the Mission's fortunes from the 1870s on.

4.2.4 The Botley/Southampton Mission

In some respects the early fortunes of the Bible Christians in the Southampton area were a re-run of what the Wesleyans had experienced in the previous century. Initial efforts came to nothing and a fresh start had to be made, though in the case of the Bible Christians this took the form of a mission centred on the villages to the east and north-east of the town.

100. BC Magazine, 1840, p 24

101. BC Magazine, 1842, p 22

102. BC Magazine, 1842, p 75

The first missionary appointed to the Southampton Mission, in 1825, Richard Uglow, was succeeded in 1826 by William Skinner and in 1827 by William Gibbs and Eliza Dew, both of whom had spent the previous year in the Portsea Mission. Despite this doubling of staff, the Mission seems to have sunk without trace at that point. No further appointments were made to Southampton until 1840, when a fresh start was made under the title of the 'Botley Mission'.

There is no firm evidence that a Bible Christian society - much less a chapel - ever existed in Botley itself, which seems to have lent its name to the mission simply by virtue of being central to the area. The focus had shifted for a time away from Southampton. Whereas Gibbs's address in 1827 had been given as W. Young's, 16 Bridge Street, [Southampton], Richard Westington, who was sent to revive the work, took up residence at Moor Green, a hamlet three or four miles north-east of the town, in the sprawling parish of South Stoneham. His successors until the mid-1850s lived at West End nearby.

Progress was slow and arduous. Unlike their largely urban fellows in Portsea Island, but like so many of the Primitive Methodists, the Bible Christians here encountered a measure of hostility. In the middle of his second year in the Mission, Westington reported:

'The state of this Mission is not so cheering as I could wish, nor has the gospel met with that kind of reception which it ought to have done. A great many are strangers to its saving influence, and are doing all they can to prevent its progress ... The tide of persecution has ran very high of late ...'

He went on to describe how a group of young men had recently disturbed a meeting by throwing stones and bricks at the chapel, doing it considerable damage. Despite this, congregations had increased and there was an increase of six members in the quarter.[103] It is possible that the unidentified chapel to which he refers was at Botley itself, and that the strength of the opposition caused the Bible Christians to abandon the village and concentrate their efforts elsewhere. More probably, there was some kind of preaching-place at West End, where the itinerant was living, a forgotten predecessor of the 'Ebenezer' chapel opened in 1847. At any rate, that is the earliest chapel of which we have any firm evidence (See Table 5:15). In the summer of 1843 we find them using a small Baptist chapel, probably the

103. BC Magazine, 1842, pp 74-5

one at Hedge End, for an evening meeting. The Mission was 'in a low state' but there was 'a very large field for missionary labours'. Opposition, however, had not yet ceased and the itinerant, Francis Haycraft, had to take three young men to court for disturbing one of the meetings. They were obliged to pay costs and promised not to continue their disturbance.[104] This is both reminiscent of, and at the same time worlds away from the prolonged persecution endured by the Primitive Methodists.

Since they had chosen to concentrate initially on the villages, the presence of other Christian congregations was a much more significant factor for the Bible Christians in this Mission than it was in the Portsea area. This may well have been the vital factor in Botley itself, where a new parish church nearer the centre of the village had been built as recently as 1836, and where there was also an established Independent congregation. At West End, one of five tythings in the extensive parish of South Stoneham, the Anglicans had a chapel of ease and a vicarage, with a living worth £330. The Wesleyans had been here since the 1820s, but their chapel in Burnetts Lane was some distance to the north-east of the village, beyond Moorgreen. The Bible Christians built their chapel at Hatch Bottom, considerably nearer the centre. Upham, too, had a parish church, but no Nonconformist groups, and the Bible Christians settled on the outlying hamlet of Lower Upham.

But the clearest example is that of Bishopstoke, where a chapel was built not down in the 'church village' (a term used in the magazine, reminiscent of the Cornish expression 'church town'), but out at the common. A local preacher named Pearce was the first to preach at Bishopstoke, initially under some trees near the churchyard. Only a few turned out to hear him, until he took up the suggestion that he should try the common, half a mile or so away to the north, where most of the village folk lived. He did so with more success, despite the reticence of the local residents when faced with so unfamiliar a spectacle.

'They would come and just peep round the corner and then back again, as if some monster were come amongst them. [But] in the course of time they came and stood at a distance and heard for themselves.'

With the onset of winter, the need for a preaching-house became clear,

104. BC Magazine, 1843, pp 194-5

and they were offered the use of a room in a cottage by a labourer and his wife, until a chapel could be built on part of their garden. The Benhams did not fear any recriminations from the local rector 'as they never received anything from him'; and their landlord, despite being a supporter of the Wesleyan Association, gave his consent. So the 'neat, commodious little chapel' was opened on Christmas Eve, 1848, with the celebrations continuing the following day. 'The people being poor, the collections were as good as we could expect,' but a debt of about £44 remained.[105]

The return to Southampton itself seems to have been delayed for some years, or was so tentative that it left no permanent trace. But by the spring of 1851 the Bible Christians were worshipping in a room over a workshop somewhere in St. Mary's parish. It was a modest beginning, recording attendances of 14 or 15 on the morning and evening respectively of Census Sunday; and the minister was still living out at West End.[106] But eighteen months later the next minister, William Hill, registered premises known as the 'Travellers Lodging House' in Simnel Street as a place of worship.[107] Hill was an experienced itinerant who had been in the ministry since 1825 and had married one of the women preachers, Jane Bray. He had served one year in the Isle of Wight early in his ministry and had two terms, each of three years, in the Botley Mission, the second of which, 1852-55, seems to have been a turning-point in its fortunes. The Simnel Street premises presumably continued in use until 'Jubilee' Chapel was opened in 1863, a further sign that the tide had turned.

4.3 Tent Methodism

Although less well known than either the Primitive Methodists or the Bible Christians because it remained more localized and proved more transient, Tent Methodism shared some significant features with these other movements, arising out of the dissatisfaction and frustration felt by laymen at the slackening of evangelical outreach in the Wesleyan Connexion. Although it survived as a separate movement only for a few years and was overshadowed - if not actually taken over - by the arrival of the first Primitive Methodist missionaries in the south,

105. BC Magazine, 1849, pp 115-16

106. Ecclesiastical Census 105/1/1

107. Registration, 17 November 1852 (PRO RG.450)

it had in the meantime made some impact on one or two individual Wesleyans and on some of the places within the area of the present study. It therefore has a place, however minor, in this account.

The surviving evidence for the history of Tent Methodism is very limited in scope and almost entirely one-sided. Local Wesleyan records for the period have largely disappeared, while at connexional level the Wesleyans seem to have adopted a policy of ignoring the new movement. For the most part, therefore, the detailed evidence derives from the Tent Methodists themselves and their sympathisers, and is undisguisedly partisan.[108]

The movement began in, and remained centred on, the Bristol area,[109] where in April 1814 two or three Wesleyan local preachers pitched a large tent on waste ground adjoining the village of Whitchurch and 'consecrated' it to the service of God. The venture was 'characterised by simplicity, benevolence and zeal': 'They intended no schism, they sought no applause, their efforts were only engaged for the extinction of vice, and the promotion of virtue'.[110]

Prominent among the local preachers involved were George Pocock and John Pyer. Pocock was a man of independent means who was the proprietor of an 'academy' in Bristol. Pyer was a man of humbler accomplishments who became a full-time missionary in 1818 and eventually, after the demise of the movement, a Congregational pastor at South Molton and Devonport. Pocock eventually found his way back into the Wesleyan fold.

That first summer the tent was pitched in the vicinity of Bristol and Bath, and also further afield in and around Swindon and Newbury. The Wesleyan Conference, which happened to be meeting in Bristol that year,

108. The most detailed account of the early years of the movement is a series of articles in the Tent Methodist Magazine, Vol. 1 (1823) - probably the only volume to be published. (The writer speaks of a more detailed 'Tent History, now in a course of publication', but I have not been able to trace a copy of this.) Sympathetic reports also appeared in The London Christian Instructor or Congregational Magazine, Vol. V (1822), pp. 107-8 and The Christian Reformer or New Evangelical Miscellany Vol. VIII (1822), pp. 389-95. There is a chapter on Pocock in G. Eayres, 1911 and a Memoir of Pyer by K.P. Russell, 1865.

109. This, rather than 'the Thames-Avon-Kennet area' named by Currie (PWHs XXXVI 71) was the heartland of Tent-Methodism, and, as the rest of this section will show, the link with the arrival of Primitive Methodism in Berkshire and North Wiltshire was more tenuous and less direct than Currie implies.

110. Tent Methodist Magazine, p. 31.

expressed approval of the work. Some of the itinerants gave it their individual support.

During the next two or three years, the work expanded and met with some success, but also with a more equivocal response from the Wesleyan authorities. The spontaneity of the venture, coupled with encouraging results, seems to have given cause for second thoughts. True, the preacher appointed as superintendent of the Bristol Circuit in 1816, Walter Griffith, was at first sympathetic and supportive, but in general the official line had hardened. As early as 1815, members who at the love-feasts spoke appreciatively of the work of the Tent Methodists were rebuked and discouraged; and as time went on any local preacher who gave them his support came under official censure.

Despite this, the work flourished to a modest degree. A second larger tent, was brought into use in 1817 and the following summer the range of the mission was significantly extended in a tour which took in Marlborough, Wantage, Hungerford, Andover, Stockbridge, Southampton and the Isle of Wight. One result of this was the support of several men of substance, including Harry Noyes of Thruxton near Andover; another was the appointment of Pyer as full-time missionary.

There is no evidence that the itinerants stationed in the circuits affected by this almost spontaneous expansion were consulted or forewarned, and this, coupled with the very success of the mission, is what seems to have precipitated a clash. The power struggle between the itinerant preachers and leading laymen (represented respectively by the Conference and the Trustees of some of the larger chapels) which had dominated much of the first decade after Wesley's death had left the preachers in a vulnerable and defensive state of mind. As William O'Bryan found in the West Country about the same time, any activity not under the control of the itinerants was suspect and frowned on, and could lead to expulsions.

In the case of the Tent Methodists, John Pyer's employment as a kind of free-lance missioner added fuel to the fire. In the early months of 1818 the success of Tent Missions at Frampton Cotterell and Dursley, Glos., was accompanied by growing disquiet on the part of the itinerants. The Conference of that year declined to give its official approval to the work, but stationed a missioner in the Frampton-Olveston area to take pastoral charge of the converts. That

autumn the new Superintendent of the Dursley Circuit bluntly told Pyer that he had 'no right to preach in any part of his circuit without asking his leave' - an intriguing echo of the attitude of the parish clergy to John Wesley's itinerant ministry nearly a century earlier.

Matters finally came to a head in January 1820. Two issues had become intertwined. Pyer was under threat of expulsion from the society by the Bristol Superintendent, Thomas Ward, who felt his authority challenged. At the same time, the Itinerants were now openly insisting that the work must be placed firmly under their control if it was to be officially recognised and supported. A meeting between the two parties on January 31st seemed at first to have broken the deadlock. Pyer's supporters won a concession, that his case should have a fair hearing before any other issues were discussed. In return they accepted three undertakings:

that a tent should be erected in a circuit only with the Superintendent's consent; that only properly accredited local preachers should be involved in the work; and that all converts should be encouraged to join the Methodist society without delay.

This was a reasonable and practical compromise.

But the truce proved an illusory one. Soon after the meeting Pyer was expelled without further enquiry into his case, followed by Pocock who had protested at the way Pyer's case was handled. Even if they still had any wish to remain within the Wesleyan Connexion the leading Tent Methodists were presented with a fait accompli and henceforth the movement went its own way. In March 1820 they issued their first class ticket (referred to as a 'membership card'), depicting the roughly circular Tent and bearing Gamaliel's advice from Acts 5:38: 'And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone ...' The following month a chapel was offered to them and their first society was formed, with 31 members and four preachers; others followed at Bath, Dursley and elsewhere. The response of the Wesleyan Conference later in the summer was to impose sanctions on any member actively participating in their meetings. Despite this, a year later the movement spread to Manchester, inspired by the gift of a tent by a Mancunian gentleman living in Marlborough. By the end of the year they had a chapel at Ancoats, but the leading figure, Peter Arrive, was expelled by the Wesleyans in a manner similar to Pyer and Pocock.

The 'Rules' drawn up probably as early as 1820 clearly reflect the circumstances which gave rise to the new movement, and embody much of its ethos. Rule 15 provides that 'No member shall be excluded ... but for the breach of some scriptural or moral obligation', and Rule 17, that any accused person 'shall have full liberty to be present in the meeting [of Preachers, Pastors and Deacons] during the whole time his case is under consideration.'

More positively, Rule 28 lays down that 'From Easter to October there shall be no preaching on a Sabbath evening in any chapel or other building, provided convenience will allow of preaching in the open air, or under a Tent, in the neighbourhood of such chapel or building. Let us remember we are sent "after that which is lost".' A 'Conclusion' at the end of the Rules refers to the Movement as 'this cast-away scion of Methodism', with an oblique reference to the Wesleyan itinerants as the 'false shepherds' of Ezekiel 34.

The movement seems to have petered out, rather than come to any formal end. In 1823, a Tent Methodist Magazine appeared, though it does not seem to have survived beyond that year. A Home Missionary Society was established, but by 1830 Pyer had given up his position of missionary and was engaged by the Christian Instruction Society of London. Pocock eventually made his peace with the Bristol Methodists.[111]

Harry Noyes' flirtation with the Tent Methodists in 1818 seems to have been a passing one, confined to the earliest phase, when the movement was still contained within Wesleyanism. His continuing loyalty to the Wesleyans is evidenced by his appointment as a trustee of both the Andover and the Nether Wallop chapels in 1819; and in the case of the Andover chapel, his trusteeship was renewed twenty years later.

The case of William Sanger of Salisbury is a more interesting one. His family had connections with the Church Street society which lasted from the late 18th century until recent years, beginning with his father, a baker of the same name. William Sanger Junior was a leather-cutter. Both father and son signed the form registering the new Church Street

111. Jacob Stanley, Superintendent of the Bristol (King Street) Circuit, reported to Henry Moore in December 1839: 'Your old friend George Pococke has been reunited to us and is now on our Plan as a Local Preacher. Much opposition was made to his re-admission, but now I believe the general feeling is that of gratitude for his return. He seems in a humble and friendly state of mind.' (Letter of December 20th, 1839; Drew University Library)

chapel in June 1811, and by the following year both were describing themselves as 'gentleman'.

William Sanger Junior continued to register places of Methodist worship - most of them private houses - in the Salisbury area for nearly two decades.[112] What makes these of particular interest to us is that from the beginning of 1821 he was registering them as Independent Methodist, and between August 1823 and August 1824 registered five properties under the designation 'Tent Methodist'. That there is a link between these two groups of registrations is suggested, if not proved, by the fact that in three cases the double designation 'Independent or Tent Methodist' is used, and that 'Independent Methodist' continues to occur during the same period, as well as in the years after 1824.[113] Particularly interesting as evidence of his ambiguous (if not divided) loyalties throughout this period is the solitary case of a 'Wesleyan' registration in 1828.

Most of these registrations were in the villages of eastern Wiltshire and western Berkshire and represent evangelistic ventures which did not result in any permanent society or chapel. The exceptions are the towns of Salisbury and Newbury where some link with the Primitive Methodists can be substantiated. [114]

In the case of Salisbury, the 'Room called Freemason's Hall' in the George Yard, which Sanger registered on behalf of the Tent Methodists at the end of 1823 is probably the room taken over by the Primitive Methodists in 1827, its proximity to the Wesleyan cause in Church Street making it a direct rival. At Newbury, 'Union Chapel', Bartholomew Street, was registered for the Independent Methodists just three months after a field called Daisy Meadow had been registered on behalf of the Tent Methodists, in both cases by Sanger. The Primitive Methodists bought Union Chapel in 1837, though its history in the intervening years is uncertain.

112. Beginning with one in 1811 (Damerham chapel); then 3 in 1815, 12 in 1816, 5 in 1817, 8 in 1818, 2 in 1819, 8 in 1820, 8 in 1821, 2 in 1822, 11 in 1823, 4 in 1824, 3 in 1825, 1 in 1828, and 2 in 1829.

113. N.b. also the case of the two Newbury registrations in 1824, noted below.

114. In the case of Wilton, there is a possible connection with the Wesleyan work, but the difficulty of interpreting the evidence is compounded by uncertainty as to whether Wilton near Salisbury or Wilton near Hungerford is the place referred to. VCH Wiltshire VI, 1962, p 33 wrongly identifies this as the beginning of Primitive Methodism in Wilton; the link is more tenuous and complex than this.

In the case of the villages, while the evidence does not amount to any continuity between William Sanger's ventures and those of the Primitive Methodists, it seems clear that his largely individual initiative during those two decades anticipated and foreshadowed their later mission. To that extent, they may have arrived in the south just in time to be heirs to the declining fortunes of the Tent Methodists, of whom William Sanger was an isolated supporter. Was it mere coincidence that the Bristol Mission was launched by the Tunstall and Scotter circuits in 1823, just as the Tent Methodist movement was beginning to falter?

There was, however, one significant difference between Tent Methodism and the other new evangelical ventures within early 19th century Methodism. In the words of Julia Stewart Werner, 'Bible Christianity and Primitive Methodism were of the people; Tent Methodism was for them.' [115]

4.4 The Wesleyan Methodist Association

The Methodist New Connexion, the Protestant Methodists of Leeds, the Wesleyan Association and the Wesleyan Reform Movement may be seen not as separate movements so much as successive waves of protest and reform between the death of John Wesley and the mid-19th century. The occasions and immediate causes were different, but the underlying issue remained that of the relationship of ministers and laity, or the division of authority between a ministerial conference and local lay leadership. In an age of growing political awareness and democratic demands, these were problems that refused to go away.

This part of southern England, as we have seen, was unaffected by the initial wave of agitation led by Alexander Kilham in the 1790s. Three decades later, in 1827, the Wesleyan societies in Leeds were split by a controversy over the circumstances in which Brunswick Chapel was provided with an organ, a symptom of much deeper unrest over the autocratic powers of Conference and their supposed abuse. The effects of this protest were felt mainly in the north of England, though a Protestant Methodist society was also formed in London. But before there could be any wider impact on Southern England, the movement was absorbed into a further wave of protest which led to the formation of a

115. J S Werner, 1984, p 21

'Grand Central Association' in November 1834. This time the immediate cause of trouble was the plans for a Theological Institution for ministerial training, and in particular the choice of Dr. Jabez Bunting as its President. The 'Wesleyan Association', as it was at first called, held its first Assembly in August 1835, composed of both ministers and laymen - though the New Connexion principle of equal lay and ministerial representation was not adopted.[116] The protest movement spread and some 8,000 disaffected Wesleyans 'seceded or were expelled' (J.T. Wilkinson's phrase, embodying a nice distinction), being joined in the next two years by the Protestant Methodists and other break-away groups from Scarborough and Derby.[117]

By the 1830s, even the conservative and more tractable Methodists of the south were ready to join in the revolt. There was agitation in support of the Association, chiefly in Gosport and the Winchester area. No southern delegates were present at the Manchester assembly in 1835, but the following year Winchester was represented by William Redstone, a tailor-turned-bookseller who had been a trustee of the St. Peter Street chapel since its opening. (The only other places in the south to be represented that year were Chatham and Camelford, though letters of support were received from Plymouth, Devonport, Helston and Gosport. The strong representation of naval towns is noteworthy.) For several years, beginning in 1838, Henry Woodrow, another tailor, represented Gosport at the annual Assembly, whereas Winchester only occasionally sent a delegate.[118]

In Hampshire, as elsewhere, the tinder that was awaiting a spark was a growing frustration on the part of some of the more articulate laity, coupled with intransigence and over-reaction by ministers in a precipitate exercise of disciplinary powers. Few details have survived of the specific circumstances which led to local secessions, but one later writer refers to 'a number of the ablest local preachers and leaders' in the Winchester area being 'dropped without charges preferred'. [119] An attempt to reconcile the opposing parties was made

116. At the 1835 Assembly, only five itinerants were present, compared with eighty-four lay delegates.

117. For a convenient summary, J T Wilkinson, 1978, pp 315-18; also O A Beckerlegge, 1957, pp 21-7

118. WMA Minutes of Conference, *passim*

119. R.J. Hall, 1936, p 1

at a meeting in the Winchester chapel on January 20th 1835, but this failed and most of the village societies north and west of the city seceded and joined the Association. Having the support of a majority of the local trustees, they were able to take with them the only chapels that existed at that time - at Houghton and King's Somborne. Reports in the connexional Magazine also name Micheldever, Farley and Stockbridge as places where the Association was active.

Elsewhere, chapels were built by the members themselves - at Kings Worthy (1841) of chalk mud and thatch, the menfolk getting up for a 3 a.m. prayer meeting and working on the building before and after their long day in the fields; at Up Somborne (1843), where they gathered flints from the fields for the walls, and at Stockbridge (1843), where a well-wisher gave them both a site and most of the building materials.[120] At Twyford, 'a large and respectable village', a Methodist builder, William Richardson, bought a site for the chapel and contributed £100 towards the building. It was opened on New Year's Day, 1851 and reported to be 'well attended'. [121] Later chapels were built at Soberton in 1868 and Sparsholt in 1893.[122] But chapel-building reflects only a part of the efforts put into the attempt to mission the villages. The circuit preaching plan for November 1836-January 1837 lists fourteen places with weekly appointments; of these five (Stoke Charity, Braishfield, Bishopstoke, Upham and Bitterne) had been abandoned by 1842, when three new places appeared (Sparsholt, Littleton and Crawley).

The preaching at Micheldever was a fresh attempt to mission a village where Wesleyans had met with little success in the 1820s: and where the Primitive Methodists now had a footing. The problem was the same as it had always been - 'the land being in the hands of one man who will not let us have a spot for a chapel'. 'For some years past the influence of high church principles has here been as the deadly nightshade to the cause of spiritual religion.' The writer nevertheless went on to report recent conversions, and a society was kept in existence there for a while. In their village work, the Associationists found themselves in danger of competing with the Primitive Methodists, but

120. WMA Magazine, 1841 p 294; 1843, p 255; 1844, pp 253-5

121. WMA Magazine, 1851, pp 102, 404

122. E.R. Pillow, 1985, pp 19,17; R.J. Hall, 1936; A.L. Unsworth, 1972

liked to think that their appeal was to a different class of people. As the same report said of King's Somborne, where no Primitive Methodist rivalry existed: 'Many that have never attended a Methodist Chapel are now seen there regularly on the Sabbath day; some of these are above the ordinary class of our country hearers, persons in comfortable circumstances in the world, and who would some time back have thought it a disgrace to have been seen in a Methodist chapel.'^[123] The general rise in social status, which had been perceptible for a generation or two in the congregations of most town chapels, was beginning to spread to the villages - though the distinction between urban and rural societies in both social and cultural terms never entirely disappeared.

In Winchester itself, premises were found in Hyde Close, a substantial brick building designed by Sir John Soane as an 'academy';^[124] but within a few years the society had moved to a chapel in Upper Brook Street.^[125] Here the predominant Church influence continued to put a stigma on any form of nonconformity and rendered it 'barren soil'. 'The present tactics of the church is, I am informed, to render the charities, which are numerous, a means of holding back the poorer inhabitants from attending dissenting places of worship.' The Upper Brook Street chapel was inadequate and badly located, but in 1844 improved congregations and an increase of 12 members in the society were reported.^[126]

That improved premises were not the whole answer to the situation is spelled out in a report from Edmund Heywood seven years later. Recognising the need for 'a determined and continuous effort' to counter recent decline in the Winchester society, he had begun to witness in the open air on Sunday afternoons, supported by a few friends. Here is exposed the less salubrious underside of life in a Victorian cathedral city, an aspect of the community unaffected by, and largely ignored by, the Anglican establishment: 'My open-air efforts here have been put forth in the most depraved parts of the town, and I

123. WMA Magazine, 1844, pp 253-5

124. Clearly identified on a city street map of c. 1836. The premises had come on the market following the death of the original owner, the Rev. Charles Richards, in 1833.

125. 1851 Ecclesiastical Census, which gives its date as 'about 1839'; local directories of 1854 and 1859.

126. WMA Magazine, 1844, p 255

have seen ... an amount of wickedness and contempt of the Gospel, or efforts made to spread the Gospel, such as I never saw in any other part of the country ... I never encountered such storms of ridicule as have met me here.' Heywood mentions several places in the North and Midlands of which he had experience, and from his references to several 'Magdalens' he was clearly attempting an assault on Winchester's 'red-light district'.^[127]

'Our prospects here are beginning to brighten, the clouds which have been hanging over us so long are happily though surely dispersing ... At Winchester, especially, we have been favoured with a gracious visit from above.' This note of qualified optimism in a report for 1840, like the reference to 'the present happy and prosperous state of this circuit' in 1841,^[128] proved to be unjustifiably sanguine. Not all those who left the Wesleyans became Associationists, and some who did later defected or returned to their earlier allegiance. In 1837 (the first year for which membership figures exist) the Winchester Circuit reported 209 members. This rose to 300 the following year, but then declined rapidly, and continued to decline steadily, reaching 86 in 1857, the year in which the Wesleyan Association became part of the United Methodist Free Churches. (Table 4:12) The precarious situation is more faithfully represented by Edmund Heywood after his first few weeks in the circuit in 1851: 'I found the cause in a pleasing and prosperous state in some of the villages. In Winchester, however, ... for several years our people have been without any special marks of [spiritual] prosperity ... There are a few, however, who feel sincerely attached to our cause. But we have lost, since I came, one of our principal friends. Several of our people are growing old and infirm; we greatly need an infusion of young blood and energy amongst us.'^[129] Significantly the number of members on trial in the circuit as a whole never reached double figures, although the numbers of Sunday School scholars and teachers began to increase after an initial period of decline.

By comparison with Winchester, the Associationist enclave at Gosport was small and isolated. (Table 4:13) It had a much more precarious

127. WMA Magazine, 1851, pp 606-7

128. WMA Magazine, 1840, p 118; 1841, p 254

129. WMA Magazine, 1851, pp 606

Table 4:12 Winchester WMA Circuit: Tabular View

	Itinerants	Local Preachers	L.P.s on trial	Leaders	Members	Members on trial	Chapels	Other Preaching Places	Sunday Schools	Sunday School Scholars	Teachers
1837(-8)	-	-	-	-	209	-	3	12	-	-	-
1838	-	23	-	12	300	-	3	12	-	-	-
1839	1	18	6	13	190	5	4	9	3	105	10
1840	1	20	3	11	164	5	3	11	3	108	16
1841	1	23	-	8	158	2	5	5	3	100	12
1842	1	21	-	7	159	2	5	4	3	100	12
1843	1	25	-	7	131	-	6	2	2	100	12
1844	1	20	-	9	148	5	5	2	3	120	14
1845	1	18	-	8	135	3	5	3	3	133	13
1846	1	16	-	9	118	5	5	5	3	120	13
1847	1	16	-	10	121	-	5	4	3	149	12
1848	1	17	-	8	96	8	5	3	2	75	8
1849	1	20	-	?	102	2	5	3	?	?	?
1850	1	21	-	?	111	3	5	3	?	?	?
1851	1	22	-	9	125	4	6	2	2	78	10
1852	1	20	-	7	127	-	6	1	2	80	10
1853	1	15	-	6	117	-	6	1	2	70	10
1854	1	15	-	6	117	-	-	-	-	-	-
1855[1]	-	16	-	6	90	-	6	1	1	-	-
1856[2]	1	15	-	8	109	-	6	2	2	128	18
1857[2]	1	24	-	8	86	-	6	2	2	165	20

Notes:

1. Linked with Gosport in the Stations.
2. 'Winchester and Wickham'

Table 4:13 Gosport WMA Circuit: Tabular View

	Itinerants	Local Preachers	L.P.s on trial	Leaders	Members	Members on trial	Chapels	Other Preaching Places	Sunday Schools	Sunday School Scholars	Teachers
1837	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1838	1	8	-	4	40	4	1	3	1	87	8
1839	1	10	-	6	60	3	1	2	2	120	10
1840	-	8	-	7	84	0	0	4	1	80	14
1841	1	11	-	8	74	1	-	3	1	60	14
1842	1	9	-	7	66	4	-	3	2	95	12
1843	1	8	-	7	75	2	1	2	1	80	13
1844	1	8	-	6	80	1	1	2	2	120	18
1845	1	8	-	7	54	-	1	1	1	80	15
1846	1	8	-	7	50	2	1	1	1	90	14
1847	1	10	-	6	52	2	1	1	1	80	11
1848	1	7	-	5	50	-	1	1	1	70	15
1849	1	5	-	?	48	-	1	1	?	?	?
1850	1	7	-	?	47	2	1	1	?	?	?
1851	1	9	-	5	43	2	1	1	1	50	8
1852	1	7	-	5	42	1	1	1	2	160	20
1853	1	7	-	5	39	-	2	-	2	160	20
1854	1	4	-	3	25	-	2	-	1	90	14
1855[1]	1	3	-	2	22	-	1	1	1	80	18

Note:

1. Gosport is linked with Winchester in the 1855 Stations, and disappears from then on.

existence, with a circuit membership of 40 in 1838 which rose to 84 in 1840, but then declined, especially in the 1850s. The society appears to have died out by 1856, when Gosport disappears from the stations in the Minutes of Conference.[130] This lack of success may have been both a cause and an effect of the failure to maintain a full-time preacher in the town. Seven times between 1838 and 1855 the annual Minutes of Conference show that no appointment was made.

Some kind of preaching place was in use from November 1837, but a new chapel was opened in March 1843. The preachers for the occasion were local Independent and General Baptist ministers ('The Dissenters give us general countenance and support' - perhaps a gesture of disapproval towards the Wesleyans, who still held themselves a little aloof from the nonconformist camp); and the Associationists clearly felt themselves to be no threat to any existing congregations. Their North Street chapel was 'well situated, being surrounded with a dense population, few of whom pay any regard to the obligations of the Lord's Day, or the business of their soul's salvation. It is in a part of the town where there is no other place of worship and is considered the very best site the town affords.'[131] On the following Sunday they were honoured with a visit from Robert Eckett, the ex-President, but this must have been the only occasion on which Gosport was visited by a leading figure in the Association.

Gosport remained a relatively isolated society, its nearest neighbours being at Portsea and Wickham, and one factor in the circuit's eventual demise much have been its failure to win over any of the village societies in the local Wesleyan circuits. The existence of the society at Portsea seems to have been a shadowy one.[132] A site for a chapel and a schoolroom was obtained in 1845, but significantly none of the named trustees was from the Portsmouth area, and the absence of further evidence casts doubt on whether the chapel was ever built.[133]

130. The last recorded membership figure is 22 in 1855, and that year Gosport was linked again with Winchester, as had been the case in the early days. For 1856-57 on the stations give only 'Winchester and Wickham'.

131. WMA Magazine, 1843, pp 166-7

132. Ibid

133. Enrolled deed (PRO: C.54: 1846:68:18) All but one of the trustees (James Foot of Boarhunt) were from Gosport. The Circuit returns list one chapel and two other preaching places in 1844, but this is reduced to one other preaching place from 1845 on.

The evidence for the Associationist society at Wickham is not so much shadowy as problematical. The connexional Magazine refers to the conversion of a William Barfoot in 1842 and a society must have existed for some time before 1851, when 'one of the principle gentlemen of the town' fitted up a new chapel for them, to replace their smaller preaching room which held only about forty and had become uncomfortably crowded as a result of a revival. (Congregations had previously dropped to as few as five, 'three of whom were soundly asleep and disturbed the rest by their snoring'.)[134] Whether the earlier preaching-room had been taken over from the Wesleyans remains uncertain. Nor is it clear how the chapel opened in 1851 was related to a new chapel whose opening on 14 November 1852 was also reported in the Magazine,[135] or to the place of worship registered on 19th October 1853 by its 'occupier', Alfred Woodwas.

Of the eighteen preachers stationed in one or other of the two Hampshire Circuits during the twenty years of the Association's existence, none had been in the Wesleyan itinerancy prior to joining the dissidents, though at least two, Charles Edwards and George Chesson, had been Wesleyan local preachers. For six of them, this was their first circuit appointment, though one of these, Edward Boaden, was at the beginning of a long and distinguished career as a Free Methodist: holding a number of connexional offices and being twice elected President, in 1871 and again in 1907, the year of union with the New Connexion and the Bible Christians. For the most part, they were young men whose service in the itinerancy was quite short-lived, several of them retiring or simply disappearing from the list of stations within a few years. These more distant outposts of the Association never enjoyed priority in the allocation of available preachers, and Gosport Circuit was sometimes left unpastored. Though linked after 1857 with groups of Wesleyan Reformers in Salisbury, Weymouth and elsewhere, they remained comparatively isolated.

4.5. The Wesleyan Reform Movement

The last and most cataclysmic of the attempts to reform 19th century Wesleyanism was the movement which began with the publication of a series of anonymous Fly Sheets in 1844-48, strongly critical of the

134. WMA Magazine, 1851, p 605

135. WMA Magazine, 1852, p 593

Wesleyan hierarchy, and reached a climax in the expulsion of three of the preachers, James Everett, Samuel Dunn and William Griffith, at the Conference of 1849. As in 1834, Jabez Bunting was the chief target of the would-be reformers, both as the object of much personal animosity and as a symbol of 'Wesleyan tyranny'. Feelings ran high; and the bitterness and coarseness of language used on both sides does no credit to either party. In an attempt to discover the members of the self-styled 'Corresponding Committee for detecting, exposing and correcting abuses', every preacher was required to sign a Declaration dissociating himself from the Fly Sheets agitation. Of the thirty-six who refused to comply, the three expelled ministers were singled out as under particular suspicion.

The expulsions triggered off a series of protest meetings throughout the Connexion. Widespread sympathy was expressed for the three ministers; local societies were divided on the issue and many members were expelled for associating with the Reform Movement by circuit superintendents acting (according to one's point of view) more vigorously in upholding Methodist discipline or more dictatorially than in any of the earlier crises. In five years, over 100,000 members, nearly a third of the total membership, were lost. The most determined and widely supported of the campaigns for reform had met with a response in the form of ruthless surgery resulting in many defections.[136]

At first the Reformers hoped to carry a majority of leaders and members with them and so effect the changes they desired within the Wesleyan Connexion itself. They did not see themselves as a new denomination, any more than the earliest followers of the Wesleys had done, but rather as a kind of 'shadow' connexion, or more exactly, a loose federation of local reforming groups. Hence they continued to use the title 'Wesleyan' without qualification, as on the 'Wesleyan Methodist Preachers Plan' for the 'Weymouth and Dorchester Circuits' covering the period from November 1854 to January 1855. This lists preaching appointments at Weymouth, Dorchester and Charminster only and is, in fact, a Wesleyan Reform document.

The Reform congregation at Salisbury described itself in July 1851 as 'a Branch of the Wesleyan Church in this city'. Three years later a

136. J T Wilkinson, 1978, pp 318-21; O A Beckerlegge, 1957, pp 30-38

Special Quarterly Meeting was held to consider 'the difference of opinion among many Reformers as to whether it would be best to join some of the existing liberal Methodist Churches or form another separate Church,' but unanimously drew back from the brink of recommending amalgamation with any other body.[137] Only gradually did the Reformers come to accept that the parent connexion was not yet ready for radical reform; but in 1857 the great majority of them joined forces with the Methodist Association to form a new denomination known as the United Methodist Free Churches.

Support for the reformers of 1849 was much more widespread than had been the case on earlier occasions. The divisive influence and membership losses were felt in circuits and societies throughout the country. But again the impact on the south was less than was felt elsewhere. The two places in this part of southern England most affected were the Salisbury and Weymouth Circuits, neither of which had any Wesleyan Association causes within their territory.

During the first half of the 1850s a kind of loose federation of Reform groups existed within the Portsmouth District, holding an annual meeting to receive reports from various places within the District and to co-ordinate policy. The first of these was held in the Primitive Methodist chapel at Southampton and was attended by representatives from six circuits: Portsmouth, Gosport, Southampton, Salisbury, the Isle of Wight and Wimborne. Reports were received from three other circuits, Chichester, Poole and Andover, on 'the state of Methodism and the progress of the Reform movement'. There was discussion on 'the best method of forwarding the objects of the movement, namely, to effect a scriptural reform in Wesleyan polity'.

The meeting was attended by the editor of the Wesleyan Times, John Harrison, who played a prominent part in the discussions. He advocated separate services, which he argued did not amount to secession, but not the building of chapels if this could be avoided, especially as he expected most of the trustees to side with the people rather than with the preachers.

Later, in a discussion on the lay administration of the Sacrament, Harrison inveigled against 'priestly tyranny' in this matter and laid

137. Salisbury WR Circuit Quarterly Meeting minutes, 19 May 1854

bare part of the radical foundations of the movement: 'The idea of administering the Sacrament was a fallacy. It had no authority in Scripture. We are commanded to celebrate the death of Christ. Every church, however small, might celebrate it, without the presence of an ordained minister, or any minister at all.'[138]

Although these District Meetings continued for another four years, the progress of Reform in the District was slow. For some reason Portsmouth, as the Associationists had found, seems to have proved stony ground. James Bromley addressed a meeting in the town in the course of a tour of protest against his expulsion by the Conference of 1850. Unfortunately, in one mind at least, memories of his ministry in the circuit thirty years earlier still rankled, and an anonymous handbill was issued, signed by 'A Steward of the Portsmouth Circuit', branding him as 'an agitator and trouble-maker in the Connexion' who had broken his promise to amend his ways. So far as any complaint of 'arbitrary conduct' was concerned, the writer asked, 'Is it possible that he can have forgotten, when in this Circuit, three times refusing to administer the Communion to several members at Gosport, because they would not give up their old Class Leader (whose character was blameless and who still lives) and meet with a Leader he wished to force upon them?' There is no further trace of Reform activity in the area.

Expulsions from the Salisbury society in 1850 led to a mass walk-out of nearly five hundred scholars and teachers from the Sunday School in Salt Lane. Many of the Reformers found a temporary home in the Endless Street Independent Chapel, where they were still swelling the congregational numbers on Census Sunday, March 30th, 1851.[139] They also retained control of the Salt Lane schoolroom, and from the beginning of April began regular Sunday services there.

A Quarterly Meeting was held at Salt Lane on 28 January 1851, at which a contribution was voted to the General Reform Fund. Other sums were collected in support of James Beaumont and Thomas Rowland, two leading

138. Minutes of meetings of Wesleyan Reform delegates in the Portsmouth District, 1851-55 (MAC)

139. 'The Evening's congregation of 626 is about 200 more than the average number. The additional number were Wesleyans and were induced to attend on the occasion from the peculiar local circumstances at present affecting that Body in Salisbury.' (Census return, 264/1/2) This is confirmed by the Wesleyan return.

Reformers.[140] Although described as a 'Quarterly Meeting' to indicate its equivalence to the regular Quarterly Meeting of the Wesleyan Circuit, this was followed by a series of further meetings at fortnightly and even weekly intervals through the spring and summer, an indication of the volatile situation as the two rival parties manoeuvred for position and sparred with each other. Regular Sunday worship was begun in the Salt Lane Schoolroom. A meeting was arranged at Downton, where John Nicklin, the Superintendent minister, had expelled 35 members, and in March representatives were invited to the next Quarterly Meeting from all those places where expulsions had taken place: Wilton, Whiteparish, Downton, Woodgreen, Stratford-sub-Castle, Winterslow, Amesbury and West Grimstead. The prevailing spirit is nicely caught by the announcement of a 'Glorious Reform Tea Meeting' on, of all days, Good Friday.

By the summer the rift was widening and threatening to become permanent, nor is there any evidence of attempts on the part of the Wesleyan minister or leaders to win back the disaffected. On the Reformers' side, several crucial steps were taken in July. Thomas Miell was chosen as delegate to the 'People's Conference' at Newcastle, but in the event had to apologise for not being able to attend. The first steps were taken to acquire a site for a chapel in Milford Street and a Trust was appointed. And a set of Rules was adopted, dealing not with the doctrinal, spiritual, or moral requirements of personal membership, but with matters of polity and administration. These reflect the extent to which the split in the Wesleyan Connexion was a political, even more than a religious one, and show the forces of democracy and local autonomy at work even within what remained recognisable as a connexional system. In comparing these rules with Wesleyan polity, both the similarities and the differences are significant.

- '1. That this meeting recognises the Church in its collective capacity as the highest court for all its affairs, whether financial, executive or disciplinary ...
2. Leaders to be elected by ballot, with notice given from the pulpit.
3. Leaders meeting to consist of Leaders, Stewards and Preachers.

140. Beaumont was a persistently outspoken critic of the Wesleyan hierarchy, though he remained within the Connexion. Rowland was expelled in 1852, after serving in the Wesleyan itinerancy since 1813, and later joined the UMFC.

4. The Leaders have power to admit on trial any person making application for Church Membership, and after three months on trial the final reception or rejection of such individuals shall be decided by the votes of the Church Meeting.
5. That no accusation be received against any member before the accuser or accusers have fulfilled the directions of the Scriptures, Matt. 18: 15-17, [141] after which the exercise of discipline shall rest with the Leaders Meeting, the accused having the right of appeal first to those members of the Church who worship in the same place with the accused and subsequently to the Quarterly Meeting, whose decision shall be final.
6. Society and Poor Stewards to be elected annually by ballot in each place at a meeting of the members.
7. A meeting of all the members in the Circuit to be held quarterly.
8. Circuit Stewards to be elected annually by ballot at the Lady Day Quarterly Meeting.
9. System of quarterly tickets to continue.
10. No person to be admitted as a Preacher without the joint consent of the Preachers and Quarterly Meeting.
11. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper to be duly celebrated in all places where there are separate services. [142]
12. Any member may propose the repeal or alteration of any existing rule or the introduction of any new rule at a Quarterly Meeting. [143]

We are dealing with a nonconformist churchmanship diametrically opposed to the high Wesleyan view of the pastoral office as conferring authority from above rather than from below. The gulf between sincerely held convictions on both sides was virtually unbridgeable. From the point of view of the Wesleyan ministers, the Rules confirmed their worst fears of democratic anarchy in the Church. To the Reformers they were no more than reasonable demands in an age in which democratic principles were steadily, if slowly, gaining ground.

From an early date, there were other Reform congregations in the Salisbury area; and by June 1853 membership figures were reported from eight societies:

141. "And if they brother sin against thee, go, shew him his fault between thee and him alone; if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the Church; and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican."

142. Several laymen had earlier been appointed to officiate at the Sacrament, and it had been decided "that we celebrate the Lord's Supper in a sitting posture", a move away from Wesleyanism with its Anglican background towards the nonconformist camp.

143. Quarterly Meeting minutes, 16 July 1851.

Salisbury	164
Wilton	27
Winterbourne [Dauntsey]	16
Downton	35
Alderbury	6
Woodford	10
Stratford	6
East Grimstead	6

Total	270

A few other places, such as Amesbury, Winterslow, Whiteparish and Quidhampton, were 'attempted', but without permanent results. All these village societies remained small in comparison to the town society with its chapel in Milford Street, Salisbury.

The marked discrepancy between these membership figures and the losses sustained by the Wesleyans is a measure of the numbers who were probably lost to Methodism altogether. Some may have returned in due course to the Wesleyan fold and helped to make up some of the losses sustained at the beginning of the decade.[144] Others may have given their allegiance to the Independents or some other denomination, or dropped out altogether. Whatever the sincerity and dedication of leading Reformers may have been, it is likely that their followers included many who were simply disgruntled or disillusioned, or had a personal grudge of some kind.

In 1854, the Milford Street Quarterly Meeting had unanimously endorsed the view that 'as Wesleyan Reformers we are bound to maintain the connectional principle, and think that it can be carried out without interfering at all with the local independence of the churches.' Over the next thirty years repeated attempts were made to unite the various congregations into a single circuit, but these were constantly thwarted by the dogged independence of the two largest village societies, at Wilton and Downton. On numerous occasions these two societies declined to send in any report or to contribute to circuit funds. In October 1859 and January 1860 the desirability of 'circuit union' was urged - and ignored by the two wayward congregations. The Wilton group were still refusing to meet a deputation from Salisbury at the beginning of 1870. The Salisbury preachers nevertheless continued to supply the Wilton pulpit until declining numbers and growing debts forced a closure in 1879.[145]

144. See Table 4:14

145. Salisbury WR Circuit Quarterly Meeting minutes, 6 October 1859, 5 July and 4 October 1860, 30 September 1869, 6 January 1870, 18 September 1879.

The Downton society showed an even more independent spirit, but eventually in 1883, sent to the Salisbury Quarterly Meeting a resolution asking to be received as part of the circuit, and this was agreed.[146]

Reluctance on the part of the Wilton and Downton societies to ally themselves with Milford Street may have been based partly on financial considerations. In July 1859 the Quarterly Meeting considered a suggestion from the Milford Street church meeting that a full-time minister be engaged. The committee appointed to find out what financial support might be forthcoming in the circuit reported back in October. Towards the envisaged salary of £100 a year, the Salisbury congregation promised £65, and Winterbourne about £3; but there was no response from Wilton or Downton or East Grimstead. It was this which called forth the conversation on the need for 'closer union'. At the same time, the search for a minister began and Richard Collinson was engaged early in the new year, despite the lack of support from the village causes.[147]

A further reason for Wilton and Downton holding aloof from the circuit was its affiliation to the United Methodist Free Churches in 1861. Salisbury had at first been one of the Reform circuits which remained out of the denomination when it was formed in 1857. (This was in line with the views of the delegates meeting in the District two years earlier, which passed a resolution against 'amalgamating with any existing body', preferring 'Free Methodist Churches' as 'more scriptural and calculated more fully to extend the Redeemer's kingdom'.) A letter sent to the Special Reform Committee in London deprecated the fact that the committee 'has been devoting its powerful influence to the questionable and disputed subject of amalgamation' instead of concentrating its attention and energies on 'its legitimate duties, that of promoting and strengthening the interests of those principles which as a body of Reformers we were raised up to maintain and disseminate'. And when only a 'vague reply' was received to this magisterial rebuke, the Salisbury Reformers agreed to take no further notice of the matter. In April 1860 a letter was received from Bristol inviting them to join the UMFC, but the Quarterly Meeting 'respectfully

146. Ibid, 15 March 1883

147. Ibid, 7 July and 6 October 1859; 5 January and 13 February 1860

declined entertaining the subject at present'. By the following January, however, they had become 'persuaded that an amalgamation with the United Methodist Free Churches would tend to the promotion of the cause of God in this Circuit' and invited the views of the country societies on the matter. Three months later, despite objections from Wilton, the motion to amalgamate was carried.[148]

Of the Weymouth and Dorchester Reform Circuit, little detailed information can be given in the absence of early records. Clearly it was a small and isolated pocket of radical Methodism, confined, so far as we can tell, to the three societies which appear listed on the preaching plan of 1854-5: Weymouth, Dorchester and Charminster.

Each of the three societies had a chapel of sorts. The Weymouth Reformers at first rented part of a building in Brunswick Place,[149] but eventually, in 1868 bought the old chapel in Conygar Lane when the Wesleyans moved to Maiden Street.[150] In Dorchester, they rented the Masonic Hall in Back West Street; while in Charminster, where the Wesleyans had had a small preaching room since 1838, the Reformers took over in 1862 a chapel built three years earlier by George D. Pocklington, a Sherborne architect and surveyor who supported the Reformers' cause.[151]

None of these three causes survived to the end of the century. Though the circumstances of their demise are obscure, we may assume that they died of attrition. The Weymouth chapel was sold in 1880, and it is probably significant that all of the four trustees surviving from 1868 turn up in 1895 as Wesleyan trustees at Maiden Street. It would probably be unfair to conclude that they had merely given up the struggle; their return to the Wesleyan fold could equally be interpreted as a claim to victory of a kind. In 1878 lay representatives were at last admitted to the Wesleyan Conference, hitherto a ministerial preserve symbolising the pastoral authority of the itinerant preachers. This bastion stormed, the mood of the laity

148. Ibid, 6 July 1857; 9 April 1860; 3 January and 4 April 1861

149. a cul-de-sac off Commercial Road, between Conygar Lane and School Lane

150. Conveyance, 7 February 1868 (PRO: C.54/1875.84.m.23)

151. Conveyance, 11 April 1862 (PRO: C.54/1862.165.12)

was one of thankfulness as much as triumph;[152] and the reunion of Wesleyans and Reformers at Weymouth needs to be seen in that context. Elsewhere, however, Reform congregations were sufficiently entrenched and committed (in terms of both property and patterns of activity) for there to be no immediate prospect of reunion.

In a number of ways the Wesleyan Reform movement and Primitive Methodism may be seen as the two ends of the Methodist spectrum. The Reformers may have been politically radical, but they were not, like the early Primitive Methodists, plebeian. The possibility of a Wesleyan Reform trustee being unable to sign his name is inconceivable. The Reformers drew their support from the lower middle classes and the minor professions, and were accordingly much more politically conscious and articulate. The day when Primitive Methodists would be in the thick of the rural trade union movement, on the other hand, was still well in the future. For the present evangelisation was their very life blood, whereas the *raison d'etre* of the Reform movement was not mission so much as ecclesiastical politics. This was markedly more true of the Reformers than it had been of their fellow-radicals the Wesleyan Associationists a few years earlier. It was perhaps a recognition of all this, as much as any good will towards a rival denomination, that prompted the Salisbury Reform Circuit in 1855 to give up their preaching at Woodford and recommend their supporters there to join the Primitive Methodists.[153]

Some over-all impression of the effect of the disruptions of 1834-5 and 1849 can be gained by an examination of Wesleyan membership figures for these troubled decades (Table 4:14). The first thing we may notice is that neither nationally nor locally, was membership decline a simple effect of agitation for reform. In 1835 and 1836, the national figures actually continued to show modest increases, and the decrease reported in 1837 was a negligible one. The total figures for central southern England follow the national pattern quite closely, but the pattern at circuit level is much more varied, reflecting local circumstances. In the 1830s, in addition to Gosport and Portsmouth, circuits which also suffered a decline included Salisbury, Shaftesbury, Weymouth and Dorchester, though we have no evidence of any Wesleyan Association

152. Cf the title of the 'Thanksgiving Fund' set up to commemorate the event by raising money for further advances in the Church's work

153. Salisbury WR Circuit Quarterly Meeting minutes, 2 July 1855

Table 4:14 Wesleyan Circuit Membership figures, 1835-1859

	Salisbury	Poole[2]	Shaftesbury	Weymouth/ Portland[4]	Dorchester	Ringwood/ Christchurch[5]	Wimborne[3]	Sherborne	Portsmouth	Southampton	Gosport	Andover	Totals	National Totals[7] (England)
1835	960	660	816	468	308	72	-	421	764	454	228	250	5,401	271,416
1836	913	700	827	518	385	78	-	475	742	464	213	276	5,591	273,588
1837	820	702	809	539	390	91	-	476[6]	630	466	180	280	5,383	273,450
1838	780	720	737	511	379	89	-	479	606	500	165	330	5,296	277,240
1839	743	742	681	506	336	78	-	505	594	471	172	341	5,169	286,568
1840	772	740	656	500	326	80	-	521	569	497	153	327	5,141	301,743
1841	794	773	650	472	326	84	-	523	575	514	179	292	5,182	305,682
1842	772	753	725	455	336	86	-	539	596	517	173	300	5,252	303,817
1843	824	772	905	471	342	92	-	539	665	536	184	373	5,703	308,162
1844	900	880	898	500	376	86	-	589	760	552	156	384	6,081	314,871
1845	967	960	910	550	379	100	-	655	830	573	172	334	6,430	318,289
1846	1,004	957	912	620	400	129	-	658	932	588	177	343	6,720	319,770
1847	1,010	1,006	881	622	352	138	-	595	942	606	154	341	6,647	318,129
1848	1,025	957	864	654	354	150	-	599	875	608	153	315	6,554	317,522
1849	1,064	938	915	660	394	156	-	604	842	557	173	327	6,630	325,691
1850	1,216	560[3]	875	617	454	171	350	616	905	617	162	382	6,969	334,458
1851	773	586	765	519	430	144	388	601	896	608	164	373	6,247	280,054
1852	610	590	767	562	406	142	367	626	834	580	146	343	5,973	258,929
1853	647	593	747	574	412	119	362	536	790	546	120	358	5,804	249,221
1854	650	516	690	594	384	91	336	541	780	525	140	298	5,545	242,231
1855	654	517	691	600	340	93	315	550	730	504	154	250	5,398	239,136
1856	675	522	715	580	341	94	336	553	752	519	158	252	5,497	242,296
1857	629	530	770	575	334	94	340	626	818	547	150	254	5,667	248,338
1858	644	540	785	593	334	91	348	658	903	616	136	255	5,903	255,173
1859	705	640	820	891	429	91	363	701	1,016	701	143	260	6,760	269,485
1860	713	630	870	916	409	94	462	744	1,040	714	131	310	7,033	282,783

Notes:

1. Source: Wesleyan Minutes of Conference.
2. Throughout this period, Poole Circuit includes the figures for Wareham.
3. Wimborne Circuit was formed from Poole in 1849.
4. Portland became a separate circuit in 1857, but its membership figures have been included with those for Weymouth for the years 1858-60.
5. Ringwood Circuit was renamed Christchurch Circuit in 1856.
6. Wrongly printed as '176' in the Minutes.
7. Membership totals for England taken from Currie, Gilbert and Horsley, 1977, pp. 140-1.

congregations being formed in those parts of Wiltshire and Dorset. On the other hand, the membership figures for Southampton Circuit remained remarkably steady, despite the reform agitation in and around Winchester. Clearly membership losses were offset by the rate at which new members were being recruited, but in the absence of membership records for individual societies we cannot determine where the main growing points were.

In the wake of the 1849 disruption, more substantial losses were sustained, especially, as we would expect, in the Salisbury, Weymouth and Dorchester Circuits; but there were also net losses during the same period in other circuits (notably Shaftesbury, Ringwood, Portsmouth, Gosport and Southampton) which we cannot link directly to any known Reform agitation, still less to the formation of Reform societies or circuits in those areas. The loss of over 1,500 out of a total of nearly 7,000 members was substantially below the average: 22.5% compared with the national average of 28.6%. With 2.1% of the national membership, these southern circuits' losses represented only 1.6% of the total losses throughout England. These figures confirm that, even in the years 1850-55 the main impact of the disruption was felt elsewhere than in the South.

5 RELIGION IN 1851

5.1 The Victorian Religious Scene

The first half of the 19th century was a period of accelerating change, both in society as a whole and in the life of the Church of England. Whether welcome or not, by mid-century the changes were recognisable enough, even if it was as yet too early to see them in perspective.

The population of England was growing fast, doubling from 8,290,769 to 16,738,695 between 1801 and 1851. The process of industrial and urban development that would transform English life in the second half of the century was already well under way, though less evident in the South than in the Midlands and the North. Here the old rural patterns persisted, with agriculture, directly or indirectly, still the main source of employment.

One response to these changes in society was the sustained effort, already noted, to provide new churches, though never at a rate that kept pace with the growth of population, even when the separate nonconformist initiatives are taken into account. Another was the long-needed overhauling of ecclesiastical machinery, initiated by parliamentary legislation, but increasingly matched by a new spirit of reform within the Church, as first the Evangelical Revival and later the Oxford Movement began to have an impact.

By 1850 Newman had been a Roman Catholic for five years and the Gorham judgment was about to impel Manning and others to follow his example. Pusey had inherited the mantle of leadership among the Anglo-Catholics, the first Anglican sisterhood had been founded, and private confession had been reintroduced. John Mason Neale was already involved in his protracted conflict with Bishop Gilbert, an omen of battles still to be fought within the Church. In another direction, Christian Socialism had soon diverted its resources from political to economic channels and was busy fostering workers' co-operatives; but the bridge between the Established Church and the working classes remained a tenuous one.

A similar period of renewal and growth brought the nonconformist churches (with which even Wesleyanism was increasingly identified) to a point where by mid-century they could collectively rival the Established Church in terms of available accommodation and number of worshippers. Both Protestant and Catholic nonconformists were

beginning to struggle free from their civil disabilities. For the Roman Catholic minority, political emancipation in 1829 inaugurated a recovery of confidence which was given dramatic expression in 1850 with the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England.

Beneath all these changes an undertow of secularism, doubt and indifference had set in, which was destined to flow with increasing strength as the century advanced, to the alarm and dismay of many of the faithful. At the mid-point of the century, an official census of church attendance provided an opportunity for all parties to take stock of the situation. But churchgoing was, of course, only one feature in the religious scene, and it is arguable that other criteria provide better, if less easily measurable, indicators of the spiritual climate of the mid-19th century. The problem has been posed by Geoffrey Best in this way:

'Was the period 1500-1650 more largely Christian than, say, 1780-1880? Was the 19th century meant to be called "an age of faith"? Such questions are at once irresistible and unanswerable. By some criteria or other, indeed, they should be answerable; but what could those criteria be? External like church attendance are the more measurable, but they are not self-evidently indicative of internals - depth of devotion, seriousness of belief - which matter more and are in any case no more measurable than definable.' [1]

Best's questions are a means of provoking certain important and inescapable distinctions between religious convictions and various forms of their outward expression, of which churchgoing is one. The outward manifestations take us some way at least towards an answer to the question of how large a part religion played in the lives and thinking of the population of mid-Victorian England. But behind and beyond that question lie more imponderable issues such as 'How true was Victorian religion to the Christian ideal?' (however that may be defined) or 'How sincere or wholehearted were Victorian Christians in their religious protestations?' Such issues may be less susceptible of generalisation and impossible to answer with any degree of historical certainty. Nevertheless they belong to the context which gives meaning to any examination of patterns of religious practice.

Compared with the 20th century, the Victorian age was much more preoccupied with religious concerns and behavioural patterns. Yet the difference was greatest on the surface, and beneath a continuing degree

1. G Best, 1971, p 170

of orthodoxy and conformity by the mid-century the cross-currents were flowing more and more strongly. Significantly, even so 'establishment' a figure as Tennyson could speak of 'honest doubt'. In Memoriam, begun in 1833 but not published until 1850, was a tribute to his friend Arthur Hallam, described as one

Who touched a jarring note at first
But ever strove to make it true.

Of Hallam's struggle for faith, Tennyson writes:

Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out.
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds. (Stanza xcv)

In Memoriam was one of the most representative poems of the age, enjoying a popularity far beyond its literary merits, and serves our present purpose all the better for that. Inspired by Hallam's premature death, it might be expected to assert an unequivocal belief in resurrection, but noticeably fails to do so. Even the bold opening apostrophe to the 'strong Son of God' is muted before the end of the stanza:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing, where we cannot prove.

The most moving and convincing passages are those in which 'honest doubt' is more in evidence than 'lame' faith; e.g.:

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope. (Stanza liv)

In the decade following the publication of In Memoriam, other writers were to raise a series of protests from those who could not accept in prose what Tennyson expressed more cloudily in verse. F.D. Maurice, pioneer of liberal theology whom Tennyson admired and supported, came under pressure to resign his professorship at King's College, London, because he challenged the prevailing orthodoxy on the concept of eternal punishment in his Theological Essays (1853). And an equally fierce outcry greeted the publication in 1860 of Essays and Reviews, an attempt by a group of liberal Churchmen to re-assess and restate the Christian faith in the light of scientific and philosophical

developments. Meanwhile the publication of Darwin's On the Origin of Species in the previous year gave rise to a more lasting storm of controversy. Ideas which were already sufficiently current for Tennyson to voice them in poetical form proved unacceptable to many when set out in prose and supported by scientific evidence.

Such were the underlying tensions of an age which Alec Vidler has characterized as 'one of religious seriousness [rather] than of faith', surmising that behind 'the strident tones and the proclivity to heresy-hunting' of many orthodox Victorians may have lurked 'an uncertainty or anxiety about their own faith', or even 'a turmoil of doubt and uncertainty'. [2] The mid-Victorian mixture of faith and doubt is nowhere better caught than in the lines written by Matthew Arnold in 1851:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd,
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world. [3]

The average man in the pew, - and certainly, the average Methodist of the time - was probably not much more conversant with the poetry of Tennyson or Arnold than with the contemporary theological treatises. If he knew anything of them, it was likely to be at second or third hand through his spiritual pastors and mentors. But he could not remain entirely unaffected by the spirit of so restless an age as that to which men like Charles Bradlaugh and T.H. Huxley belonged. This, too, was the intellectual and cultural background of the ecclesiastical reforms for which both politicians and churchmen were striving as the century progressed.

Perhaps the most significant sign of renewal within the Church was the growing attention paid by both bishops and clergy to pastoral oversight. Bishops began to spend more time in their dioceses, to examine candidates for ordination more rigorously, applying higher intellectual and spiritual standards, and to urge their clergy to take their parochial duties more seriously. They themselves began to make more adequate provision for confirmation, so widely neglected in the

2. A R Vidler, 1961 pp 112-13

3. Matthew Arnold, Dover Beach

18th century. 'In the diocese of Salisbury Bishop Burgess (died 1836) confirmed only in large towns; Bishop Denison (died 1854) confirmed in large towns and large villages; Bishop Hamilton (1854-69) in almost any church where the incumbent asked for him.'[4] This particular succession of bishops in the Salisbury diocese provides a useful illustration of the direction of the changes that were beginning to take place, even if the pace of change inevitably varied from one diocese to another.[5] Thomas Burgess, who was translated to Salisbury from St. David's in 1825, owed his advancement to influence and political patronage, but was no exception in that. At the same time he was a sign of the times in that he took his ecclesiastical responsibilities with considerably more seriousness than had been normal in the previous century. A product of the Evangelical Revival, he counted Hannah More and other Evangelicals among his friends. His evangelical stance is evidenced by the subject of his primary charge to the Salisbury clergy, a discourse on 'Justification by faith alone', and by his vigorous opposition to Catholic emancipation in 1829. As Prebendary of Salisbury from 1787 to 1803 he helped to promote Sunday Schools in the diocese and in 1804 was one of the founders of the Bible Society. At St. David's he did not treat his office merely as a stepping-stone to a more lucrative appointment, but initiated vigorous reforms, especially in the education of the clergy, and was conscientious in administering both ordination and confirmation. By the time he came to Salisbury, he was past his prime and in poor health; but he nevertheless 'showed great energy in visiting, confirming, educating and ordaining'.[6]

At Salisbury, Burgess continued his reforms, but in a spirit of cautious moderation which is encapsulated in his policy towards those in deacon's orders: 'In order to obviate as far as he could, without undue rigour, the anomaly which certainly appears to exist in our Church, of intrusting a deacon ... with the sole care of a parish, he would not accept titles for orders from deacons upon curacies of which

4. Owen Chadwick, Part 1, 1966 p 515

5. During almost the whole period represented by these three Bishops of Salisbury, the Winchester diocese was under the care of Bishop C. Sumner, who pursued a roughly parallel policy of reform, despite being a classic example of a political appointee.

6. DNB He was the founder of St. David's College, Lampeter, although it did not open until 1827, after he had left for Salisbury. For an account of his episcopacy at Salisbury by Archdeacon Liscombe Clarke, see Harford, 1841, pp 392-41

the population exceeded four hundred, except in cases where the incumbent, or a curate in priest's orders, was resident ...'[7]

The more practical passages in his primary Charge to the Salisbury clergy show a rather circumscribed area of concern, dealing with their neglect of the 'public duties' of 'maintaining the King's supremacy' four times a year and also of reading the Proclamation for the restraining of wickedness and vice, blasphemy and irreligion and the due observance of the sabbath. The twin evils of plurality and non-residence were mentioned, but the concern he expressed was muted, the emphasis being on the circumstances in which pluralities were justified in the interests of clerical incomes. Similarly, in dealing with ordination vows, his main stress was on the duty of combatting 'all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's word', by which he meant in particular the doctrines of Rome, Unitarianism and Antinomianism. And he was at pains to insist that his clergy should 'adhere strictly to the directions of the Rubric' and to the language of the Prayer Book, even to the extent of not substituting 'who' for 'which' in the Lord's Prayer.[8]

Burgess's third Charge, delivered in 1832, acknowledged the spirit of reform that had recently been at work in the political sphere and cautiously admitted its application in matters ecclesiastical, especially in such familiar areas of concern as non-residence, clerical education, and the preparation and examination of ordinands. But in dealing with the neglect of the Lord's Supper, his concern was that there were so few male communicants, and he made no reference to the infrequency of celebration. The moderate and moralising tone of the whole Charge is made even clearer if we set it alongside those of his successor, Edward Denison.

At the time of his appointment, Denison was still a young man of 36, who had been in orders for only ten years. He was appointed by Lord Melbourne despite his youthfulness, on the grounds of 'his scholarship and energy of character', as well as because, in the wake of the controversy over the Hampden appointment, he was theologically safe.

Denison quickly took up where Burgess had left off and proved an

7. Harford, 1841, p 397. Italics mine

8. T Burgess, 1827, pp 5-10, 41. In his second Charge (1829), he returned at length to the matter of Roman and Unitarian doctrines.

energetic and able administrator. 'He immediately increased the number of Sunday services in the parish churches and reformed the mode of conducting confirmations.' Whenever he was in Salisbury on a Sunday, he made a point of preaching in one or other of the city's churches. Much of his income went in charitable benefactions. Alongside the predominantly ecclesiastical issues dealt with in his Charges to the clergy is an awareness of and concern for the plight of the poor, especially the agricultural labourers and their families in his diocese.[9] More significant still of his sincere humanitarianism was his conduct during the cholera outbreak of 1849 when, with his successor, W.K. Hamilton, then a canon of the cathedral, he assiduously visited the crowded homes of the victims in the poorest areas of the city, showing a concern for sanitation as well as for spiritual wellbeing. The idea of an 18th century bishop behaving in this way is virtually inconceivable.

Denison succeeded at a time when, as he said, 'the external circumstances of the Church necessarily engage an unusual share of our attention' and his first Charge opened with a review of the reforms recently effected through Parliamentary legislation: chiefly, diocesan reorganisation, the setting up of the Ecclesiastical Commission, the new marriage law, provision for the civil registration of births and deaths, the commutation of tithes and new legislation on pluralism and non-residence.

The boundaries of the Salisbury diocese had been radically altered by the loss of Berkshire and the regaining of Dorset; and to these changes the new bishop was for the most part agreeable; but he had misgivings about the Commission becoming 'a permanent power in the Church' and hoped that its functions would not be extended to the reform of parochial benefits or cathedral establishments. This was at once a more positive and more vigorously accommodating stance than that taken up by his predecessor; nevertheless, Denison was all for a process of gradual change, as likely to be more generally accepted.[10] Nor did he see the commutation of tithes as entirely advantageous to the

9. E.g. in his third Charge (1845), pp 21, 33-4 and especially 42; fifth Charge (1851), pp 6-7, 12

10. He spoke in 1845 of 'a steady progress of improvement' within the diocese, 'and this effected with calmness and consideration, without excitement or extravagance' (Charge (1845) p 18). This was in line with the policy he had advocated in 1839 (Charge pp 11-12).

Church. The financial interests of the clergy apart, he was prepared to argue that payment of tithes was not always or even generally an occasion for dispute or resentment, but 'in many cases [gave rise] to feelings of mutual goodwill between the parties concerned' - a view not widely held either at the time or since.

Denison's seventeen years as bishop saw improvements in several areas of parochial life, and may be said to have been marked by a quickening of the pace of change. By 1851 he could claim (perhaps a little too sanguinely) that any deficiencies in the number of parish churches or the amount of accommodation they offered had largely disappeared: 72 parishes still needed some increase in accommodation, but few additional churches or new ecclesiastical districts were required. Parishes holding two Sunday services had increased from 143 to 295; those celebrating Holy Communion once a month, from 35 to 84. The number of places in which the Bishop held Confirmation services had risen steadily to 82.[11] The number of livings held in plurality was reduced to acceptable, if not negligible proportions: in the nine years up to 1848, the number of parishes with a non-resident incumbent had dropped from 157 to 108, and of the 90 cases of plurality that remained, the majority involved 'small and contiguous' parishes.[12] He was also able to report a steady increase in public baptism (i.e. in the presence of the worshipping congregation, instead of at a private ceremony), a practice that had become widely neglected in the English Church.

Walter Kerr Hamilton, a friend and colleague who succeeded Denison in 1854, had already shown himself to be 'an indefatigable parish priest and an earnest evangelical preacher', and as such was one of a growing number who represented the new generation of parish clergy. In more than one respect, indeed, he was a sign of the times, even if a somewhat premature one. Denison had been considerably influenced by the Oxford Movement, but his approval of its beneficent influence on the life and teaching of the Church was qualified by the recognition that, like the Evangelical Revival, it was 'accompanied by extravagancies'.[13] Hamilton, though nurtured in Evangelicalism, was more

11. Denison, 1851, pp 8-10

12. Denison, 1848, p 33

13. Denison, 1842, pp 14-20

deeply influenced by the Tractarians. As a canon at Salisbury from 1841 he put his energies into improving the standards of worship in the cathedral and discouraging absenteeism among his fellow canons. As bishop from 1854 on, he was to continue and extend his predecessor's reforms, increasing the frequency of confirmations and founding a theological college in 1861 as part of his efforts to raise the standard of ordinands. One sign of changing times was the fact that he spent more time in his diocese than in the Lords. Queen Victoria is said to have been nonplussed and annoyed to find that, on Lord Liverpool's recommendation, she had appointed a Puseyite to the episcopal bench; but as such he remained an anomaly for some years.

A leading high churchman, John Mason Neale, summed up the 'signs of hope' for the renewal of the Church as he saw them in 1850:

'Go to one village after another, and everywhere you will find some mark of energy never known before. A new church, or a restored church, or a new school; fresh services, more frequent communions, more frequent sermons, more assiduous visiting, more done for the poor, more claimed from the rich. You will find popular feeling everywhere changed. Twenty years ago the cry was for shortening the services, now it is for increasing them; ... then, hardly a Church, except the Cathedrals, had daily services; now in some six hundred, it is said; weekly communion was then unknown, now it is not unfrequent.'^[14]

5.2 The Census of Religious Worship

The Census of Religious Worship was part of the general census of 1851 and was the only official attempt ever made to measure the spiritual state of the population of England and Wales, by church attendance on a designated Sunday. As the major source of statistical information on this aspect of 19th century life, it cannot be ignored by historians, whatever qualifications may be necessary regarding its accuracy and reliability.

Criticism of the Census on these counts has a long history. It began as soon as plans for it were announced, continued during the interval between Census Day and the publication of the Report in 1853,^[15] and was renewed among those (especially Anglicans) who found some aspects of the Report unpalatable. The Bishop of Salisbury was one of those who opposed it from the outset, and it may be presumed that episcopal influence lay behind the failure (or refusal) of a number of the parish

14. J.M. Neale, 1850, pp 15-16

15. PP 1852-53, lxxxix

clergy to submit a return. Serious use of the material by historians and sociologists did not begin until much more recently, but has resulted in an increasing flow of monographs and other studies.[16]

The census attempted to measure two quite different things - the amount of accommodation available for worshippers and the numbers attending places of worship belonging to the different religious bodies. Different forms were used for Anglican churches and for other denominations,[17] and were delivered by the local enumerators to representatives of each religious body in their area before the census day. It was left to the local clergy or lay leaders to complete the return, though the enumerator was instructed to check its accuracy (by some unspecified means) when collecting it the following Monday.[18] The ability of those concerned to submit accurate figures unaffected by denominational bias was one cause of concern from the outset. Another was the refusal, particularly by a number of Anglican incumbents, to participate in the census. In such cases, the local Registrar was instructed, as a last resort, to make some estimate of the missing figures.[19]

Two fundamental questions have to be considered: (1) how accurate is the information provided by the Census, and (2) how is it to be interpreted? The two questions have not always been sufficiently clearly distinguished in recent discussion of the census material; but it is virtually impossible to consider the second, without coming to some conclusions on the first.

16. For a survey of the literature, see Clive D Field, 1978. The most substantial contributions are those by K S Inglis (1960), D M Thompson (1967) and W S F Pickering (1967), cited below.

17. Roman Catholics were classed as dissenters for this purpose. On the other hand, a third form was used for the Society of Friends, though this is nowhere stated in the official Report and, unlike the other two, the form is not reproduced there. The main difference seems to be that the dimensions of the room used for meetings replaced the number of sittings.

18. 'This Paper will be called for on Monday March 31st, by the appointed Officer ... It will be the Officer's duty to verify the facts as far as possible ...' Explanatory note to the Census Schedule. However, Mann's Appendix to the Report on the 'Mode of Procuring and Digesting the Returns' (pp clxix-clxxi) virtually concedes that this check was not made, since after the returns had been collected in and 'tabulated in parochial order', 'it was then discovered that many of them were defective' in various specified ways. The evidence of the returns themselves clearly indicates a widespread neglect of the instructions given, as the following paragraphs show.

19. Ibid, p clxx

5.2.1 The Accuracy of the Census

The question of reliability as historical evidence arises at two levels: (a) that of the individual returns, which show widely varying degrees of competence and carefulness, and (b) that of the detailed tables and summaries in the printed Report prepared by Horace Mann and the accuracy with which these reflect the returns on which they are based. It would be true to say, I think, that those scholars who have shown greatest confidence in the Census and fewest misgivings about its limitations are those who have concentrated on the published Report rather than on the original returns, and whose approach tends to be more sociological than historical. A comment like that of Inglis, that the various reasons given for low attendance 'may be interpreted as a sign that worshippers were being enumerated conscientiously'[20] seems open to the charge of naivety on at least three counts: (1) it ignores the fact that most of the returns offered no such explanations; (2) it presupposes that explanation and exaggeration are not likely to coexist; and (3) it by-passes the possibility that both unconscious exaggeration and undue casualness in completing the returns may have played at least as great a part as any deliberate misrepresentation of the facts.

The degree of care taken in completing the returns varied greatly, as was only to be expected; and this was clearly a matter of individual ability and attitude, rather than a geographical or denominational one. Errors and discrepancies obvious enough to be easily corrected when the enumerator collected the returns are sufficiently common to suggest a casualness on the part of the local census officers, who may well have seen this as just one more task to be performed at a time when they were already too busy.

One of the detectable errors is wrong additions. At Barton Stacey parish church (118/1/3) 160 'general congregation' and 62 Sunday School Scholars make a total of 322, instead of 222. The curate at Morden (273/4/1) added 280 and 200 to make a total of 400 sittings; then, misreading 12 as 120 gave the average afternoon attendance as 240 instead of 132. At Ebenezer Baptist chapel, Southsea (96/4/1), $80 + 12 = 72$; at Highbury Independent chapel, Portsmouth, $67 + 100 = 267$; at Dr. Bogue's Independent chapel Gosport (97/1/1) $50 + 170 = 120$; and the

20. K S Inglis, 1960, pp 76-7

Primitive Methodist minister at Enmore Green, Shaftesbury (268/1/1) added 70 and 35 and made 85. Where these errors occur in average attendances, for places where actual attendances are also given, they do not affect the tables in the printed report; but they are nevertheless symptomatic of a fairly widespread carelessness on the part of the enumerators.[21]

Methods of determining the number of attendances varied widely, though only a minority of returns specifically mention the method used. At Holy Trinity, Weymouth (274/2/4) the general congregations (428 in the morning and 659 in the evening) were 'counted by a person at the door for the purpose'. There were similar counts at Poole and Christchurch Independent Chapels (101/1/1; 272/2/3). The totals at Poole, though inclusive of children, were quite impressive - 831 in the morning, 695 in the afternoon, and 693 in the evening; but they were nevertheless reported to be below average because of the 'prevailing influenza'. Anglican congregations at Abbots Ann (118/1/8) were counted on two successive Sundays. At the other end of the scale, Tichfield parish church (98/2/3) offered average attendances only, in round figures, the incumbent adding that these were 'quite a guess'. 'I cannot count my congregation myself, and do not feel justified in so occupying any other person during Divine Service'. The vicar of Holy Rood, Southampton, left it to his Churchwardens, but added his own doubts about their estimates. 'Either the available space is overstated, or there is some error in the number of persons attending divine service, especially in the evening.'

In many cases round figures are entered as actual attendances. The suspicion that these must be estimated averages is reinforced by the return for All Saints, Portsea (96/4/1), where identical rounded figures are given for both actual and average attendances, with the comment: 'I cannot certify that the last return is correct - it is very difficult to form a correct idea of congregated numbers.' Others had been aware of the difficulty, but had made some attempt to overcome it.[22]

There seems to have been some reluctance to use the space provided for

21. D M Thompson, 1967, p 90, refers to serious addition mistakes in the tables for the East Midlands, citing Leicester as an example.

22. Cf. W S F Pickering, 1967, p 385

estimated averages, even when the rounded numbers given for actual attendance are clearly suspect. The clearest example of this comes from the Dorchester Wesleyan Circuit (270/1/2 etc.), where the Superintendent minister, John Stevens, obviously filled in the returns for a number of preaching places under his care during the week or so prior to Census Sunday, signing them on various dates between the 21st and 31st March, and giving what are clearly estimates in round figures only, but entering them as actual attendances.

Duplicated returns may, if not detected and eliminated, distort the final results, but at the same time provide a means of determining the margin of error for which we must be prepared in the figures as a whole. At Maiden Newton the Independent Chapel (275/3/6) was said to hold 150 by the minister, but 250 by the Registrar, while the 48 morning and 126 evening worshippers become a single figure of 160 in the Registrar's return. At West Stour (268/3/3) separate returns were made by the church warden and by the curate in the absence of the vicar. Their figures for actual attendances were similar; but for average attendances, the former gave 39 in the mornings and 59 in the afternoons, whereas the latter gave only a single figure, 76, which may have been intended as an average for all services. A similar error occurs in the case of duplicate Anglican returns for Hamworthy (272/3/1), one of them made by the incumbent of Sturminster Marshall with which the living was linked. This duplication went undetected because the two parishes were in different Registration Districts. The estimates of average attendances differed by about 25%. Since a number of incumbents, especially in the Winchester diocese, boycotted the census, leaving the local Registrar to arrive at a figure by a combination of enquiry and guesswork, the cases where a registrar's estimate duplicates another return are a useful indicator of the degree of accuracy that can be assumed. Examples include St. Mary's, Motcombe (268/1/1), where the Registrar estimated the congregations as 120 and 150, compared with the 200 and 300 reported by the curate in the absence of the vicar. The Chapel of Ease at Soberton (110/3/2) had seating for 270 according to the curate, but 300 according to the Registrar. The curate reported morning and afternoon attendances as 149 and 111, compared with the 140 and 105 estimated by the Registrar.

None of these discrepancies quite equals that of the Wesleyan chapel at Ninfield in East Sussex (790/1/6), where average attendances were

estimated separately by the Sunday School Superintendent and by the Superintendent Minister of the Hastings Circuit, the one giving the figure of 70 for both afternoon and evening services, compared with 80 and 110 estimated by the other. In addition, the minister, Henry W. Williams, was under the impression that the Sunday School met in the afternoon, not in the morning, and that it could muster 30 more pupils than the Superintendent reported.

A considerable number of Anglican returns are missing, in many cases because they were never submitted. Others were returned blank. From the Nonconformist side, a much smaller proportion of returns are missing (Table 5:1), though it is always possible that some informal and ephemeral groups, meeting in private houses, may have been overlooked.

Table 5:1 Number of Registration Districts for which returns are defective

	Total Returns	C of E	Independents	Baptists	Wesleyans	PM	BC
Hants	20	10	1	0	2	1	1
Dorset	9	7	1	0	3	1	0
S. Wilts	7	7	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	36	24	2	0	5	2	1

There is no trace of a return for the Wesleyan chapels at Portchester (98/1/2), Romsey (107/1/1), Gillingham (268/3/1) or Tolpuddle (275/2/7), either among the original returns or in the Summary Tables in the Report. Information on the Bible Christian chapel at Crookham, Hants is entered on the return for the Bible Christians of Crondall (115/1/3), with the explanatory note: 'No papers left at Crookham'. A missing return may turn up elsewhere through being wrongly filed. Thus one of the two Wesleyan returns from Tarrant Monkton (270/2/16) is filed under Portsea, probably because the Society Steward misunderstood the heading 'District' and wrote 'Portsmouth District' instead of 'Blandford'. The Independent Chapel at Whitechurch Canonicorum is wrongly filed under Whitchurch, Hants, and the return for a Wesleyan chapel at Twyford, Hants turns out to be one for Twyford, Berks. A return filed under Nutley, Hants, belongs to Nutley in Sussex.

There was some criticism from Anglican quarters of the accuracy of figures reported by the nonconformists. They were accused either of exaggerating their support or making efforts to drum up attendances

well above the average for this special occasion. The rector of Meonstoke (110/2/1) took upon himself to endorse the Primitive Methodist return with his own comment: 'I think it just and necessary to add to this return - that the Place of Meeting herein certified is simply a room, in a dwelling house occupied by Two Separate Families and measuring 13ft square and about 7ft. 6in. high, cannot possibly contain free sittings for 60 persons and standing room for 20. Moreover the average number reported does not represent the estimate of Dissent in this village. A meeting-room being opened here, they came from surrounding places - and on the day of the Census extraordinary pains were taken to get up large numbers.' [23] The Primitive Methodist figures themselves lend some colour to this complaint, since the attendance figures of 28, 61 and 84 for the three services contrast with 0, 10 and 40 given as average attendances. The Anglican return for Ashmansworth (119/1/2) complained that 'Many who usually attend Church were this day misled by the Dissenters' - but without offering any explanation of how or why this occurred.

Confusion over what was required, incomplete or misleading data, and missing returns combine to make any attempt to check the reliability of the published Report and its summary tables highly problematical and frustrating. For the most part we lack the alternative sources of information necessary to provide an independent check on the figures. Something can be done on the basis of available membership figures, chiefly from the various Methodist denominations, to discover whether there is any consistent ratio of membership to attendance; but the absence of any such ratio might point to the operation of a variety of local factors, rather than to any unreliability in the census figures; and in any case we cannot apply such tests at the level of the individual congregation, but only on a wider basis, usually that of the circuit, to which membership records apply.

Even a Registration District for which a complete set of returns is available presents its problems when examined in any detail. Whitchurch, Hants (117), is exceptional in being such a District; in this instance, even the Anglican clergy complied and provided the required information. (The printed Summary Table lists 3 Independent places, though there are only two returns; but since the attendance

23. Cf. the example cited by R W Ambler, 1975, p 376

figures tally, we may assume that this is a misprint in the Report.) In regard to both accommodation and attendance, the returns and the Report tally, with only minor discrepancies. The rector of Ashe referred to 'forms in the chancel' in addition to the pews, but these are ignored in the printed data on accommodation. For the Independents, the Report gives a total of 450 free sittings, which is 100 more than are found in the returns. This might be taken as evidence of a third chapel, were it not that the attendance totals tally.

The Methodists fare better. Returns and Report tally in the case of both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists. The only qualification is that four out of the six Wesleyan chapels provided no accommodation figures. In such a case, no attempt was made to estimate the missing figures and to adjust the totals; so that the Wesleyan accommodation figures for the Whitchurch District are seriously understated. Clearly generalisations or conclusions based on any unadjusted figures of this kind have very limited validity.

Whitchurch poses far fewer difficulties than most Registration Districts. The range of problems which more usually arise is seen in the case of Romsey District (107). In this case there are surviving returns from only six of the eleven Anglican parishes, plus one more, East Dean, which is 'included under Mottisfont'. The Report gives the total of parishes as nine, with 859 more sittings than those in the returns; which suggests that some of the returns have subsequently gone astray.

The figures for the Independents tally, provided one undefined congregation for which there is a return is included. The Baptist figures similarly present only one comparatively minor problem. The return for Toothill Chapel lists only 12 sittings, but congregations of 30 and 65, suggesting that the accommodation is being reported in pews rather than individual seats. The Report nevertheless treats them as the latter.

The Methodist figures are rather more problematical. There is no return for Romsey Wesleyan chapel, nor is its existence reflected in the Report. There is a discrepancy of 100 between the accommodation figures in the returns and in the Report, but as the two agree in their attendance figures, we cannot posit a missing return as explanation of the discrepancy.

In the case of the two Primitive Methodist causes, the Report gives the correct attendance figures for both, but the accommodation figures for only one of them. (A footnote stating that one of the returns failed to give the number of sittings is incorrect.)

For a parallel to the missing Romsey Wesleyan return, we may turn to the Shaftesbury Registration District (268), where there is no trace of a return for the Wesleyan Chapel in Gillingham. In the accommodation figures and in those for morning attendances, the returns and the Report tally, but there are discrepancies in the figures for afternoon and evening attendances:

	Returns	Report
Afternoon	292	182
Evening	673	473

A footnote to the summary table in the Report states that no attendance figures were given for 'one Wesleyan place of worship containing 185 sittings', i.e. Fontmell Magna; yet the Fontmell return does provide attendance figures: 100 in the afternoon and 200 in the evening. (The fact that these figures correspond almost exactly to the discrepancies noted suggests the possibility that the attendance figures were added to the Fontmell return later, perhaps by the Registrar; but an examination of the return itself lends no support to this hypothesis.)

Figures given for the Primitive Methodists, for both accommodation and attendance, agree. So do those for the Independents, except that the figure given in one case as the average attendance is included in the evening total, despite being entered in the space for the afternoon. Returns for two of the Baptist chapels give no accommodation figures,[24] yet, contrary to normal practice, some estimate of their seating seems to have been made and included in the printed totals in the Report.[25] The attendance figures tally.

For an example of a missing Primitive Methodist return we may turn to Winchester Registration District (109). Here the Wesleyan, Wesleyan Association and Bible Christian figures present no problems. But of the three Primitive Methodist places of worship recorded in the District Table, only two are represented by surviving returns. The third return was for Twyford, Berks, wrongly filed here and included in

24. A footnote to the Summary Table refers to only one.

25. Returns: 230 free. Report: 38 free.

the Winchester District totals in error. The Census shows no trace of the Micheldever society, which may have been overlooked because, despite giving its name to the circuit, it was still without a chapel.[26] If any return was ever made, it must have gone astray before the Report was compiled.

Where a number of returns within a Registration District are missing, it is virtually impossible to check the District Tables in the Report against the original returns. This is particularly the case with the Anglican returns, for which a complete set is rarely available. Droxford District (110) is unusual in this respect. The printed table records a total of 18 Anglican places of worship, and there are 18 Anglican returns, including one duplicate for the Chapel of Ease at Soberton (110/3/2). On examination, the printed totals for both accommodation and attendance are found to include both sets of figures for Soberton, except that there is a discrepancy of 6 in those for afternoon attendances. In the case of Portsea District (96), on the other hand, a duplicate return for All Saints District Chapel (96/1/1 and 4) has been properly ignored. The printed Report gives the number of Anglican places of worship correctly as 12; and the totals for morning and afternoon attendances tally with those in the returns.[27]

The Nonconformist returns for a particular Registration District are more often complete, enabling us to check the accuracy of the Detailed Tables. It is thus possible to confirm that both sets of figures for the Independent chapel at Maiden Newton (275/3/6) have been included in the printed totals, and this has also happened in the case of several Wesleyan causes.[28]

5.2.2. Problems of interpretation

Assuming the accuracy and completeness of the statistics obtained, their interpretation remained highly problematical and gave rise to

26. See above, pp 238-40, 254

27. The remaining totals for evening attendance and for accommodation, cannot be reconciled with the original returns, whether one includes or excludes the duplicate return, and some arithmetical error must be assumed.

28. Evidence that this particular source of error occurred fairly widely is found in Nottinghamshire (D M Thompson, 1967, pp 89-90, 94), and in Lincolnshire (R H Ambler, 1979, p xxii), and in the West Midlands, where Geoffrey Robson has found many duplicate Quaker returns counted twice. Another Wesleyan example occurs in the Hailsham District in East Sussex.

immediate controversy as well as to much recent speculation and calculation on the part of scholars frustrated by the ambiguities of the material. In this respect even the comparatively straightforward details of available accommodation raise some problems. The prevalence of pews made some basis for calculation essential, though the Census officials provided none. Some respondents reckoned on the basis of 20" per sitting,[29] others 18";[30] most did not indicate their method of calculation and probably did no more than estimate in general terms. In at least one instance, the parish church at Belchalwell, Dorset (269/2/13), the figures given (totalling only 21 'sittings') must refer to pews, rather than individual places. An additional note on the same return draws attention to 'a raised seat for the Schoolmistress and about 18 children' in a gallery which is not included in the accommodation figures. Such an area set aside for the Sunday School children was sometimes excluded,[31] but in the absence of any specific indication must be assumed to be included in the total.

Another source of confusion was the presence of children in the general congregation. Those responsible for the census failed to give clear instructions as to whether or not these should be included in the totals, and this lack of precision communicated itself through local Registrars and Enumerators to those who attempted to complete the forms. Although a separate space was provided for the numbers of Sunday School scholars, there was clearly much uncertainty as to whether the totals should include those who met entirely separately from the adult congregation, or only those present for at least some part of the church services. Nor was any guidance given about those children who attended the service with their parents and remained throughout. Hence the plea for advice by the incumbent at Crawley, Hants (109/2/8): 'Are all Children in Church, but not in the Sunday School, to be reckoned as part of the general congregation, as I have now done?' At King Street Independent chapel, Portsea (96/2/1), fifty Sunday Scholars were listed, with the remainder sitting with their

29. e.g. Bishops Waltham parish church (110/1/3), where the 'space for the children' is specifically excepted.

30. E.g. Liss parish church (112/1/5), Andover Independent chapel (118/3/5), Abbotsbury Independent chapel (274/4/2).

31. E.g. At Over Compton parish church (276/3/10): 'The Scholars are seated in the Chancel and the Aisle and not reckoned in the sittings'. (On the other hand at the Tabernacle at Lewes, Sussex (84/3/6) the Independents reported 517 free sittings, including 324 for children in a gallery.)

parents; but the Baptists at Ebenezer Chapel in Southsea (96/4/1) did not include the afternoon Sunday Scholars, as they were kept in the schoolroom during the service.

The normal situation is no doubt represented by the return from Rimpton parish church (276/3/7), which notes that 'The general congregation probably includes some of the older Sunday scholars'. At the Pear Tree Green Independent Chapel, Itchen (106/1/1), 'The Sunday School closes before the morning service, when the children attend in the chapel, so that they are reckoned as part of the Congregation in the morning, as well as separately in the school'. On the other hand, the Wesleyan returns from Hunger Hill (268/3/2) and Stalbridge (269/1/3) specifically omitted figures for the children attending Sunday School or in the general congregation; while others (e.g. the Wakeham and Fortuneswell Wesleyan returns at Portland (274/3/1) and that for Porton Chapel of Ease (262/3/7)) give no figures for Sunday School attendance.

When he came to prepare the Census Report, Horace Mann found himself faced with the impossibility of distinguishing between children and adults in the 'general congregation' and had to resort to a compromise. Recognising that the figures for the general congregation included children, he added in the numbers of Sunday Scholars reported as meeting at the same time of day as a service of public worship, but ignored any reported at other times.[32] In any attempt to determine what percentage of the population was church-going, this widespread inclusion of children in the general attendance figures must be taken into account. The numbers concerned could be quite substantial. At the Landport Baptist chapel (96/2/1) about 250 Sunday scholars met separately in the schoolroom 'for want of more room in the Chapel'; and at the Albion Independent chapel in Southampton (105/1/1) there were 215 children at a separate morning service.

A question that soon became a matter of dispute was that of how far the attendance figures for Census Sunday could be taken as typical. The inclusion of columns for average as well as for actual attendances on the forms was presumably intended to provide an answer to this; but the general failure to supply both sets of figures made a firm answer more difficult. The motives of those who declined to give actual

32. Report, p. clxxi

attendances were presumably much the same as the reason given by the rector of Durweston (207/2/7), who provided averages only, adding the explanation: 'I do not think the taking of any one Sunday at all a fair criterion of the attendance at Church.' [33]

Among the reasons given for attendances differing from the average, the weather, as in other parts of the country, loomed large. This was especially the case in scattered rural parishes. The incumbent at East Stoke (273/3/8) was more explicit than most on this point: 'Owing to the distance from which many of the parishioners must come, the attendance depends so much on the state of the weather that it varies considerably, and the number present on any one Sunday can be no fair criterion of the general attendance. The parish is very extensive [3,273 acres], including a great deal of uncultivated land; the population consequently much scattered. Some portions are entirely detached, separated from the main body of the parish by intervening parishes.' [34] He might have added that two strategically located Wesleyan chapels, at Binnegar and High Wood, were likely to attract those deterred by distance from attending the parish church. It was probably true that only a minority of parishioners were likely to walk more than a mile to worship; nor was this the case only with Anglicans. When Sarah Cook moved to the hamlet of Fyfield near Andover in 1822, she found that no one from the village ever went over to the Methodist preaching services at Thruxton chapel, though it was barely a mile away. So she offered her home to the preachers of the Andover Circuit. [35]

Exceptionally, fine weather at Winterbourne Came (275/1/8) was credited with producing a larger congregation than usual in the parish church. A number of parishes noted that attendances were higher in the summer months than in the winter. This seasonal variation was particularly noted in the country areas, [36] but also affected some town

33. His argument is somewhat blunted by his adding: 'the congregation so far as regards parishioners varying from Sunday to Sunday very little except for accidental causes'.

34. Similar returns came from Burley (102/1/8), Faccombe (118/4/6), Kingsclere (119/1/1) and Brimpton, near Newbury (119/2/3). Many other Anglican returns refer to the extensive nature of the parish, its scattered population, the inaccessibility of the parish church and the consequent seasonal variations in the size of the congregations.

35. Dredge, 1833, pp 70-1

36. E.g. Hinton St. Mary (269/2/12), Buckland (96/1/1, Independent Chapel).

congregations.[37] The return for St. Nicholas Church, Milbrook (106/3/3) spelled this out a little more fully. It reported a general congregation of 650 at the morning service and 350 in the afternoon, adding that morning congregations varied from 200-300 on a wet winter morning to as many as 900 on a fine summer one, with afternoon numbers ranging similarly between 200 and 700.

A report from the Wesleyan chapel at Thrupton (1128/2/3) draws attention to a rather different factor at work. Here 'the number of the congregations is always larger in winter than in summer, as, being an agricultural population, the people are more at liberty in winter'. As a result, average numbers went up from 40-50 to 70-80. Similarly, the Independents at Stour Provost (268/3/4) held their evening school during the winter months only, because 'the people are so poor they cannot spare their children during the day'. In this conflict between weather conditions and occupational demands, the significant factor seems to have been the difference of social background between Anglican congregations and others. But Anglican congregations were also affected by the demands of agriculture. In agricultural parishes like Hinton Ampner and the neighbouring Kilmiston (113/1/4 and 5), the afternoon service, complete with sermon, 'invariably' drew the largest numbers.[38]

A further seasonal variation is noted in the case of a few urban Anglican congregations. In Anglican churches the morning congregation was almost invariably the largest. But at St. Mary's, Alverstoke (96/1/1), where there were three well attended services, it was noted that 'the afternoon congregation is generally the largest in the winter months and the evening in the summer months'; and another town church, St James's, Poole (272/2/3) had its largest congregation in the evening.

Among other explanations offered for below-average attendances on March 30th, the commonest was illness, particularly influenza[39] and measles.[40] The choice of mid-Lent Sunday as Census day, adduced in

37. E.g. St. Mary's, Portsea and St. Paul's, Southsea (96/4/1); Gosport (97/1/2, High St. Wesleyan Chapel)

38. Cf. Nately Scures (116/1/2) and Bramley (116/2/2).

39. Reported from Hayling Island (95/1/1), Havant (95/1/4), Fareham (98/1/1), Pimperne (270/2/12) and Poole (272/2/3).

40. Reported from Stockbridge (118/2/3) and Pitton (263/1/3).

some parts of the country as a reason for small attendances, seems to have had only marginal effect in the south, being mentioned only at Holy Trinity, Wonston (109/1/1) and the Independent chapel at Stockbridge (118/2/3). Elsewhere, public baptisms (at St. Peter's, Fareham, 98/1/1 and Silver Hill Baptist chapel, Winchester, 109/3/5) increased the congregations; while the absence of key families and their households (e.g. at Sarisbury, 98/2/3 and Bryanston, 270/2/6), the illness or absence of a minister (e.g. at Damerham Baptist chapel, 103/1/4, Portland Baptist Chapel, Southampton, 105/1/2 and Wareham Independent chapel, 273/3/12), or even the administration of the Sacrament (at Holybourne near Alton, 114/21/5 see below), might reduce them.

'Sacrament Sunday' was still a comparatively infrequent and unpopular occasion, and many rural parishes had yet to feel the impact of Tractarianism. One indication of this is the use of the chancel (e.g. at Over Compton, 276/3/10 and Tolpuddle, 275/2/7) to accommodate the Sunday School. The incumbent at Landford (263/1/11) noted plaintively, 'We want a new Church, the accommodation being inconvenient (the children packed into the Chancel, & disagreeable, esp. to the women).' Of the 226 adults attending the morning service at All Saints, Dorchester (275/1/3), only 58 were communicants, compared with 50 out of a congregation of 88 at Little Bredy (275/3/15). The 'temporary curate' at Holybourne reported that 'the 30th March was the Sacrament Sunday and on such days the Congregation is always less than on other occasions'.

When the census returns came to be analysed for the published Report, one major defect in the design of the questions became apparent. No account had been taken of the number of worshippers who attended more than one service on Census Sunday. This created problems for Horace Mann as he prepared his Report, and has engaged the ingenuity of interpreters ever since in their attempts to determine what percentage of the population were churchgoers in the mid-19th century.

Of the various attempts to solve this problem, the earliest was the formula which Mann himself rather belatedly employed:

Morning attendance + half afternoon attendance + one-third evening attendance = Total number of worshippers.

This formula could not be applied as it stood in the many cases where

there was no morning service; and in fact it was not applied to the figures for individual congregations, but only in order to estimate percentage of worshippers at national level.[41]

In any case, Nonconformist spokesmen were quick to point out that the formula discriminated against them and in favour of the Established Church, whose main service of the day tended to be in the morning, whereas the Nonconformists usually drew their largest congregations in the evening.[42] A well-known comment from the *Anglican* camp was that of Dr. A. Hume of Liverpool, who described the morning service as 'the service of necessity, the afternoon 'that of convenience' and the evening 'that of devotion'.[43]

In recent years various attempts have been made to overcome the shortcomings of Mann's formula. W.S.F. Pickering used what he called the 'maximum-minimum' figures, taking the numbers recorded at the most numerous attended service as a means of determining the minimum number of individuals who attended church on Census Sunday.[44] D.M. Thompson similarly uses the figures for the largest congregation in the day to 'give some idea of the number of people influenced by any place of worship'. Clearly, in an age when attendance more than once on a Sunday was common, especially among Nonconformists, the resulting totals tend to underestimate church attendance. Nevertheless, they provide a more objective basis for comparison, and are less weighted in favour of the Church of England.

To balance any tendency to underestimation, it is possible to work with two sets of attendance figures, representing (a) the 'maximum-minimum' of Pickering and Thompson, and (b) the hypothetical maximum, arrived at by totalling all attendances at all services on the day, and thereby ignoring the incidence of double or triple attendance.[45]

K.S. Inglis has a different 'Index of Attendance', which he arrives at by totalling the attendances at all services in the day and expressing

41. Report, p clii; cf. W F S Pickering, 1967, p 390; D M Thompson, 1967, pp 91-3.

42. Inglis, 1960, p 78

43. Quoted in W F S Pickering, 1967, p. 390

44. W F S Pickering, 1967, pp 393-4

45. This approach is used by G E Milburn in studies of the Census returns for the North-East (1974, 1975).

it as a percentage of the local population.[46] R W Ambler, on the other hand, has an 'Index of Attendance' which uses only the figures for the best attended service of the day, expressed as a percentage of the population.[47] Neither formula brings us any closer to a reliable estimate of the number of individual worshippers, but it does provide a basis for more objective comparisons, e.g. between denominations or between different geographical areas or types of community. It enables Inglis, for example, to show the considerable overall difference between levels of attendance in towns of more than 10,000 people and those in rural areas. The problematical nature of the attendance figures has persuaded at least one scholar, Alan Everitt, to fall back on the figures for accommodation; at the same time expressing reservations about this approach which amount virtually to an admission of defeat.[48] On the whole, it seems better to continue to grapple with the problems of interpreting the reported attendances.

Whatever the chosen basis for calculation, the totals arrived at may be expressed as a percentage either of the total population, or of the total 'eligible population', arrived at by deducting the number of children, the sick and the elderly and any others deemed unable to attend church even if they wished (e.g. domestic servants, according to Mann or, since the Census was conducted at the height of the lambing season, shepherds and other farm workers).

The few returns which specifically refer to this matter of multiple attendance are insufficient to form ^a basis for any assessment of Mann's formula. But they do seem to indicate a fairly wide range of patterns of behaviour, arising from local circumstances. At one extreme, we have a town parish like Holy Trinity, Southampton (105/1/1), where 'With individual exceptions, the same persons attend both services'.[49] At the other, a scattered rural parish like Faccombe (118/4/6) reported: 'The great majority of the parishioners live more

46. K S Inglis, 1960, pp 79-82

47. R W Ambler, 1979

48. A Everitt, 1972, pp 14-15, 46-7

49. Unusually, for an Anglican congregation, the evening numbers (507 adults) were substantially larger than the morning ones (419), and perhaps contained a number of domestic servants and others who were not free to attend in the morning. It would be wrong to see this as an urban phenomenon; among the few other examples was Yetminster (276/1/8), with only 90 adults and 67 children at the morning service, but '200 or more' in the evening.

than a mile from the Church [at the top of a very steep hill: added]. Few therefore come twice; and the morning and afternoon congregations are, with few exceptions, composed of different persons.' At Broughton (108/1/6), where the second service was in the evening, many parishioners attended only once in the day. The curate at Barton Stacey (118/1/3) recorded that 'many of the congregation who attend in the morning do not in the afternoon and vice versa, the parish being very straggling'; and much the same situation prevailed at Upper Clatford (118/1/7), where the rector surmised that average congregations of around 70 in the morning and 80 in the afternoon represented a total of perhaps 120 individual worshippers, with only about 30, or 25%, attending twice. The proportion was considerably higher at Durley (110/1/2), where the average morning congregation of 190 and the afternoon one of 140 were reckoned to represent about 250 individuals, just over one third of them attending both services.[50]

Nonconformists were probably rather more inclined than Anglicans to attend more than one service on Sunday; but the main distinction remained that between town and country. The pastor of the Baptist Meeting at Poole (272/2/3) estimated that 'the average of the Congregation meeting at any one time in the day is not more than two thirds of the persons who are in the habit of attending this place of worship and no other'. His implication appears to be that such a proportion was low; but it was in fact well above what seems to have been the average.

There is some evidence that, at any rate in the parish churches, male worshippers predominated at the morning service, no doubt for domestic reasons. At St. George's, Portland (274/3/1), 'The males in the morning congregation were as nearly as possible two to one female. In the evening, the numbers were nearly equal.' (The adult attendance at these services is given as 114 and 306.) Similarly at East Stratton (109/1/5), 'The custom is that the men generally attend in the morning, and their wives in the afternoon.' The same is reported from Northington (113/2/8); and the pattern is confirmed by the more detailed breakdown from the neighbouring parish of Brown Candover (113/2/9), where attendances for the day were:

50. On the basis of the somewhat higher figures given for actual attendance on Census Sunday, the proportion of 'twicers' would be considerably higher - just over 50%.

	Morning	Afternoon
Males	70	33
Females	31	70
Schoolboys	14	7
Schoolgirls	26	20

The return which gives the most specific information on the numbers attending more than once in the day comes from the north-eastern fringe of the area we are at present concerned with. The rector of Baughurst (119/2/7) reported: 'The morning and afternoon congregations are only in a very slight degree identical. Yesterday of the 33 in the afternoon 23 had not been there in the morning' (when the congregation had numbered 42). The overlap of 'twicers' was thus less than one sixth of the total number of individual worshippers during the day.

For a parish with a population of 568, the Anglican attendances were far from satisfactory and the incumbent clearly felt that some further comment was called for. His parish was, in fact, one in which both the Wesleyans and the Primitive Methodists had established themselves. The Wesleyan chapel, though dating from 1795, drew small enough congregations (a total of 76 at its three services) for it to be ignored; but the challenge of the Primitive Methodist chapel, though built as recently as 1845, had to be faced, though the exact tone of the rector's comment (whether commendatory or self-excusing) is difficult to gauge: 'The Primitive Methodists, generally called "Ranters", have long been established in the Parish & are doing good. Our police-constable, a most respectable man, tells me that in an adjoining parish, formerly proverbial for its heathen state, the Beer-houses on Sundays are no longer full; the people are gone to the Ranters' Chapels.' Their congregations at Baughurst (160 in the afternoon and 145 in the evening) far outnumbered Anglican and Wesleyan attendances put together; and even in the morning, there was a turn-out of 40 for a meeting at a private house at 'Townsend'. The Anglican response to such a situation had been the rebuilding of the dilapidated parish church four years before; but the rector described the new building, 'with open roof and open seats, after the approved medieval fashion', as 'intolerably cold' and added a complaint about the inadequate endowment of the living. For once, the Establishment was on the defensive.

At Houghton (108/2/4), it was the long-established Wesleyan cause that was blamed for decreasing attendance at the parish church, though the

services were in direct competition only in the afternoon.[51] It was more common for the threat of dissent to be dismissed as of little consequence. The Primitive Methodists at Homington (263/2/5) claimed congregations of 50 and 69, with an average attendance of as many as 80. But the incumbent asserted that 'The actual Dissenters amount (with their children) to 27, and the remaining population are real, or nominal, members of the Church.' We are left to assume that the chapel was drawing many of its supporters from outside the parish, and that these were therefore of no concern to the vicar.

Here and there an Anglican incumbent went on the offensive. The evangelical Henry Moule at Fordington (275/1/6) protested: 'The attendance at the church services gives no adequate idea of the instruction received by the people from a faithful clergyman. While many may attend other churches and chapels, the visiting of all especially in time of sickness rests on him.' And this was echoed by the curate at Pimperne (270/2/12) in a lengthy peroration:

'No account is taken of the sick and aged who belong to the Established Church, without a single exception. The ordinances and religious instruction given to them at home ought to be taken account of, if this return is to be looked upon as a test of the numerical influence of the several religious denominations. I never heard of an instance of a poor, sick or infirm person ministered to spiritually in their own homes by teachers of any religious denomination (in this parish) except the Established Church.'

In the case of the Church of England, all the inhabitants were, at least theoretically, its potential worshippers; and in compact rural parishes, especially those that have come to be termed 'closed' communities, the reality might approximate to this ideal. Thus at Langton Herring (274/4/1), three-quarters of the parishioners were said to attend the services in the parish church which was the only place of worship in the parish - though the incumbent refrained from supplying either actual or average attendance figures, from which some idea of the frequency of their attendance might be gained.

For the 'gathered' congregations of the Nonconformists, the situation was rather different. Even if we measure their strength against the population of the parish in which a chapel stood, we have to take into account the fact that they often drew their support from further afield - though, except for town causes, this was limited by the more

51. The actual attendances reported were: Morning: Anglicans, 120; afternoon: Anglicans, 100, Wesleyans, 85; evening: Wesleyans, 95.

rudimentary means of travel. It would be more meaningful in the case of nonconformist attendances to set them against membership figures, which unfortunately are not always available for individual congregations, or against the estimated numbers of those more loosely associated with them. Only occasionally do the Census returns contain information of this kind.

The Baptist minister at Beaulieu Rails Chapel, South Baddesley (100/1/2) claimed that about 250 adults made the chapel 'their regular place of worship'. Congregations were below average because of illness, but were recorded as 149, 162 and 166, excluding Sunday School scholars, at the three services of the day. Applying Mann's formula here would give a total of 285 individual worshippers during the day.

The Independent Chapel at Wareham (273/3/12) had congregations of 276, 126 and 320 on Census Sunday (reckoned to be 'much below average' because of the lack of a 'settled minister' for over a year), plus 160 Sunday School scholars in the morning and 162 in the afternoon. The deacon who completed the return estimated that 'upward of 650 persons (men, women and children)' belonged to the chapel and were present at some time on that day. Applying Mann's formula in this case is complicated by uncertainty as to how many of the Sunday School children are likely to have attended both morning and afternoon sessions: possibly nearer 100% than the 50% assumed by Mann for the 'general congregation'. Mann's formula applied to the total figures gives us an estimated 681 individuals (adults and children) attending at some time on that day. But if we were to assume that nearly all the Sunday School scholars attended twice, this would bring the total down to about 600, lending some weight to the objection that the formula discriminated against dissenters.

A possible refinement of Mann's formula would be to take the most numerous congregation, irrespective of time of day, and add to it half of the second largest attendance and one third of the smallest attendance. Applied to the Wareham Independents, this would give a range of between 659 and 739 individuals attending at least once during the day, depending on how many of the Sunday School scholars were present twice.

Another dimension of the situation is presented by the return for the Poole Baptist chapel (272/2/3), where it was reckoned that the average

congregation was never more than two thirds of those who were associated with the chapel and were in the habit of worshipping there; the remaining third representing those who were sick, or prevented by their duties, absence at sea, etc. There were 'some who attend only in the morning, many only in the evening, especially young females with young families'.

5.2.3 Church-going in 1851

The accuracy of the original returns and the problems involved in their interpretation set limits to the value of the Religious Census as historical evidence. Nevertheless it does provide a considerable body of material and in the absence of any other source as detailed and comprehensive as this, we must make what we can of it. Individual returns need to be corrected wherever internal errors and discrepancies are detected, and tested, wherever possible, against other available evidence. But the Census material as a whole seems both plentiful and reliable enough to form the basis for comparisons between different denominations, between different parts of the country, and between different sizes and types of community.[52] It will therefore serve our purpose reasonably well if we use it, with whatever reservations, to examine the state of southern Methodism in the mid-19th century, in the wider context of religious observance as a whole.

In terms of the adequacy of accommodation for worship, central southern England was much better provided for than the country as a whole. (Table 5:2) In this respect, Hampshire, with seating for only 58.7% of the population, came nearest to the national average of 57%; but with a preponderance of Anglican accommodation (seating 37% compared with 29% nation-wide). What is, in fact, notable is that the area as a whole differed from the national picture in the general imbalance in the amount of accommodation provided by Anglicans and by other churches. Whereas nationally the two provided roughly equal numbers of sittings, throughout the three southern counties the Protestant Nonconformists and Roman Catholics still fell well behind the Anglicans in this respect. Just over three fifths of the rural parishes (322 out of 535) still had no non-conformist chapels, though in some cases there were small groups meeting in private houses.

52. Most discussions of the census's value to historians fall back on the claim that it is useful for the purposes of comparison; e.g. W F S Pickering, 1967, p 387; D M Thompson, 1967, p 97

Table 5:2 Accommodation provided by the Church of England
and other Churches

	Sittings as % of population			Sittings as % of total sittings provided	
	CofE	Others	Total	CofE	Others
England and Wales	29.6	27.4	57.0	51.9	48.1
Dorset	51.1	27.2	78.3	65.3	34.7
Hampshire	37.2	21.5	58.7	63.4	36.6
Wiltshire	46.1	31.2	77.3	59.6	40.4
Large towns: national average	17.2	18.8	36.0	47.8	52.2
Portsmouth	17.0	19.9	36.9	46.1	53.9
Southampton	28.8	22.1	50.9	56.6	43.4

Source: Census Report, Table K, uncorrected

In the 'large towns' (those with more than 10,000 inhabitants, of which there were only two in this part of the south, both in Hampshire) the situation was somewhat different. Here, the level of provision was noticeably lower than in the smaller towns and villages (36% as against 57%), with the Church of England providing less than 50% of the available sittings. The two Hampshire towns present an interesting contrast, with the larger, Portsmouth, close to the norm, while Southampton belonged to a minority in which resorts like Bath, Cheltenham and Brighton, county towns and cathedral cities, like Exeter, Norwich and Worcester, predominated. The combined parishes of Portsmouth and Portsea had twice the population of Southampton's six parishes, yet it was Southampton that had by far the faster population growth during the first half of the century, with an increase of 347% compared with Portsea Island's 117% since 1801. Despite this, the Anglicans still provided substantially more accommodation than the other denominations in Southampton, whereas in Portsmouth, as in the industrial towns of the North and Midlands, they had dropped behind.

By far the most detailed examination of the attendance patterns for southern England is found in the article by Coleman, covering the ten counties which comprised Division II (South-East) and Divisions V (South-West). Some general characteristics of the region as a whole can be identified, notably the relative strength of the Church of England, whether in relation to the total population or to the strength of nonconformity, the exceptions to this being predominantly at the western and eastern ends of the region. Nevertheless, the closer one looks at the statistics county by county, or even more by individual registration districts, the more clearly do the complexities emerge. There are, on the one hand, areas of relative Anglican weakness, notably such upland areas as the Weald, Dartmoor and 'much of Cornwall', the older industrial and mining areas, and the larger towns. And the nonconformist pattern varies much more widely, both absolutely and relative to Anglican strength, both from one district to another and between different denominational bodies. Coleman's conclusion is that the region displays 'a considerable degree of differentiation and diversity within a framework of Anglican predominance'. [53]

53. B I Coleman, 1983, pp 158, 176-7

One feature which emerges clearly from Coleman's detailed examination is the limited significance of the counties in this context. On the one hand, he is able to identify five 'zones', cutting across the county boundaries, each of which has some degree of coherence, and on the other, it is arguable from his analysis that the really significant variations are much more local, so that it is on the registration districts, rather than on any of the larger units, that our attention should be focussed. This is especially the case in Hampshire, where the contrast between the two urban districts of Portsmouth and Southampton and their rural neighbours is a marked one.

The area with which we are at present concerned falls in the centre of Coleman's region and straddles the boundary between east and west, with Hampshire among the south-eastern counties and Dorset and Wiltshire among the south-western ones. It corresponds fairly closely with the third of the five 'zones' which Coleman identifies: 'Wiltshire with parts of west Hampshire, west Berkshire, east Dorset and east Somerset'. He categorises this zone as having 'the highest levels of aggregate attendance in the region ... produced by the combination of strong Anglican performance with the strongest Nonconformity outside zone (5)[54] with both Old Dissent and Methodism well supported'.

Any comparison of attendances must begin, as we have already noted, with decisions about the basis on which computations are to be made. Coleman uses Inglis's Index of Attendance (1A)[55] and also the Percentage Share (PS) of each denominational group.[56] (We shall use these as the basis for our more detailed examination of the Methodist attendance figures in the next section.) On the other hand, Table N of the Census Report uses the figures for the best-attended service (Pickering's 'maximum-minimum' figures), and this has been used here as the basis for comparison in Tables 5:3 and 5:4.

As Table 5:3 indicates, judged on this basis church attendance in central southern England was well up on the national average of 34.2%, even in Hampshire, where the figures for the county as a whole were

54. Zone (5) comprised Cornwall and western parts of Devon, where the denominational pattern was in stark contrast to the rest of the region.

55. Total attendances for the day, expressed as a percentage of population. (See above, p 322-3)

56. The total attendances for a denomination or group of denominations, expressed as a percentage of the aggregate attendance for the day.

Table 5:3 Attendances at the best attended service
in relation to total population

	Population	Total Attendances	C of E	Protestant Dissenters	Roman Catholics	Others
England	16,738,695	5,732,719 34.2%	2,838,318 17.0%	2,629,590 15.7%	243,701 1.5%	21,110 0.1%
Dorset	177,095	83,123 46.9%	53,240 30.1%	28,910 16.3%	797 0.5%	176 0.1%
Hampshire	402,016	160,364 39.9%	92,939 23.1%	63,842 15.9%	3,179 0.8%	404 0.1%
Wiltshire	240,966	122,672 50.9%	63,726 26.4%	57,519 23.9%	1,005 0.4%	422 0.2%
Portsea Island	72,126	18,286 25.4%	7,878 10.9%	9,362 13.0%	931 1.3%	115 0.2%
Southampton	34,098	11,031 32.4%	6,244 18.3%	4,140 12.1%	500 1.5%	147 0.4%
3 Southern Counties	820,077	366,159 44.6%	209,905 25.6%	150,271 18.3%	4,981 0.6%	1,002 0.1%

Sources: Census Report, Table N and original census returns for
Portsea Island and Southampton

Table 5:4 Percentage Share of Attendances at the most
numerously attended service

	C of E	Protestant Dissenters	Roman Catholics	Others
England	49.5	45.9	4.3	0.4
Hampshire	58.0	39.8	2.0	0.3
Dorset	64.0	34.8	1.0	0.2
Wiltshire	51.9	46.9	0.8	0.3
Portsea Island	43.1	51.2	5.1	0.6
Southampton	56.6	37.5	4.5	1.3

Sources: Census Report, Table N; and original census returns for
Portsea Island and Southampton

depressed by low attendances in Portsmouth and Southampton (25.5% and 32.4% of the population respectively). But whereas in the rest of the country, Protestant dissenters were running neck and neck with the Anglicans, and in some cases had outstripped them in their attendance figures, in these three southern counties the Church of England retained a substantial lead. (Table 5:4) The one exception to this is Portsea Island.[57] The much narrower gap in the case of Wiltshire is largely accounted for by the strength of dissent in the woollen towns of the west. Roman Catholic numbers in the south were still negligible, with substantial congregations only in Portsmouth and Southampton. 'Others' included Jews and Latter Day Saints.

The percentages in Table 5:4 approximate quite closely to the 'percentage shares' based on total attendances in Coleman's Table 1,[58] the discrepancies being negligible in comparison with the degree of inaccuracy for which we must allow in the census returns. Nor is there any discernible pattern in the differences. It might be expected that using the figures for the best attended service would favour the Anglicans and Roman Catholics[59] as against nonconformists, whose attendances tended to be more evenly distributed between two or even three services in the day. But if so, this appears to have been counterbalanced by the fact that individual nonconformists were more inclined to attend two or more services on the same day. In Portsea Island, where nonconformist attenders were in a majority, counting attendances at all services rather than only the best attended one put up the nonconformist percentage share from 51.2 to 52.8, but that of the Church of England only from 43.3 to 43.5. (The losers in this game were the Roman Catholics, whose total attendance of 931 was concentrated into a single morning attendance figure.)

57. For the relative strength of Nonconformity in the larger towns, where overall attendances were low, see Pickering, 1967, pp 402-3

58. B I Coleman, p 183; cf 1980 p 40. In both cases, Coleman's population figures are for 'Counties proper', whereas I have followed Table N of the Census Report in using Registration Counties.

59. The main evidence that this tendency may have an effect is in Hampshire, where the Roman Catholic percentage share increases from 1.4 to 2.0%. Numbers of Roman Catholics were in any case small (a factor which adds to the significance of this percentage change), and in the case of Dorset, negligible. In England as a whole, the increase in their percentage share is from 3.5 to 3.9.

6 METHODISM IN 1851

In March 1851 the Wesleyans were still coping with the aftermath of the last and most serious in the series of disruptions and schisms which had begun with the Kilhamite agitation in 1796 and continued to trouble the Connexion throughout the first half of the new century. Supporters of the Wesleyan Reform movement, led by Everett and other ministers expelled in 1849, were still hoping to gain the sympathy of a majority of leaders and members and thereby effect the changes they advocated in the Original Connexion. Though the considerable number expelled by the Wesleyan itinerants formed societies of their own, found alternative meeting places, and even organised a kind of 'shadow' circuit with its own preaching plan, they still hovered on the edge of the parent body and at first had no intention, for the most part, of a permanent separation, unless as a last resort. Hence the fluid situation in Salisbury was typical: the supporters of Reform meeting in temporary accommodation, with one eye still on a possible return to the Wesleyan fold, but plans for the building of their own chapel developing fast.

Of the earlier break-away groups, only the Associationists had a toe-hold in the area, and their presence was a localized and comparatively weak one. But both the new evangelistic movements, as we have seen, had established bases, with the Primitive Methodists more widely and vigorously in evidence than the Bible Christians, who were still confined to parts of the coast.

The Wesleyans remained by far the largest of the Methodist denominations, despite their recent losses, and were more evenly spread throughout the area, though there were still some parts of Hampshire where they were missing and the other groups had opportunities to establish themselves without direct rivalry.[1] Only the Primitive Methodists, however, had made any extensive incursions into these districts (though the Bible Christians were at work in the adjoining Hampshire-Surrey border country). In Dorset and southern Wiltshire the newer Methodist denominations had to work in closer proximity, and therefore more direct rivalry, to the Original Connexion.

1. There were no Wesleyan societies in the following Registration Districts: Lymington (100), Droxford (110), Catherington (111), Alresford (113)

6.1 The evidence of the Census

The 1851 Census enables us to look more closely at the distribution pattern of Methodism, and its relationship to other denominations, in terms of both the provision of sittings and levels of attendance. In both respects, some general tendencies can be identified, but what emerges is not so much a detailed overall pattern as a range of local variations.

6.1.1 Accommodation

The amount of accommodation it provided is one measure of a denomination's potential influence in a given locality, particularly in the case of those denominations which depended more fully than did the Church of England on voluntary support. This was because, like an Anglican proprietary chapel, many nonconformist chapels had to be a combination of business and missionary venture. In the circumstances, pew rents, however frowned on in some quarters, were a necessary evil.[2] The cost of building and maintaining even comparatively humble premises was part of the world of mundane reality in which rival denominations competed for the allegiance and support of the local population.

The building of a chapel was therefore both a symptom and a cause of local success. On the one hand, apart from the exceptional case of a benefactor providing a chapel at little or no expense to the local members, building could only be contemplated when a society was large enough and well enough established to raise the cost or (more often) undertake the burden of debt.[3] On the other hand, without a chapel or with one that was too small or unpretentious, no society could prosper for long by attracting 'outsiders'. And as they edged their way up the social ladder, rebuilding of the humble 'Bethels' of earlier days became at least as important as the provision of entirely new chapels as part of a programme of Methodist expansion, carried out in competition with other denominational groups.

2. For pew rents, see J L and B Hammond, 1947, pp 119-20, 136

3. This generalisation has to be qualified in two ways. The financial responsibility fell, in the first instance, on a body of trustees, who were, however, unlikely to agree to serve unless they were satisfied that local support would be forthcoming. And in the case of Methodism, financial responsibility was shouldered at circuit level, but again was likely to be conditional on local response and support.

We have noted earlier that the accommodation provided by the Churches as a whole was more adequate in Dorset and Wiltshire than in Hampshire. Within those Registration Districts with which we are concerned, 65.3% of the population of Dorset and southern Wiltshire could be accommodated, compared with only 51.8% in Hampshire. The discrepancy between these two figures is partly accounted for by the atypical situation in the Portsmouth area.[4] Without Portsea Island, the over-all provision in Hampshire rises to 56.7%, though still remaining well below that of the adjoining counties.

Within this general picture the Methodist contribution to the total number of available sittings follows a very similar pattern: Methodist chapels in Hampshire could accommodate only 5.7% of the population, compared with 10.0% in Dorset and 10.3% in southern Wiltshire. Their 'share' of total accommodation was only 10.9% in Hampshire, where the shortfall was greatest, compared with 15.3% in Dorset and 15.9% in southern Wiltshire.

But the pattern was more complex than such comparisons at county level might suggest. Figures 6:1 and 6:2 show the kind of patterns that emerge from an examination of Registration Districts, and the same unit of comparison is used as the basis of Table 6:1. At this more local level, an initial caveat must be entered. Many of the figures in the District tables must be treated with reserve and, especially where they are affected by missing or defective returns, it would be hazardous to draw any very firm conclusions from them. Thus only two of the six Wesleyan chapels in Whitchurch District reported the number of sittings, and no estimate for the missing details is added into the total. Again, the accommodation figures at Stockbridge, though high, are depressed because one Wesleyan and two Primitive Methodist returns failed to report sittings. A third Primitive Methodist return reported 80 sittings without differentiating between 'free' and 'appropriated' and this figure was omitted from the total. (By contrast, one Baptist chapel for which no accommodation figures were entered was credited with 240 free sittings, apparently on the strength of the morning attendance.)

At this District level it is difficult to discover any consistent relationship between the total level of provision and Methodism's share

4. See Table 5:2

Figure 6:1 Methodist accommodation as % of population

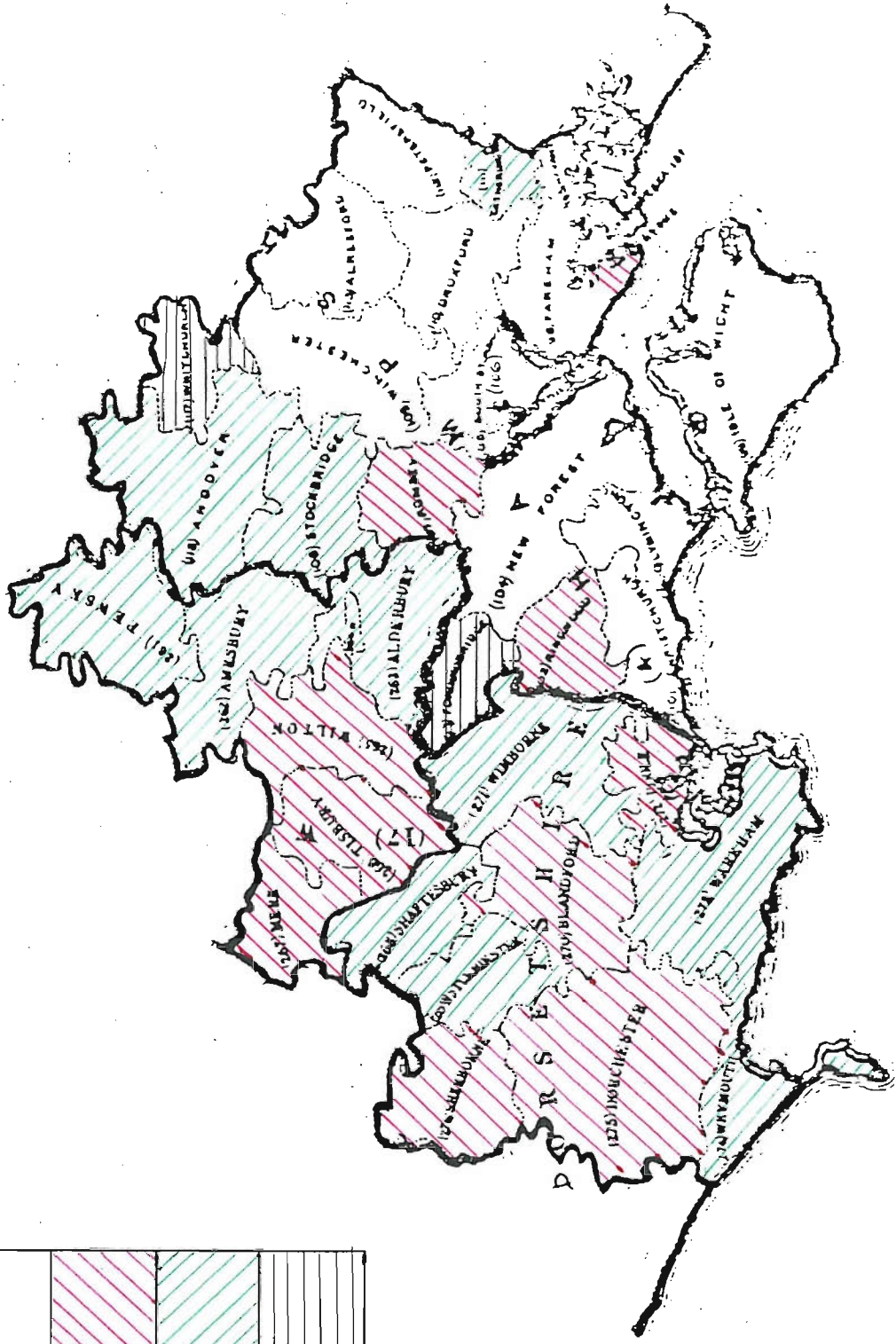
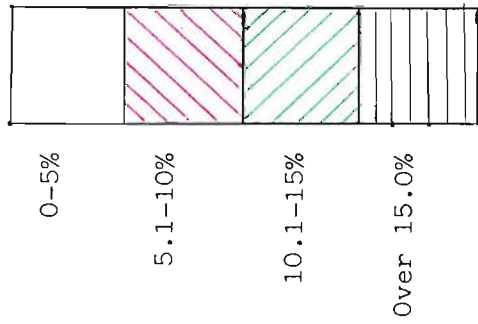


Figure 6:2 Methodist accommodation as % of total sittings

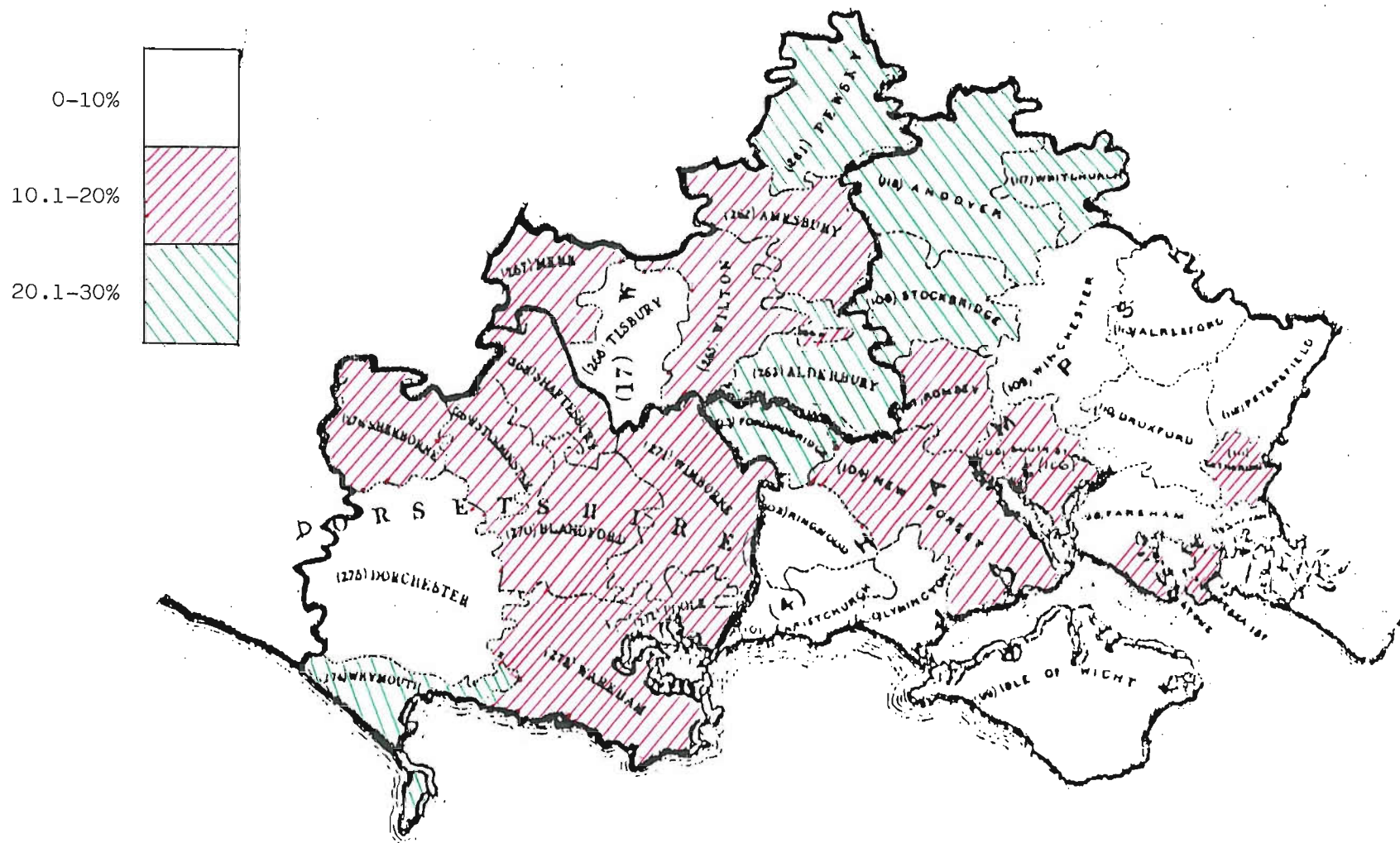


Table 6:1 Methodist contribution to total accommodation

		Sittings as percentage of population (Figures in brackets represent percentage shares)					
Districts	All Churches	Wesleyan	Primitive Methodist	Bible Christian	Other Methodist	Total Methodist	
1	Havant	73.2	1.4 (1.9)	-	-	-	1.4 (1.9)
2	Alresford	55.6	-	1.8 (3.2)	-	-	1.8 (3.2)
3	Droxford	57.8	-	2.4 (2.4)	-	-	2.4 (2.4)
4	Fareham	51.6	1.7 (3.2)	-	-	0.9 (1.8)	2.6 (5.0)
5	Christchurch	64.1	3.0 (4.7)	-	-	-	3.0 (4.7)
6	Winchester	48.1	1.6 (3.2)	0.6 (1.2)	0.3 (0.6)	1.5 (3.1)	3.9 (8.1)
7	Lymington	84.2	-	2.0 (2.4)	-	2.0 (2.4)	4.0 (4.8)
8	Petersfield	53.4	2.9 (5.4)	1.7 (3.1)	-	-	4.6 (8.6)
9	Southampton	51.5	3.2 (6.3)	0.8 (1.6)	0.8 (1.6)	-	4.8 (9.4)
	{ S. Stoneham	46.4	4.0 (8.7)	-	0.8 (1.6)	-	4.8 (10.3)
11	New Forest	44.1	3.0 (6.8)	1.8 (4.2)	-	-	4.9 (11.0)
12	Portsea Island	35.9	3.9 (10.7)	0.3 (0.9)	0.8 (2.2)	-	5.0 (13.8)
13	Dorchester	61.3	4.2 (6.9)	0.3 (0.5)	-	0.8 (1.3)	5.3 (8.6)
14	Ringwood	73.5	5.4 (7.3)	-	-	-	5.4 (7.3)
15	Alverstoke	56.3	4.5 (7.9)	-	-	1.2 (2.2)	5.7 (10.1)
16	Romsey	49.1	4.0 (8.1)	1.8 (3.7)	-	-	5.8 (11.8)
17	Tisbury	82.2	3.9 (4.8)	2.2 (2.6)	-	-	6.1 (7.4)
18	Wilton	67.9	2.3 (3.5)	4.8 (7.1)	-	-	7.2 (10.5)
19	Sherborne	62.5	6.8 (10.9)	1.0 (1.7)	-	-	7.9 (12.6)
20	Mere	66.1	3.6 (5.5)	5.3 (8.0)	-	-	8.9 (13.5)
21	Blandford	74.8	7.1 (9.4)	1.9 (2.5)	-	-	9.0 (12.0)
22	Poole	63.5	8.0 (12.7)	2.0 (3.1)	-	-	10.0 (15.8)
	Pewsey	42.4	8.0 (18.9)	2.5 (5.8)	-	-	10.5 (24.8)
23	Shaftesbury	64.1	7.5 (11.6)	3.1 (4.8)	-	-	10.5 (16.4)
25	Wareham	71.0	10.6 (15.0)	0.5 (0.7)	-	-	11.1 (15.7)
26	Amesbury	75.4	9.7 (12.8)	1.6 (2.1)	-	-	11.2 (14.9)
27	Catherington	74.2	-	-	-	11.6 (15.7)	11.6 (15.7)
28	Salisbury	78.9	11.9 (15.1)	-	-	-	11.9 (15.1)
29	Wimborne	69.2	8.6 (12.5)	3.4 (4.9)	-	-	12.0 (17.4)
30	Weymouth	60.5	10.1 (16.7)	2.0 (3.4)	-	1.0 (1.6)	13.1 (21.7)
31	Sturminster	68.7	6.1 (9.0)	7.2 (10.5)	-	-	13.3 (19.4)
32	{ Stockbridge	52.3	5.5 (10.6)	3.3 (6.2)	-	5.3 (10.1)	14.1 (26.9)
	{ Andover	63.6	6.4 (10.1)	7.7 (12.1)	-	-	14.1 (22.2)
34	Alderbury	53.1	9.0 (17.0)	5.5 (10.4)	-	-	14.5 (27.3)
35	Whitchurch	74.6	8.4 (11.2)	6.9 (9.3)	-	-	15.3 (20.5)
36	Fordingbridge	69.1	8.3 (11.9)	7.3 (10.6)	-	-	15.5 (22.5)

Notes:

Sources: Census Report and original returns.

1. Registration Districts are ranked in order of adequacy of accommodation provided by all Methodist denominations
2. 'Other Methodists' include the Wesleyan Methodist Association, the Wesleyan Reform movement, and Independent Methodism (including the Countess of Hartington's Connexion)

in it. Dorchester and Tisbury in the western part of the area were Districts in which the Methodist share of the sittings was as low as in many parts of Hampshire, though they could accommodate a higher percentage of the population; and the north of the area, on both sides of the Hampshire-Wiltshire border, was one of relative Methodist strength, thanks in part to the Primitive Methodist missions.

The presence of more than one Methodist denomination was clearly one factor which helped to raise the Methodist percentage of sittings in a District. The Primitive Methodists in particular made a significant contribution to the total accommodation in at least four Districts (Andover, Fordingbridge, Sturminster and Alderbury) and provided more sittings than the Wesleyans in three others (Wilton, Mere and Shaftesbury). In Whitchurch Wesleyans and Primitive Methodists contributed almost equally to the high percentage of Methodist sittings. There were two Districts, Winchester and Stockbridge, where the Associationists had attracted enough initial support from the parent connexion to have almost as many sittings as the Wesleyans. In another, Catherington, a little group of Independent Methodists held undisputed sway and provided 11.6% of the total accommodation. In Portsmouth, with its quite different urban conditions, the Primitive Methodists had so far been less successful than the Bible Christians in establishing a toe-hold; and neither denomination had chapels in the Gosport area.

Over the area as a whole, therefore, the Methodist denominations were providing between them roughly 50% of the nonconformist accommodation, but their contribution was very unevenly distributed. Those Districts in which there were sittings for only a small percentage of the population would seem to offer the greatest challenge and opportunity for Methodist evangelism; but it cannot be said that, in these terms, Methodist resources were concentrated on the areas where the need was greatest. It is true that the highest level of Wesleyan accommodation (18.9% of total sittings accommodating 8.0% of the population) was recorded in Pewsey, one of the six Districts where there were sittings for fewer than half of the inhabitants.[5] But this was not matched in the five other Districts in this category (Winchester, South Stoneham, New Forest, Portsea Island and Romsey - all of them, significantly, in

5. Even in the case of Pewsey, the figures are probably distorted by non-returns from some Anglican parishes.

Hampshire). Either the Methodists were, to a considerable degree, failing to respond to the greater need of these areas, or other, more important, factors were at work. We can best examine this issue in connection with the pattern of attendances.

6.1.2 Attendances

Table 6:2 sets out the Methodist attendance figures by District, relating them both to population (IA) and to aggregate attendances (PS), with the Anglican and Dissenting[6] percentage shares for comparison. The final column gives the Index of Attendance for all denominations combined, as an indication of the level of church-going in each District, varying from 50.7 in the Portsmouth area to 108.5 in Catherington. Districts are ranked in ascending order of Methodist IA. Percentages are calculated from corrected figures, wherever the surviving returns make this possible. Methodist percentages of aggregate attendances range from 2.0 to 30.2%. Both the lowest and the highest percentages occur in a variety of situations.

In the case of Methodism at least, there was a close relationship between the number of sittings provided and the size of congregations on Census Sunday. Table 6:3 shows the positive correlation between accommodation (expressed as a percentage of the total accommodation available) and attendance (calculated on the basis of total attendances at all services). In each of the three columns Registration Districts are ranked in ascending order. Table 6:4 highlights the main discrepancies between accommodation figures and attendances, showing how few these were.

In two Districts attendances were abnormally low in relation to seating capacity. Petersfield, on the edge of the 'Methodist wilderness', was an area where Methodism was still weak. Both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists appear to have over-estimated their ability to attract local support in the size of chapels they chose to build. Salisbury had only Wesleyans within the city itself, and their Church Street chapel, rebuilt in 1810, was a substantial one, with a well-established congregation. But numbers were seriously depleted at the time by the local dispute over Methodist Reform. Of the 1,000 or more seats in the chapel (nearly half of the total available for Protestant Dissenters),

6. In this section, as in Table 5:6, the terms 'Dissent' and 'dissenting' refer to non-Methodist forms of Nonconformity.

Table 6:2 Methodist and other attendances

District	Methodist attendances		Anglican attendances	Dissenting attendances	Aggregate attendances
	IA	PS	PS	PS	IA
Havant	1.3	2.0	74.6	21.0	73.0
Alresford	2.0	3.0	89.0	5.5	65.2
Droxford	2.3	3.5	94.5	1.3	65.0
Fareham	2.9	4.6	71.6	23.8	62.5
Petersfield	4.1	5.2	75.2	17.5	79.5
Winchester	4.3	8.3	76.8	9.3	52.0
Alverstoke		8.9	65.0	21.8	50.6
Christchurch	4.5	4.9	47.8	46.9	92.0
Lymington		6.7	55.8	37.1	99.5
Southampton	6.7	10.7	56.2	25.5	62.7
Dorchester		9.1	81.9	9.0	74.3
Ringwood	7.3	8.9	54.7	36.4	82.3
S. Stoneham	7.4	13.6	71.7	14.4	54.3
New Forest	8.3	11.4	67.0	21.6	72.8
Portsea Island	8.7	17.2	43.5	35.2	50.7
Romsey	9.1	14.0	56.3	29.2	65.0
Salisbury	10.6	10.2	58.3	27.4	104.2
Wilton	10.9	11.1	71.1	18.7	97.8
Blandford	11.4	11.7	65.8	20.9	97.2
Tisbury	12.9	13.3	55.0	20.4	97.1
Sherborne	13.3	16.8	68.5	12.5	78.9
Poole	13.9	16.3	48.2	30.0	85.4
Amesbury	14.8	15.7	67.1	17.3	94.8
Weymouth	16.1	21.6	57.3	15.8	75.0
Mere	17.3	22.3	51.2	22.4	78.0
Shaftesbury	17.4	25.5	64.5	12.7	65.2
Wareham	17.5	21.7	54.9	20.3	80.6
Andover	18.1	21.5	62.9	15.0	83.9
Wimborne	20.1	27.2	48.8	21.2	74.4
Alderbury	20.9	28.3	61.8	9.7	73.8
Pewsey	22.5	26.8	62.0	12.1	85.0
Catherington	22.8	21.6	65.6	12.9	105.4
Fordingbridge	22.9	21.3	56.2	21.8	108.5
Sturminster	23.1	25.3	65.7	6.4	90.3
Stockbridge	27.9	38.6	42.2	17.6	72.6
Whitchurch	30.4	30.2	43.9	25.7	100.5

Table 6:3 Methodist accommodation and attendances

ACCOMMODATION		ATTENDANCES				
as % of		as % of		as % of		
total accommodation		population		total attendances		
		(IA)		(PS)		
1	Havant (95)	1.9	Havant	1.3	Havant	2.0
2	Droxford (110)	2.4	Alresford	2.0	Alresford	3.0
3	Alresford (113)	3.2	Droxford	2.3	Droxford	3.5
4	Christchurch (101)	4.7	Fareham	2.9	Fareham	4.6
5	Lymington (100)	4.8	Petersfield	4.1	Christchurch	4.9
6	Fareham (98)	5.0	Winchester	4.3	Petersfield	5.2
7	Ringwood (102)	7.3	Alverstoake	4.5	Lymington	6.7
8	Tisbury (266)	7.4	Christchurch		Winchester	8.3
9	Winchester (109)	8.1	Lymington	6.7	Alverstoake	8.9
10	Petersfield (112)	8.6	Southampton		Ringwood	
11	Dorchester (275)		Dorchester	Dorchester	9.1	
12	Southampton (105)	9.4	Ringwood	7.3	Salisbury	10.2
13	Alverstoake (97)	10.1	S. Stoneham	7.4	Southampton	10.7
14	S. Stoneham (106)	10.3	New Forest	8.3	Wilton	11.1
15	Wilton (265)	10.5	Portsea Island	8.7	New Forest	11.4
16	New Forest (104)	11.0	Romsey	9.1	Blandford	11.7
17	Romsey (107)	11.8	Salisbury	10.6	Tisbury	13.3
18	Blandford (270)	12.0	Wilton	10.9	S. Stoneham	13.6
19	Sherborne (276)	12.6	Blandford	11.4	Romsey	14.0
20	Mere (267)	13.5	Tisbury	12.9	Amesbury	15.7
21	Portsea Island (96)	13.8	Sherborne	13.3	Poole	16.3
22	Amesbury (262)	14.9	Poole	13.9	Sherborne	16.8
23	Salisbury (264)	15.1	Amesbury	14.8	Portsea Island	17.2
24	Catherington (111)	15.7	Weymouth	16.1	Fordingbridge	21.3
25	Wareham (273)		Mere	17.3	Andover	21.5
26	Poole (272)	15.8	Shaftesbury	17.4	Catherington	21.6
27	Shaftesbury (268)	16.4	Wareham	17.5	Weymouth	
28	Wimborne (271)	17.4	Andover	18.1	Wareham	21.7
29	Sturminster (269)	19.4	Wimborne	20.1	Mere	22.3
30	Whitchurch (117)	20.5	Alderbury	20.9	Sturminster	25.3
31	Weymouth (274)	21.7	Pewsey	22.5	Shaftesbury	25.5
32	Andover (118)	22.2	Catherington	22.8	Pewsey	26.8
33	Fordingbridge (103)	22.5	Fordingbridge	22.9	Wimborne	27.2
34	Pewsey (261)	24.8	Sturminster	23.1	Alderbury	28.3
35	Stockbridge (108)	26.9	Stockbridge	27.9	Whitchurch	30.2
36	Alderbury (263)	27.3	Whitchurch	30.4	Stockbridge	38.6

Table 6:4 Discrepancies between available Methodist accommodation and attendances

Districts	% of total accommodation	attendances	
		PS	IA
Lymington[2]	4.8	6.7	6.7
Tisbury[3]	7.4	13.3	12.9
Petersfield	8.6	5.2	4.1
S. Stoneham	10.3	13.6	7.4
Romsey	11.8	14.0	9.1
Sherborne	12.6	16.8	13.3
Mere[4]	13.5	22.3	17.3
Portsea Island	13.8	17.2	8.7
Salisbury[5]	15.1	10.2	10.6
Catherington[6]	15.7	21.6	22.8
Wareham[7]	15.7	21.7	17.5
Shaftesbury[8]	16.4	25.5	17.4
Wimborne	17.4	27.2	20.1
Sturminster	19.4	25.3	23.1
Whitchurch	20.5	30.2	30.4
Stockbridge	26.9	38.6	27.9

Notes:

1. Districts are ranked in ascending order of percentage of Methodist accommodation.
2. All Primitive Methodist.
3. Donhead St. Mary Wesleyan chapel, with 230 sittings, reported attendances of 391 (including 91 children) both morning and evening.
4. Mere Primitive Methodist chapel, with 267 sittings, reported an evening congregation of 300.
5. Coleman's figures for Salisbury appear to differ from the published table. Figures given here are calculated from the original returns.
6. Three Independent Methodist congregations in Catherington District are treated as Independent in the Report, but separated out here. They recorded particularly high levels of attendance, in the absence of any other Methodist groups in the District.
7. The PS of attendances reflects the high level of reported attendances.
8. Attendance figures for Shaftesbury District are substantially higher than in Coleman's tables because of errors in the Wesleyan totals in the printed Table.
9. Accommodation figures for Whitchurch and Stockbridge Districts are depressed by defective returns. See text.

over half were unoccupied on Census Sunday, and even the addition of about 200 supporters of 'Reform' who absented themselves and attended the local Independent chapel would have left the chapel almost half empty.

The two maps (Figures 6:3 and 6:4) set out the distribution of Methodist attendances calculated in relation to population (IA) and to total attendances (PS) respectively. In each case, eastern and southern Hampshire have the lowest attendance figures, matched only by Dorchester in the west. A band of Districts with the highest levels of Methodist attendance runs north-eastwards through the area from Weymouth to Whitchurch. The absence of any clear or coherent pattern emerging from the statistics themselves suggests the possibility that other factors may have been at work, affecting all the rival denominational groups.

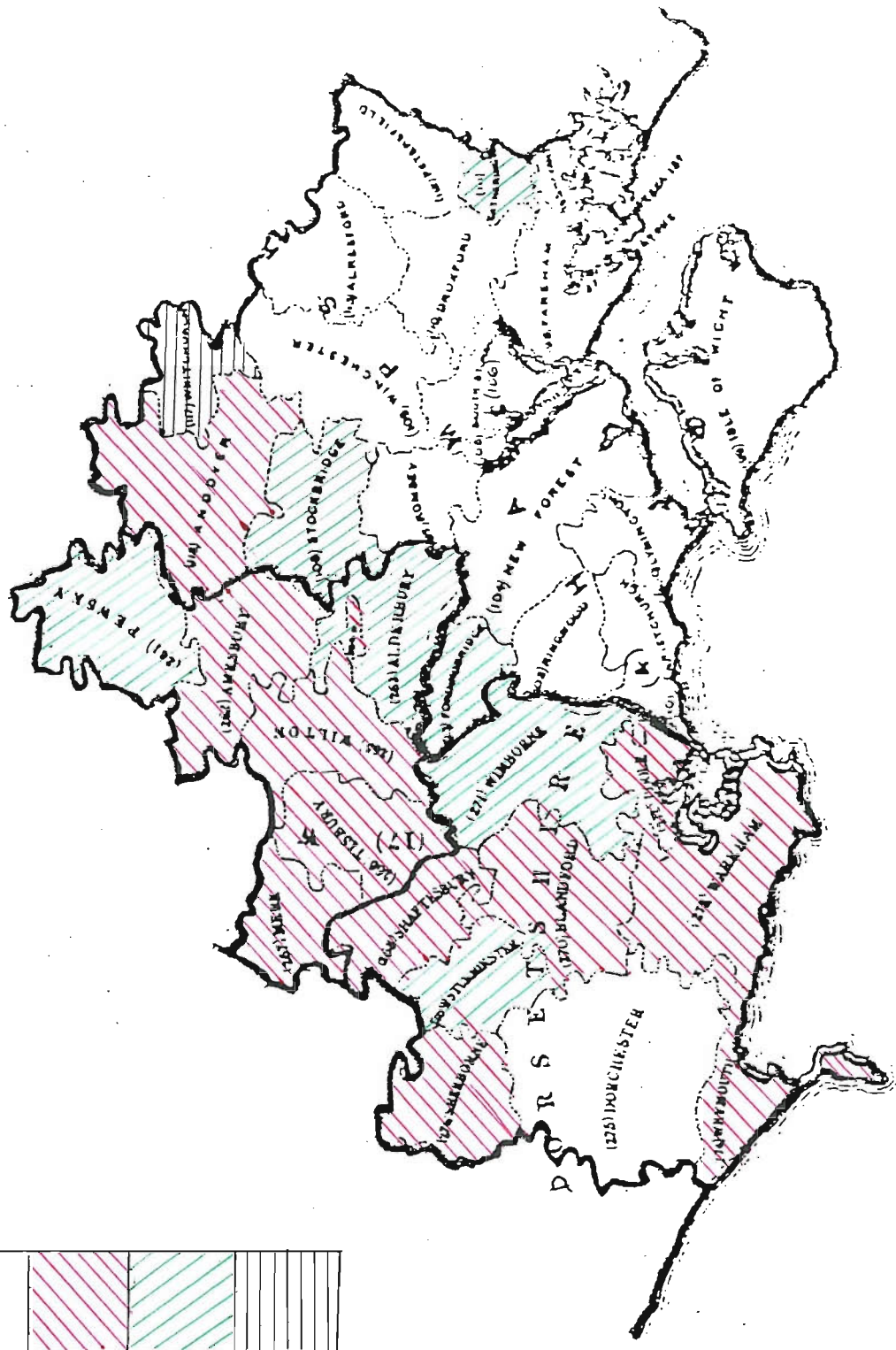
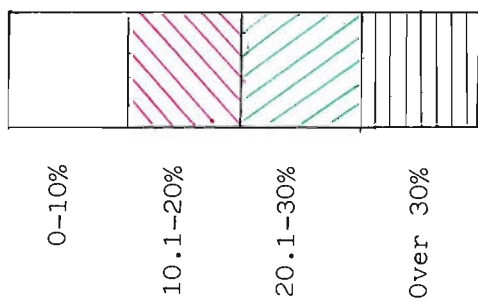
As the case of Whitchurch shows, the presence of other Methodist groups besides Wesleyans increased not only the Methodist percentage of total accommodation, but also its attendance figures, whether measured in terms of local population (the IA) or of total attendances (the PS). These were also the Districts in which a higher proportion of the available Methodist sittings were occupied by worshippers than in other Districts; i.e. the Methodist attendance scores were appreciably higher than the accommodation scores (Table 6:4). Again, it was usually Primitive Methodism which was particularly in evidence. It was the only form of Methodism in the Lymington District. But in Catherington a group of Independent Methodist congregations and in South Stoneham the Bible Christians made their presence felt.

There are a few cases, e.g. Donhead St. Mary in the Shaftesbury Wesleyan Circuit (Tisbury District) and Mere Primitive Methodist chapel, where the discrepancy between available sittings and reported congregations is large enough to lend substance to the accusation of exaggerated attendance figures. But these are exceptional cases. Most of the examples relate to cottage meetings, usually of Primitive Methodists, and involve relatively small numbers.[7]

Table 6:2 enables us to examine the various attempts to relate the distribution of Methodism to that of the Church of England and Old

7. Cf the comment on the Primitive Methodist attendance figures, p 313 above.

Figure 6:3 Methodist Attendance: Index of attendance



Dissent. Of these the most convincing is by Robert Currie, who concludes that 'whilst the older dissent generally grew strong where the Church of England was strong, deriving (at least historically) much of its membership directly from the Church of England, Methodism grew strong where the Church of England was weak, and recruited from those sections of the population that Anglicanism failed to reach.' [8]

The 'similar small-scale pattern' which Currie sees 'underlying this broad distribution' will be considered in a later section. Here our concern is with his general distinction between areas of Anglican weakness (particularly in the Midlands and north of England) and the southern half of the country where, as we have already seen, Anglicanism was in a much stronger position, whether measured by the adequacy of its accommodation or by attendances.

While Currie's thesis is supported by the attendance figures examined at county level, [9] a much more complex pattern emerges from the same figures broken down by Registration District, as in Table 6:2.

The highest Methodist attendances (both IA and PS) were recorded at Whitchurch, where the aggregate attendance figures were also high (lower only than those at Fordingbridge, Catherington and Salisbury). Here Methodism had a high proportion of the non-Anglican attendances, and Methodism and Dissent together could claim stronger support than the Church of England, whose percentage share was only 43.9. Credit for this success belonged to the Primitive Methodists, even more than to the Wesleyans who provided 55% of the Methodist sittings but claimed only 43% of Methodist attendances.

In Districts like Whitchurch and Fordingbridge, Methodism was flourishing in circumstances that appeared to be favourable to all denominations. There were other districts with high Methodist attendances, where the Anglican and/or Dissenting attendances were much lower. Dissenting attendances were particularly low in Alderbury and Shaftesbury Districts, while both Dissent and the Church of England had below-average attendances in Stockbridge. [10] In these cases Methodism was having a measure of success where others languished.

8. R Currie, 1967, p 68

9. E.g. by J D Gay, 1971

10. But this reflects the fact that only 8 of the 14 parishes in the Stockbridge District submitted returns.

At the other end of the scale, Methodism was weak in some Districts with relatively high aggregate attendances, inhibited perhaps by the existence of well-attended churches of other denominations. Christchurch and Lymington Districts are the main examples of this pattern. In each case, attendances at the dissenting chapels were well above average (46.9% at Christchurch; 37.1% at Lymington) and comparable with the Anglican figures. (In fact, the Anglican figures for Christchurch District were only 47.8%, the fourth lowest in the whole area and less than 1% above the dissenting percentage.) Hence, in these districts Methodism was failing to make headway in the face of a strong Dissent and in spite of the relative weakness of the Church of England. In other Districts, Methodist attendances were low in spite of the general weakness of Dissent and in the face of relatively strong Anglicanism. Alresford, Droxford, Fareham and Petersfield were all Districts in which Anglican percentages were high and the Methodist ones low, in a setting of low over-all attendances. In the case of Droxford and Alresford, dissenting figures were also low; but at Fareham and Petersfield, they had a considerably higher proportion of attendances. In Districts as different as Winchester and Alverstoke, where the general levels of church attendance were low (1A 52.0 and 50.6 respectively), the Methodist percentage was unimpressive, reminding us that the failure of others did not guarantee success to the newest and most fervent evangelical group.

To do justice to Currie's thesis in the light of these attendance figures, several points need to be borne in mind. In the first place, Currie was working primarily with two yardsticks: the number of parish churches and Wesleyan membership figures. The former is not necessarily equivalent to the number of sittings provided (still less, the number of worshippers), while the latter may differ from the degree of support reflected in the 1851 attendance figures. In each case we may expect a broad correlation, but also considerable local variations, e.g. between urban and rural areas, or between areas of high and low levels of church attendance.

Secondly, by 1851 we have to take into account not only the rise of Methodism, but the extent to which the other dissenting bodies had been influenced by the Evangelical Revival. By the time of the Census, many other congregations had taken a new lease of life, and the dissenting chapels springing up in more and more of the villages were adding an

extra dimension to the picture. It was no longer possible to make a simple distinction between 'Old Dissent' and 'new Methodism'.

Thirdly, by 1851, the non-Wesleyan branches of Methodism were also beginning to complicate the threefold pattern of Anglican/Dissenting/Wesleyan interaction. We have already seen how, in Currie's words, 'In the early nineteenth century, the "new" Methodism grew in the "gaps" of Wesleyanism.' But this should not tempt us to over-simplify the picture. An examination of the distribution of Primitive Methodism in the south (see Section 6.3 below) shows to what extent the newer movement also flourished in areas where the Wesleyans were already at work. It was not so much a case of filling the vacuums left by the spread of Wesleyanism as of infiltrating wherever opportunities remained, sometimes following up Wesleyan missioning that had borne no lasting fruit or appealing to levels of society the Wesleyans were failing to reach. In other words, the distinction was not always a geographical one.

So while Currie's broad distinction between north and south holds good, comparison of the attendance figures from different Registration Districts reveals a much more complex pattern, as Coleman's regional study shows.[11] Taken District by District, the strength of Anglicanism varied in central southern England, from the high level of church attendance reported from Catherington (where the Anglican IA was 69%) to the very low attendance on Portsea Island (IA=22%). The other denominations showed similar variations.

Currie's thesis would lead us to expect a preponderance of Dissent in strong Anglican Districts and a preponderance of Methodism in those Districts with the lowest Anglican attendance figures. The Census figures give only marginal support for the first, and no positive support for the second of these propositions. Measured by attendance levels, Dissent was stronger than Methodism in 17 of the 36 Districts, and weaker in 11 others. There were 8 Districts in which the difference between them was too marginal to be significant either way. Of the 18 Districts where the Church of England had its highest attendances, there were 8 in which Dissent was markedly stronger than Methodism; but in 6 others the position was reversed. The other 18 Districts were those in which the Church of England was relatively weak

11. B I Coleman, 1983; cf pp 330-4 above.

(though in most cases, still above the national average). Of these, 5 Districts had more Methodist than Dissenting attendances, but in 9 others Dissent still predominated.[12]

Three conclusions may be drawn from this examination of the District attendances. Firstly, the fortunes of Methodism at the local level could be affected at least as much by the Dissenting as by the Anglican presence. Those Districts in which Methodism trailed in third place despite relative Anglican weakness were ones in which long-established Dissenting congregations already existed, as at Portsmouth, Gosport, Southampton, Romsey, Poole, Christchurch and Ringwood. In most cases, the original Dissenting cause had taken on a new lease of life, resulting in some cases in a proliferation of new village causes. All this made it more difficult for Methodism (especially if, as so often in the south, it arrived too late on the scene) to gain a footing. The case appears to be that Methodism needed both Anglican and Dissenting weakness[13] for it to be able to take root and flourish in a particular locality without a lengthy struggle.

Secondly, a realistic appraisal requires us to think in terms of potential demand, rather than of total population. One thing that the Religious Census made very clear at the time was the number of Englishmen who 'did not want to know' about religion in any of its denominational guises.

So Anglican and Dissenting weakness was at best a negative condition, rather than a positive guarantee, of Methodist success. The crucial difference between areas of high and low religious observance has not always been taken sufficiently into account in analysing and interpreting the attendance figures. In theory, those Districts where levels of church attendance were lowest should have provided Methodism with its greatest opportunity. But of the ten Districts recording the lowest over-all IA, all but one show below-average Methodist

12. These figures have to be treated with some caution, in view of the number of parishes for which no Anglican returns were made. Thus Stockbridge District ranks as second only to Portsea Island in terms of Anglican weakness, but this is almost certainly due to the fact that only 8 of the 14 parishes submitted a return. The local Registrar appears to have been unable or unwilling to supply the missing information, and the Census Report therefore reflects this shortfall.

13. 'Weakness' could, of course, be created (or measured) by a rapid population growth, outstripping the recruitment rate of local churches, and thereby providing an opportunity for newcomers. This factor came increasingly into play in the second half of the century.

attendances. The implication is that Methodists faced the same difficulties as others in these areas, and with comparable success rates. This was also the case at the other end of the scale. Among the ten Districts with the highest over-all attendances are several with high Methodist scores; notably Whitchurch, where Methodism had more than its average share of the local support.

The third conclusion is that more - and more complex - factors were at work than is revealed by the county statistics on which Gay and Currie base their interpretations. The county patterns, in Gilbert's words, 'obscure the existence of crucial local variations of religious adherence'. [14] The kind of local factors he goes on to list will be considered in a later section (6.4).

6.2 The Wesleyan Circuits

In the quarter century since 1825, only four new Wesleyan circuits had been formed, bringing the total (including the Isle of Wight) to thirteen. Gosport was separated from Portsmouth, and Dorchester from Weymouth in 1831. Christchurch Circuit was formed in 1834, and Wimborne Circuit in 1849, both from Poole. Wareham is listed as a separate circuit in the stations for 1850-54, but its existence seems to have been tenuous as well as brief and from the fact that no separate membership figures were recorded we may conclude that it was still treated as part of the Poole Circuit. Petersfield Circuit, formed from Portsmouth in 1826, had survived for a decade and then been linked to Guildford.

The annual membership figures for this period do not enable us to differentiate between such factors as the number of deaths, lapses or expulsions, and the rate of recruitment. But within the general pattern of growing numbers, there are periods of marked decline, coinciding in many but not all cases with the periods of reformist activity in the mid 1830s and the early 1850s. Salisbury Circuit's loss of over 200 members between 1835 and 1839 cannot, however, be blamed directly on the Wesleyan Association, nor can a similar decline in the Shaftesbury Circuit. There was, in fact, a more sustained period of decline in these southern circuits between 1836 and 1840 than in the Connexion as a whole. Whether this was the result of the general

14. A D Gilbert, 1976, p 116

unrest making itself felt in the area without the Associationists (whose strength lay in the Midlands and the North - somewhat remote from the rural south) being able to harness it to their cause, or reflected a slackening of the evangelistic momentum is more difficult to determine. In 1850, Salisbury Circuit bore the brunt of the Reformers impact on the south, but the adjoining Shaftesbury Circuit was much less obviously affected. (Table 4:14)

Throughout the first half of the century, the ratio of Wesleyan membership to general population remained below the national average in these southern counties, though by 1851 the gap had narrowed. Nevertheless, Wesleyans in the south represented only 1.2% of the population, compared with the national average of 1.7% even after the 1849 disruption.[15] Adding in the membership of non-Wesleyan groups, Methodism had a membership representing 1.9% of the population in the south, compared with an average of 2.6% for England as a whole. The speed with which the Primitive Methodist circuits in the south had grown in the past two decades is indicated by the fact that their membership equalled the denominational average of 0.6% of the general population at national level. Membership of the other non-Wesleyan groups was negligible, and their attendance figures on Census Sunday only marginally less so, even taking into account that the figures in Table 6:5 are for the best attended service only.

The ratio of full-time ministers to membership varied considerably, as Table 6:6 indicates. Of the new circuits, Gosport and Christchurch were still 'single stations' with a small membership. Portsmouth, with the largest membership, and by far the highest ratio of members per minister, was also the most compact of the circuits. Of its five chapels all except one (at Havant) were on Portsea Island; and only one other preaching place appeared on the plan - a room at the Royal Victoria Day School rented out for Sunday worship. By contrast, Salisbury's 773 members were scattered among 21 chapels and two other preaching places, though the circuit was manned by one fewer preacher. Southampton had three preachers, but with Winchester and Romsey still part of the circuit, its membership was much more widely distributed than in Portsmouth. Of the older circuits, Andover was the one with the lowest staffing ratio (one minister to 187 members), but it was also a

15. See above, pp 296-8 and Figures 4:1 and 4:14

Table 6:5 Southern Methodist membership and attendance figures, 1851

	Membership	% of population	Attendance at best attended service	% of population
Wesleyans[1]	6,247	1.2	18,852	3.7
Primitive Methodists[2]	3,272	0.6	8,829	1.7
Bible Christians[3]	264	0.05	833	0.2
Wesleyan Association	168	0.03	702	0.1
Wesleyan Reformers	-		247[4]	0.05
Totals	9,951	1.9	29,463	5.8

Notes:

1. Excluding the Isle of Wight Circuit, which had a membership of 623.
2. Excluding the adjoining Brinkworth and Shefford Circuits to the north and the Isle of Wight.
3. Excluding the Isle of Wight and the Farnham and Liphook Circuit on the north-eastern edge of the area.
4. The most substantial group of Reformers, at Salisbury, were not meeting separately for worship on Census Sunday; many of them joined the Endless Street Independent congregation that day. The census return, recording this fact estimated an influx of about 200 Wesleyans at the evening service.

Table 6:6 Wesleyan Circuits in 1851 - Ministers and chapels

Circuit	Membership	Number of Ministers	Members per minister	Number of chapels	Members per chapel	Other preaching places
Salisbury	773	2	387	21	36.8	2
Portsmouth	896	3	299	5	179.2	1
Poole[1]	586	3	195	11	53.3	8
Southampton	608	3	203	14	43.4	0
Weymouth	519	2	260	10	51.9	0
Shaftesbury	765	2	383	15	51.0	6
Andover	373	2	187	15	24.9	3
Sherborne	601	2	301	12	50.1	4
Gosport	164	1	164	4	41.0	0
Dorchester	430	2	215	9	47.8	8
Christchurch	144	1	144	4	36.0	1
Wimborne	388	2	194	12	32.3	0
	6,247	25	250	132	47.3	33

Notes:

1. Including Wareham, for which no separate membership figures are given in the Minutes.

circuit of small societies, with an average of only 25 members per chapel.

Because circuit boundaries were less clearly defined and did not coincide with registration districts or other civil units, any attempt to relate either membership or attendance to local population involves an element of conjecture. We must also allow for an element of error (usually in the form of exaggeration) such as has been noted in the Sherborne Circuit in 1828.[16] Nevertheless, the general pattern revealed by Table 6:7 is a valid and coherent one. In particular, there is a high correlation between the ratio of members to population and the ratio of attendance to population, which confirms the general accuracy of both sets of figures. The relationship between membership and the number of worshippers is at first glance less patent; but the range is considerably reduced if we exclude Portsmouth and Gosport. These two adjacent circuits represented the largest concentration of urban population anywhere in central southern England, with a preponderantly working-class population. It is scarcely coincidental that their congregations seem to have included a much smaller proportion of non-members than the general ratio of 3 to one. Methodism - like other denominations - found it more difficult to attract outsiders from among the urban proletariat than in the middle class suburbs or the villages. Scattered rural circuits like Andover and Wimborne seemed able to attract a much higher proportion of worshippers who were not members. Horace Mann's estimate that the number of individual worshippers was on average three or four times the membership is confirmed by the over-all figures for this part of the south.

The relative strength of Wesleyanism, as of other forms of Dissent, measured by the attendance figures, varied considerably from circuit to circuit. The highest percentage was 46.7% in the Dorchester Circuit, the lowest, 11.7 at Gosport. The highest Wesleyan percentage shares were all for Dorset and Wiltshire circuits, the lowest all in Hampshire, where the older forms of Dissent were strongest and the Primitive Methodists were most in evidence.

The detailed configuration of individual circuits and the variations between them are tabulated in the following pages. Not surprisingly,

16. See above, p 206

Table 6:7 Wesleyan Circuits in 1851: Membership and Population

Circuits	Population	Circuit Membership	Membership as % of population	Highest adult attendances	Attendances as % of population	Attendances as % of membership	Attendances as % of Nonconformist attendances
Salisbury	47,425	773	1.6	2,685	5.7	347	36.8
Portsmouth	79,338	896	1.1	1,680	2.1	188	18.8
Poole	26,277	586	2.2	1,876[1]	7.1	320	41.9
Southampton	100,083	608	0.6	1,911[2]	1.9	314	20.0
Weymouth	23,138	519	2.2	1,722	7.4	332	43.5
Shaftesbury	49,492	765	1.5	2,412[3]	4.9	315	30.4
Andover	26,380	373	1.4	1,560	5.9	418	24.2
Sherborne	41,889	601	1.4	1,635	3.9	272	35.0
Gosport	30,832	164	0.5	256[4]	0.8	156	11.7
Dorchester	20,698	430	2.0	1,245[5]	6.0	290	46.7
Christchurch	14,157	144	1.0	412	2.9	286	19.6
Wimborne	16,723	388	2.3	1,539	9.2	397	44.9
TOTALS	476,432	6,247	1.3	18,933	4.0	303	29.7

Notes:

1. No return for Organford chapel
2. No return for Romsey chapel
3. No return for Gillingham chapel
4. No return for Portchester chapel
5. No return for Tolpuddle chapel

the more locally we focus our attention, the greater the variations become and the more complex the pattern. In the circuit tables, attendance figures exclude children (apart from any included in the figures under 'general congregation' in the census returns). Congregations meeting in private houses or other make-shift accommodation are bracketed. Other dissenting congregations within the same locality are listed in the right-hand columns. The following denominational abbreviations are used: B Baptist; BC Bible Christian; C Calvinistic; E Evangelical; I Independent; IM Independent Methodist; LDS Latter-Day Saints; P Presbyterian; PM Primitive Methodist; Q Society of Friends; U Unitarian; WMA Wesleyan Methodist Association; WR Wesleyan Reform.

Table 6:8 Salisbury Circuit

Membership: 773 % of population: 1.6

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
103/1/1	Fordingbridge, 1836	100			Fordinbridge I Fordingbridge Q Frogham I Gorley I Hungerford I Godshill I	212 18 35 26 202 33
103/1/3	Wood Green, 1830	158				
103/1/7			Sandleheath PM, 1843	59		
108/1/2					(West Tytherley B)	20
108/1/3					East Tytherley Q	5
108/1/6	Broughton, 1818	140			Broughton B	180
262/2/2	Netton, 1812	146				
262/2/4	Amesbury, 1820[1]	100				
262/2/5					Bulford I	128
262/2/6					Durrington I	29
262/2/8			(Figheldean PM)	70		
262/3/3			Allington PM, 1843	46		
262/3/7	Idmiston, 1818	100				
262/3/10	Winterborne Gunner, 1822	140				
262/3/12	Hurdcott, 1844	65				

Table 6:8 continued

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
263/1/1	Shripple, Winterslow, 1810	96			Winterslow B	-
263/1/2	Alderbury, c.1826	162				
263/1/3	Pitton, 1836[2]	62				
263/1/6	West Grimstead, 1819[3]	72				
263/1/7	(East Grimstead)	44				
263/1/8	Whiteparish, 1826	200				
263/2/1	Redlynch, 1826[4] Lodehill, Downton, 1814	45 163	Woodfalls Hill PM, 1835	165	Downton B Downton, South Lane B Gravel Close B	80 130 100
263/2/3	Hamptworth, 1825	90			Redlynch B	80
263/2/5			Homington PM, 1839	69	Bodenham B	81
263/3/3			(Laverstock 'Methodist')[7]	36	(Laverstock I)	28
263/3/6	(Stratford-sub-Castle)	40			(Stratford-sub-Castle B)	16
263/3/7	Fisherton Anger, 1835[5]	130	Fisherton PM, 1835	162		
264/1/2	Church Street, Salisbury, 1810	425			Swedenborgian Scots Lane I Endless Street I Brown Street B	55 199 625 336
264/1/3						
265/1/2					Quidhampton B	25
265/1/3	Wilton, c.1830	100	Wilton PM, 1837	69	Crow Lane I	223
265/1/4	South Newton, 1812	15				
265/1/5					Wishford I	22
265/1/6	Stapleford, 1824[6]	92				
265/1/8			Hanging Langford PM, 1849	50		
265/1/10					Wylve I	118
265/2/3					Fovant I	165
265/2/5			Barford St. Martin PM, 1845	112		
265/2/9			Broad Chalke PM, 1843	85	Broad Chalke I	197
265/2/11			(Bowerchalke PM)	96	(Bowerchalke B)	54
265/2/12					Ebbesbourne Wake I	180
Totals		2,685		1,019		3,602

Notes:

1. Return says '1806', but this chapel was replaced on a different site in 1820.
2. Return says 'about 1805', but the earlier chapel was replaced in 1836.
3. Return says '1819', but the deed of conveyance is dated 1825.
4. 'Warminster Green' on the 1825 Plan; chapel opened, 1826.
5. Return says 'about 1823', but this refers to the earlier chapel sold to the Primitive Methodists when a new chapel was built in 1836.
6. Probably 1824, the 'Meeting House on the Nap' registered on 16 November 1824. Return says 'about 1820'. (But n.b. a different property was conveyed to the Wesleyans on 22 April 1850.)
7. The return describes this group simply as 'Methodist'. It may have been a small group of Wesleyan Reformers (who were active in the village a few years later).
8. Wesleyan preaching places that had disappeared since 1825: Chitterne, Cholderton, Damerham, Dean, Farley, Ford, Landford, Netherhampton.
9. Three PM societies just north of the Salisbury Wesleyan Circuit were in the Hungerford Circuit: Netheravon, Chisenbury and Figheldean (Districts 261, 262).

Table 6:9 Portsmouth CircuitMembership: 896 % of population: 1.1

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
95/1/1					Hayling Island I	94
95/1/3					Emsworth I Emsworth C Emsworth B	84 20 138
95/1/4	Havant, 1833	45			Havant I	160
95/1/5					Bedhampton	c.50
96/1/1					Landport B 'Zion' C Portsea I Milton I Portsea B	950 130 450 26 476
96/2/1	St. Peter's, Portsea, 1800 'Wesley', Landport, 1844	491 586	Landport PM	130	Landport B Portsea B King St., Portsea I Bethel, Portsea I Portsea C Portsea, Brethren Portsea, LDS	c.450 50 1,820 500 40 - 180
96/3/1	Green Row, Portsmouth, 1811 Bath Square, Portsmouth[1]	458 40			Portsmouth B Highbury I Portsmouth U	35 184 100+
96/4/1	Southsea[2]	60	Southsea BC Landport BC	296 88	St. Paul's Square B 'Ebenezer', B Park View B 'Zoar' B 'Providence' B 'Salem' B	c.400 175 91 40 12 80
Totals		1,680		514		6,735

Notes:

1. 'Bethel' - premises rented from the Royal Victoria Day School.
2. Little Southsea Street, formerly Bible Christian, but taken over by the Wesleyans in 1847.
3. There is no trace in the Census of the Methodist Association cause which was in existence in 1845.
4. Summary Table for Portsea (96) includes a return for Tarrant Monkton, Dorset (270/2/16) in error.
5. To the north of Portsmouth lay an area occupied partly by the Primitive Methodists and partly by a group of Independent Methodist societies. There were PM societies at Swanmore and Meonstoke (District 110), with two others, Buriton and Steep, in the vicinity of Petersfield (District 112). The Independent Methodist societies were at Boarhunt (District 98), Catherington, Chalton and Clanfield (District 111).

Table 6:10 Poole Circuit

Membership: 586 % of population: 2.2

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
272/1/1					Broadstone I	34
272/1/2	Kinson, 1840[1]				Howe I	70
272/2/2	(Parkstone)	20			Parkstone I	226
272/2/3	Poole, 1793	517	Poole PM, 1842	112	Poole I Poole B Poole U Poole Q Poole LDS	693 150 50 12 60
272/3/1					Hamworthy I	33
272/3/2	Lytchett Minster, 1843 Organford, 1832[4]	51 -			Lytchett Minster B/I	166
273/3/3	Lytchett Matravers, 1825	115	Lytchett Matravers PM, 1842	81		
273/1/1					Studland I	30
273/1/2	Swanage, 1807	300			Swanage I	200
273/1/3	Langton Matravers, 1842	110			(Langton Matravers I) Langton Matravers B	18 40
273/1/4	Worth, 1836	80				
273/2/1	(Corfe Castle)[3] (Rempstone Heath)[3] (Scotland Heath)[3] (Kingston)[2][3]	70 60 41 60	(Corfe Castle PM)	52	Corfe Castle I	74
273/2/4	Creech, 1825[3]	48				
273/3/5					West Lulworth I	50
273/3/7	(Wool)[3]	35				
273/3/8	Highwood, East Stoke, 1812[3] Binnegar, East Stoke, 1823[3]	33 105				
273/3/10	(Wareham)	60	(Wareham PM)	40	Wareham U	93
273/3/12					Wareham 'Old Meeting' Wareham, West Street	320
273/3/14	(Arne)[3]	40				
273/4/1	West Morden, 1846[3]	117				
Totals		1,862		285		2,319

Notes:

1. I.e. Constitution Hill, Poole.
2. Wrongly labelled 'Wareham' and filed under 273/3/10, but completed and signed by "Thomas Beaves, Steward, Kingston, Nr Wareham".
3. These ten societies formed the Wareham Circuit, with a minister, William Watson, stationed in Wareham itself. But the circuit's independent existence was tenuous and brief, and its membership figures were included in those for Poole Circuit, with which it was reunited in 1854.
4. No census return for Organford; but the conveyance deed is dated 1832.
5. The returns for Swanage, Langton Matravers and Worth were signed by the junior minister of the Poole Circuit, Richard Eland.

Table 6:11 Southampton Circuit

Membership: 608 % of population: 0.6

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
104/1/1			Nomansland PM, 1845	100		
104/1/2	Bramshaw, 1839	86	Bramshaw PM[1]	30	Bramshaw B	40
104/1/4	Cadnam, 1812[9]	-	Cadnam PM, 1850	100	Cadnam I	155
104/1/5					Lyndhurst B	150
104/2/6	Fawley, 1817[2]	144			Hythe I Blackfield Common B	170 210
104/3/1	Longdown, 1832	55			Marchwood I Totton I (Eling I) (Eling I)[11]	75 150 30 30
105/1/1			(Southampton BC) Southampton PM, 1838	15 208	Southampton, Albion Chapel, I Southampton U Southampton B 'Town Mission' Southampton 'undenominational' Southampton 'Above Bar' I	680 33 30 109 150 1,131
105/1/2	Southampton, East Street, 1850	600			Southampton P 'Zion', free Anglican East Street B 'Portland' B Southampton Q Southampton LDS	300 300 160 220 54 50
106/1/1					Pear Tree Green I	173
106/1/2					Netley I	59
106/2/1					Botley I	130
106/2/2	Burnetts Lane, West End, 1845	135				
106/2/4	Bitterne, 1823[4]	91			(Bitterne I) Bitterne LDS	0 13
106/2/5			Hatch Bottom, West End BC, 1847[5] (Moor Hill BC)[5]	100 18	Hedge End B	107
106/3/3	Church Street, Shirley, 1843	316			Millbrook I (Millbrook I) Shirley B	25 20 105
107/1/1	Nursling, 1815	75				
107/1/2	Romsey, 1815[8]	-	Romsey PM, 1845	103	Toothill B (Romsey LDS) Romsey I Romsey, Bell St. B Romsey U	65 14 339 150 20
107/2/1	Timsbury, 1815	40				
107/2/2	Awbridge, 1847	50			Awbridge I Unspecified	50 86
107/2/3					Mottisfont B	50
107/2/6	West Wellow, 1815[6]	90				
107/2/9			Lockerley Newtown PM, 1844	100	Lockerley B	60
109/1/1			(Sutton Scotney PM)	50		
109/1/4			(Micheldever PM)[10] (Micheldever WMA)[10]	- -		

Table 6:11 continued

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
109/2/4			Easton PM, 1840	95		
109/2/5			Kingsworthy WMA, 1841	60		
109/3/2					Winchester 'New Jerusalem'	20
109/3/4	Winchester, 1818	134				
109/3/5			Winchester WMA, c.1839	65	Winchester B Winchester I	170 319
109/3/6					Winchester B	120
109/3/18					(Winchester B)	35
109/4/4	Crowdhill, 1822	95	Bishopstoke BC, 1848	89	Horton Heath I	72
109/4/5			Twyford WMA, 1851	85		
109/5/3			Farley Chamberlayne WMA[10]	-		
Totals		1,911		1,218		6,429

Notes:

1. No other trace of this chapel.
2. Return says '1814'
3. Probably misfiled under 104/3/1; should be under 104/1/4.
4. Headed 'Southsdon' (i.e. South Stoneham), but signed by the Steward, whose address is Bitterne. Date given on Return as 1829.
5. Two Bible Christian returns from South Stoneham, apparently for different places: 'Ebenezer', 1847 and 'Moon-hill'.
6. Return says 'about 1820'.
7. Stoke Common chapel.
8. No return for Romsey Wesleyan chapel.
9. Cadnam Wesleyan chapel (built 1812; on Southampton Circuit plan, 1825): no trace in Census.
10. No returns for Micheldever PM or for Micheldever and Farley Chamberlayne WMA (both of which originated as Wesleyan societies).
11. Two returns for different Independent groups meeting in private houses in the parish of Eling.
12. Wesleyan preaching places that had disappeared since 1825: Braishfield/Pucknall, Stoke Charity, Wonston.

Table 6:12 Weymouth CircuitMembership: 519 % of population: 2.2

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
273/4/8	Winfrith Newburgh, 1836[1]	150				
274/1/5	Preston, 1819	92				
274/1/6					(Bincombe B)	40
274/1/7					Upwey I	135
274/1/8	Broadwey, 1839	109				
274/2/1	West Chickere11, c.1820	50	(West Chickere11 PM)	15	West Chickere11 I	63
274/2/3	Conygar Lane, Weymouth, 1805	244	Weymouth WR	126	Weymouth I Weymouth B Weymouth B[2] Weymouth E Weymouth, 'Christians'	204 235 30 200 350
274/2/4	Chapel Hay, Weymouth, 1834	24	Weymouth, Hope Square PM, 1841	70	Weymouth, Hope Chapel I	223
274/2/5	Wyke Regis, 1844	70			Wyke Regis, 'Christians'	28
274/3/1	Wakeham, 1825 Fortuneswell, 1792 Southwell, 1849	200 526 103	Chiswell PM, by 1839	165	Chiswell I	160
274/4/2			(Abbotsbury PM)	31	Abbotsbury I	80
274/4/3			(Portesham PM)	30	Portesham I	23
			(Coryatts PM)	25		
Totals		1,722		462		1,771

Notes:

1. The chapel was at East Knighton.
2. Probably a Sunday School.

Table 6:13 Shaftesbury Circuit

Membership: 765 % of population: 1.5

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
266/1/2					Berwick St. John B	110
266/1/5	Donhead St. Mary, 1837	300[1]			Donhead St. Mary I	160
266/1/6			Semley PM	33	Semley B	200
266/2/2	East Tisbury, 1846	140			East Tisbury I	332
266/2/3			(West Tisbury PM)	53		
266/2/5					Swallowcliff Catholic & Apostolic	-
266/3/2			Teffont Magna PM, 1850[2]	80		
266/3/3					Chilmark B	38
266/3/7			Hindon PM, 1841	50	Hindon I	95
267/1/1			East Knoyle PM, 1847	90	East Knoyle I	36
267/1/2			(West Knoyle PM)	30		
267/1/6					Maiden Bradley I	182
267/1/8	Kilminster, 1847	140			Kilminster LDS	19
267/1/11			Mere PM, 1846	300	Mere I Mere 'Christians'	315 60
267/1/14			(Zeals PM)	76	Zeals I	85
267/1/17	Bourton, 1845	135			Bourton B	100
268/1/1	Motcombe, 1773	100	Motcombe PM, 1828 Enmore Green PM, 1827	135 91		
268/1/2	Shaftesbury, 1829	200			Shaftesbury I Shaftesbury Q	195 10
268/1/4						
268/2/2			(Bere Knap, Compton PM)	104		
268/2/3	Ashmore, 1837	85				
268/2/4	Fontmell Magna, 1797	200				
268/2/7					Iwerne Minster B	110
268/2/8	Hartgrove, 1824[3]		(East Orchard PM)	50		
268/3/1	Gillingham, 1824[3]	-	Gillingham PM, 1836	125	Gillingham B	108
268/3/2	Hunger Hill, East Stour, 1826	88			East Stour B	61
268/3/3					(West Stour B)	35
268/3/4					Stour Provost I	110
269/1/2	Marnhull, 1799	42	(Marnhull PM)	7	Marnhull I Marnhull Q	80 7
269/1/9			(Lydlinch PM)	35	(Lydlinch LDS)	45
269/2/1	Sturminster Newton, 1832	300	Sturminster Newton PM, 1846 (Bagber PM)	190 65		
269/2/2			Hinton St. Mary PM, 1830	30		
269/2/4	(Hammoon)	30				
269/2/5	(Child Okeford)	107				
269/2/6	(Shillingstone)	55				
269/2/7	Okeford Fitzpaine, 1830[3]		(Okeford Fitzpaine PM)	50		

Table 6:13 continued

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
269/2/8			(Fifehead Neville PM)	70		
269/2/9			Hazelbury Bryan PM, 1847	120		
269/2/12	(Ibberton)	-	(Ibberton PM)	30		
269/2/13	Belchalwell, 1843	65				
270/1/15			Spetisbury PM, 1842	50	Spetisbury I	47
270/1/16			(Charlton Marshall PM)	20	Charlton Marshall I	70
270/2/4	Blandford, 1833	150			Blandford I[4] Blandford I	460 306
270/2/6					Bryanston I	40
270/2/8	Stourpaine, 1833	70			Stourpaine I	71
270/2/12	Pimperne, 1847	60				
271/1/6	(Farnham)	53				
271/1/8	(Woodcutts)	92	(Sixpenny Handley PM) Deanland PM, 1841	80 70	Sixpenny Handley I	0
Totals		2,412		2,034		3,487

Notes:

1. One of the very few examples of an attendance figure substantially in excess of the reported accommodation.
2. Taken over from the Wesleyans.
3. No returns for Gillingham, Hartgrove or Okeford Fitzpaine Wesleyan chapels.
4. There are two returns for Independent congregations in Blandford, referring apparently to different chapels.

Table 6:14 Andover Circuit

Membership: 373 % of population: 1.4

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
108/1/7	Nether Wallop, 1817	155	(Nether Wallop PM)	95		
108/1/8					Over Wallop B	125
108/2/1			Longstock PM, 1846	80		
108/2/2			Leckford PM, 1846	50		
108/2/3	Stockbridge[1]	90	(Stockbridge PM)	37	Stockbridge I	128
108/2/4			Houghton WMA, 1833	95		
108/2/6			Kings Somborne WMA, 1827	100	Kings Somborne B/I	c.40
			Up Somborne WMA, 1843	107		
			(Kings Somborne PM)	40		
117/1/2	Overton, 1842	57			Overton I	150
117/1/5	Whitchurch, 1812	150	Whitchurch PM, 1849	190	Whitchurch I Whitchurch B	150 182
117/1/7	(Hurstbourne Priors) Down Hurstbourne, 1822	30 80	(Hurstbourne Priors PM)	110		
117/1/8	St. Mary Bourne, 1833 Bourne, Whitchurch, c.1830 }	40[2]	St. Mary Bourne PM, 1838	185	St. Mary Bourne B	79

Table 6:14 continued

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
118/1/1	(Longparish)	30			Longparish B	84
118/1/3			Barton Stacey PM, 1844	162		
118/1/5	Wherwell, 1846	150	Wherwell PM, 1835	36		
118/1/6			Goodworth Clatford PM, 1847	50	Goodworth Clatford I	40
118/1/7			Upper Clatford PM, 1846 (Upper Clatford PM)	127 63		
118/1/8					Abbotts Ann I	35
118/2/2	Amport[6]	60-70	Amport PM, 1846	85		
118/2/3	Thrupton, 1817	45-50				
118/2/7					Shipton Bellinger B	46
118/2/10			Ludgershall PM, 1844	180	Ludgershall B	60
118/3/3					(Penton Mewsey I)	44
118/3/5	Andover, 1824 Wildern/Hatherden?, 1818	103 40	Andover PM, 1838 (Charlton PM)	120 55	Andover I Andover I Andover B Smannell B	300 45 100 46
118/4/2	Lower Chute, 1844	76				
118/4/4	Vernham Dean, 1816	45	Vernham Dean PM, 1845 Littledown PM, 1845	81 100	Upton I	73
118/4/6	Facombe, 1819[3]	70				
118/4/7	(Hurstbourne Tarrant)	40			Hurstbourne Tarrant I	110
261/1/1			Netheravon PM, 1847	65	Netheravon B	113
261/1/3			(Enford-Chisenbury PM)	51	Enford B	120
261/1/5					Upavon B	100
261/2/6	Collingbourne Kingston, 1819	274[4]				
261/2/7			Collingbourne Ducis PM, 1849	210		
Totals		1,543		2,474		2,170

Notes:

1. Stockbridge Wesleyan: References in circuit records 1840-44, but no other trace.
2. Two returns for St. Mary Bourne are not identical, but probably refer to the same congregation.
3. Faccombe does not appear on the 1825 Wesleyan plan.
4. Attendance figures for Collingbourne Kingston include children.
5. The following Wesleyan preaching places had disappeared since 1825: Clatford, Collingbourne Ducis, Everleigh, Penton Mewsey.
6. The date of the Amport Wesleyan chapel was given as 'not known'; it was apparently privately owned.

Table 6:15 Sherborne Circuit

Membership: 601 % of population: 1.4

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
269/1/3	Stalbridge, 1833	81			Stalbridge I	200
269/1/7			Stourton Caundle PM	70	Stourton Caundle I Stourton Caundle LDS	70 41
275/4/9	(Middlemarsh)	45				
275/4/18			(Buckland Newton PM)	60	Buckland Newton I	74
276/1/1	Holwell, 1827	193				
276/1/2	(Bishop's Caundle)	65				
276/1/6	Long Burton, 1850	55	(Long Burton PM)	28		
276/1/8	Yetminster, 1850	67				
276/1/9	(Leigh)	65				
276/1/14					Thornford, 'Christians'	30
276/1/15					Lillington, 'Christians'	20

Table 6:15 continued

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
276/2/1	Sherborne, 1842	279	Sherborne PM, 1832	33	Sherborne I Sherborne C/I Sherborne Q Sherborne, Brethren (Sherborne LDS)	389 80 30-40 50 30
276/3/2					(Purse Caundle I)	24
276/3/11					Nether Compton I	120
319/1/8					East Coker B East Coker I East Coker, Brethren	50 93 140
319/1/9	West Coker, 1839	59				
319/1/11	(East Chinnock)	60				
319/4/5	Yeovil, 1824	250			Yeovil B Henford I Yeovil, 'Calvinistic' Yeovil, Brethren Yeovil U Yeovil Marsh Yeovil Q	300 530 190 130 55 49 8
319/4/6	Mudford, 1845	33			(Mudford Sock B)	23
320/2/1	Charlton Horethorne, 1828	86				
320/2/3	Milborne Port, 1829	136			Milborne Port I	386
320/2/5	South Cheriton, 1844	80			Horrington B South Cheriton I	45 42
320/2/6					Abbas Coombe I	150
320/2/7					Henstridge I	160
320/3/1			Kington Magna PM, 1827	300	Nyland I	60
320/3/2			(Buckhorn Weston PM)	30		
320/3/5					Charlton Musgrave B	33
320/3/8			Wincanton, 'Methodist'[2]	40	Wincanton I Wincanton B Wincanton Q Wincanton LDS	170 180 5 c.40
320/3/9			Holton BC, 1831	47		
320/3/12	Blackford, 1837	81				
Totals		1,635		608		4,002

Notes:

- Two places listed on the 1825 circuit plan are not found in the Census returns: Glanvilles Wootton (275/4/24) and Bishops Down (276/1/2). A chapel was built at Glanvilles Wootton in 1869; local tradition speaks of cottage meetings beginning in 1861.
- 'Zion Chapel' at Bale Common, Wincanton (320/3/8) is described simply as 'Methodist'. Its return is signed by a Maragaret Lanning describing herself enigmatically as 'Minister'. The Wesleyan chapel in Post Office Lane was taken over by the Primitive Methodists in 1847, was later used by the Mormons and then demolished. The Wesleyans opened a new preaching place in North Street in 1873. The Census shows no trace of a Wesleyan congregation in 1851.

Table 6:16 Gosport Circuit

Membership: 164 % of population: 0.5

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
97/1/1	Alverstoke, 1817[3]	64			Alverstoke (Dr. Bogue's) I Alverstoke B Forton B	320 35 169
97/1/2	High Street, Gosport, 1810	135	Gosport WMA	85	Gosport I Elson I Gosport C (Gosport LDS)	202 45 37 40
98/1/1	Fareham	57			Fareham I	189
98/1/2	Portchester[1]	-				
98/1/4					Cosham I	72
98/1/6			Boarhunt IM	69		
98/2/1			Wickham WMA	60		
98/2/3					Titchfield I[2] Titchfield I[2] Titchfield I[2] Sarisbury Green B	200 270 110 37
Totals		256		214		1,726

Notes:

1. No return for the Portchester Wesleyan chapel, built in 1818 by Augustus Marblestone and conveyed by him to a Wesleyan trust in 1826.
2. Three separate returns, two of them signed by the Rev. John Flower, but all apparently for different congregations.
3. Unidentified, but possibly the shop used as a chapel by the society at Hardway until 1870.

Table 6:17 Dorchester Circuit

Membership: 430 % of population: 2.0

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
270/1/2	Winterborne Stickland, 1834	40	(Winterborne Stickland PM)	100		
270/1/4	(Winterborne Houghton)	50				
270/1/8	(Milborne Stileham)	50				
270/1/9	Winterborne Whitchurch, 1847	100	Winterborne Whitchurch PM, c.1825	70		
270/1/10	Winterborne Kingston, 1837	50			Winterborne Kingston I	159
273/4/3	Bere Regis, 1828 Bere Heath, 1850	130 100			Bere Regis I	200
275/1/3					Dorchester I	291
275/1/4	Dorchester, 1840	160			Dorchester B	107
275/1/5			Dorchester WR	90	Dorchester P/U	39
275/2/3	(Broadmayne)	50				
275/2/7	Tolpuddle, 1818[1]	-				
275/2/10	Dewlish, 1843	90				
275/2/11	(Puddletown)	40				
275/3/1	(Charminster)	40				
275/3/6					Maiden Newton I	126
275/3/18	(Martinstown)	60				
275/4/3	(Sydling St. Nicholas)	35			Sydling St. Nicholas I	63
275/4/11	Cerne Abbas, 1843	120			Cerne Abbas I	178
275/4/13	Piddletrenthide, 1832	130				
Totals		1,245		260		1,163

Notes:

1. No return for the Tolpuddle chapel - a barn converted for use as a place of worship in 1818.
2. Places found on the circuit plan in 1825, but not in the Census returns: Alton Pancras (perhaps succeeded by Piddletrenthide), Fordington, Tincleton.

Table 6:18 Christchurch Circuit

Membership: 144 % of population: 1.0

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other dissenting congregations	Largest Adult attendance
101/1/1	Purewell, 1835 Bransgore, 1844	106	Pokesdown I	42
		100	Christchurch I	500
			Christchurch I	51
			Christchurch I	28
			Christchurch I	38
101/1/2			Parley B	125
			Bournemouth I	64
101/1/3			Throope I	137
			Ripley I	177
102/1/1	Ringwood[2] Crow Hill, 1833	84	Ringwood P/U	74
		88	Ringwood I	100
			Ringwood I	80
			Poulner B	70
			Kingston I	60
102/1/3			(Ibsley I)	34
102/1/8	(Burley)	34	Burley I	110
Totals		412		1,690

Table 6:18 continued

Notes:

1. There were no other Methodist societies, apart from Wesleyan ones, in the area covered by the Christchurch Circuit. The adjoining Lymington Registration District, which included the south-eastern parts of the New Forest, had no Wesleyan societies, but some Primitive Methodist ones and some belonging to the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion (listed in the Census as 'Independent Methodist'):

Registration District	Methodist Congregations	Largest Adult attendance	Other dissenting congregations	Largest Adult attendance
100/1/1	Lymington IM	170	Lymington B Lymington I	262 303
100/1/2	Sway PM, 1845 Wootton PM, 1844	120 130	East End, Boldre I Beaulieu Rails B Sway B	98 166 39
100/1/3	Brockenhurst IM	50	Brockenhurst B	75
100/2/1			Milford B Stote's Chapel, Milford B	102 41
100/2/2			Hordle B	57
100/2/3			Ashley B Milton I	121 160
Totals		470		1,424

2. The Wesleyan Superintendent was at this time stationed at Ringwood, which was the head of the Circuit until 1855. The Ringwood return gives the date of the chapel as 'before 1800'. Little is known about it, but it was probably a building taken over from another denomination or adapted from secular purposes. A new chapel was built in 1870.

Table 6:19 Wimborne Circuit

Membership: 388 % of population: 2.3

Registration District	Wesleyan Societies	Largest Adult attendance	Other Methodist congregations	Attendance	Other Dissenting congregations	Attendance
103/1/4	Crendell, 1839[1]	79	Damerham PM, 1845	92	Damerham B Damerham I	78 40
103/1/5			Martin PM, 1844	300		
270/2/16	Tarrant Monkton, 1830[2]	105				
271/1/3	Horton Heath, 1850	154				
271/1/4	Gussage St. Michael, 1847	114				
271/1/11	Cranborne, 1847[5]	200	Cranborne PM, 1848 Verwood PM, 1840	86 50	Alderholt I Cripplestyle I Verwood I Verwood I	63 279 101 57
271/1/13					Edmondsham PM, 1848	50
271/1/14	Woodlands, 1837[4]	160				
271/2/2	Witchampton, 1811	87				
271/2/6	Longham, 1834	60			Longham I	250
271/3/1	Wimborne, 1820 Broomhill, 1835 Holtwood, 1841 Colehill, 1807[7]	335 90 95 60			Wimborne I Chilbridge I	200 36
271/3/2			Shapwick PM, 1845	61		
271/3/3					Sturminster Marshall I	90
271/3/4					Corfe Mullen B	58
Totals		1,539		589		1,302

Notes:

1. The 1841 deed of conveyance shows that the chapel was in Wimborne Circuit.
2. Tarrant Monkton was missioned from the Poole Circuit and two of the four trustees of the chapel were from Wimborne. An endowment of £200, with interest payable to the circuit, encouraged the Wimborne Circuit to retain the chapel rather than transfer it later on to the Blandford Circuit.
3. Cranborne PM chapel had belonged to the Wesleyans, who sold it in 1848 on opening their new chapel.
4. Woodlands Chapel: The Census return says 'before 1800' apparently in error. The original preaching room was lost in 1837, on the death of Joseph Haskell, the occupier of the house, which reverted to the Earl of Shaftesbury. A site for a new chapel was given by 'a well-wisher of another denomination'. (Centenary Handbook of the Wimborne Circuit)
5. The addresses of the trustees of Cranborne Wesleyan chapel in 1849 show that it was in the Poole Circuit and so became part of the Wimborne Circuit on its formation that year.
6. Preaching places found on the 1825 plan which had since disappeared: Bloxworth (later missioned by the Primitive Methodists), Canford (probably replaced by Longham), East Parley, and Edmondsham (only a Primitive Methodist cause by 1851). Winterborne Kingston had been transferred to the Dorchester Circuit.
7. This date is given in the Census return, but must be treated as suspect. For the beginnings of Methodism in Wimborne and Colehill, see p 196-7.

6.3 The Methodist Branches

Except for the Primitive Methodists, none of the branches of Methodism in the south had a network of circuits and societies that came near to rivalling the Wesleyans; though there were local challenges that had to be taken seriously, such as that of the Associationists in the villages around Winchester. (Table 4:12)

If there was an alternative to Wesleyanism on offer, it was in most cases the Primitive Methodist brand. Primitive Methodist membership in these southern counties was just over half of the Wesleyan total of 6,247. The Primitive Methodists had well over half the number of Wesleyan preaching places, but a much higher proportion of these were rooms in the houses of members, and the chapels themselves were smaller. (Table 6:20)

The number of groups meeting in private houses may be seen as an indication of outreach and growth. Some Wesleyan circuits still had a number of societies without a chapel (e.g. Poole, Dorchester, Shaftesbury), but others (Portsmouth, Gosport, Weymouth, Wimborne) had none. Among the Primitive Methodists, Shaftesbury Circuit stood out, with just over half of its 26 preaching places still lacking a chapel. Another possible indication of active outreach is a high level of attendance in relation to membership. By this criterion the Primitive Methodists would appear to lag well behind the Wesleyans, and the most active, or most successful, evangelism was that of the Wesleyan Association. Other evidence, however, fails to support this view of the situation, and the percentages in Column 9 may rather reflect numbers that are too small to be typical. This was certainly true of the Reform movement, which, as the situation at Salisbury shows, was too recent for its strength to be quantifiable. The uneven distribution of Primitive Methodism is plotted in Table 6:21.

Shaftesbury was one of two areas in which the Primitive Methodists had the strongest presence^[17], the other being Andover. In both cases, they now had more preaching places than the Wesleyans, and in the Andover area their attendances on Census Sunday were substantially

17. This exception apart, Hobsbawm's inclusion of Dorset among the regions previously colonized by the Wesleyans and therefore impervious to Primitive Methodism, is true. (Hobsbawm, 1971, pp 136-7)

Table 6:20 Methodist membership, attendances and accommodation, 1851

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Membership	Largest Adult Attendance	Chapels	Other preaching places	Total preaching places	Total sittings	Members per preaching place	Attendance as % of sittings	Attendance as % of membership
Wesleyan	6,247	18,852	134	32	166	26,571	37.6	70.9	302
Primitive Methodist	3,272[1]	8,376	60	37	97	9,682	33.7	86.6	256
Bible Christian	264	606	4	2	6	842	44	72.0	230
WMA	168	657	7	1	8	1,044	24	62.9	391
Reform[2]	-	216[3]	2	0	2	414	-	52.2	-

Notes:

1. Including the Petersfield Mission, but not the remainder of the Shefford Circuit, nor the Brinkworth Circuit or the Isle of Wight Mission, which lay outside the territory of the Wesleyan circuits under review.
2. No membership figures are available for the Wesleyan Reformers before 1852.
3. This does not include the supporters of Reform at Salisbury, some 200 of whom worshipped with the Independents on Census Sunday.

Table 6:21 Distribution of Primitive Methodism in
relation to Wesleyan circuits, 1851

Wesleyan circuits etc.[1]	Primitive Methodism in the same areas			
	Chapels	Other preaching places	Total	Largest Adult Attendances[2]
Salisbury	9	2	11	983
Portsmouth	1	0	1	130
Droxford/ Petersfield	2	2	4	205
Poole	2	2	4	285
Southampton	6	1	7	691
Weymouth	2	4	6	336
Shaftesbury	12	14	26	1,964
Andover	15	7	22	2,172
Sherborne	2	4	6	521
Gosport	0	0	0	-
Dorchester	1	1	2	170
Christchurch	0	0	0	-
Lymington	2	0	2	250
Wimborne	6	0	6	639
Totals	60	37	97	8,346

Notes:

1. Including two areas where Wesleyanism was not represented (Droxford and Lymington) and one (Petersfield) formerly part of the Portsmouth Circuit, but now linked with the Guildford Circuit.
2. For comparison with the Wesleyan attendance figures, see Table 5:11.

higher - 2,172 compared with 1,560.[18] Where Wesleyanism was non-existent (e.g. Lymington District[19]) or weak (e.g. Christchurch District), the Primitive Methodists mustered 50% of the attendances at the nearest Wesleyan chapels. In the Southampton-Winchester area the ratio of one Primitive Methodist to three Wesleyan attenders reflected the impact of the Association on the Wesleyans, as much as the success of Primitive Methodist preaching.

Urban areas like Portsmouth and Southampton had a large enough concentration of population and a low enough level of church attendance to provide opportunities for any new evangelical venture; and the same was true to a lesser extent of the country towns. So it is not surprising that by 1851 in virtually all such towns[20] the Primitive Methodists were challenging the Wesleyans and the older dissenting congregations. In some cases the Primitive Methodists were located in an outlying settlement such as Fisherton Anger at Salisbury, Enmore Green at Shaftesbury, and in Hope Square at Weymouth. Their Fisherton Anger chapel was, in fact, bought from the Wesleyans when the latter moved into a larger building on the other side of the street. At Cranborne and Teffont Magna, too, the Wesleyans sold them their former chapel. In such cases,[21] any Wesleyan fear of competition was outweighed either by good will towards their rivals or by commercial interests - or a combination of both. (The Teffont Magna chapel was in a 'ruinous state' when sold, an indication perhaps that the Primitive Methodists were willing to venture in territory the Wesleyans had found to be stony ground.)

Cranborne is an example from a group of smaller towns and larger villages which by 1851 had both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist chapels. Others included Whitchurch, Gillingham, Wilton and Sturminster Newton. This was also the situation in some much smaller villages, such as Winterborne Whitchurch, with a population of only 595. In other cases where there was already a Wesleyan chapel, the

18. These are the totals for the largest congregation of the day at each place, ignoring any figures for Sunday scholars. Cf the case of Baughurst in an adjacent District, noted on p 325 above.

19. Wesleyanism eventually reached Lymington itself from the Isle of Wight, opening its first chapel in 1859.

20. The exceptions included Gosport, Fareham, Winchester, Ringwood and Blandford, where there were as yet no Primitive Methodists.

21. Another occurred later at Weymouth, where the Conygar Lane chapel was sold to the UMFC after Maiden Street chapel was opened in 1869.

Primitive Methodists could manage no more than a house group meeting in the poorer quarter of the village, e.g. at West Tisbury (where the Wesleyan chapel was in the main settlement of East Tisbury) and Marnhull (where the Primitive Methodist cottage meeting was in Bath Alley, on the southern edge of the village). There is at least one case on record early in the second half of the century of an agreement to avoid direct rivalry in the villages. The Sherborne Wesleyan Circuit decided to leave Bishops Caundle to the Primitive Methodists and to concentrate on the neighbouring village of Allweston, from which the Primitive Methodists in their turn agreed to withdraw.[22]

Clearly, the larger the local population, the better the opportunity of gaining support for a new congregation, but even in a village as small as Ibberton (population: 218), both Wesleyans and Primitive Methodists had 'house churches' and were to build chapels in the second half of the century.[23] But the combination of large parish and scattered population remained the ideal situation for the growth of any form of nonconformity, and this will be examined in the next section.

6.4 The Distribution of Methodism

Even as late as 1851, 60% of southern rural parishes had no dissenting chapels; in Dorset, the figure was as high as 70%. (Table 6:22). Of the two fifths where Nonconformity in one form or another had established itself, over half had at least one Methodist chapel. In most of these cases, Methodism had no dissenting rivals, but was the only form of nonconformist presence in the parish. There was, however, a minority of cases where, by mid-century, the inhabitants of some even quite small village communities had a choice of denominational chapels.

The most detailed study of the distribution of village Dissent is by Alan Everitt.[24] While noting differences in the strength of Dissent between one county and another, Everitt's main focus is upon more local variations which 'are certainly in some way related to significant differences of local society as well as to more purely personal and

22. Typescript notes by the Rev J P Taylor, drawing on local tradition, in 1908. Allweston Wesleyan chapel was built in 1861; Bishops Caundle Primitive Methodist chapel, in 1871.

23. The Primitive Methodists opened their chapel in 1869 and the Wesleyans, undeterred by this, followed suit in 1884 on a site provided by a local farmer; but, as at St Mary Bourne, their rival venture never flourished and was eventually closed.

24. A Everitt, 1972

Table 6:22 Rural 'Parishes' [1] with Dissenting Chapels

	Parishes with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants			Parishes with Wesleyan chapels					Parishes with PM chapels				Parishes with Methodist chapels		
	No dissent	Some dissent	Total	No other chapel	Other chapels[2]			Total	No Other chapel	Other chapels[2]			Total	Number	%
					1	2	3+			1	2	3+			
Hants	105	84 (44%)	189	11	7	5	1	24 (13%)	13	5	2	2	22 (12%)	46	24
Dorset	156	66 (30%)	222	23	14	2	0	39 (18%)	6	6	0	0	12 (5%)	51	23
S. Wilts	61	63 (51%)	124	18	4	1	0	23 (19%)	7	2	2	0	11 (9%)	34	27
Totals	322	213 (40%)	535	52	25	8	1	86 (16%)	26	13	4	2	45 (8%)	131[2]	24

Notes:

1. 'Parishes' here includes chapelries, tithings etc. listed as separate communities in the 1851 Census, but not extra-parochial areas, except for one or two cases (e.g. Nomansland on the edge of the New Forest, 104/1/1) where there was a chapel. The number of parishes is slightly less than the total number of rural chapels, because of a few parishes which had more than one Methodist chapel.
2. 'Other chapels' includes those of other Methodist denominations, i.e. either Wesleyan or Primitive Methodist. For the incidence of Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist causes in the same parish, see p 378-82 above.

spiritual causes'. His examination concentrates on the 'diverse sub-regions or rural economies' within each of his chosen counties and on 'a varied spectrum of parish types'. He finds that at this level 'Dissent tended to be associated chiefly with certain forms of local society, while it was largely absent from others'.[25]

Everitt's analysis of parish types differentiates mainly between estate parishes, controlled by a single landlord (or a small number of landowners) and 'freeholders' parishes' in which the property was 'divided' or 'much subdivided'. He finds evidence that Dissent was stronger in the latter, and also in boundary settlements, decayed market towns and industrial villages. D M Thompson works with a similar classification into 'freehold', 'divided', 'absentee landlord' and 'squire's' villages in his analysis of the relationship between the presence of Dissent and the landownership structure of the village.[26]

Everitt's conclusion that Dissent was more prevalent in freehold parishes than in estate parishes is a fairly predictable one; the exceptional cases of chapels even in parishes dominated by a single landowner are a reminder that other factors were at work. Dealing in an earlier article with the distribution of Nonconformity in Kent, he identifies four of these as size of parishes, the scattered nature of Wealden settlements, the comparative weakness of the local manorial system, and changes in the structure of population, and concludes that 'the proliferation of Dissent was due to a conjunction of favourable circumstances rather than to any single universal cause'.[27] He prefaces his more detailed analysis with the further warning that '[not] all differences in the distribution of Dissent can be explained in terms of diverse rural economies ... The probability remains that many peculiarities in the pattern of Dissent would still elude us.' Among the 'purely personal or fortuitous causes' he mentions are local family feuds, the presence of a dominating personality (or the absence of adequate local leadership), the visit of a powerful preacher, and the attitude and degree of energy of the local incumbent.[28] His

25. A Everitt, 1972, pp 9, 11

26. D M Thompson, 1969, Table 5. Thompson's categories derived, in turn, from an article by Dennis Mills in Amateur Historian VI (1963-65) p 277

27. A Everitt, 1970, pp 189-92.

28. A Everitt, 1972, p 12

general analysis thus becomes the starting point for the 'microscopic examination of the society of each county, of the social structure of each local community within the county, and of the Dissenting sects and chapels within each community,' which he himself sees to be necessary 'if the pattern of rural Nonconformity in England is to be explained'. [29]

The attempt to apply Everitt's general thesis to the counties covered by the present study runs into certain initial difficulties. The source of his differentiation between the four main types of land-holding is the Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales (1870). For his chosen counties, information on land-ownership appears to have been given for over 90% of the parishes. But in the case of Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire, the percentage is less than 25, so that no significant analysis can be attempted without some alternative source of information.

The most detailed available source is the series of tithe apportionments, in which both landowners and tenants were listed for each parish in preparation for the commutation of tithes under the Tithe Act of 1836. These are available among the Inland Revenue records at the Public Record Office (IR 29), though the sheer volume of material makes a comprehensive survey of a large area difficult. For the present purpose, a sample of 16% of parishes in Hampshire and Dorset (72 out of 449 parishes) was taken.

The first thing to be noted is the considerable discrepancy between the tithe records and the Imperial Gazetteer in the information on land-ownership. In part, this may be due to the difference in date, i.e. the thirty years between the Tithe Apportionments and the Gazetteer. In part it may also reflect a lack of precision in such terms as 'property divided among a few' and 'property sub-divided'. Since the Tithe Apportionment is both more specific and more detailed than the Gazetteer, and also considerably closer in date to the period now under consideration, it is clearly a source to be preferred; and the discrepancies noted must cast some doubt on the adequacy of the Gazetteer as a basis for any detailed statistical analysis such as Everitt's.

29. A Everitt, 1972, p 48; cf A Everitt, 1970, pp 182-3; also McLeod, 1981, p 71: 'The reasons for these highly varied patterns [in rural France] have to be determined by detailed local investigation.'

Examples of the kind of discrepancy found will indicate something of the scale of the problem.

Parishes described in the Gazetteer as 'divided among a few' include some with as many as 32 landowners (e.g. Appleshaw, Crawley, Tolpuddle), 35 landowners (Bishopstoke), 37 landowners (Martin), 42 landowners (Compton Abbas), or even 58 (Corfe Castle). Even more sub-divided was the property at Marnhull, Motcombe and Sixpenny Handley in Dorset, and Barford, Bowerchalke and Broad Chalke in Wiltshire, all described in the same terms.

The phrase 'divided among a few' could, in fact, cover a variety of situations, some of them quite complex. For example, both Collingbourne Ducis and Collingbourne Kingston were described in this way in the Gazetteer, but the situation in these adjoining parishes differed considerably. Most of the land at Collingbourne Ducis was owned by the Marquis of Ailesbury, but 26 properties on his estate were in the hands of lifeholders, not all of whom were in actual occupation. Collingbourne Kingston, on the other hand, was divided among a large number of landowners at the time of the tithe apportionment.

A village like Winterborne Whitchurch was correctly described in the Gazetteer as 'chiefly divided between two'. At the time of the apportionment, these were Margaretta Michell and Thomas Shave; but there were 30 other small landowners in the parish, and it was one of those, 'John Foster, woodman,' who provided a site for the Wesleyan chapel built in 1846.[30]

The case of Winterborne Whitchurch presents us with another difficulty, the unreliability of oral history. Local tradition[31] spoke of the chapel site as the only plot of land in the village that did not belong to the Squire, and added that it was left to the Wesleyans by its owner Amos Shave. The nearest we can get to corroborating this from the tithe apportionment is that among those listed is a Thomas Shave who owned three tenements and gardens and a 'meeting house'. But this was by no means the only freehold property in the parish. Similarly, the local

30. Enrolled deed, 12 March 1846 (PRO C. 54: 1846.84.13)

31. Olive M Philpott, 1974, though a fanciful retelling of the story, is based on traditions surviving in the village society until her day.

tradition that the Primitive Methodists were for many years prevented from building a chapel at Breamore by the Lord of the Manor, has to be treated with some caution. According to the Aldersgate Magazine 45 years elapsed between the first missioning of the village by the Motcombe Circuit and the building of a chapel. In the interim, the society was prevented from continuing to worship in a cottage when it reverted to the estate, and later another sympathetic cottager was threatened with eviction if he entertained the Methodists. They were therefore driven to meet out of doors. Eventually, the only freeholder in the village, George Edsall, opened his house for preaching and later sold them a site for their chapel.[32] But in fact, according to the tithe apportionment, even an estate village like Breamore had as many as 40 small landowners (in addition to the Hulse family at Breamore House). The explanation in this case seems to be that these small freehold properties were outside the main village, in outlying parts of the parish. George Edsall, who was the village blacksmith, was the only one able to offer a reasonably central site for Methodist worship.

Breamore is not the only example of an estate parish where a number of lesser landowners were to be found. Clanfield is described in the Gazetteer as 'all in one estate,' and at the time of the tithe apportionment most of the land was in fact in the hands of the Rev Sir Samuel Clarke Jervoise. But the tithe records list fourteen other landowners in the parish. The apportionment for Abbots Ann, near Andover, lists a much larger number of landowners. At Micheldever, too, where by far the largest landowner was Sir Francis Baring, there were eight others. Since these included St John's Hospital, Winchester, Winchester College, Lord Ashburton and Sir William Heathcote, it is not surprising that the Primitive Methodists had difficulty in finding a chapel site there. Nevertheless, the fact remained, that only one sympathiser with the land for sale was required to enable the Methodists to establish a physical presence in a parish.

The difficulties which beset any attempt to test Everitt's general thesis by an examination of the evidence from these southern counties are therefore considerable. His general conclusions are largely

32. Aldersgate PM Magazine, 1901 pp 350-1. Edsall is named as the vendor, as well as one of the trustees of the chapel, in the deed of conveyance, 20, September 1875.

confirmed, but detailed statistical analysis is of doubtful value. It seems more profitable to concentrate on individual examples and to attempt the 'microscopic examination' of particular local communities which Everitt himself advocates. From these it is at least possible to identify some of the varied factors that appear to have been at work in determining the distribution of Methodist congregations well enough established to be in possession of a chapel.

6.4.1 Types of parish: size and distribution of population

In addition to the types of land holding highlighted by Everitt, three other inter-related factors deserve attention. These are the size of a parish in terms both of its acreage and of its population, and - probably more significant - the pattern of population distribution within it. Numbers alone counted for less than their geographical location.

There were no parishes in this part of southern England comparable in extent to the vast moorland parishes of the north.[33] Nevertheless, those that were large enough to include two or more centres of population provided more opportunity for Dissent than the nucleated settlements of smaller parishes, where social and economic pressures could be more directly applied and felt. The problem facing the vicar of Andover, whose parish included several outlying hamlets,[34] often occurred in more rural settings. As we have already noted, many Anglican census returns in 1851 acknowledged that distance from the parish church (and thereby from the direct surveillance of both ecclesiastical and secular authority) reinforced any disinclination to attend the Anglican services.

Larger villages which were decayed market towns and remained a focal point for their locality were always promising territory for nonconformist advance. Elsewhere, it was the newer settlements (such as Lockerley Newtown and the 'Newtown' area at Milborne Port), where the main population growth was concentrated, that provided the opportunity.

Parishes with as many as three nonconformist chapels were very much the exception in an area where many village communities were too small or

33. See p 30 above

34. See above, p 47

too tightly-knit, geographically and socially, to sustain even one. Their existence is the more significant for that, and they throw some light on the varied and complex factors at work.

An examination of particular examples, rather than any over-all statistics, is likely to bring into focus this interplay of factors determining the pattern of dissent in general and Methodism in particular in the rural south.

The examples examined in the following sections are arranged by county and in the order in which they occur in the 1851 Census, from which the population figures are taken.

HAMPSHIRE

Christchurch (101/1/1): an extensive parish (nearly 25,000 acres; population 6,256) including the hamlet of Hinton Admiral and several tithings. The parish was dominated by the Priory Church, but chapels of ease had been built at Bransgore, Burton and Hinton Admiral.[35] The living, though united with the perpetual curacy of Holdenhurst,[36] was worth only £166.

The Independents were the only non-Anglican body with a chapel in the town itself and they dominated the nonconformist scene with no fewer than four other chapels scattered around the rest of the parish. The Wesleyan Chapel (1885) was at Purewell, with another, much smaller, one at Bransgore (1844); their congregations were modest compared with those of the Anglicans and Independents, who divided the great majority of the reported attendances between them.

Fordingbridge (103/1/1-3) offers an interesting parallel to Downton, the next place of any size to the north.[37] There was less industry than at Downton, and the Independents, not the Baptists, provided the main dissenting element. The parish, though half that of Downton in extent, included six tithings, and its population of 3,585 included the extra-parochial district of Woodgreen. The property was 'much

35. Chapelries were later established at Pokesdown (1859), Highcliffe (1862) and Bournemouth (1867)

36. Holdenhurst, with an acreage of 7,390 and a population of 1,330 (an increase of 172%), was itself quite large enough by 1851 to sustain its own incumbent. A church had been built there in 1833. There were two Independent causes in the parish, but no Methodism. The development of Bournemouth to the south-west was still in the future.

37. See under Wiltshire below.

sub-divided'.

The parish church had accommodation for less than one third of the population - or just under half, if we exclude the 'above 1,000 inhabitants reported by the vicar as living 'nearly two miles from the church'. The average attendance was given as 700-800, or between one fifth and one quarter of the population. The living included the perpetual curacy of Ibsley (population: 316), three miles to the south.

The larger of the two Wesleyan chapels was not in the town, but out at Woodgreen (1832). The town chapel, built slightly later (1836) had fewer sittings and smaller congregations, being in competition with not only the parish church, but a well-established Independent chapel with its own resident minister. There was also a small Quaker meeting. The Independents had smaller outlying chapels at Godshill, Hungerford and Gorley, all - like Woodgreen - on the fringes of the New Forest, and were also worshipping in a schoolroom at Frogham. The nearest Primitive Methodist chapels were at Sandleheath (a movable wooden structure until 1884) and Woodfalls (another settlement on the edge of the New Forest), noted under Downton parish below.[38]

Eling (104/3/1) was an extensive parish on the fringes of the New Forest - twice the size of South Stoneham, but with half its population density and growth rate.[39] In addition to the main settlement, the parish contained a scattering of hamlets and farmsteads, extending westwards as far as Bartley, just short of Cadnam, north-west to Ower and Wigley, and south-east to Marchwood. Additional churches had been built in 1834 at North Eling, where population growth had been stimulated by the new bridge at Totton; and at Marchwood in 1843.[40]

South Stoneham (106/2/2-6) was hardly a typical southern parish, if only because it was affected by the expansion of Southampton. But it does exemplify some of the factors at work, less patently, elsewhere. A relatively large parish of nearly 9,000 acres, its proximity to Southampton gave it a fast-growing population (4,691 in 1851, an increase of 222% since 1801). The ecclesiastical response to this

38. For the New Forest border settlements, see below, pp 405-6

39. 17,729 acres, excluding water; population 5,852, an increase of 103% since 1801

40. A third chapelry was constituted, at Netley Marsh, in 1855

situation took the form of the creation of chapelries at West End (1840), Portswood (1848, further divided in 1867) and Bitterne (1853)[41], and the building of new churches, the one at Portswood (1847) being twice enlarged in the next twenty years.

What is significant, however, is that long before this flurry of Anglican activity the nonconformists had established themselves in the outlying parts of the parish. The Baptists had a chapel at Hedge End (1814), and the Independents used a room at Bitterne for weeknight meetings; but these were overshadowed by the Methodist presence: Wesleyan chapels at Burnetts Lane, West End (1845, replacing a chapel of 1825) and Bitterne (1823), and a Bible Christian chapel at Hatch Bottom, West End (1847). At Portswood, the Wesleyans were slower in gaining a footing: although a tenement was registered as a place of worship as early as 1826, no chapel was built until the 1860s.[42] The isolated location of the Burnetts Lane chapel, some distance north-east of the main West End settlement, is probably indicative of some difficulty in obtaining a site. The freehold site was bought in 1826 from an illiterate labourer, William Moody. (Unusually for the Wesleyans, two of the trustees also were unable to sign their names.)

Bishopstoke (109/4/4) though not yet eclipsed by its neighbour, Eastleigh, was no more than a village, despite its cheese market. The living, in the gift of the Bishop of Winchester, was not a poor one: the rectory was worth £437 and a new church had been built in 1825. But at the time of the census, the parish was served by a curate. The population of 1,249 was dispersed, and each of the nonconformist chapels was situated in one of the outlying settlements: the Independents (1820) at Horton Heath, the Wesleyans (1822) at Crowdhill and the Bible Christians (1848) at Stoke Common.[43] (The latter eventually opened a mission in the village itself, but not until 1895.)

In the parish of Droxford (110/3/1),[44] the outlying hamlets were catered for by chapels of ease at Shedfield (1829) and Swanmore (1845) and in 1851 the only Nonconformity in the parish was a small Primitive

41. Prior to this, the Anglicans were using a former Baptist chapel, which they held on a seven-year lease. (Census return, 106/2./4)

42. It is shown on the OS map, c 1865, on the western side of Adelaide Road, just south of the railway station.

43. See above, pp 272-3

44. 6,986 acres; population 2,005, an increase of 67%

Methodist congregation.

Vernham Dean (118/4/4), and St Mary Bourne (117/1/8) to the north and north-east of Andover were both examples of parishes in which the property was 'much sub-divided'. Both were perpetual curacies annexed to other livings. At Vernham Dean the Wesleyans had had a chapel since 1816, close to the George Inn at the centre of the village. There were two Primitive Methodist chapels in the parish - one in Chapel Lane just off the village centre, and another at Little Down a mile north, both built in 1845. There was also an Independent chapel (built in 1829) at Upton, a village one and a half miles to the south-east; it stood near the boundary with Hurstbourne Tarrant and was linked with an Independent chapel there. At the time of the Census, the Wesleyans had the smallest congregations of all these causes, despite (or because of) their more central site.

St Mary Bourne was a much larger parish, with a population scattered in a number of settlements.[45] According to the Census returns, the Wesleyans had two chapels in the parish, though it is possible, despite several differences of detail, that what we have is two returns for the same chapel. The Primitive Methodists and the Baptists both had chapels in the tything of Swampton at the opposite end of the village. All had been built within the last two decades. Again, the Wesleyan congregations were smallest on Census Sunday.

WILTSHIRE

Downton (263/2/1) was a large parish[46] served for many years about the turn of the 18th century by a 'truly pious and evangelical' vicar and 'his pious and excellent curate.'[47] This may have inhibited the growth of Methodism in the town, until well into the new century. In every other respect it had all the features usually reckoned to be conducive to nonconformity - a large and increasing population dispersed in a number of outlying settlements as well as in the borough itself; an unusually wide range of craft industries (chiefly lace-making, tick-weaving, malting, tanning and paper-making); a defunct market and two annual fairs; and property divided among a large

45. 7,678 acres, compared with Vernham Dean's 3,486 acres. The parish included six tithings.

46. 13,221 acres; population 4,174

47. Dredge, 1833, pp 108, 109

number of landowners. The parish included several tithings, two of which, Redlynch and Charlton, had been constituted separate chapelries by 1851. The small adjoining parish of Nunton-with-Bodenham (263/2/3) had been merged into the Downton living and its population was included in the Downton figures in the 1851 Census. It was something of a Baptist stronghold, with both Particular and General Baptist chapels in the town itself, and others at Redlynch and Bodenham. The Independents were, by contrast, missing; but both the Wesleyans and the Primitive Methodists had established bases, and shortly after the Census the Wesleyan Reformers also opened a chapel in the town[48] The Wesleyan chapel on Lode Hill was said to date from 1815; at Redlynch they met in a converted woodshed at Warminster Green; and they also had a chapel (1825) at Hamptworth. The Primitive Methodists had attempted to establish a society in the town in the 1830s, but were more successful at Woodfalls Hill, where they had a flourishing chapel (1833; gallery added 1843).

In terms of total sittings available, the Anglican parish churches (at Downton and Nunton) and the district chapel at Redlynch were more than adequate to hold those who actually attended on Census Sunday, though their 1,500 sittings fell far short of the total population.

On the basis of the modified version of Mann's formula suggested above,[49] something like half of Downton's population attended one or other of its places of worship on Census Sunday, and Anglican worshippers accounted for rather more than one third of the total. The remaining two thirds were fairly evenly divided between the Methodists and the Baptists[50]

Wilton (265/1/3) was a parish whose population (1,804) had actually declined by 16% since 1801, despite the paternalism of the Pembroke family at the great house noted by Defoe in 1724. One evidence of the continuance of their benevolent rule over a century later was the

48. Their first chapel was converted from two thatched cottages, the earliest deed being dated 25 November 1853. The present chapel was built on the site in 1884; enlarged 1894. VCH Wiltshire Vol XI p 50 confuses this with the Wesleyan chapel of 1866, now part of a house.

49. P 327

50. Whatever the basic formula used, one of the imponderables is the number of children included in the totals for the 'General Congregation' because they attended with their parents. No allowance has been made for this factor, though the numbers of 'Sunday Scholars' have been discounted.

building of the new parish church in 1844, in an incongruous Italianate style. Wilton remained an important centre for its sheep fair, but its weekly market was in decline and by 1870 was reported as 'nearly obsolete'. Its long-established cloth industry suffered from the failure to adopt new mechanized methods.[51] Despite its prestigious patronage, the Wilton rectory was united with three other livings (Bulbridge, Ditchampton and Netherampton) and even so was worth only £400. The provision of a new church was possibly a response to the growth of local nonconformity, represented by three chapels - Independent (pre-1800), Wesleyan (c 1830, at the top of North Street after the several false starts noted earlier[52]) and Primitive Methodist (1837, in West Street). Five years after the Census the Wesleyan Reformers added a fourth by opening up the former Wesleyan chapel in Kingsbury. Even under the shadow of the great house, the spirit of independence might take root, though the Anglican congregations easily outnumbered the total Nonconformist attendances, (with the Independents outnumbering the Methodists two to one).

Cranborne (271/1/11) (13,7730 acres; population 2,737, an increase of 95% since 1801) was an important centre in the chalk downland stretching south-west of Salisbury into eastern Dorset. It had a market and two annual fairs. Its population was even more widely dispersed than that of Downton or Fordingbridge. The parish included the tithings of Alderholt to the east, Verwood to the south-east, Monkton-up-Wimborne to the west and Blagdon to the north. It was also well supplied with places of worship. In addition to the parish church in Cranborne itself, there were chapels of ease at Verwood (1829) and Boveridge (1841) and a district church at Alderholt (1849), though services at Alderholt and Verwood alternated, and those at Boveridge were held only on alternate Sundays between March and October. The perpetual curacies of Boveridge and Verwood were part of the living, but Alderholt vicarage was a separate benefice. The Marquis of Salisbury was Lord of the Manor, and also held the advowson.

As at Fordingbridge to the east, the Independents provided the main dissenting alternative, though three of their four chapels were small

51. VCH Wiltshire, VI pp 15, 18

52. The registrations in 1778, 1780 and 1794, far from 'reflecting the growing strength of Wesleyan Methodism towards the end of the 18th century' (ibid, p 33), mark unsuccessful attempts to establish a permanent Wesleyan society.

and all were outside the main settlement. The oldest and largest, at Cripplestyle, could seat 350 and drew its congregations from Damerham and Edmondsham parishes as well as from Cranborne. The Wesleyans had opened a new chapel, seating 210, in Cranborne itself in 1847, selling the earlier one to the Primitive Methodists, who also had a chapel at Verwood. But, as at Fordingbridge, the combined Methodist figures for both accommodation and attendances fell short of those for the Independents.

DORSET

East Stoke (273/3/8)[53] to the west of Wareham, was one of those parishes whose incumbent drew attention in 1851 to its extensiveness and scattered population. It was, nevertheless, too small to have any additional churches, although a larger parish church had been built in 1829 to replace the old one which had been 'on a site inconvenient of access'. Clearly, what the rector meant by 'very extensive' had less to do with acreage than with low population density and a high degree of dispersion. Even if the new church accommodated as many of the inhabitants as were likely to attend, the absence of more conveniently placed chapels of ease left the door open for the Wesleyans, who reported congregations at both Highwood and Binnegar, both with chapels, however unpretentious, dating from 1812 and 1823 respectively.

A notable example of a parish whose population was widely dispersed was the Island of Portland (274/3/1). There was no single community that deserved to be considered the focal point of the parish, but a number of settlements scattered throughout the island.[54] The medieval parish church of St Andrew's at Church Ope Cove had been replaced in 1766 by St George's, Reforne on a much more central, but isolated, site. Beside this, there was just one District Church, built in 1839 at Fortuneswell to serve a population of over 5,000. Here was as open an opportunity for nonconformity as anywhere in the south, especially as at St George's the freehold of all but 20 of the 642 sittings was let.

53. 3,273 acres; population 2,005; increase 67%

54. These included the villages of Fortuneswell, Chiswell, Easton, Reforne, Wakeham, Weston and Castleton and the hamlet of Mallams (1851 Census).

In 1851 there was no Baptist congregation in the parish, but the Independents had a chapel (1828) at Chiswell on the north-western shore, where the Primitive Methodists were just beginning to establish themselves. The main Wesleyan chapel was the one built by Brackenbury at Fortuneswell (1792), but they also had smaller chapels at Wakeham (1825) and Southwell (1849). What is noteworthy is that at the main nonconformist chapels, as at St George's, only a small proportion of the sittings were free.[55] To that extent, financial constraints were hampering their appeal to the poorer classes. There was still room for the Bible Christians, whose mission on the island did not begin until 1857.

6.4.2 Chapel locations

Local Methodist folklore speaks often enough of opposition encountered in attempts to build a chapel, to justify the presumption that this was in fact a widespread occurrence, particularly in the first half of the century.[56] Local histories and oral tradition frequently refer to efforts to prevent a site being bought for the purpose. As a result, many chapels were built either in one of the secondary settlements of a parish or, at best, on the fringe of the main centre of population. In a few cases chapels stood on a comparatively isolated site, away from any of the settlements.

In such circumstances, the sources from which sites were obtained take on extra significance and throw some light on the struggle for survival and acceptance in the wider community.

The hostility encountered by many rural Methodist societies, whether from Anglican or secular sources, though widespread, was not, of course, universal; and in focusing on the general pattern we should not overlook the exceptions. The manor of Bishops Waltham which granted a copyhold site to the Wesleyans at Durley in 1849, and an extension of

55. At Chiswell Independent and Fortuneswell Wesleyan only a quarter of the sittings were reported to be free.

56. E.g. At Damerham, Woodlands and Gussage All Saints, the Wesleyans lost their earliest preaching-place through the intervention of the local squirearchy and their agents. At Kings Worthy they were refused a site by the Lord of the Manor, as were the Primitive Methodists at Micheldever and elsewhere. At Sandleheath, which straddled the boundary between Fordingbridge and Rockbourne parishes, the Primitive Methodists built a temporary wooden chapel in 1843 on the only site they could find, anticipating that it would have to be moved when the short lease ran out. (PM Magazine, 1845, p 80) In this case, however, their fears proved unjustified and the chapel survived until 1884. (There was no parish church at Sandleheath until 1906.)

the site ten years later, belonged to the Bishop of Winchester until it was vested in the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1869.

Chapels in central locations

From an early date, some societies were fortunate enough to obtain chapel sites in a central position, i.e. in the area where most of the population of a parish was concentrated, often - though not invariably - close to the parish church. Even if these remained for most of the period exceptional rather than typical cases, they deserve attention in the hope that they may throw light on the factors at work. Table 6:23 lists examples chronologically, but it is not exhaustive, partly because whatever the criteria applied, there are a number of borderline cases. It would, in any case, be hazardous to deduce a growing willingness on the part of property owners to make sites available to the Methodist societies. The larger number of cases in the second half of the period reflects, at least as much as this, the increased volume of chapel building as the century progressed.

We are here concerned predominantly with the situation in the rural parishes; but it is worth noting that as early as 1758 the Salisbury society succeeded in obtaining a site quite close to the town centre, in contrast to the difficulties encountered at Winchester (and in other cathedral cities, such as Chichester). They were fortunate in having the active interest and support of Wesley himself, who made himself a member of the original Trust for the chapel in St Edmund Church Street. But more crucially important was the existence of sympathisers who owned property they could make available as a chapel site. At Salisbury, the leasehold site was in the hands of two local tradesmen, Joseph Marsh, dyer, and William Westcott, maltster. The latter was father of the Trustee named first after Wesley himself in the deed of conveyance (and described as 'gentleman').

An influential - and well-to-do - supporter was clearly a major asset to any society, as the Methodists at Poole found nearly half a century later. The land for their High Street chapel was made available on a 99-year lease by the Lord of the Manor, Sir John Noble of great Canford, but it is doubtful whether the baronet would have been so helpful had the initiative and most of the financing of the building scheme not come from Robert Carr Brackenbury, the Lincolnshire squire, who had turned his evangelising attention from Portland to Poole.

Table 6:23 Village Chapels in central locations

Year	Place	Census Return reference	Notes
1794	Fontmell Magna	268/2/4	
1810	Sturminster Newton	269/2/1	
1811	Witchampton	271/2/2	
1813	Whitchurch, Hants	117/1/5	
1815	West Wellow	107/2/6	
1816	Preston, Dorset	274/1/5	
1817	Thruxton	118/2/3	Just west of the George Inn.
1818	Tolpuddle	275/2/7	200 yards east of the village green.
1819	West Grimstead	263/1/6	Central and close to the parish church. (At East Grimstead, which had only a chapel of ease and an incumbent shared with West Dean, the Wesleyans had only a cottage meeting.)
1820	Amesbury	262/2/4	
1824	Lytchett Matravers	272/3/3	
by			
1825	Alderbury	263/1/2	
1828	Cranborne	271/1/11	Transferred to the Primitive Methodists in 1848, when a larger, equally central chapel was built.
	Bere Regis	273/4/3	
1829	Charlton Horethorn	320/2/1	In the Knapp, on the north side of the village centre.
1833	Houghton	108/2/4	Became WMA in 1835. On west of street, at Houghton Drayton.
1837	Blackford	320/3/12	
	Donhead St. Mary	266/1/5	
1839	Winterborne Kingston	270/1/10	

Table 6:23 continued

Year	Place	Census Return reference	Notes
1842	Overton Langton Matravers Lytchett Matravers PM Spetisbury	117/1/2 273/1/3 272/3/3 270/1/15	In High Street.
1843	Dewlish Allington PM	275/2/10 262/3/3	Converted from a cottage.
1845	Henstridge	320/2/7	
1846	Wherwell Upper Clatford PM	118/1/5 118/1/7	East side of village street. Built by William Tasker (see below).
1847	Pimperne Netheravon PM	270/2/12 261/1/1	Just off the market-place and close to the older Strict Baptist chapel.
1848	Buriton PM Edmondsham PM	112/1/1 271/1/13	
1851	Twyford WMA	109/4/5	

Notes:

1. All chapels are Wesleyan unless otherwise designated.

(Apart from Brackenbury the only trustee with any social pretensions was the surgeon Thomas Bell.)

The identity of those willing to make village sites available to the Methodists will be considered more generally in a later section (6.4.3).

Chapels outside the main settlement

The pattern discernible in the larger parishes examined above holds good more generally, e.g. in smaller parishes with more than one centre of population. With a variety of factors at work, sometimes operating in conflicting ways, the examples that follow demonstrate not a uniform pattern, except in the widest terms, so much as that no two cases are identical. In such circumstances, statistical analysis becomes largely meaningless and only general trends can be identified and illustrated.

HAMPSHIRE

Timsbury (107/2/1) had a small and fairly static population (194, an increase of only 9% since 1801). There were 18 freeholders, in addition to the chief landowner, Lord Sherborne.

The Wesleyan chapel was built in 1814 to the north of the village, off the lane to Michelmersh, by Peter Jewell, a small farmer, on land belonging to himself and later settled by his widow on a group of Trustees.[57] Significantly, only one of the 16 Trustees lived in the parish, a fact which underlines the probability that, without Jewell's involvement, the Wesleyans would have had neither society nor chapel there. (When the trust was renewed in 1859, there was still only one Trustee from Timsbury.)

Wonston (109/1/1) Population 716

The living was a lucrative one worth £967 p.a. and was in the gift of the Bishop of Winchester. There were three services each Sunday by 1851 and the rector estimated that his congregations were down by as much as a quarter because of the custom among 'the labouring classes' of visiting their friends on mid-Lent Sunday. This was not a ready-made situation for any form of Nonconformity. Both the Wesleyans and, later,

57. See above, pp 91-2

the Primitive Methodists, struggled to establish themselves in the parish, but for a long time had only a precarious presence there. The Primitive Methodists eventually built a chapel (1864) in the hamlet of Sutton Scotney on the western side of the parish.[58]

Durley (110/1/2) Population 424, including Mincingfield tithing. 'Much sub-divided.'

Wesleyan chapel, 1849. The copyhold site was in the tithing, north-east of the village, towards Durley Street, and was granted to the Trustees by the manor of Bishops Waltham. (Further land was granted in 1859, but the site remained copyhold until enfranchised in 1895.)

Amport (118/2/2) Population 745. 'Divided among many.'

Primitive Methodist chapel, 1846, in the tithing of Sarson, east of the main village.

As already noted, there were several chapels in the Downton-Fordingbridge area which fell into this category, being located in an outlying settlement rather than in the main village. These include the Wesleyan chapels at Wood Green and Redlynch, and the Primitive Methodist chapels at Woodfalls and Sandleheath.

WILTSHIRE

South Damerham[59] (103/1/4) Although the population of the parish as a whole was only 759, the village itself had three nonconformist chapels. The Primitive Methodists opened theirs in 1845, in spite of the existence of Baptist and Independent chapels (both dating from 1834). Neither in the morning nor in the afternoon did their combined attendances approach those at the parish church.

The Parish Church stands in an isolated location, separated from the main part of the village by water meadows. Both the Independent and the Primitive Methodist chapels were at the bottom end of the village; the latter, in Mill End Lane, was replaced in 1877 by a larger one in the main street. The Wesleyans and Independents had small chapels elsewhere in the parish, at Crendell and Cripplestyle. The Wesleyans had formerly had a small chapel in Damerham itself, a humble building

58. For the early Wesleyan cause, see above, pp 105-7

59. This parish is now in Hampshire

with chalk walls on a piece of waste ground, but it had been demolished by the estate steward and its furnishings dispersed.[60]

Martin[61] (103/1/5-6) Population 616

Primitive Methodist chapel (1829) at the western end of the village. Enlarged in 1844, when it proved impossible to obtain a more central site.[62]

Chute (118/4/2-3) Population 714, including the hamlet of Cadley.

Wesleyan chapel, 1844, at Lower Chute, one mile east of Upper Chute, where the parish church was located. (A Primitive Methodist chapel was built at Upper Chute in 1879.)

Winterslow (263/1/1) Population 913

The Wesleyan chapel (1810) was, in fact, in the hamlet of Shreppell, then a detached part of Idmiston parish, and itself some distance from Winterslow village.

Steeple Langford (265/1/8) Population 634

The Primitive Methodist chapel (1849) was built in the tything of Hanging Langford, and at the western end of the village, i.e. furthest from the main settlement.

This is an exceptional case in an area which yields no other clear example of chapels located in secondary centres of population. The upland chalk country to the north and west of Salisbury had large parishes which included extensive areas of open downland; but the population was concentrated in the river valleys and was not, for the most part, dispersed in two or more settlements. the closeness of the parishes to one another along the valleys of the Wylve and the Avon was noted in some detail by Cobbett[63] and is also characteristic of the lower part of the Bourne valley to the north-east of Salisbury, where several Methodist chapels were located close to the village centres.

60. J Dredge, 1833, p 7

61. This parish is now in Hampshire

62. PM Magazine, February 1845, pp 79-81

63. Cobbett, 1983, pp 296-9, 311-12, 325. In the Avon Valley, Cobbett counted 29 parish churches in 30 miles.

DORSET

East Stour (268/3/2) Population 538. The living was a perpetual curacy annexed to Gillingham, with the parish church at the south-west corner of the village.

The Baptists had a chapel (c 1837) in the village, but the Wesleyan chapel (1826) was at Hunger Hill to the north.

Lydlinch (269/1/9), west of Sturminster Newton. Population 407

At the time of the 1851 Census, both Primitive Methodists and Latter Day Saints had cottage meetings in the village, and two years later they took a chapel at Bagber, a hamlet east of the village, whose owner conceded them its use for 21 years in exchange for the pew rents.

Sturminster Newton (269/2/1) with a population of nearly 2,000, a weekly market and two annual fairs, this was an important rural centre. The living, worth £712 p.a. was in the gift of Lord Rivers and the parish church had been rebuilt in 1827.

The Wesleyans had been fortunate enough to take over an unoccupied chapel in the town itself in 1810, and to obtain another central site for its successor in 1833.[64] The Primitive Methodists, on the other hand, had to be content with a site outside the town, west of the river bridge, where in 1847 they acquired a former public house recently converted into a chapel.[65] In 1851 there was no other local Dissent.

Hazelbury Bryan (269/2/9) Population 709. The parish church is at Droop, east of the main village. The Primitive Methodist chapel (1847) was in the hamlet of Wonston, west of the village.

Pentridge (271/1/10) Population 256. Manor belonging to the Earl of Shaftesbury. The difficulties faced by the Primitive Methodists in this relatively compact parish have been described above.[66] The site they obtained and built on despite opposition from their 'betters' was in the hamlet of Woodyates, a mile north of the main village.

64. See pp 202-3, 412

65. Its successor, built in 1870, was on the same relatively inaccessible site.

66. pp 230-2

Winfrith Newburgh (273/4/8) Population 1,101 distributed between the main village and five hamlets. In addition to the parish church, there was a chapel of ease at East Barton, at the eastern end of the parish. The rectory was worth £640 p.a.

The Wesleyan chapel (1835) was at East Knighton, midway between the two Anglican places of worship. An unpretentious structure with cob walls plastered inside; replaced in 1915 by the chapel in Winfrith itself.

Compton Abbas (275/3/11) south of Shaftesbury. The Primitive Methodists opened a small chapel in 1827 in the hamlet of Bere Knap, serving a community of button-makers. The cause died out with the demise of the cottage industry on which this isolated settlement largely depended. (The Wesleyans eventually opened a chapel in Compton Abbas itself (1864), close to the parish church, on a site provided by a local farmer.)

In the small parish of East Orchard (268/2/8) immediately to the west, the Wesleyans had a chapel in the hamlet of Hartgrove (1824). East Orchard was linked with three other parishes, Iwerne Minster, Margaret Marsh and Hinton St Mary, in a single living, the combined population of which was only 1,344.

At Holwell (276/1/1) the Wesleyan chapel (1827) was at Crouch Hill, some way south of the village, and owed its existence to a convert with land she could make available.[67]

Longburton (276/1/6) was a living united with that of Holnest. The Wesleyan Chapel (1851; rebuilt 1886) was at the southern end of the village.

In the parish of Cheriton across the Somerset border (320/2/5) the parish church and a Baptist chapel were at Horsington to the south-east, while the Wesleyans and Independents had chapels at South Cheriton dating from 1844 and before 1800 respectively. Despite being recent arrivals, the Wesleyans had the stronger cause, partly, perhaps, because the Independent minister lived at Milborne Port several miles away. The Wesleyan circuit system made the lack of a resident pastor less crucial.

67. See below, p 412

Boundary settlements

One of Everitt's categories, the boundary settlement, occurs in this area most conspicuously along the edges of the New Forest. In 1843 William Brewer, sent by the Andover Primitive Methodist Circuit to initiate a New Forest mission, found widespread lawlessness and godlessness, but also a much greater response to his preaching than elsewhere in the county. The mission grew rapidly and was soon flourishing.[68]

Only two Methodist chapels within the confines of the Forest are recorded in the 1851 Census - at Bramshaw (Wesleyan, 1839) and at Brockenhurst (Independent Methodist[69], 1849). Despite the formation of a Primitive Methodist mission in 1844, no Methodists were reported from Lyndhurst, where the General Baptists were the only representatives of Nonconformity. But by this time, many of the villages that lay on the borders of the Forest, and several just outside them, had either Wesleyan or Primitive Methodist chapels.

From east to west, the following chapels were located in communities on or just outside the Forest boundary:

Longdown (Wesleyan, 1832)[70]
Cadnam (Primitive Methodist, 1833)[71]
Nomansland (Primitive Methodist, 1844)
Woodfalls (Primitive Methodist, 1833)[72]
Wood Green (Wesleyan, 1832)
Wootton (Primitive Methodist, 1844)
Sway (Primitive Methodist, 1845)

Others were added later: East End (Primitive Methodist, 1859), Thorney Hill (Wesleyan, by 1863) and Canada Common (Primitive Methodist, 1867, known for a time as 'West Wellow').

Some of the gaps in this ring were filled by Wesleyan chapels situated only a short distance outside the Forest proper: Bransgore (1845), Crow Hill, near Ringwood (1838) and West Wellow (1815). it is noticeable

68. Petty, 1860, pp 354-5

69. Associated with the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, which also had a chapel in Lymington.

70. On the north-eastern edge of Longdown Inclosure, and therefore right on the Forest boundary.

71. An earlier Wesleyan society, for which a 'chapel' was registered in 1812, had disappeared by 1851.

72. By 1851, Woodfalls lay just outside the Forest, but at an earlier date the boundary had run through the hamlet.

that the Wesleyans concentrated for the most part on the more settled communities, leaving boundary settlements like Nomansland, which was little more than a few squatters huts on the edge of the open forest, to be missioned by the Primitive Methodists.

6.4.3 Chapel sites: Vendors and donors

The search for village sites, especially where social pressures and the concentration of landownership in fewer hands were more in evidence, must have been more difficult than in a cathedral city. But even here, all that was needed was one sympathiser with land that could be made available. In many cases we know no more of the vendor than his name and address and status or occupation. In the absence of contemporary membership records, we cannot even be sure whether or not he (or she) was a Methodist, though the presumption must be that most were not, if only because so few of them are also named as trustees of the chapel that were built. But an examination of Trust deeds is at least a first step towards determining in what sections of the community Methodists were most likely to find sympathy, encouragement and practical support.

The Vendors

Village societies were sometimes fortunate enough to find a local benefactor who might not only provide a site, but contribute substantially to the building costs. Some benefactors were recent converts eager to express gratitude in a practical way. Even if they did no more than agree to sell a suitable site, their practical good will was of real value where land was hard to come by. Vendors varied widely, but certain groups emerge from an examination of the chapel deeds. Some were sympathetic yeomen; others no more than agricultural labourers with part of a garden or some other piece of land at their disposal. Widows or other beneficiaries to an estate occur with some frequency. These latter were the more inclined to sell to the Methodists if they lived elsewhere than the village in which the property was situated. Some were persuaded by their difficulties in meeting mortgage payments. Others appear to have built a chapel to accommodate worship and preaching that was to their liking, but subsequently offered it to one or other of the Methodist bodies as a means of ensuring a supply of preachers. (In the later part of the century, there is even evidence of speculative builders erecting a

chapel in developing areas like Bournemouth and Eastleigh and then putting it on the market.) In some cases, a third party was engaged as a means to purchase a site and then re-convey it to the Trustees, as a way of pre-empting expected opposition. Examples of all these situations and of others where several factors coalesced are set out below. Statistical analysis is once again inappropriate, not only because the categories overlap, but because we can rarely be sure what mixture of motives lay behind the transaction. It was perfectly possible, of course, for goodwill towards the Methodists, or even missionary fervour, to co-exist with the need to obtain ready money, or willingness to make a reasonable profit.

Yeomen farmers

Like most social and occupational terms 'yeoman' covers a frustratingly wide range of meanings, but at least it carries the implication that, unlike the tenant farmer, a man had freehold land at his disposal and was relatively independent of the local squire or other influential figures. Vendors of chapel sites described in the deeds as 'yeomen' occur at Swanage (1808), Preston near Weymouth (1816), Vernham Dean (1817), Tolpuddle (1818), Redlynch (1826), Kington Magna (Primitive Methodist, 1827), Bramshaw (1839), Crendell (1841) and Michelmersh (1847). Of these, only William John Blake of Bramshaw also features in the list of Trustees. The site of the chapel at Fontmell Magna (1831) was sold to the Wesleyans by two yeomen, neither of whom lived in the parish: Samuel Hall of Ashmore and James Whitmarsh of Melbury Abbas. Of these, the former at least was a Methodist, though neither became a Trustee.

Agricultural labourers

Lower down the social and economic scale were agricultural labourers (some of them illiterate) with land they were prepared to sell to the Methodists, whether out of sympathy or in the face of hardship. The site of the Wesleyan chapel at Stapleford in the Wylve valley (1850) was a corner of the garden of George Leversuch, hemmed in on all sides except the road by the property of Lord Ashburton. Both Wesleyan examples (e.g. Bitterne, 1823; Burnetts Lane, West End, 1826) and Primitive Methodist examples (e.g. Edmondsham, 1842, East Knoyle, 1847) can be found. The value of these sites varied considerably. In the Weymouth Wesleyan Circuit an empty site at East Knighton cost only £2

in 1826, whereas a slightly smaller site at Broadway two years later was sold at £20.

The vendor of the site of the Primitive Methodist chapel at Martin (1829), Cornelius Flemington, was an illiterate labourer. The deed of conveyance is a homespun document that bears the signs of having been prepared by a non-professional. The vendor made his mark; none of the trustees buying the site signed the deed. The only signatures are those of three witnesses to the transaction. The property was part of Flemington's garden at 'Town End'.

George Warner, the vendor of a site to the Primitive Methodists at Woodfalls (1833) was another illiterate labourer. He was exceptional in that he also became one of the Trustees of the chapel. We do not always know how the land came into the possession of the vendors, but in Warner's case he had bought it as part of a larger plot, presumably an indication that he was more provident as well as more prosperous than most of his fellows.

Widows

In a number of cases, the vendor was a widow, or other members of a bereaved family acting as executors or beneficiaries of the estate. The motives in such cases might vary from genuine sympathy towards the Methodist cause (sharpened perhaps by bereavement) to a desire to realise available assets as part of the settlement procedure. The latter was all the more likely if those concerned had moved away following the bereavement or were already living elsewhere.

For example, the site of the Durngate Street Wesleyan chapel in Dorchester was bought from Harriet Fisher, 'late of Dorchester, but now of Honiton', the newly widowed wife of a Dorchester merchant, and her son John, 'late of Highbury Park, Middlesex, but now of Chatham Place, Hackney'. They might well have objected strongly to the building of the chapel had the site been on their doorstep; but at a sufficient distance it was acceptable enough.

Other sites acquired from the newly widowed were at Holwell (1826), Woodyates (1841), Lockerley Newtown (1843) and Hazelbury Bryan (1846), the last three all being Primitive Methodist.

The first Wesleyan chapel on the Island of Portland was doubly indebted to widows. The Fortuneswell site was acquired by Robert Carr

Brackenbury in 1792 from the widow of William Atwool, mariner. The chapel he built there remained Brackenbury's property, and so passed to his widow, who conveyed it by deed of gift to a group of local Trustees in 1819, as one of many tokens of her continuing interest in the work her husband had begun so far from their Lincolnshire home.

Only occasionally is a motive made explicit. Sarah Chiddy, a widow at Eaton, Hants, presented the local society with a site 'in consideration of the affection and regard which she hath and beareth unto the members of the Primitive Methodist Connexion residing at Eaton'. Sometimes good intentions proved insufficient. Mrs Catherine Williams of Tarrant Monkton allowed the local Wesleyans to build a chapel of timber and thatch on land which she rented from the squire, but they were forced to close the chapel because of his opposition. She therefore did the best she could, and bequeathed a sum of £200 to be invested in the interests of whichever Wesleyan circuit provided preachers for the village. (Reluctance to forego this benefaction later prevented the transfer of Tarrant Monkton from the Wimborne to the Blandford Circuit.)

Heirs and beneficiaries

Other heirs or the executors of a will might be willing to sell in the process of realising the assets of an estate. The three sons of the late William Courtney, gentleman, of Newton Stacey were happy to dispose of a plot of land in Barton Stacey to the Primitive Methodists in 1844. David Glass, a labourer from Thatcham, Berks, sold the Primitive Methodists their site at West Grafton near Andover, acting as the eldest son and heir of a West Grafton labourer, in 1857. What provision he made for his bereaved mother and his younger brother, who were still occupying the cottage on the site is not recorded; but the Methodists gained their site at a cost of £20. Similarly, Edward Nash, a labourer at Rogate, Sussex, sold the site of the Primitive Methodist chapel at Buriton in 1847, having inherited the house and garden from his father. The site of the Primitive Methodist chapel at Winterborne Zelstone was part of the estate of Daniel Coward of Poole, and all three beneficiaries under his will came from that town, a fact which is likely to have reduced any hesitation they might otherwise have had to sell to the Methodists.

George Forward, the vendor of the site on which the Primitive

Methodists built at Sturminster Newton (1845), was a native of the town, but had set up as a merchant in Newfoundland. The property came to him from his deceased brother, Charles. Whatever his own religious convictions, he had no objection to selling a site for which he himself had no use. Twelve years earlier the Wesleyans had acquired their more central site from a Weymouth builder.

Non-residence was probably a factor in a number of other such transactions; e.g. Lower Chute (Wesleyan, 1844: William Bland, market gardener of Bedminster, Som.); Ludgershall (1843: Thomas Chandler of Devizes, Maltster), and Hanging Langford (1849: William Rowden, farmer at Abbots Ann), both Primitive Methodist.

Mortgaged properties

Sometimes a site became available because a mortgagor defaulted on his payments. Thus the property acquired by the Primitive Methodists at Damerham in 1845 had been mortgaged by the vendor in 1832 for £80, but not only was the capital sum still owing, but he was in arrears with the interest, and he was therefore content to transfer his liabilities as well as the property to them for the sum of £5.00.

The Primitive Methodist site at Sway (1846) was sold by a local labourer, Levi Rickman, on condition that the trustees paid off both the £50 capital and the interest owing to the mortgagee. (There were several Rickmans among the chapel Trustees, but Levi was not one of them.) The Wesleyan site at Wareham (1851) became available apparently because the owner, a painter from Swanage, was unable to meet the interest payments due to the mortgagee, a Wareham coal merchant. The trustees agreed to pay £50 capital, plus a further £40 to the vendor.

In a number of cases, their financial resources being what they were, Trustees were obliged to mortgage the premises soon after they were built, and it was common for a chapel to be burdened by debt for many years after it was opened: sometimes until it was replaced by a larger one. The plight of the Romsey Trustees mentioned in the next section was fortunately exceptional, however.

Benefactors

The pioneering work of Robert Carr Brackenbury at Portland and Poole is an outstanding, but not unique, illustration of the difference a well-to-do benefactor could make to a society just struggling to

establish itself.[73]

The Crowdhill society had met for some years in a room provided for them by Richard Twynam and continued to do so after his death under the terms of his will. Then in 1830 they obtained a grant of copyhold land from the manor of Bishopstoke, which was part of an enclosure held by a Southampton widow, Delita New, under an enclosure act of 1820. The Romsey Society were rather less fortunate. Their first chapel had been built by Peter Jewell of Timsbury, who duly conveyed it to a group of Trustees in 1812 for the sum of £260. Two years later, however, the Trustees found themselves in such financial straits that they mortgaged the premises to Jewell for £1,500. According to the legal assignment, they had spent considerable sums on 'erecting, completing and finishing the said chapel'. The understanding was that Jewell would take the seat rents in lieu of interest, but this was not written into the agreement, and by 1820 the Trustees were faced with demands from his executors for the repayment of the principal together with £196 in unpaid interest. Such was their plight that they were given permission to make a general appeal throughout the Connexion. An endorsement on the agreement records that by 1826 half of the principal plus all the outstanding interest had been paid off. But a long struggle still lay ahead and the debt was not finally cleared until 1857.[74] In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that of the sixteen members of the original Trust, only one was willing to continue in 1827. Three had died since 1812, and the remaining twelve asked to be discharged. It may be an indication that new trustees were difficult to find, that the Superintendent minister of the Southampton Circuit and one of his colleagues were included on the 1827 Trust.

Despite the case of the Romsey chapel, a society with a member or well-wisher able to provide it with a chapel was normally a fortunate one. Harry Noyes, a small farmer at Thruxton whom we have met in connection with the Tent Methodists, built at his own expense both the Thruxton chapel (1818) and one at Collingbourne Kingston (1822). In each case he then conveyed the property to Wesleyan Trustees. In 1827

73. See above, pp 187-9, 195-6

74. For Peter Jewell, see above p 91. The pressure put on Trustees in 1820 probably came from the children of his first marriage, since his widow, Mary, was a staunch Methodist and headed the list of donations in 1820 with a handsome £20. If so, the bitter grudge which his first wife harboured against the Methodists cast a long shadow across the path of the Romsey society.

he built a third chapel at Wildhern, but it remained his property until 1843 when he rather belatedly decided 'to exercise his power of appointment' and a Trust was formed. Similarly, the chapel built by A W Marblestone at Portchester remained his property for some years;[75] and the first chapel used by the Associationists at King's Worthy (1841) was built in the garden of Thomas Shearmen and remained his private property. Only in 1890, after his widow's death and the building of a larger chapel by his son in 1885, was the property transferred to a Trust representing the United Methodist Free Churches.

Some chapels were built by converts, such as Mrs Susannah Graham, wife of a farmer at Holwell, Dorset. After her conversion in 1818, she opened her home for regular preaching services in the village. In 1826 she bought a site, part of the freehold garden of a labourer's cottage, and built a chapel which was duly conveyed to a Wesleyan Trust.

The Pitton society in the Salisbury Circuit benefited from the help of two successive supporters. Their first small chapel was built for them by 'a friend', but by 1835 they had outgrown this. Thomas Whitlock senior then offered them a new site and his brother, George, gave the first £20 towards the cost of a new chapel. The poorer members made more modest weekly contributions, and friends from other parts of the circuit gave their support.[76]

Existing chapels

Chapels built and owned by some individual were sometimes sold to the Methodists, either because the owner approved of their work and wanted to further it, or more negatively, because of financial embarrassment or difficulty in providing preachers. The first Wesleyan chapel at Sturminster Newton had been built as part of an unsuccessful missionary venture by an Independent minister. The chapel in Union Terrace taken over in 1799 by the Southampton Methodists had been built by Thomas Bartlett, whether as a business speculation or as an evangelistic venture does not appear. The circumstances surrounding the building of the first Primitive methodist chapel in the town forty years later are equally obscure. The chapel was built by James Wheeler, a local baker, in St Mary's Street in 1837. The Hampshire Chronicle of 6th March 1837

75. See above pp 171-2

76. WM Magazine, 1836, pp 53-4

reported that the Primitive Methodists were 'about to erect a Chapel in St Mary's Street'. From this we might expect some link between Wheeler and that body. But he appears on the 1840 deed of conveyance only as the vendor; he did not become a Trustee of the chapel he had built, and we are left speculating about his reasons both for building it and for disposing of it so soon.

In rather similar circumstances, the Shirley society in 1843 bought from Daniel Jackson, a Romsey ironmonger, 'a building intended to be used as a Chapel ...but ... at present in an unfinished state,' and it became their High Street chapel.

Chapels built by individual enterprise were sometimes let to the Methodists. James Moore of Hinton St Mary had fitted up a 'Room' as a place of worship and in 1830 entered into an agreement to give it up exclusively to the Wesleyans 'for their use free of all expense, as long as it shall continue a place of worship.' For their part, the Methodists were to supply it with 'regular Preaching' and to allow Moore in return 'all monies arising from Pew Rents.[77] A more elaborate agreement of this kind was made between Richard Haines, a shoemaker of Burcombe, Wilts and the Superintendent minister and circuit stewards of the Salisbury Circuit in August 1845:

'The said Richard Haines doth hereby agree with all convenient speed to erect and build at his own costs and charges a certain building to be hereafter used as and for a Wesleyan Chapel on his own land at Burcombe aforesaid, which said Chapel shall be capable of affording accommodation for about one hundred and fifty persons...

'And the said Richard Haines hereby further agrees to fit up the said chapel with two large pews or seats one on either side of the pulpit - with eight other seats and rail backs affixed, four on each side of the said chapel, and with a number of other seats or forms without backs sufficient to fill up the remainder of the said chapel, and to render the same in every other respect fit and proper for the performance of Divine Service with the exception of a Pulpit and a Chandelée which will be provided by the parties hereto of the other part.'

Having done all this, Haines further agreed to let the premises to the Methodist authorities for 14 years at £4.00 a year free of rates and taxes. Burcombe was a small parish with only 420 inhabitants, to the west of Wilton. The venture seems a forlorn one from the outset, and in the absence of any other trace of it, even in the 1851 Religious

77. Moore was a Methodist, apparently of wide sympathies, who turns up as a Trustee of Sturminster Newton Wesleyan chapel in 1833 and who sold to the Primitive Methodists in 1850 the chapel he had built three years earlier in Hazelbury Bryan. Like James Wheeler of Southampton, he was a baker by trade, not, as we might suppose, a speculative builder.

Census, we are left wondering whether the chapel was ever built. Was it, perhaps, a rather desperate bid to counter the influence of the Primitive Methodists, who had opened their chapel at Barford St Martin two years earlier?

Third parties

If local opposition to the Methodists was strong and active enough, they were sometimes driven to subterfuge to obtain a site. Such was the case with Barnard Herrington at Woodyates;[78] and it may have been the reason why William Goffe, a Southampton shoemaker bought premises in Winchester in March 1814 'at the request and on behalf of the [Wesleyan] Trustees' and reconveyed the property to them in August.[79] Another example may be that of the West Wellow chapel site (1815), which was part of an orchard 'lately purchased' by Timothy Goddard, a local yeoman farmer. He sold the plot to the Superintendent of the Southampton Circuit, who in turn conveyed it to a body of trustees two days later. This roundabout procedure suggests some fear of opposition, perhaps on the part of Lord Ilchester whose grounds adjoined the site on one side. In this instance, Goddard himself was one of the Trustees.

The employment of a stratagem to circumvent opposition to the building of a chapel is illustrated most clearly by the case of the Wesleyan chapel built in the centre of Wherwell in 1846. The society there had met for some years in two cottages in 'the Chalk pit', registered for worship in 1816 and partially converted for that use. Most of the land was in the hands of three landowners. In 1841 these were Lord Stuart de Rothsay, Sir William Heathcote and William Iremonger, plus five others with much smaller holdings. One of the latter was a lady living at Basingstoke and it was her willingness to sell her cottages in the Court that provided the Wesleyans with their opportunity. Two leading members of the Wherwell society, James Tovey, cordwainer, and Charles Batt, blacksmith at the Priory, went to Basingstoke taking enough money to put a deposit on the property without this being known in the village. This was done in Batt's name and with no indication of the purpose they had in mind. To avert local opposition, only a few of the

78. See above, pp 230-2

79. For their problems in finding an alternative to Winscom's Silver Hill chapel, see above, pp 101-2, 118-19

members were let into the secret and a subterfuge was employed. The former preaching place was demolished and trenches were dug, to give the impression that a new chapel was to be built on the same site. Only when the purchase of the new site was completed were their real intentions made known. Batt then found himself under pressure to sell the site, but stood firm in the face of both bribery and threats, and the building of the new chapel went ahead. Soon afterwards he was dismissed from his employment and was eventually forced to emigrate to Canada. When Tovey moved to Salisbury, the Wherwell society had lost its two most effective leaders, but survived in its freehold premises under the leadership of Tovey's son.[80]

The second half of the century falls outside the period with which we are at present concerned, but a glance forward will round off the picture already presented. Against a continuing increase in the amount of chapel building (which included the rebuilding of many earlier chapels on a larger and more imposing scale, often on more central and prestigious sites), the evidence indicates a falling-off of the kind of opposition noted in the earlier decades of the century. It would be surprising if attempts to prevent chapels being built ceased altogether, since the period saw a deepening of the rift between Anglicans and Nonconformists as the Tractarian influence made itself felt on both sides. 'Church' and 'chapel' became embattled camps both nationally and in many village communities. Other factors, however, were at work in the opposite direction. The Methodists, like the Nonconformists generally, were gradually becoming more bourgeois, in a period when the middle classes to which they belonged or aspired were increasingly coming into their own in Victorian society.

The case of the first Wesleyan chapel at Winterslow (263/1/1) - or our limited knowledge of it - provides a final cautionary note to this survey, and a reminder that in many cases the surviving evidence is insufficient to enable us to be sure what were the roles played by individuals, where the real initiatives lay, or which were the decisive factors in a given situation. (Still less can we determine motives with any degree of certainty.) From the title deeds, and in particular from an endorsement added in 1843 to a deed of 1757, we learn that the

80. Local tradition recorded in B R K Paintin, 1946, and corroborated by the chapel deeds.

Winterslow site was acquired in 1810[81] by Stephen Bell, a miller at Fisherton Anger and a staunch Methodist, whose name occurs on several Trust deeds in the Salisbury area. Bell built a chapel on the site, which he registered in conjunction with several other known Methodist activists, and it was regularly used for Wesleyan preaching services from then on. But the chapel remained his private property[82] until 1825, in spite of the fact that he had 'collected money for the building from and among the Society of People called Methodists'. Why it was not conveyed to a Trust for fifteen years remains a matter of guesswork and leaves open the question of Bell's exact role in the affair.

* * *

Two conclusions at least may be drawn from these case studies.

1. As was suggested at the outset, what we find is a shifting combination of factors at work in determining the establishment and progress of a Methodist society in any given locality, limiting the validity of any general conclusions, whether presented statistically or otherwise. 'A helpful environment facilitated growth, but did not produce it'.[83] A variety of causes and influences can be identified: not only those we have been concerned with in this chapter, but others noted earlier, such as the presence of individuals with powers of leadership and initiative, and proximity to other established Methodist societies, especially a strong town congregation. The interplay of these various factors in a wide variety of geographical and demographic situations (Everitt's 'varied spectrum of parish types' interpreted in terms of more than just patterns of land-holding) sends us back to his 'microscopic examination' of each congregation in its particular community within whatever county or other regional setting it is found [84]. The value of the wider survey then lies in its providing a

81. The endorsement says 'about 1810', but the exact year is confirmed by the date of registration and the Census return in 1851.

82. The vendors in 1825 were Thomas and Stephen Bell. Thomas's relationship to Stephen Bell is not clear. He was a yeoman farmer at Winterslow and sold the site to Stephen in 1810, but retained the freehold rights and hence was involved in the eventual conveyance to a Wesleyan Trust.

83. D Hempton, 1984, p 16

84. A Everitt, 1972, pp 11, 48

contextual framework within which particular local examples can be studied and interpreted.

2. Currie's thesis that Methodism, unlike the older Dissent, benefited from Anglican weakness is more fully supported at parish and local community level than at the level of Registration Districts examined earlier (5.3.1 above).[85] With the 'strength' of the Church of England (whether measured by size of parish, number of sittings, clerical residence or some other more imponderable yardstick) varying from one community to another even within a region of 'Anglican predominance', individual case studies do show Methodism taking advantage of relative Anglican weakness, by gaining a footing predominantly where the parish system was inadequate and was not already supplemented by some form of Dissent. The 'out-townships of straggling parishes', 'new industrial settlements' and 'parishes with non-resident or pluralist clergy' were not confined to Yorkshire or northern England generally.[86] And what the Wesleyans had so far failed to achieve in this respect, the Primitive Methodists (and on a much smaller scale, the Bible Christians) did a good deal to complete. In Currie's words, 'In the eighteenth century [but also, here in the south, well into the nineteenth], the new Methodism grew in the "gaps" of Wesleyanism.' [87]

A final caveat must, however, be added regarding Currie's secondary point that Methodism, unlike the older Dissent, recruited mainly from 'those sections of the population that Anglicanism failed to reach.' [88] Undoubtedly the earlier generations of Wesleyan preachers (like their Primitive Methodist successors) were much closer to some sections of the population than the Anglican clergy of their day and won converts from among the 'unchurched masses'. There were, nevertheless, many among the poorest classes, and for that matter many artisans, who remained indifferent to the appeal of clergy, dissenters and Methodists alike. Nor is it clear from the evidence that, by the end of the 18th century at least, most Methodist converts were from outside the churchgoing section of the population. On the contrary, such firm evidence as can be found suggests that Wesleyan growth was

85. Cf Hempton's conclusion (1984, p 15) that Methodism 'thrived in areas of Anglican parochial weakness.' (italics mine)

86. R Currie, 1967, p 69

87. R Currie, 1967, p 73

88. R Currie, 1967, p 68

already largely autogenous. Few obituaries and memoirs in the Methodist Magazine give any information on parental background. But of the twelve members of the Salisbury Wesleyan Circuit born between 1739 and 1809, whose lives are related by James Dredge in his Biographical Record in 1833, five were from 'practising' Anglican homes, five were second-generation Wesleyans, and one was from a family described as 'respectable, but not religious'. Only one, on whose early background no information is given, may possibly have come from circles outside the reach of both Established and Dissenting influences.

6.5 Social composition

The study of the social composition of Methodism at any level other than that of broad generalisation is beset with difficulties, as the most detailed survey available amply demonstrates.[89] There is, in the first place, a paucity of detailed information, coupled with an unevenness of distribution which limits the value of comparison. Secondly, two distinct, but interacting, factors have to be taken into account: geographical variations and chronological developments. Field's example of Stourport and Redditch as 'respectable' Methodist congregations involves comparison between two situations only a few miles apart, but separated by thirty years, since the evidence relates to 1812 and 1842 respectively.[90] In examining available data, it is therefore far from easy to be sure that we are comparing like with like, and one of the main conclusions that may be drawn from the examples in Field's article is that the social composition of particular Methodist societies varied widely not only from one part of the country to another (e.g. his examples from Weymouth and Norwich contrasting with others from Stourport and Wakefield[91], but between different congregations in such larger towns as Liverpool and Newcastle-upon-Tyne.[92] The unusual composition of Morley Punshon's congregations at Carlisle in 1847[93] was certainly far from typical of Methodism in any area, but serves to highlight the general problem.

89. C D Field, 1977

90. C D Field, 1977, p 203

91. C D Field, 1977, pp 203,204

92. C D Field, 1977, pp 204,205

93. C D Field, 1977, p 205. Cf F W Macdonald, 1888, p 53: 'Persons found themselves side by side in the Methodist chapel who had never been in one before, who had never met one another there or elsewhere.'

Local, and sometimes transitory, influences often played as significant a part as more general sociological or economic factors in determining the social and occupational spectrum of both membership and congregations.

For central southern England, the sources of information are very limited. There are, in the first place, no membership lists giving occupation or social status, nor any Methodist marriage registers for the period before 1851. We are left with two main sources: baptismal registers and Trust deeds.

Because of the anomalies and ambiguities inherent in much of the evidence, no scheme of classification in terms of occupation and/or social status is completely satisfactory. Tables 6:24 and 6:25 use Gilbert's classification, making some comparison between national and regional figures possible.

The percentages in Table 6:24 are based on figures taken from the non-parochial baptismal registers deposited with the Registrar General in 1838 and now at the Public Record Office. No allowance has been made for the distorting effect of class fertility differentials, although, as Field has indicated, this could be considerable.[94] The figures for England and Wales in columns 2, 3 and 4 are given for comparison.[95]

These baptismal records inevitably reflect a rather wider spectrum of supporters and adherents than the actual membership of the society, though it seems likely that non-members who chose Methodist rather than Anglican baptism in those early days were predominantly from the lower classes. The preference for Anglican baptism which persisted in some Wesleyan circles well into the 19th century, was a legacy of the 'Church-Methodist' tradition and characterised the middle-class members rather than their social inferiors.

The percentages for southern England show some marked variations from the national pattern, with substantially more tradesmen and a much higher proportion of labourers, but fewer farmers, artisans, and miners, than at national level. It was less true in the south than in the country generally that 'unskilled toilers were heavily outnumbered

94. C D Field, 1977, p 200 and note 6

95. For the figures in columns 2, 3 and 4: A D Gilbert, 1976, Tables 3:1 and 3:2. Cf C D Field, 1977, Table II.

Table 6:24 Social structure of Wesleyanism: Baptismal registers
1800-1837: Percentage distribution

Occupations	England and Wales	Non- conformity	Wesleyanism	
			England	Southern Counties
1 Merchants, manufacturers 'gentlemen'[1]	2.2	2.2	1.7	0.9
2 Tradesmen	6.2	7.1	5.8	9.9
3 Farmers[2]	14.0	5.3	5.5	2.5
4 Artisans	23.5	59.4	62.7	43.8
5 Colliers, miners, quarrymen	2.5	6.6	7.6	1.8
6 Labourers[3]	17.0	10.8	9.5	30.7
7 Other occupations[4]	33.2	8.6	7.2	10.6

Notes:

1. 'Gentleman' occurs only very rarely in the registers, but is much more common in the Trust deeds.
2. Including a minority specifically described as 'Yeoman'.
3. Preponderantly, agricultural.
4. 'Other' covers a wide range of occupations, varying from one locality to another, and including seamen, fishermen, coastguards, soldiers, schoolmasters, but also individual examples of musician, 'artist', architect, surgeon and banker's clerk.

by artisans', [96] even after the turn of the 18th century. These deviations probably reflect the nature of southern society as a whole, as much as any peculiarity in the composition of Methodism itself. Thus, in the absence of any coal-mining in the area, the 1.8% in group 5 represents the Methodist workers in the Portland quarries, who accounted for over two fifths of the entries in the baptismal register at Fortuneswell chapel. Relatively few Wesleyans were farmers, many of whom in the south were tenants of the landed estates, and more inclined thereby to conformity. The great majority of Methodist labourers were agricultural workers belonging to the village chapels.

Non-Wesleyan registers are too few to provide a basis for detailed comparison but the baptismal register for the Micheldever Circuit shows a preponderance of labourers (including woodmen) and artisans (in the proportion of three to one), reflecting the humble social background of rural Primitive Methodism.

A parallel set of figures may be extracted from the Trust deeds, where the occupation or status of each Trustee is stated. Here we are concerned only with actual members of society and, particularly, in the case of the Wesleyans, with the more affluent and socially advantaged among the membership. To become a Trustee was to accept certain financial liabilities which, especially in the face of long-standing chapel debts, might become very real. So the social and economic status of Trustees reflects a narrower spectrum than that of the membership as a whole. The significance of this data lies in the indication it gives of how far up the social scale Methodism was able to reach, and how far down it need to go in recruiting Trustees, especially for the village chapels.

Because of the small number of chapels built before 1800, there are too few 18th century Trustees to provide a basis for more than tentative comparison. They show clearly enough, however, the extent to which local Methodist leadership was drawn from the ranks of the skilled craftsman and lower middle class. Out of 55 Trustees, 44% were artisans, 24% farmers, and 18% tradesmen. There was only one Trustee described as a labourer. At the other end of the scale, the professional and more prosperous trading classes provided Trustees only in the more substantial town chapels such as Church Street, Salisbury

96. C D Field, 1977, p 216

and High Street, Poole.

Table 6:25 summarizes the occupations of over 1,500 Wesleyan and 525 Primitive Methodist Trustees appointed in southern circuits during the first six decades of the 19th century. The percentage of farmers had decreased by half since the previous century and, in fact, varied widely from one place to another. All but four of the thirteen Wesleyan Trustees at Kilmington in the Shaftesbury Circuit in 1855 were farmers; whereas there were none at all on the trust at Michelmersh, near Romsey, in 1847. Labourers were a small minority on Wesleyan Trusts, but what is more significant is the fact that they do occur, at least as Trustees of rural chapels. The occupational and social range of some Trusts is noteworthy. At Corfe Castle in 1856, of the thirteen Trustees two described themselves as 'gentlemen', one was a timber merchant from Poole, and three were agricultural labourers.

The Wesleyans now had sufficient middle-class support to enable them to find men of substance, chiefly manufacturers and tradesmen, willing to serve as Trustees of several chapels. The Sherborne Circuit was particularly well favoured in this respect. Methodism in Sherborne itself may be said to have languished for many years under the shadow of the Abbey church, but took a new lease of life with the arrival in 1821 of William Dingley. Bringing his Methodism with him from his native Launceston, he established a flourishing drapery business in the town. Several generations of the family were leading supporters of the Wesleyan cause. William himself became a Trustee of thirteen chapels in the circuit between 1826 and his death in 1883, when the Sherborne chapel was enlarged and renovated as a memorial to him. His two sons, Edward and Alfred, continued the family business, held many offices in the church and local community, and were Trustees of fifteen and ten different chapels respectively. William's brother Samuel was Trustee of six.

Similar service was rendered by the Ensor family at Milborne Port, where a Methodist society was formed following the arrival of Edward Ensor in 1820, who was joined shortly afterwards by his brother Thomas. Their glove-making business flourished and was continued by Thomas's sons, Charles and Edward John. Along with another family of glove-manufacturers, the Dykes, they built up the Methodist community in the village and provided it with spacious premises. Edward Ensor was a Trustee of four of the circuit chapels, Thomas of ten, Charles of

Table 6:25 Occupation/Status of Trustees, 1800-1860

		Wesleyan %	Primitive Methodist %
1	Merchants, manufacturers, 'gentlemen'	10.7	1.1
2	Tradesmen	20.4	9.1
3	Farmers	12.5	17.0
4	Artisans	44.9	37.3
5	Quarrymen	1.0	-
6	Labourers	3.4	30.5
7	Others	7.1	5.0

Notes:

1. Stonemasons are included under 'Artisans'.
2. 'Farmers' includes a number designated 'yeoman'; also a few market gardeners.
3. 'Others' includes a wide variety of occupations not easy to classify; e.g. surveyor, excise officer, relieving officer, Poor House governor, town crier, warder, lighthouse keeper, waterman, fisherman, coachman, carrier, naval gunner, gamekeeper, scrivener, hairdresser, shop assistant. Most occur only once or twice; the most frequent is 'schoolmaster'.

eleven and the younger Edward of eight. The Dyke family, who came to the village in 1837, included Silas Dyke, who was a Trustee of four chapels, and his two sons, Henry (ten chapels) and George (six chapels). This does not, of course, exhaust their service to local Methodism. Thomas Ensor, for example, was the superintendent of a flourishing Sunday School, while Henry Dyke was a local preacher and led a very successful Bible class. Comparable examples to these can be found elsewhere, for example in the case of various members of the Harding and Sutton families in the Salisbury Circuit.

No account has been taken in Table 6:25 of the fact that some individuals especially among the Wesleyans, were trustees of several different chapels and are therefore counted more than once. Any adjustment to allow for this distortion would reduce the percentage share of Groups 1 and 2 in particular, throwing into greater relief the predominance of artisans. But the general configuration would remain essentially unchanged.

Invariably, the Trusts distinguished by their superior social background were those of the more established town chapels. The original Trust of the Green Row chapel in Portsmouth (1810) included five 'gentlemen', three pilots and an assortment of tradesmen, but no one lower in the social scale than skilled craftsman. The fact that the village chapels were served largely or entirely by the local preachers tended to perpetuate the social and cultural gap between them and the town congregations.

The Primitive Methodist Trusts date from the mid-1820s and make some comparisons between the two denominations possible. (The evidence from other branches of Methodism is negligible for this period.) It was much less common for any individual to serve on more than one Trust. The majority of Primitive Methodist Trustees, especially of the village chapels, were of humble social and economic status. Many were agricultural labourers who, in some cases, could only make their mark on the chapel deed. Such men had few if any reserves to fall back on if a financial crisis should arise in the affairs of the chapel. Their involvement was therefore a gesture of considerable courage, faith and devotion to the local cause, especially in view of the desperately low level of agricultural wages at that period. Such exceptional cases as that of William Flemington, the Martin labourer, were all the more remarkable in the light of these circumstances. He was a Trustee of

seven other chapels besides Martin itself, including the one at Fisherton Anger, Salisbury. In general, however, Primitive Methodist Trustees tended to be drawn more from the locality of the chapel concerned than was the case with the Wesleyans, and consequently there was a wider gap, in terms of social background, between the Trusts of town and country chapels.

Although the proportion of unskilled labourers on Primitive Methodist Trusts was remarkable, they were still outnumbered by the artisans. The percentage of middle-class Trustees was correspondingly low, but the number of farmers is higher than we might expect. It seems likely that many were small-holders of relatively humble means.

Many of those who served on more than one successive Trust provide evidence of social mobility, almost always upwards. William Hunt, a joiner, and Job Loader, a bricklayer, both on the 1840 Poole Trust, had become 'builders' by the time the Trust was renewed in 1858. Joseph Knight, on the same Trust, was a draper in 1840, had become a house agent by 1858, an accountant by 1870 and County Court Bailiff by 1878. George Laishley, a Southampton draper, on the Fawley Trust of 1836, is described as 'gentleman' on the 1846 deed and by 1860 had become 'George Laishley of St John's Wood, Middlesex, Esquire'. From numerous other examples, we may infer that a claim to the title of 'gentleman' simply marked retirement from a successful career in trade or manufacturing.

The picture that emerges from this evidence largely confirms what has been found to be the case in other parts of the country. While Wesleyans as well as Primitive Methodists did attract working-class support (especially if we take into account those who attended the chapels from time to time, but without committing themselves to membership of the society), their strength lay among the 'labour elite' and the emerging middle classes, and was increasingly marked by 'the Toryism of aspiring respectability.'^[97] At either end of the social spectrum, were those who were too impoverished for religion to be more than an irrelevant luxury (apart from any material benefits it might confer in a paternalistic situation) and those whose superior position disposed them to remain within the ecclesiastical as well as the social establishment.

97. D Hempton, 1984, p 186

The Primitive Methodists who, by 1851, were still in the first, expansionist phase of their campaign to evangelise the south had a markedly more plebeian following, partly because they were strongest in the villages. Their preachers, mostly young, from a humble social background and limited educationally and culturally, had a greater rapport with the 'lower orders', and could identify with them more readily than the new generation of Wesleyan pastors. But there was a considerable social overlap between the two denominations, and in most rural communities whether one became a Wesleyan or a 'Primitive' depended simply on what non-Anglican variety happened to be on offer locally.

Moreover, from one point of view, any distinction was as much chronological as cultural, social or theological. The 'upward' social trend was societal as well as personal, with whole congregations, as well as individual members, tending to move up the social scale and thereby increase their appeal to the middle classes. The building of larger, more impressive (if not always more attractive) chapels in both towns and villages during the course of the century was one outward symbol of this growing respectability and social acceptability. In their turn, the long-standing debts which these building schemes involved led to greater dependence on pew rents and more frequent appeals and financial efforts (the later Victorian era was the heyday of the 'chapel bazaar'). The poorer classes were not, of course, excluded by these developments, but many of them were discouraged in an age of conscious social divisions. The Wesleyans, who had been around longer, were more clearly affected by this upward mobility, but evidence shows that the Bible Christians, and even the Primitive Methodists, would increasingly be affected in the second half of the century.

Surviving local records give us a close-up view of the process as it affected particular circuits and societies and enable us to be a little more specific about the general trend. The social composition of congregations varied not just between the Wesleyans and other Methodist bodies, or from one place to another, or even from one decade to another; but also according to how long a society had been established in a given locality. The humble origins of the Wesleyan society at

Poole[98] is one among many examples. The evidence clearly suggests that, whenever a town or village was first missioned, the initial appeal had to be to the lower levels of society, and that only gradually were those further up the social scale attracted. Very often the crucial break-through came with the arrival (or, more rarely, the conversion) of an individual or family of superior social standing (like the Dingleys and Ensors in the Sherborne Circuit). But other factors included the ability to build a chapel large or attractive enough to draw in the more 'respectable', and the calibre of available preachers, both itinerant and lay.

The fortunes of the Bible Christians in Portland, though chronologically outside the period of the present study, do for that very reason clearly illustrate this point. The survival of the early circuit records enable us to follow the fortunes of this mission more closely than in most other cases. The first preachers arrived in 1857, long after the Bible Christian movement had 'leap-frogged' from its West Country base to the Isle of Wight and Kent. They found the Wesleyans well established,[99] and the Primitive Methodists beginning to gain a footing. It was, therefore, by no means virgin territory. The story of the Portland Mission for the rest of the century is one of painful struggle to build a viable base in the face of long-standing debts, membership losses and isolation from the rest of the Bible Christian Connexion. Repeated attempts to establish a cause in Weymouth failed. Financial constraints went hand in hand with spiritual weakness. As late as the 1890s they were venturing from time to time into the open air, but with little result: 'a few listen from a distance'. And after four weeks of special services at Maidenwell and Wakeham, there were 'not many who came to a full decision for Christ and his service'. A membership of 65 in 1859 had risen to 103 (with 110 on trial) in 1861, but then declined and remained in the 50s during the closing decades of the century, with very few on trial. The social and economic background of their adherents undoubtedly played a key role in this, as the circuit records make clear. With support coming almost entirely from working class families, the Bible Christians were seriously affected by the depression in the quarrying industry in the

98. See above, p 195

99. Portland separated, somewhat reluctantly, from Weymouth and became a Circuit on its own that year.

1870s and only survived through financial support from Connexional mission funds.

Such information as we have on the social composition of southern Methodism illustrates the role of Nonconformity as the 'midwife' of the class society that was struggling into existence in place of the old hierarchical order, in the century before 1851.[100] In this, Methodism undoubtedly played a major part. Its societies and congregations brought together people of widely differing social classes and income levels, providing small-scale models for the class society of the future, and opportunities for the lower orders to enjoy a degree of independence, to exercise social skills and abilities, and to have a share in the responsibility and leadership of the local chapel or circuit. Whether this should be seen as a diversion of their talents and energies away from political radicalism or as a preparation for their growing participation in the democratized society of the future, is a much debated issue which cannot yet be answered.

100. H Perkins, 1969, pp 196-208. Cf Obelkevich's conclusions, with particular reference to Primitive Methodism in Lincolnshire (1976, esp, pp 242-58).

7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The area covered by this study, though readily definable in terms of Methodist history, especially in its original Wesleyan form (Chapter 1.1), can hardly be said to furnish a 'typical' case of Methodist growth and distribution. In several respects it differed from those areas such as Cornwall and the West Riding where Methodism was planted early and grew quickly, so that by 1851 it had become the predominant form of Nonconformity and offered a serious challenge to the Established Church. By contrast, in this part of southern England, Methodism made a late and much more tentative start (Chapter 2), and by the mid-19th century was still overshadowed by the Church of England - and, in some places, by older forms of Dissent (Chapter 5.2.3).

It can be claimed that these very features which made southern Methodism atypical enable us to identify and examine in some detail that interplay of factors which determined the pattern of denominational strength and weakness in different areas of the country (Chapter 6.4).

7.2 John Wesley was caught up in a movement of which he was only partly the cause. In most towns and villages the seeds of Methodism were sown by others - often local laymen or women - and Wesley arrived on the scene, if at all, only to give encouragement and support, to consolidate and organise the work and annexe it to his 'connexion' of societies. His absence, by and large, from the counties of central southern England was as much an effect as a cause of the widely dispersed nature and numerical weakness of the societies in this part of the south (Chapters 2; 3.1).

Similarly, the Evangelical Revival was a wider phenomenon than the Methodism associated with the Wesleys and we must not give the latter sole credit for what had wider roots in the new evangelical spirit. Methodism provided organisational examples to be copied and a spur to fresh missionary endeavour on the part of its rivals; but its influence was not the sole cause of the upsurge of religious fervour. This is particularly evident in the south, where the Revival manifested itself in places where the Methodism was either absent or very weak (Chapters 3.2; 5.1; 5.2.3).

7.3 Statistical analysis of such data as membership records and attendance figures provides a general framework, but falls short of

satisfactory explanation of the distribution pattern, especially when we bear in mind the problematical nature of much of the data (Sections 5.2; 6.4; 6.5). The county, and even the Registration District, prove in the last analysis to be units too large to serve our purpose. The generalised picture that emerges from them takes no account of local and individual variations, and therefore ignores some of the significant factors at work. A closer, more detailed study of particular local situations, within the general statistical framework, brings us nearer to the reality behind the generalisations, each case exhibiting a unique combination of circumstances, including individual personalities.

7.4 While local factors such as the size and nature of a community and the strength of the Anglican 'presence' clearly affected its chances, the successful introduction of Methodism into a particular place depended even more on personnel, in the form of capable and determined leadership, sympathetic property owners and other individual involvement. Without these, the work might languish, or even die out, at least for a time. The ability to build a chapel, however humble, was one crucial break-through, and its rebuilding on a larger scale, often in more pretentious style and on a more central site, was another, signalling the improved social status of its members (Chapter 6.4.2, 6.4.3). The first missioning of a town or village invariably concentrated on the lower orders and the first society was necessarily of humble social origins, though not usually including many of the very poorest classes. The Primitive Methodists were a partial exception, but even they were soon recruiting more from the semi-skilled and artisan classes. Town societies, once established, were socially superior to those in the villages (where competition from the parish church was more direct). At the same time, a flourishing and vigorous town society was almost a prerequisite for the establishment of village causes within reach of the town (Chapter 6.5). Primitive Methodist circuits which lacked this focal point in the early days were more vulnerable and subject to greater fluctuations of fortune.

7.5 At the same time, the conjunction of favourable factors in any particular place did not automatically lead to the introduction of Methodism and cannot in itself account for the existence or success of a society, though it may go a long way to explaining why particular places were missioned at particular times. Personal initiatives were

again at work in many cases; and financial constraints, especially when the crucial stage of chapel-building was reached, played a significant part. The shortage of adequate leadership and financial resources seriously affected the earliest Wesleyan home mission ventures (Chapter 3.2) and underlay the rise of other evangelical initiatives, some of which developed into independent movements outside the administrative and financial control of the Wesleyan itinerancy (Chapters 4; 6.3).

7.6 The influence of Methodism on the wider society was affected by the relatively small percentage of the population who became members or attended a chapel (though others were no doubt influenced less directly); by the uneven distribution of societies and chapels; by the quality of leadership (especially pastors and preachers); and by cultural and social constraints. Financial considerations again played a part, especially hampering any extension into new areas and any missions among the poorer classes. These considerations also apply to the development of the non-Wesleyan branches, though with important qualifications in the earliest period of Primitive Methodist advance (Chapter 4.1). An examination of Methodism in the south supports Hobsbawm's conclusion that Methodism, especially in the southern half of England, was not strong enough to have 'a major political influence'; but its social influence was more pervasive. The distribution of Methodism in the south by the mid-19th century fell well short of realising Wesley's ideal of going to 'those who need you most'; nevertheless much had been achieved at a cost in terms of dedication, persistent effort, courage and sacrifice which deserves our admiration.

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Abbreviations used:

District Civil Registration District BC Bible Christian
CE Church of England PM Primitive Methodist
WM Wesleyan Methodist WMA Wesleyan Methodist Association
WR Wesleyan Reform 'n' refers to a footnote reference

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