

THE JOURNAL
of the
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH HISTORY SOCIETY
(incorporating the Congregational Historical Society, founded in
1899, and the Presbyterian Historical Society of England,
founded in 1913)

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Volume 3 No.7 October 1985

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Editorial | 267 |
| Robert Travers and the Lichfield-Longdon Church Book by <i>Alan P.F. Sell, M.A., B.D., Ph.D.,</i> <i>F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S.</i> | 268 |
| The Bible Society and the French Connection by <i>Roger H. Martin, M.A., Ph.D.</i> | 278 |
| A New Town Story: The United Reformed Churches in the Warrington-Runcorn Urban Complex <i>by Ian Sellers</i> by <i>Ian Sellers, M.A., M.Litt., Ph.D.</i> | 290 |
| Review Article: The Westminster Assembly Revisited by <i>Geoffrey F. Nuttall, M.A., D.D.</i> , ... | 307 |
| Reviews by <i>Mark Greengrass, Alan Argent, David Thompson</i> <i>and Clyde Binfield</i> | 310 |

EDITORIAL

Norman Goodall died on 1st January 1985. He was in his eighty-ninth year. He was at once historian (of himself, of the London Missionary Society and, in his most recent contribution to this *Journal*, of Nathaniel Micklem) and one who made history. His pastorates were at Walthamstow and New Barnet from 1922 to 1936. Thereafter he served the London Missionary Society, the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches, of which he was Assistant General Secretary from 1961 to 1963. He held the highest offices in the Congregational Union of England and Wales, the Free Church Federal Council and the International Congregational Council. As a speaker he was an unfailing delight. He was also a statesman.

It is hoped to include a full appreciation in a future issue.

Robert Watson, the Librarian at 86 Tavistock Place from 1967 to 1976, died on 8 April aged ninety-one years. First with John Darling and then with Gordon Esslemont he tackled a vast backlog of unsorted records and in 1972 dealt with the removal of the Library from the second floor to the basement of Church House. In the same period he responded gladly to

the growing use of the Library and the stream of inquiries. He was an elder of St. Andrew's, Woking, who saw his work for the Society as part of his Christian service, for which he never looked for reward or thanks.

The contributors to this issue include one newcomer, Professor Martin, of Harvard Divinity School, whose *Evangelicals United* will be reviewed in the next issue.

ROBERT TRAVERS AND THE LICHFIELD-LONGDON CHURCH BOOK

Not least because very few records of the earliest Protestant Nonconformity in Staffordshire are extant, the re-appearance of the Lichfield-Longdon *Church Book*, begun in 1695 by the first minister, Robert Travers, and with entries down to 1735, is of considerable interest.¹

The *Book* is a leather-covered notebook measuring 18 x 14 cm. Two pages (i.e. one sheet) have been torn out, and one hundred and seventy-four remain, all but eleven of which contain writing – some of it minute. The entries are not entirely in chronological order, and some of them are upside-down. Apart from some receipts for monies received the handwriting is that of Travers himself. Stains and the ravages of time make some portions difficult to read. Nevertheless a careful perusal of this manuscript reveals something of the life of a Presbyterian minister and his congregation in the period between the passing of the Toleration Act of 1689 and the Evangelical Awakening of the second half of the eighteenth century.

I

Robert Travers was born at Llanboidy, Carmarthenshire,² though the

1. That the *Book* was to hand earlier this century is clear from A.J. Stevens, "The story of Congregationalism in Longdon and Lichfield", *Trans. Cong. Hist. Soc.* III, pp.33–47; and A.G. Matthews, *The Congregational Churches of Staffordshire* [1924], pp.112–113. These writers provide extracts from the *Book*, but not a complete description of it; nor do they undertake the necessary detective work in connection with Robert Travers and the prevailing doctrinal climate. The present writer discovered the *Book* among the records of Bridge Street Congregational Church, Walsall. It is now in the Staffordshire Record Office, D.4119. The Bridge Street records are now at Walsall Central Library Archives.
2. So Joshua Wilson, "Documents and Memoranda relating to Early Nonconformity", Dr. Williams's Library (DWL), New College MSS; cf. *Trans. Cong. Hist. Soc.*, III, p.394. The place name is given as "Landeboy", which does at least resemble "Llanboidy". I am grateful to Mr. D.E. Williams, Assistant Keeper, Department of Manuscripts and Records, The National Library of Wales, for his (sadly fruitless) search for confirmation that Travers was born in Llanboidy. The few extant bishops' transcripts of the 1670s and 1680s are silent on the matter. The suggestion that Travers may have come from Llandybie is less strong, given the similar lack of documentary evidence and the fact that Llanboidy was in a more ardently dissenting district of Carmarthenshire.

date of his birth (as of his death) remains a mystery. He was trained for the ministry possibly under James Owen at Oswestry, and certainly under John Woodhouse at Sheriffhales.³ In view of the relatively fluid "denominational" boundaries of those days, and of the prevailing doctrinal flux, a glance at Owen and Woodhouse will help us to place Travers against his intellectual background.⁴

James Owen (1654—1706) trained under Samuel Jones at Brynlllywarch, and then became assistant to Stephen Hughes at Swansea.⁵ A native of Abernant, Carmarthenshire, he did his major work in north-east Wales, where he itinerated, opened his Oswestry Academy in 1690 and, on becoming co-pastor to Francis Tallents at Shrewsbury, removed his school to that town in 1700. In his *DWB* article R.T. Jenkins states that Owen is "ranked as an Independent", and A. Gordon had earlier made the same claim in *Freedom After Ejection*. Jenkins does, however, note that Owen "had leanings towards Presbyterianism". In support of this he cites Owen's agreement with Richard Baxter's moderate Calvinism, and Owen's works, *Moderation a Virtue* (1703) and *Moderation Still a Virtue* (1704), in which the author argued for occasional conformity. Our view is that there are grounds for claiming that Owen was more Presbyterian than anything else. He translated the *Shorter Catechism* of the Westminster Assembly into Welsh (1701); the Presbyterian Fund supported fourteen of his students,⁶ his funeral sermon was preached by

3. Travers appears in a list of Woodhouse's students in Joshua Toulmin, *A Historical View of the State of the Protestant Dissenters*, 1814, p.559; and in J. Wilson, *op. cit.* The suggestion that he was also under Owen is on Travers's card in C. Surman's biographical index of nonconformist ministers, DWL. It would not be surprising if Travers had felt drawn to the academy conducted by a notable from his own district. It is certainly the case that students sometimes migrated from one academy to another. Thus, for example, in the *Minutes* of the Presbyterian Fund Board (established 1690) for December 1690 we read, "Ordered that John Lewis and Thomas Davies, two Welchmen lately come from under tuition of Mr. John Woodhouse and now with Mr. James Owen at Oswestree in North Wales, have £10 sterl. allowed them for their Board charge to Michaelmas next 1691". The *Minutes* are at DWL.
4. For James Owen see Charles Owen, *Some account of the Life and Writings of James Owen, 1709; Monthly Repository* I, 1806; *DNB; DWB*; T. Rees and J. Thomas, *Hanes Eglwysl Annibynol Cymro*, Liverpool 1873, III, pp.337—365; T. Rees, *History of Protestant Nonconformity in Wales*, 1883, pp.247—255, 287—295; J. Toulmin, *op. cit.*; J.C. Morrice, *Wales in the Seventeenth Century*, Bangor 1918, pp.178—181; Thomas Richards, *Religious Developments in Wales* (1923), *Wales under the Penal Code* (1925) and *Wales under the Indulgence* (1928), *passim*; H.P. Roberts, "Nonconformist academies in Wales", *Trans. Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1930, pp.44—46; H. McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts*, Manchester 1931, pp.81—83 and *passim*. *DWB* "corrects" *DNB* by pointing out that Owen could not have been at school under the Quaker James Picton since the latter left Tenby when Owen was but four years of age and spent most of the following years in prison. However, Dr. G.F. Nuttall advises me that although he left Tenby in 1658, Picton was not in prison until 1663 — by which time Owen was nine years old. For John Woodhouse see J. Toulmin, *op. cit.*; A.G. Matthews, *op. cit.*; H. McLachlan, *op. cit.* For Owen and Woodhouse see A. Gordon, *Freedom After Ejection*, Manchester 1917.
5. For Jones and Hughes see *DNB*.
6. See Walter D. Jeremy, *The Presbyterian Fund and Dr. Daniel Williams's Trust*, 1885, p.12.

Matthew Henry;⁷ and, above all, on 27th June 1681 he was joined by Philip Henry in a public disputation with William Lloyd, Bishop of St. Asaph, on the question of ordination. Owen and Henry were supported by Jonathan Roberts, the Bishop by Henry Dodwell. Owen's case may be inferred from his subsequently published book, *A Plea for Scripture Ordination* (1694) in which he argued for the validity of ordination by presbyters, and against the necessity of an episcopal presence at ordination services.⁸ An ardent paedobaptist, Owen published *Bedydd Plant o'r Nefoedd (Infant Baptism from Heaven)* in 1693, and thus came into conflict with the Welsh Baptists. They had Owen's book translated into English (though, since neither Wing nor Whitley record it, the translation may not have been published) so that no less a person than Benjamin Keach could refute it; and then Keach's reply was published in Welsh.

The Presbyterian John Woodhouse (1627–1700) was of an amiable disposition, and less combative than Owen. He came into money through his wife, Mary Hubbert of Resesby, Leicestershire, and purchased the 1609 manor house at Sheriffhales. There he established his Academy, educating men for the professions as well as for the ministry. Joshua Toulmin, in his book, *A Historical View of the State of the Protestant Dissenters* (1814), provides a full account of the Sheriffhales curriculum; and what is especially interesting from our point of view is the following selection from the books used: Calvin's *Institutes*; Baxter's *Reasons of the Christian Religion and End of Controversy*; the Westminster Assembly's *Confession of Faith and Larger Catechism*; and Vincent's *Exposition of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism*. Here is the staple diet of moderate Presbyterian Calvinism, and it comes as no surprise to learn that twenty-five of Woodhouse's students received grants from the Presbyterian Fund.⁹

On 27th September 1692 Robert Travers was examined by the Cheshire Classis (in good Presbyterian fashion) 'in ye Tongues Philosophy &c.,' and he defended his thesis, *An vere fideles a fide possint excidere aut finaliter aut totaliter?*¹⁰ John Evans's ms. *List* gives the date of Travers's examination as the date of his ordination; and accords Lichfield and Longdon 280 hearers and 60 voters.¹¹ The ordination took place in Knutsford, and Travers was

7. See J.B. Williams, *Memoirs of... the Rev. Matthew Henry*, 1828, pp.226–229. Reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974.

8. M. Henry, *The Life of the Rev. Philip Henry* (1698), corrected and enlarged by J.B. Williams 1825, pp.153 ff. Reprinted with the work at n. 7 above.

9. W.D. Jeremy, *op. cit.*, p.12.

10. A. Gordon, *Cheshire Classis Minutes 1691–1745*, 1919, p.209. The date and place of Travers's ordination are confirmed in the *Life* of M. Henry, p.141, where it is stated that Mr. Travers (*sic*) settled at Lichfield (with no mention of Bromborough). In the *Life* of P. Henry (p.211) mention is made of a letter of P.H. to Francis Tallents (for whom see *DNB* and A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, Oxford 1934). The letter is dated 1.1.1693/4, and it begins: "I received your's by Mr. Travers..." In the same work (p.284) an entry from M. Henry's diary is recorded thus: "1704–5. I had a letter from Mr. Travers of Lichfield, that the chancellor there designed to attempt the demolishing of my father's monument." For this episode see further *DNB* s.v. P. Henry.

11. J. Evans's *List*, p.106. This *List* (begun 1717, corrected to 1729) is at DWL.

one of six ordained on that day. (Again, this is Presbyterian rather than Independent practice: the Independents *normally* ordained a man at the scene of his first pastorate).¹² Among those ordained with Travers was Richard Edge. He proceeded to Bromborough, Cheshire, but served there for a few months only. By Christmas 1693 Travers was there, but his sojourn was brief too. As the minutes of the Cheshire Classis have it:

Upon information that Mr. Robert Travers was resolved to leave the people he had fixed with in Wirrall since Christmas last, it was agreed that the following letter should be despatched unto him to divert him from that intention:

Knutsford, Aug. 14th, 1694.

Dear Brother – Your case was this day taken into consideration. The result is we do unanimously desire you (with all tenderness) not to think of removing without a clearer call. It is feared if you should the effects would be so sad upon the congregation that hereafter it may be reflected on with much regret. Pray suspend your thoughts till another meeting, where it may be better considered and determined. God keep you in the way of duty, and make us all cordially willing to serve our dear Master Christ Jesus with constancy and fidelity in the station he hath assigned us. – We are yours in our dear Lord,

Sam: Lawrence, *Moderator*.

Gam: Jones, *Scribe*.¹³

Travers was not be diverted, however, and he removed to Lichfield and Longdon, presumably in 1694.¹⁴

Matthews gives 1738 as the year of the termination of his ministry there, but he was still in the neighbourhood in 1747, when he assigned £40 by deed to the congregations of Lichfield and Longdon. The plural “congregations” reminds us that at some time before 1747 the original Lichfield-Longdon congregation had divided into two worshipping groups.¹⁵ The baptismal register in the *Book* refers to “Lichfield meeting” (as distinct from “Lichfield”) for the first time in May 1707. Samuel Stubbs became minister in 1738 and remained until his early death on 13th May 1753. It *may* be, as Gordon suggests, that Stubbs served as Travers’s assistant with a view to the succession, but the financial records suggest that if this did happen Travers continued after 1738 without the financial support he had hitherto

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12. For an example of a case in which this did not happen cf. the double ordination of the Independents Samuel and William Rooker at Tavistock (the scene of the latter’s pastorate) on 19th June 1719. See A.P.F. Sell, “The Walsall riots, the Rooker family and eighteenth-century Dissent”, *Trans. South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, forthcoming.
 13. A Gordon, *Cheshire Classis*, pp.17–18; cf. William Urwick, *Historical Sketches of Nonconformity in the County Palatine of Chester*, 1864, p.86.
 14. Though Matthews (*Staffs.*) gives (and queries) 1693, p.256. 1693 is ruled out by the Cheshire evidence.
 15. Tradition states that the Longdon Green meeting-house was opened in 1692. So A.J. Stevens, *op. cit.*, p.40. No trace of it now remains.

enjoyed. The Presbyterian Fund granted him £6 p.a. from 1704; £10 p.a. from 1714 (though Evans's *List*, begun in 1717, gives £7, which may be a later correction); £5 p.a. from 1723; and £7 p.a. from 1726. Payments continued until 1738, the year in which Stubbs arrived on the scene. In that year too, in January 1738 the Lichfield magistrates licensed the house of the Revd. Mr. Travers for holding a conventicle for public worship. Matthews does not refer to this in his list of "Houses certified at Quarter Sessions as places of worship under Toleration Act" which is taken from records at Somerset House, and is said to be "in full till 1762." We may presume that if the division of the Lichfield-Longdon congregation had occurred before 1738 Travers's action reinforced it, and may even have resulted in the existence of *two* Lichfield meetings for a time, one ministered to by Stubbs, the other by Travers.¹⁶

II

The earliest entries in the *Book* are those at the beginning of "A Register of the Children that I have Baptised in the Countrey and City" — the last two words being subsequently added. Anne Salt's is the first name recorded. She was baptised on 14th September 1695. The register covers twenty pages, and approximately 216 baptisms are recorded. The last in Travers's hand is dated 3rd November 1735. One further baptism is recorded — that of Joseph Martin, baptised at Longdon meeting-house on 22nd August 1749 by Mr. Malkin. This would be Jonah Malkin, minister at Tamworth from 1713 to 1766. His presence at Longdon raised the doctrinal issue, as we shall see.

In 1844 Sir Robert Peel, Member for Tamworth, made a speech in the debate on the second reading of the Dissenters' Chapels Bill in which he said,

For myself I represent a town. There is a Unitarian Chapel there. It was founded in 1724. It was founded by Unitarians. There never was a suspicion that it was founded for the promotion of Trinitarian doctrines. For fifty-three years there was a minister holding anti-Trinitarian doctrines. I recollect the close of his life. There was but one single bequest for the endowment of that chapel, which was left by the daughter of that Unitarian minister.¹⁷

Clearly Malkin is the minister referred to by Peel. There was, however, a Tamworth congregation before 1724. Its first minister was Edmund Taylor, who is recorded in the Tamworth baptismal register as officiating at a baptism on Christmas Day 1695. His last entry is dated 5th October 1703/4.¹⁸ The second minister, Henry Roughley, was there from 1703 to 1708. He entered in the Tamworth book the names of one hundred and eight communicants, and also included "A Confession of faith to be made by such as are admitted

16. A. Gordon, *Cheshire Classis*, p.209, Matthews (*Staffs*) pp.125–7; I am indebted to Dr. Nigel Tringham of V.C.H. Staffordshire for alerting me to the January 1738 registration (Lichfield J.R.O., D.68f.52v).

17. George Eyre Evans, *Midland Churches*, Dudley 1899, p.204.

18. This register is at Somerset House.

to the Lord's Supper according to Gospell rule"; and this Confession is in fact the Apostles' Creed. No doctrinal deviation thus far. But from Peel's speech we gather that the tendency towards unitarianism in Tamworth set in during Malkin's ministry. Now our point is that whatever Travers may have thought on the doctrinal question (and the presumption must be that he was sympathetic towards Malkin), he was found baptising infants at Tamworth both before and during Malkin's ministry there. Thus, to give the earliest examples from the Lichfield-Longdon *Book*, on 10th August 1703 he baptised Joseph, son of John Gilbert; and on 6th April 1704 he baptised Elizabeth, daughter of Robert Shipton. These baptisms took place during Tamworth's orthodox days. But then on 14th February 1727 Travers baptised Timothy; and on 18th February 1729 he baptised Mary — and these were children of "Mr. Jonah Molchin (*sic*) Pastor of the Dissenting Congregation of Presbyterians att Tamworth."¹⁹

The Lichfield-Longdon baptismal register confirms the wide extent of Travers's labours. In addition to Longdon, Lichfield and Tamworth we find him baptising infants at King's Bromley, Yoxall, Rugeley and elsewhere. Many of the baptisms took place in the homes of the parents concerned, and others were conducted "publickly at ye Meeting-place". A special page-and-a-third is devoted to baptisms of children of the Hussey family of Little Wyrley Hall. These all took place at the Hall, with the exception of that of Elizabeth, who was born in her grandmother's house in Lichfield. The majority of baptismal entries are matter-of-fact, but Travers was clearly moved on 4th December 1714:

Baptized John son of Robert Onion att ye Meeting-house in Lichfield, the mother then lying dead, and he fourteen days old — ye root withered, but ye Branch gloriously spared. A sorrowful dispensation, but it becomes us to do duty and to submit to ye divine will and Wisdom.

On occasion infant sickness prompted a home baptism:

August 15. 1731. Baptised Thomas the son of Mr. Robert Goo of Longdon. Baptized at his own house privately being declining — he died ye 16 day.

The next entry indicates that Travers normally expected both parents to be present at the sacrament, and that he required a declaration of intent on the part of parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord:

August 21. 1731. Baptized John the Son of Johⁿ Martin, exciseman, att his Mother in Laws Mrs. Motts att her house — baptized ye Son privately ye Mother present, but the Father in ye Kings business abroad, but by Letter engaged to Educate his for God (*sic*) Redeemer according to the claim of ye New Covenant.

19. G.E. Evans quotes the Shipton baptism (but not the earlier Gilbert one) from the Tamworth register, though the date is given as 5th October 1703/4. Evans gives Malkin's wife as Mary (d. 17.11.1805 aet. 90), and mentions a son Robert — but not the Timothy and Mary whom Travers baptised. *Op. cit.*, p.211.

III

As with baptism, so with the Lord's Supper: Travers's *Book* provides an example of the way in which church discipline was exercised in the early eighteenth century:

John Slot the Brewer now of Rath formerly had his Habitation in Rochdale in Lancashire, and hath been for many years a stated member of the congregation of Protestants called Presbyterians, and had there continued, but that he finds himself necessitated to travel abroad for an honest Livelyhood, and therefore: — can seldom have an opportunity of Joyning with that Society, but expressing to me his desire to communicate *in the Lord's Super (sic) occasionally* with *Xn Churches* of that Denomination in those places where his business should cast him, I think it may be servicable to the attaining this his Desire to certify thus much to those whom it may concern, as also that I have good hopes that he wil (*sic*) every where, behave himself as becomes the Gospel of Jesus Xt. our comon (*sic*) Lord: witness my hand.

Jos: Dawson M. Pastor to the
Presbyterian congregation at Rochdale

Travers appends the following note: "This is a true copy of John Slots Certificate extracted June 21 1722 by R.T."

Underlying the above statement is that disciplined approach to communion attendance according to which a minister would commend one on his own church roll to another congregation if that person were required to travel away from home. The implication is that the Lord's Supper is for those who are saints (i.e. Christians) in good standing with their local church.

It is worth noting that Joseph Dawson (14.3.1666/7—15.4.1739) was the son of the Joseph Dawson who was ejected from Thornton near Halifax.²⁰ The son was trained under Richard Frankland at Rathmell, and was ordained on 7th June 1693. After preaching in Yorkshire we find that in 1698 his house in Rochdale was registered as a meeting-house; a chapel was erected on the Colepitt Garden in 1716, and registered at Manchester Quarter Sessions in 1717. There Dawson junior ministered until his death. He was succeeded at Rochdale by *Josiah Owen of Abernant, Carmarthen*, grandson of John Owen of Abernant under whose son James, we recall, Robert Travers was possibly trained, but whom he would certainly have known. We know from the John Slot certificate that Rochdale and Travers were in communication. It may not be *very* likely, but is it altogether inconceivable that Travers recommended the son of his old tutor to the Rochdale congregation when their minister, his correspondent, died? A bush telegraph was certainly in operation among eighteenth-century dissenters; and when to "dissenter" is added "Welsh" — and Travers's birthplace is but eight miles as the crow flies from Abernant, the home of the Owen family — the temptation to this

20. For Dawson senior (1636—1709) see A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised*; for father and son see A. Gordon, *Freedom After Ejection*.

kind of speculation is hard to resist. Quite apart from the Welsh connection, Josiah Owen ministered at Bridgnorth, Shropshire, a county with which Travers had dealings. Travers would almost certainly have known his younger colleague — even if, *contra* DNB, the latter did not minister in Staffordshire at Walsall and Stone.²¹

IV

The greater part of the Lichfield-Longdon *Book* is taken up with accounts of Christian beneficence of various kinds. Thus we read of “ye Douzen of Bibles given for ye Publick in these parts by Madam Gunstone, Rec^d June 28. 1719”. Travers dispensed bibles to adults and children alike, Isaac Edwards, grandson of Goody Gee being among the recipients. On another occasion a Mr. Wright gave Travers ten bibles for distribution; and a number of similar bequests are noted. On 10th July 1722 a box containing no fewer than thirty-five bibles was received, and Travers found a home for them all.

Many of the donations recorded take the form of monetary responses to the Government briefs which Travers duly read out and noted:

Read the Brief for the losses by fire att Puttenham in Coun Surrey, att Longdon Meeting place in Com: and collected for ye Sufferers there sum of two Shillings on July 17. 1737.

Halifax, Hexham, Ilkeston, Bangor, Neath, Gravesend — causes in all of these places and many more benefited from the donations of the Lichfield-Longdon people. They were quite ecumenical in their liberality: parish churches were frequently supported, and on 24th September 1732 the Longdon congregation sent 1/6d towards the rebuilding of “the Abbey Lanor Cost Church” (Lanercost) in Cumberland.

Fire was frequently the culprit, though refugees from the now Roman Catholic Palatinate touched the deepest chord when, on 18th September 1709, the princely sum of £1/1/4 was collected at Lichfield for “ye poor pallatines”. On the same day the Longdon members contributed £1/19/5 to the same cause. The old church at St. Mary Redcliff, Bristol, was supported, as was the new church in Sunderland. Local projects were supported —

21. For Josiah Owen (1711?–1755) see *DNB*, where he is said to have ministered after 1735 until 1739 at Bridgnorth and then for short periods, at Walsall and Stone, before removing after 1740 to Rochdale. There is enough here to suggest that Travers may well have known him — quite apart from the Welsh connection — but the details are less than secure. Thus (a) Ernest Eliot writes concerning Bridgnorth: “Between 1724 and 1747, the details are very confusing... It appears that the Rev. Josiah Owen... was minister from 1733 to 1738 or 1738”. See *A History of Congregationalism in Shropshire*, Oswestry [1898] pp.72 and 74. Owen is not mentioned by R.F. Skinner in *Nonconformity in Shropshire 1662–1816*, Shrewsbury 1964. (b) A.G. Matthews (*Staffs.*) makes no mention of Owen in connection with Walsall, and neither does G.E. Evans. Indeed, there is no room for Owen in the latter’s table of Walsall ministers, see *Midland Churches*, pp.213, 219. As for Stone, Matthews does not mention Owen in the text, and in the list of Stone’s ministers (p.262) Owen’s name appears with a query, an acknowledgment to *DNB*, and a comment: “Not in Fund Board Minutes”.

the rebuilding of St. Mary's Lichfield — as were projects far away: Copenhagen, where the Protestants had suffered "Great loss by fire"; and Oberbarmon and Mittau, where new churches were being built. A number of signed receipts for monies received are included in the *Book*.

Travers's private accounts are shown too. He paid £1/3/0 to "Mr. Goulborn an Apocethary in Chester"; £4/12/0 "For Gloves at ye Funeral"; he gave 2/0d to a "Poor Lad"; and it would be interesting to know the significance of this: "To George Walley for trespassse, £10/7/0". With the mention of 12/- to Richard Jackson, Blacksmith, we come to Travers's mode of transport. He kept a mare. One page of the *Book* is devoted to expenses in connection with this beast: 3/0 for oats; 3/6 to a farrier; £2/1/6 for hay; and £1/0/0 for stabling. The total for the year 1695-6 is £6/1/3. On the facing page is a "Memorandum: I lent my Mare to John Wadhouse's April 14 1696". A further memorandum of 1700 records that "My Mare went to Mr. Thomas Bayliff's to be kept."

That Travers was not without assistance is clear from an entry of 24th June 1720:

Midsomer Day. Thomas Higin's came to live with me att Mrs. Jesson's.

I am to give him forty Shillings a year Standing Wages, and a Coat that is an old one to make one.

On 29th September and 29th December Thomas Higgins signed receipts for two quarters' wages.

V

As we noted earlier, Travers's successor, Samuel Stubbs, remained at Lichfield and Longdon until 1753, when he died at the age of 38.²² At his funeral service Dr. Ebenezer Latham of Findern Academy said that he had hoped that Stubbs would succeed him at the Academy. He spoke of Stubbs's "vast erudition and extensive learning". Sadly, these "had rendered him not so popular as a preacher". The Longdon and Lichfield congregations dwindled, and the meeting-house in the city was closed in the year of Stubbs's death.²³ After the ministry of Joseph Threlkeld (?1754-1759) who left for Virginia, U.S.A., there followed the Greek scholar, John Alexander, who served the Longdon people whilst residing at Birmingham.²⁴

At this point doctrinal considerations come to the fore once more. James Owen was succeeded at Shrewsbury Academy by Samuel Benion, himself a student of Philip Henry at Broad Oak.²⁵ who firmly established science in the curriculum, and who used the Westminster *Confession* in class. One of

22. For Stubbs see A. Gordon, *Freedom After Ejection*; A.G. Matthews, *Staffs.*, pp.117-118.

23. A.G. Matthews, *Staffs.*, p.110; cf. *VCH Staffs.*, III, p.123. For Latham see H. McLachlan, *Essays and Addresses*, Manchester 1950, ch. IX.

24. For Alexander see *DNB*.

25. For Benion see M. Henry's funeral sermon (1708); McLachlan, *op. cit.*, pp.83-84. Benion died in his 35th year; Stubbs at 38; Alexander before he was 30.

his pupils was Ebenezer Latham, in whose own curriculum at Findern Locke appears, but the Westminster *Confession* does not.²⁶ Another of the orthodox Benion's pupils was Jonah Malkin — Peel's "Unitarian" at Tamworth. As for Alexander (1736—1765), he studied at Daventry under Caleb Ashworth.²⁷ At Daventry "Theology, Metaphysics and Ethics were taught most accurately and laboriously",²⁸ but at least two students, Alexander and his room-mate Joseph Priestley, detected a weakness in the curriculum as far as languages were concerned. Accordingly, every day they read together "ten folio pages in some Greek author, and generally a Greek play in the course of the week besides."²⁹ Priestley further records the difference of doctrinal stance as between the Daventry tutors, "Dr. Ashworth taking the orthodox side of every question, and Mr. (Samuel) Clark, the sub-tutor, that of heresy, though always with the greatest modesty".³⁰

These doctrinal straws in the wind suggest that both Stubbs and Alexander were heirs to the progressive reduction of Calvinistic orthodoxy. When we add to this the latter's witty essays, published in *The Library*, on such fashionable Augustan themes as "Dulness", "Common Sense", and "Misanthropy"; and when we recall that the older Travers, whatever he may have thought on the doctrinal points, did not break relations with Tamworth's "Unitarian" minister Malkin,³¹ and apparently lived happily alongside Stubbs, there is little reason to doubt that the Lichfield-Longdon pastorate came under those Arian or Socinian influences which were eventually to merge with rationalising tendencies and to issue in modern Unitarianism.

The Lichfield meeting-house was closed in 1753. As if to repay Travers's earlier favours the Presbyterian minister, John Byng, of Tamworth was, in 1773, visiting the dwindling cause at Longdon once a fortnight.³² Byng served at Tamworth from 1768 until his death at 81 in 1727. Like Alexander and Priestley he was trained under Ashworth at Daventry,³³ and he seems to

26. See MS. *An Account of the Dissenting Academies from the Restoration of Charles the Second*, in Dr. Williams's Library.

27. For Ashworth see *DNB*.

28. *Monthly Repository* 1824, p.230.

29. J. Priestley, *Works* (ed. Rutt), I, pt. 1, p.26.

30. *Ibid.*, p.23.

31. This, we recall, was Peel's description of Malkin. It was, strictly, illegal to be a unitarian until 21st July 1813. Before that date profession of unitarianism was punishable by forfeiture of citizenship in England, whilst in Scotland it was a capital crime. See A. Gordon, *Heads of English Unitarian History*, 1895, p.49.

32. So R. Mansfield, *VCH Staffs*. III, p.123. Mansfield (following Matthews *op. cit.* p.110?) makes no bones about calling this minister (unnamed in context) a Unitarian. No doubt he was, doctrinally. Referring to the county of Staffordshire, Mansfield says that "some congregations dwindled and others drifted towards Unitarianism". All too often a necessary connection has been supposed between the "dwindling" and the "drifting". The truth is that some congregations which became (unemotive word!) unitarian prospered. Conversely, some High Calvinist churches were smothered under doctrinal scholasticism. See F.J. Powicke's art. in *Trans. Unitarian Hist. Soc.*, I, pp.102—128; and *id.*, in *Essays Congregational and Catholic*, ed. A. Peel, [1931], p.308.

33. For Byng see G.E. Evans, *op. cit.*, p.211.

have been unitarian in doctrine. This would be consistent with an alleged, but unrecorded, dispute at Longdon during the period when those of unitarian persuasion were attempting to secure the deeds of dissenting chapels on the ground that the congregations concerned were no longer trinitarian. It is said that at Longdon the unitarian claim was successfully resisted by a Mr. Birch of Armitage.³⁴ Even so it seems likely that shortly afterwards the Longdon congregation became defunct.³⁵ But already there were stirrings of new life. George Burder was in the county, and through him the Evangelical Awakening was to touch many parts of Staffordshire — not least Lichfield — to the benefit of Establishment and Dissent alike.³⁶

ALAN P.F. SELL

THE BIBLE SOCIETY AND THE FRENCH CONNECTION

It is a matter of Welsh national pride that many great religious movements have been founded by the Welsh people and nurtured in the mountains and valleys of their lovely country. Here Howel Harris and Daniel Rowlands promoted a significant revival that predated the English Wesleyan and Whitefieldite movements of the 1740s by several years. Here in the 1780s a group of Welshmen, in touch with Robert Raikes in England and profiting from Griffith Jones's earlier experiences with the Welsh Circulating Schools, began on a national scale the famous Sunday School movement, the precursor to modern secondary public education. And from Wales in the 1790s came a cry for Bibles printed in the Welsh vernacular, a cry historians have told us would lead directly to the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, the first major mass publisher of Bibles in the world.

To challenge or even qualify the last-mentioned achievement is to fly in the face of adversity for the story of Mary Jones and Thomas Charles and their role in the founding of the Bible Society is a part of Welsh folklore, alive today with celebrations only last year marking the bicentennial of

34. See A.J. Stevens, *art. cit.*, p.26. Matthews (*op. cit.*, p.151) says that the Unitarians, presumably those at Tamworth, were behind the move to take over the property. But it is conceivable that following the ministries of Stubbs and Alexander, the apparent acquiescence of Travers, and the attentions of Byng, there were those within the Longdon fellowship who, encouraged by similar claims being made elsewhere (and notably at nearby Wolverhampton) made the first move. For the wider history of the struggle in brief see A. Gordon, *Heads*, pp.51–52. The Wolverhampton case opened in 1817 and continued until the Dissenters' Chapels Act became law on 19th July 1844. Retrospective to 1813, the Act provided that if a trust did not make specific doctrinal provisions, occupancy for twenty-five years sufficed to secure possession.

35. A.G. Matthews found no evidence that the Longdon meeting-house existed in 1800. See *op. cit.*, p.168.

36. See A.P.F. Sell, "George Burder and the Lichfield Dissenters", *Trans. South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, XIII 1971–2, pp.52–60.

Mary Jones's birth. Yet there is reason to think that France and not Wales was a more important focus of concern for those who were planning the Bible Society and that the Welsh Bible crisis, for sensitive political reasons, served in part as a diversion for xenophobic Establishment critics fearful and suspicious of all attempts to evangelize the Continent.

This essay proposes to investigate the "French connection" in the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society and also to explore a hitherto unknown aspect of Franco-British relations during the period of the French Revolution. It is not meant to criticize or question the contribution which Welsh evangelicals made in the field of Bible production or distribution. Rather, I want to suggest that far from being a simple affair, the Evangelical Revival was shaped by many forces inside and outside Britain and that nowhere were these forces more evident than in the founding of the Bible Society.

The most popular story of the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society is, of course, that of Mary Jones, the young Welsh girl whose unsuccessful quest to find a Bible in her native tongue was said to be behind the crusade of Thomas Charles (1755–1814), the well-known Welsh Calvinistic Methodist, to publish Bibles in the Welsh language. The story goes¹ that Mary Jones of the rural village of Llanfihangel y Pennant in County Gwynedd had industriously saved her pennies to possess a Bible in her native tongue. Since none was available for purchase in this northern Welsh outpost, she walked twenty-eight miles in 1800 to see Charles whose Circulating School she had attended. Welsh Bibles, however, were in short supply even in Bala and Charles at first told Mary that none was available for sale. But he relented when Mary broke down in tears and sold her one of his own Bibles. The story ends with Charles, overwhelmed by Mary Jones's plight, vowing to supply Bibles for his countrymen. Charles's subsequent visit to London in 1802 where on 7th December he urged the directors of the Religious Tract Society to consider publishing Welsh Bibles, a plea which led to the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society, is a matter of record.

While almost every British child brought up in an evangelical home can recite the story of Mary Jones from memory, its importance lies more in the realm of myth and symbol than of history. Mary Jones really existed and the Bible which Charles sold to her is still prominently displayed at the Bible Society headquarters.² But the story's central role in the founding of the Bible Society must be questioned. For instance, when the Bible Society was established in 1804, nothing was said of Mary Jones. In an unpublished letter to Joseph Tarn, the Bible Society's Assistant Secretary, dated March 1804, Charles refers to "young females in service [who had] walked thirty miles to me with only the bare hopes of obtaining a Bible each..." But the name of

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1. See W. Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 1904, I, 465.
 2. For a continuing discussion of the Mary Jones story, see R. Monica Davies, "Mary Jones 1784–1864", *Transactions of the Calvinistic Methodist Historical Society*, LII, 1967.

Mary Jones only appeared much later, in 1867, in an article published in the *Monthly Reporter*.³ It might be suggested that while Mary Jones was probably one among several who sought Bibles from Charles, she was not by herself the inspiration behind the Bible Society that popular myth later made her out to be.⁴

But even Charles's role in the founding of the Bible Society requires closer scrutiny. There was indeed a serious shortage of Welsh Bibles at the turn of the nineteenth century as the story of Mary Jones testifies, and Thomas Charles was a key figure in trying to correct this situation. But there is reason to think that Charles's quest to publish and distribute Bibles in the Welsh vernacular was only one factor, perhaps even a secondary factor, behind the decision of those who founded the Bible Society to publish testaments for global consumption. Like the story of Mary Jones, the story of Thomas Charles needs to be set in proper perspective.

It is true that as early as 1787 Charles had discussed the Bible crisis in Wales with Thomas Scott, the great evangelical Bible commentator and together they had petitioned the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.), the sole producer at the time of Welsh Bibles, for more testaments. It is also true that when the S.P.C.K. later failed to produce Welsh Bibles in numbers adequate to supply the Welsh nation, Charles decided to publish Welsh Bibles on his own authority. Indeed, it was this project which brought him to London in November 1802 in quest of a publisher and for funds and eventually, on 7th December, to a meeting of the Religious Tract Society where his project was discussed by the directors of that organization.⁵ The Religious Tract Society had been established only a few years before, in 1799, and was Britain's major publisher of evangelical literature.

What actually happened at the Tract Society, however, is disputed. The official line is that Charles's presentation at the Tract Society's 7th December meeting caused the directors of that organization to begin serious discussions of a separate Bible society and that it was the Bible crisis in Wales which was from that point the principal focus of their concerns. This claim is based on a statement which Joseph Hughes (1769—1833), the Baptist secretary of the Tract Society, was supposed to have uttered after Charles made his presentation. In a minute of the 7th December Tract Society meeting it is stated quite precisely that Thomas Charles introduced the subject of Welsh Bibles whereupon the directors present decided, as though it had never occurred to them before, that it would be desirable "to stir up the public mind to the dispersion of Bibles generally" and that a paper in a magazine to this effect would

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3. See Canton, *op. cit.*, I, 468; Bible Society Home Correspondence (Cambridge University Archives): T. Charles to J. Tarn, March 1804.
 4. It has even been suggested that the Bible Society was Mary Jones's idea. See Canton, *loc. cit.*
 5. Cf. E. Morgan, *A Brief History of the Life and Labours of the Rev. Thomas Charles*, 2nd edn. 1828; D.E. Jenkins, *The Life of the Rev. Thomas Charles*, 1908, I, 567ff.

be useful.⁶ Then Hughes, wanting to underline the significance of the event, the central importance of Wales, and his own role in the founding of the Bible Society, allegedly said, after Charles's presentation: "Surely a society might be formed for the purpose: and if for Wales, why not also for the Empire and the whole world."⁷ In case the point was missed, Hughes later had the 7th December Tract Society minute expanded to intimate that he, Joseph Hughes, suggested forming a Bible Society for this purpose.⁸

It is not our intention to question the fact of 7th December. Charles was indeed in attendance on that day and the directors of the Tract Society did decide to begin formal discussions on the formation of a separate Bible Society. What we do want to question, however, is whether, as Hughes and others have suggested, the paucity of Bibles in Wales was the "real" or underlying factor behind the founding of the Bible Society. There are at least three reasons to believe it was not. In the first place, actions by Charles himself suggest that the 7th December meeting was not critical. After briefing the directors of the Tract Society on Wales, Charles returned to Bala with the idea still in mind of producing Welsh Bibles by himself. This was hardly the action of a man who believed that a new society would be created to do this for him. Moreover, Charles did not record his meeting with the Tract Society in subsequent correspondence with friends and even as late as March 1804 he knew little about the emerging Bible Society, whose plans were by now well advanced.⁹ Had Charles been the catalyst which prompted the Tract Society directors to establish a Bible Society, one would have thought that he would be more involved in its planning, or at least better informed of developments. Secondly, one must question Joseph Hughes's heroic statements at the Tract Society on 7th December. For instance, William Alers-Hankey, a lay director

6. Religious Tract Society (School of Oriental and African Studies Archives, University of London) Minutes, 7 December 1802.
7. Cf. J. Leifchild, *Memoir of the Late Rev. J. Hughes*, 1835, 490. Joseph Tarn, the Bible Society's assistant secretary, also played up the Welsh connection and his own role in the 7 December meeting. In a letter to Charles dated 7 March 1804, Tarn suggested that after meeting privately with Charles, he (Tarn) placed the scarcity of Welsh Bibles on the Tract Society's 7 December agenda. "And then it was," Tarn wrote his friend "that the flame was kindled which now breaks out." Cited in Morgan, *op. cit.*, 484.
8. After stating that it would be desirable to stir up the public mind to the dispersion of Bibles generally and that a paper in a magazine to that effect would be useful, the minute in its original form ended with: "The object was deemed sufficiently connected with the object of this society thus generally to appear on these minutes." Hughes later added: "... and the Secretary [Hughes] who suggested it [the formation of a Bible Society] was accordingly desired to enter it [the minute]." This last part of the original sentence, squeezed in presumably as an afterthought, was taken by Henry Morris in his *A Memorable Room*, 1898, to refer to Hughes's suggestion of forming a society. D.E. Jenkins, Charles's biographer, however, argues that it only meant that Hughes suggested entering the minute in the Tract Society minute book. Cf. D.E. Jenkins, *The Life of Thomas Charles*, 1908, II, 506.
9. See Bible Society Home Correspondence: T. Charles to J. Tarn, March 1804 in which Charles thanks Tarn for telling him that a Bible Society has been established and requesting a plan of the new organization.

of the Tract Society who was present at the meeting, later suggested that Joseph Hughes never uttered the famous words "If for Wales why not also for the Empire and the whole world." Hughes's supposed statement appeared in print after his death in 1833, and it seems to have been based on a claim made by Hughes himself.¹⁰ This attempt to highlight the significance of 7th December even to the point of doctoring the minutes leads one to wonder whether, in fact, that date was as momentous as Hughes and subsequent historians have led us to believe. Finally, and as we shall see perhaps most importantly, the directors of the Tract Society, several months before 7th December, had been discussing the need for a Bible Society, not however to publish Bibles for Wales as suggested by the Mary Jones and Thomas Charles stories, but rather to publish Bibles for France. Since historians have tended to overlook or even to suppress this fact, focusing instead on Hughes's fictitious statements underlining his and Thomas Charles's role in establishing the Bible Society, an examination of the French connection might help us to understand some of the events which in fact lay behind the Society's founding.

First it would be helpful to understand in more general terms why evangelicals were fascinated, sometimes even obsessed, with their brethren across the Channel. We shall then see that this fascination permeated not only the Tract Society from which the Bible Society evolved, but also the London Missionary Society, the first major interdenominational mission in Britain on which all subsequent "pan-evangelical" societies including the Tract and Bible Societies were modelled.

Evangelical interest in France was shaped by political and social as well as by religious forces. When revolution broke out in 1789, for instance, many evangelicals believed that the new constitutional liberties given to French Protestants were a portent of the repeal of Nonconformist disabilities in their own country.¹¹ Political enfranchisement, therefore, was very much on the minds of such evangelical Dissenters as David Bogue the Independent minister at Gosport in Hampshire and Robert Haldane of Glasgow, both later involved in the Religious Tract Society, when they publicly proclaimed their support for the French Revolution.¹² Evangelical interest in France was also motivated by theological considerations: not only would the French Revolution lead to political freedoms for Nonconformists at home, but it would also deal a deadly blow to the Roman church abroad whose fall evangelicals felt to be imminent. Their hopes were not to materialize. As the Revolution veered to the left, evangelicals who had initially supported it were accused of being agents or at least dupes of the continental Illuminati whose clandestine conspiracy might soon subvert Church and government as it had done in France.¹³ Even

10. This statement first appeared in the *Monthly Extracts and Report of the Bible Society* for November 1833. Cf. Leifchild, *op. cit.*, 484, 490.

11. See G.A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes*, 1968, 6.

12. D. Bogue, *A Sermon Preached at Salters' Hall*, 1793, 46 f.; For Haldane, see *DNB*.

13. See M.J. Quinlan, *Victorian Prelude*, 1941, 90 f.

when these evangelicals hurried to demonstrate their loyalty to King and Constitution following the excesses of the Terror and later the militarism of Napoleon, they were still viewed with a suspicion which lasted well into the nineteenth century.¹⁴

Despite the disappointing turn of political events, evangelical interest in France intensified as the drama of the Revolution unfolded. Now the impending fall of Rome was linked to millennial prophecy. By studying political developments in France in the light of the Book of Revelation, evangelicals – the most habitual of all students of the Bible – felt confident that they were about to witness the dawn of a period in Christianity when anti-Christ would fall and the French nation would be saved. Ever since the Reformation, the Papal power had gradually decayed. Now its humiliation at the hands of France confirmed that it was on the brink of total ruin.¹⁵ At first it was believed that the new French state itself was God's instrument in bringing about the downfall of anti-Christ. But when Christian religion in France was replaced with a form of state deism, their exegesis had to be altered. It soon became evident that France itself was the beast prophesied in Scripture and, when war broke out between Britain and France, that Britain would be God's agent in its destruction.¹⁶ In this way evangelicals began to see themselves as God's chosen agents to disseminate the Gospel in France.¹⁷

It would be absurd to suggest that evangelical interest in France was the only motivational force behind the great evangelical missionary movement of the late eighteenth century. But it cannot be denied that from 1789 France was seen as virgin territory for evangelical mission. This was certainly true of the London Missionary Society and the Religious Tract Society where France was frequently discussed in society minutes and official correspondence.¹⁸ But was France also of central importance to the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society? It was not, if we believe the Mary Jones and Thomas Charles stories and if we depend on Joseph Hughes's questionable version of the society's founding. It was, however, if we view the founding of the Bible Society as a logical development or continuation of the objectives and goals of the Missionary and Tract Societies. Since all three societies shared virtually the same directors, it is inconceivable that France was not an urgent item on the agenda of the Tract Society subcommittee responsible for establishing the Bible Society. A brief examination of the Missionary and Tract Societies and

14. J. Griffin, *The Encouraging Aspects of the Times*, 2nd edn. 1806, 27 f.; Cf. C. Hole, *The Early History of the Church Missionary Society*, 1896, 54.

15. Cf. *Evangelical Magazine* (1), 1793, 163.

16. J. Griffin, *op. cit.*, 46 f.

17. Cf., D. Bogue, *The Diffusion of Divine Truth*, 1800, *passim*. Interestingly, David Bogue, who opened an academy for independent ministers in the 1780s, introduced French into the curriculum around the time of the Revolution. His express purpose was to prepare missionaries for France. See Methodist Missionary Society (School of Oriental and African Studies Archives, University of London) Home Correspondence Box 1: T. Coke to G. Highfield, 26 December, 1811.

18. For a detailed discussion of the Missionary and Tract societies, see R.H. Martin, *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain*, 1983.

the interest of their directors in France bears this thesis out and again raises questions about the paramount significance of Wales in the founding of the Bible Society.

France as a possible target for British missions was very much in the minds of several evangelicals when the creation of the London Missionary Society was under discussion during the mid 1790s.¹⁹ Millennial hopes nurtured this interest but French émigrés seeking refuge in London and constantly rubbing shoulders with key British evangelicals probably did much to help translate this interest into action.²⁰ When the London Missionary Society was finally established in 1795 and its directors were considering where to establish mission stations, it was John Townsend (1757–1826) Independent minister at Kingston and one of the Missionary Society's founding fathers (and later a director of the Religious Tract Society) who first suggested "that France and other countries under the dominion of the Papal See, should partake of the [Missionary Society's] intended benefits" and proposed Paris as the Society's first mission site.²¹ In this proposal Townsend was supported by two other Missionary Society directors: Joseph Hardcastle (1752–1819), a wealthy London merchant in whose business premises the future directors of the Missionary, Tract and Bible Societies would later meet, and David Bogue (1750–1825) who, along with Hardcastle, had visited Paris in 1784.²² But due to the very sensitive political situation in France in 1795, Townsend was overruled by a majority of the founding fathers of the Missionary Society and the South Sea Islands were selected as the first mission site.

Another supporter of a mission to France was Thomas Haweis (1734–1820), rector of Aldwinckle, trustee of Lady Huntingdon's Connexion and a director of the Missionary Society. In 1797 Haweis and Ambrose Serle, former under secretary for the Colonies and a wealthy Anglican layman, privately discussed the prospect of sending a mission to Paris, hoping eventually to interest the Missionary Society board. But a negative response from the French ambassador in London prematurely checked their scheme.²³

The early efforts of Hardcastle and Haweis were not in vain for by 1799, as a result of a more auspicious political climate, the Missionary Society was again willing cautiously to consider a French mission. First it tested the waters by communicating with its sister missionary societies on the

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19. As early as 1792 there existed in London an organization known as the French Bible Society. Its existence was shrouded in mystery and not even John Owen, the Anglican Secretary of the Bible Society, knew much about it. See J. Owen, *The History of the Origin and First Ten Years of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 1816, I, 26 f.; Cf., Canton, I, 3.
 20. Cf. A.S. Wood, *Thomas Haweis*, 1957, 186.
 21. J. Townsend, *Memoirs*, 1828, 56.
 22. J. Morison, *The Fathers and Founders of the London Missionary Society*, 1844, 80 f.
 23. A.S. Wood, *op. cit.*, 214.

Continent.²⁴ Then, in the spring of 1800, David Bogue submitted a plan "for promoting the Christian Religion in France, by circulating the New Testament, with a preliminary dissertation on the evidences of Christianity."²⁵

Bogue's proposal was bold not only because it assumed that evangelicals were about to engage in an offensive war against Satan's stronghold in which their objective would be the entire abolition of papal authority,²⁶ but also because the Bible, the most potent of all forces for the conversion of mankind, would be used as their principal weapon. How many evangelicals themselves had been converted by studying its pages? Even without commentaries and glosses, the Word of God was capable, when illuminated by the light of the Holy Spirit, of transforming men and women by its self-evidencing truth. In the Bible evangelicals found what they thought to be the most important instrument of conversion known and in France a perfect laboratory for its use.

Bogue's plan was unanimously accepted by the directors of the Missionary Society²⁷ and he immediately set out to prepare the address which would be prefixed to the Society's French testaments once they were printed.²⁸ The Society then decided in the peace year of 1802 to send a delegation to Paris to investigate ways of most effectively circulating the Bible in France.²⁹ It is important to note that three of the four members of this delegation — Joseph Hardcastle, Matthew Wilks and Alexander Waugh — were also directors of the Religious Tract Society and, as we shall see,

24. London Missionary Society (School of Oriental and African Studies Archives, University of London) Europe/Holland Correspondence B:1; F:1; J:A: Samuel Greethead to Missionary Society in East Friesland (draft), 1799. London Missionary Society Home Extra, B:1; F:1; J:E: J. Hardcastle and John Eyre to the Committee of the Basel Society, 4 March 1799. In this last communication the Basel Society was told that there were Englishmen who had been taking "much pains [*sic*] in acquiring the French language, on purpose that they might visit [France] with the glad tidings of the Gospel of Christ."
25. London Missionary Society Minutes, 7, 14 April 1800; 15, 19 May 1800; Cf., John Morison, *op. cit.*, 82. Bogue was encouraged in this by Joseph Hardcastle in 1800 who wrote to Bogue concerning France that "perhaps it would be advisable to compose new works, adapted to the actual state of the people in France, rather than republish old ones" and that "perhaps the [London] Missionary Society, or that for the Circulation of Religious Tracts, might consider this object as directly connected with those institutions." Cited in Morison, *op. cit.*, 80 f.
26. Cf. R. Lovett, *The History of the London Missionary Society*, 1899, 92 ff.
27. London Missionary Society Minutes, 15 May 1800; *Evangelical Magazine*, 8, 1800, 255.
28. London Missionary Society Minutes, 19 May 1800.
29. London Missionary Society Minutes, 17 May 1802. The deputation consisted of Joseph Hardcastle, Matthew Wilks, Alexander Waugh and David Bogue. See Morison, *op. cit.*, 83. For Waugh's diary of the tour see J. Hay and H. Belfrage, *A Memoir of the Rev. Alexander Waugh*, 1830, 228 f. William Wilberforce was very much interested in this tour. He wrote in his journal in 1802: "Mr. Hardcastle with me — going to France to enquire, etc., with a view to the diffusion of the Bible Assured by Fouché [prefect of Police in Paris] that he would assist them gladly." Cited in R.I. and S. Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 1838, III, 69; Cf., F.K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians*, 1961, 245. Wilberforce was one of the principal sponsors of the Bible Society when it was being planned between 1802 and 1804.

eventually involved in the early conversations of that society which led to the establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

The French tour had a profound impact on the directors of the Missionary Society convincing them that a French Bible and a French mission could be successful. Reporting that "the religion of Rome [was] fast verging toward its fall",³⁰ the deputation also told their colleagues in London that³¹

It is evident that a considerable number of the Papists are tired of Popery, and seem prepared to receive a purer system of faith. The Holy Scriptures, which are the fountains of divine knowledge, are not to be had here — at least it is difficult to procure them... This important defect, we trust, will soon be remedied, and [France will] become before long a land of Bibles.

Unfortunately the peace of 1802 turned to renewed terror and, later, war between Britain and France. The Society did finally publish a French New Testament in June 1803, but because of the war its distribution was limited,³² and the great Missionary Society plan never came to fruition. By then, however, the Religious Tract Society had taken up the cause of French Bibles.

The Religious Tract Society was established in 1799 as an ancillary organization to the more local domestic missionary and itinerant societies then being created, producing tracts and pamphlets for circulation by itinerant preachers as they toured the country in search of converts. Significantly, the Tract Society was founded by the directors of the London Missionary Society and its links with that organization were always close.³³ It should not surprise us therefore that in their early discussions of a separate Bible society, one of the most pressing issues on the minds of the Tract Society directors was, as with the London Missionary Society, French Bibles.

This was hardly coincidental. In fact we find a high degree of correlation if we compare the London Missionary Society directors who, between 7 April 1800 and March 1804 debated the publication of French Bibles and the establishment of a mission in Paris with the Tract Society directors who, roughly during the same period, planned the Bible Society.³⁴ As we have

30. London Missionary Society Minutes, 25 October 1802. Cf., London Missionary Society Scrapbook, Box A, Fol. 26: "Report Concerning the State of Religion in France" 25 October 1802; *Evangelical Magazine*, 10, 1802, 462.

31. Cited in Morison *Fathers and Founders*, 1839, 393 from a document dated 11 October 1802.

32. London Missionary Society Minutes, 20 June 1803. In July 1803 the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus, was presented with the first edition of this Bible. See London Missionary Society, Various Memoranda, 25 July 1803.

33. The idea was George Burder's, a prominent director of the London Missionary Society and minister of Fetter Lane Independent Church in London. Unlike the Missionary Society which was supported by a group of Calvinistic Methodists, Presbyterians and Independents, the Tract Society also enjoyed Baptist patronage from its inception.

34. Between 7 April 1800 and March 1804, the directors of the London Missionary Society debated publishing a French Bible twenty-six times. Seventeen of these directors also attended the founding meetings of the Bible Society (being held at the Tract Society between 7 December 1802 and March 1804) at least once. Thirteen of these attended five times or more.

seen, three of the four men who were sent by the Missionary Society to Paris in 1802 to explore the possibility of circulating French Bibles in that troubled country were also Tract Society directors and were themselves later involved in the Bible society discussions at the Tract Society. Indeed, in his biography of Joseph Hardcastle, one of the Missionary Society representatives sent to Paris, John Morison tells us that the first thing the delegation did when it returned to London from Paris was to brief the directors of the Tract Society on the French connection. Morison makes the point that this meeting took place "a few weeks before" that meeting of 7 December 1802 at which Thomas Charles appeared to introduce his concern for the paucity of Bibles in Wales.³⁵

But even before 1802, the Tract Society had been deeply involved in French matters. Since Tract Society correspondence for this period was destroyed by German bombing raids during the last World War we do not have detailed information about this involvement. But the early minutes of the Society, sketchy as they are, suggest that since its inception, the directors of the Religious Tract Society saw in France fertile grounds for mission. For instance, almost immediately after the Tract Society was founded in 1799, plans were launched to print tracts for French prisoners of war being held in British jails.³⁶ By June 1801 the Society had decided to print portions of the Scripture in French.³⁷ It was not until late October 1802 that the Society even noticed Wales, and then only to consider printing one Welsh tract.³⁸ Even after the famous 7th December meeting, the topic of French Bibles continued to be paramount in Tract Society discussions. At its anniversary in 1803, for example, when plans for what would become the British and Foreign Bible Society were well under way, S.W. Tracy, a director of the Tract Society, once again stressed the French connection in a major speech before that Society. As recorded in the Society's minute book, "the Rev. Mr. Tracy stated that in those countries which had been under the destroying hand of infidelity during the French Revolution the Holy Scriptures had been generally destroyed in the conflagration with other Religious Books which has occasioned such a scarcity as cannot possibly be supplied by the [London] Missionary Society."³⁹ He then went on to suggest that the new Bible society, now in an advanced stage of planning, would play a major role in this area. In the light of these and other statements current at the time it

35. Morison, *Fathers and Founders*, 1844, 86.

36. Religious Tract Society Minutes, 18 March 1800. Popular tracts included "Considérations Sérieuses" and "Doctrines et Devoirs de la Religion Chrétien", both written by William Alers-Hankey. They enjoyed a circulation of 5,000 and 11,000 respectively. Religious Tract Society Minutes 16 December 1800; 10, 16, 24 March 1802. Even Zachary Macaulay was involved in writing tracts for French prisoners of war. See Religious Tract Society Minutes, 9 September 1800.

37. Religious Tract Society Minutes, 30 June, 7 July 1801. See fn 25 above where as early as 1800 Joseph Hardcastle had suggested that both the Missionary and Tract Societies publish works in French.

38. Religious Tract Society Minutes, 26 October 1802.

39. Religious Tract Society Minutes, 12 May 1803.

would not be too presumptuous to suggest that Wales was not the exclusive reason — perhaps not even the principal reason — why the Bible Society came into being one year later, in 1804.⁴⁰

Why then did Wales receive more publicity than France in the annals of the Tract and Bible societies? Because we lack the early correspondence of the Tract Society committee which founded the Bible Society, the answer can never be certain. But at least one hypothesis might be suggested. The French Revolution, as we have seen, was an event of great fascination to most evangelicals. In it they saw, at various stages, the possibility of political enfranchisement, the downfall of the Papacy, the coming millennium and, of course, the possibility for mission. To non-evangelicals, however, and especially to High Church critics of the Revival, this interest was very suspicious. Fresh in their memories was the early support given to the French Revolution by evangelicals like David Bogue and Robert Haldane who applauded what they thought to be France's turn to democracy. More conservative evangelicals, especially Anglicans like William Wilberforce, deplored these statements.⁴¹ But the damage had been done. Through guilt by association, evangelicals — Dissenters as well as Churchmen — were seen by many as being French sympathizers and therefore enemies to Church and Crown.

Evangelical interest in France did not diminish as the eighteenth century drew to its close and indeed the conversion of "Popish" Europe — France included — was discussed quite publicly in sermons and in print. Concealed from public view, however, were the details of this mission. For example, before the London Missionary Society archives had been catalogued in their present form, material relating to the Continent, and in particular to France, was stored in a box marked "secret".⁴² Why this secrecy? In the first place, the correspondence was highly suspect, possibly illegal and certainly dangerous during periods of war: French agents of the Society usually had to work under cover, for fear of discovery by the French authorities who were constantly looking for conspiracies to justify repressive measures. The Bible Society in England did not want to reveal the identity of agents whose lives might be in jeopardy and thus they kept much of their correspondence from public view. But there was a second reason for wanting to play down

40. The importance of the French connection is highlighted when one compares the number of French Bibles printed by the Bible Society between 1804 and 1830 with the number of Welsh Bibles printed during the same period. French Bibles and Testaments totalled 441,590. Welsh Bibles and Testaments 299,401. From the *Twenty-Sixth Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 1830, 121.

41. For Wilberforce's opinion of Haldane, see C. Hole, *op. cit.*, 156. Other evangelicals, mostly Anglicans, also deplored this early support of the French Revolution. See J. Bull, *Memorials of the Rev. William Bull*, 1864, 221; J.D. Walsh, "The Yorkshire Evangelicals in the Eighteenth Century" (Cambridge University Ph.D Thesis 1956), 313. Cf., M.J. Quinlan, *op. cit.*, 90 f.; D. Lovegrove, "English Evangelical Dissent and the European Conflict 1789–1815", in W.J. Sheils (ed.), *The Church and War*, 1983, 263 ff.

42. This special classification was brought to my attention by Miss Irene Fletcher, Librarian emeritus of the Congregational Council for World Mission.

the French connection. As I have mentioned above, the early pro-French sympathies of certain well-known evangelicals when the Revolution broke out had given evangelicalism in general a bad name. By the century's end the Missionary and Tract Societies had to be careful about how they represented the French mission to the public. The dealings of these societies with Continental and especially French agents were innocent enough. But they could easily have been misinterpreted by the British public as being treasonous. Were these evangelicals planning with French agents how to send God's word in the form of Bibles to France and no more? Or were they really crypto-Jacobins secretly conspiring under the guise of a Bible society to join the French in a clandestine campaign to overthrow Church and Crown? The Societies did not want casual readers of their correspondence to accuse them of fomenting a Jacobin conspiracy against the government during war time.

Suppression of the French connection continued well into the nineteenth century, but even then embarrassing revelations surfaced. For instance, in 1815 Theophilus Aubazit claimed that certain "deputies" of the Bible Society were responsible for having financed and published in 1805 a French Bible, by itself an innocent (though erroneous) piece of information.⁴³ But a critic of the Society's, Henry Handley Norris, Rector of St. John's Hackney and a High Churchman, later picked up this piece of information and asserted that the Bible Society, through its foreign secretary, C.F. Steinkopf, had sent a mission to Napoleon without government approval in the hope of securing a subsidy for its French Bible. Not only did Steinkopf publicly acknowledge the right of Napoleon to the French throne but, according to Norris, the Bible Society later inserted into the title page of its French Bible "An. XIII de la République Française."⁴⁴ Even though this charge was discredited by the Bible Society,⁴⁵ it was proof to many of Jacobinical complicity in the Society's foreign operations.

The fear of being associated with the enemies of Britain during the panic years of the French Revolution and its aftermath explain to a large degree why the Missionary and Tract Societies and later the Bible Society were not eager to make very public their missionary interest in France.⁴⁶ Wales, therefore, turned out to be a much safer way to underline the urgency

43. See *Gentlemen's Magazine*, 85, 1815, 129 ff.

44. H.H. Norris, *A Respectful Letter to the Earl of Liverpool*, 1822, 193. Norris, *A Practical Exposition of the Tendency and Proceedings of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 2nd edn. 1814, 289 fn.

45. See J. Scholefield, *A Second Letter to the Earl of Liverpool*, 1822, 17 where, in a letter to Norris dated 23 July 1823, Steinkopf denied that the Bible Society published the 1805 edition or treated with Napoleon.

46. For more on the fear of Jacobinism in British society at this time, see V. Kiernan, "Evangelicalism and the French Revolution" *Past and Present*, No.2, 1952, 51; M.J. Thomis and P. Holt, *Threats of Revolution in Britain 1781-1848*, 1977, 5 ff. Lord Teignmouth, soon to become the first President of the Bible Society, expressed fear in 1801 that Napoleon was about to invade England. He would be very sensitive to charges of Jacobinism in later years. See C.J. Shore, *Memoir of the Life and Correspondence of John Lord Teignmouth*, 1843, I, 62 f.

of a need for a new Bible society. In the minds of most Englishmen at least, Wales was just as reprobate as France but, politically, much safer. Since the French correspondence of the Tract and Bible Societies was largely kept from public scrutiny until much later, the Welsh Bible crisis and later the Mary Jones story became convenient symbols around which generations of evangelicals of all persuasions would galvanize their missionary efforts. These symbols, however inaccurate they were historically, served the Bible Society well for many years.⁴⁷

ROGER H. MARTIN

A NEW TOWN STORY: THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE WARRINGTON/RUNCORN URBAN COMPLEX

The Warrington-Runcorn New Town provides for a variety of reasons rich source material for the historian of the post-Reformation church, not least of the Free Churches. Historically the two communities have certain similarities: both are proud of their Roman origins, both were in the middle ages the capita of extensive baronies and boasted religious houses (of Austin friars and Austin canons), both were in the seventeenth century little more than overgrown villages in what eager Puritans saw as a particularly "dark corner" of the land, both expanded into substantial towns in the Victorian era and both were designated New Towns in the 1960s. With local government reorganisation in 1972 they both found themselves in Cheshire at the same time as from a United Reformed standpoint they became part of the Cheshire District of the Mersey Province. From that date onwards, though separated by a jealously guarded strip of green belt, they have administratively and politically moved closer together, the Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal no longer constituting a significant barrier between them.

On the other hand there were from an early date certain obvious dissimilarities. Warrington was a "failed" new town of the middle ages, was a major marketing centre with a variety of market-based industries, and an important strategic centre, especially in times of civil strife, as it was the highest crossing point of the Mersey. Runcorn on the contrary from medieval times to the late eighteenth century was little more than a fishing village, springing into life only when it became a gathering place for the bargees and flatmen traversing the several newly-built waterways which decanted into the Mersey estuary.

Ecclesiastically too there is a marked difference: Runcorn possessed until well into the nineteenth century only one parish church, All Saints, a small edifice with a square tower founded about 1100. Warrington on the

47. I would like to thank Kathleen Cann, Archivist of the Bible Society, and Dr. John D. Walsh of Jesus College Oxford for reading the manuscript of this paper and making several valuable comments. The opinions expressed, however, are my own.

hand had had a parish church, dedicated to an obscure Celtic saint, Elphin, from Anglo-Saxon times. Rebuilt and enlarged at various times in the middle ages it housed at the Reformation two chantry chapels with an ancient grammar school nearby. It suffered, however, scandalous depredations in the 1530s and 40s: henceforth this impoverished living stood in sharp contrast to the neighbouring parish of Winwick, believed to be the wealthiest in England. A determined effort was made by the Puritan party to capture it in the early seventeenth century, but this, combined with the church's ruination during the Civil War, only resulted in an unusually large secession in 1662 under the ejected minister, Robert Yates. Yates's Presbyterian congregation was larger than that assembling in the parish church¹: by 1703 a meeting house had been built in Cairo Street which flourished to the point where in 1757 its minister, John Seddon, launched the famous Warrington Academy. This, till its closure in 1786, elevated the town to the front rank of Nonconformist centres of influence in the country. Warrington, grumbled a boorish Tory judge, James Curwen, was "ill-paved and abounded in Dissenters".² The academy also for thirty halcyon years made the town in the words of Donald Davie, "the literary if not the imaginative capital of the Kingdom",³ as well as leading to an unprecedented degree of cooperation between local Anglicans and Dissenters based on a shared liberal theology and secular idealism.

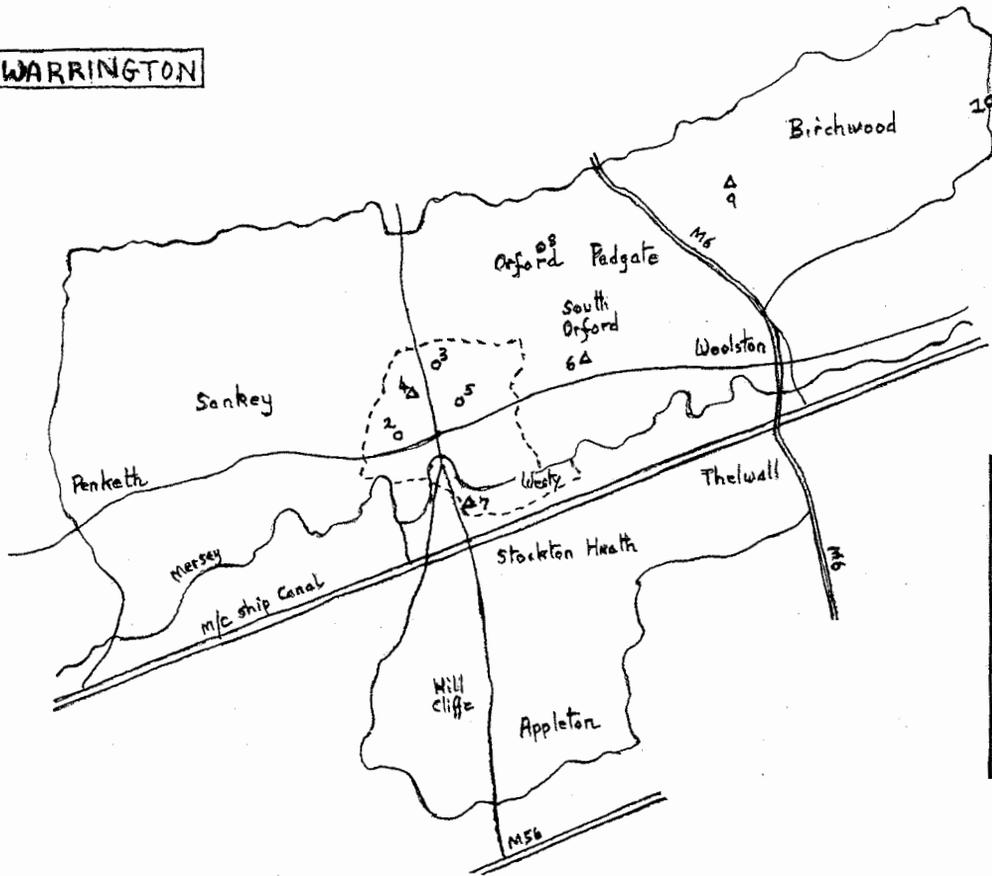
The purpose of this article is to assess the strength and prospects and take the temperature of the local Reformed churches at fifty-year intervals of their history, and from this standpoint, the scene having now been set, 1800 would seem to be an excellent starting date.

1800

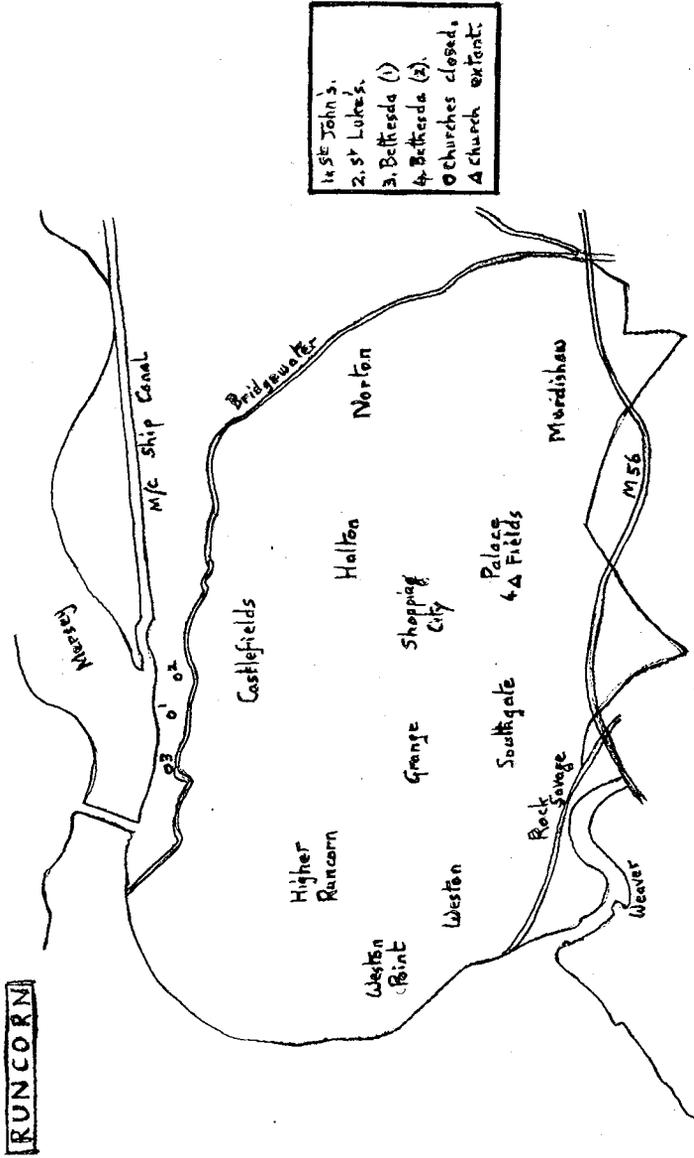
Runcorn in 1800 was a quiet village in beautiful surroundings, bypassed by the Warrington-Chester road and standing at the end of a cul-de-sac. Though still a fishing place it had become by the end of the eighteenth century a quite notable spa, "the Montpelier of Manchester", as the *Gentleman's Magazine* rather exaggeratedly described it in 1824. Its population then was a mere 1,397, but the new Sankey, Weaver, Bridgewater and Trent and Mersey Canals had rendered it in the words of the *Salford Directory* of 1802 "an astonishing place of business". The parish church remained the sole place of worship, though the Methodists of the Northwich Circuit had established a society here at least as early as 1798.⁴ Warrington's population in 1801 was 10,567, though this figure includes the numerous surrounding hamlets of this large parish: for Warrington proper this total should probably be halved. The community was growing fast, and becoming what it has remained, a "town of many industries", glass, pottery, sailcloth, beer, pins, wire, textiles and handtools. Its industry was heavily dependent on rural

1. Evans's List of 1717 shows it having 713 hearers, of whom 82 were county voters.
2. *Local Gleanings, Lancashire and Cheshire*, I, 1975-6, 262.
3. D. Davie, *A Gathered Church*, 1978, 123.
4. H.F. Starkey, *Schooner Port*, 1982, 21 ff, 228.

WARRINGTON



- 1847 Boundary.
- 1. Risley (1).
- 2. Flag Lane.
- 3. St John's (1).
- 4. Wyliffe.
- 5. Cokkedge Mission.
- 6. Elmwood Avenue.
- 7. St John's (2).
- 8. Orford.
- 9. Risley (2).
- Churches closed.
- △ Churches extant.



outworkers and the town itself was still remarkably compact, no terraced rows of workingmen's houses having yet appeared. Its employers moreover were small craftsmen and entrepreneurs and there was only an insignificant wealthier middle-class. Politically, following the angry rupture between Church and Dissent over the repeal of the Test Acts agitation in 1788⁵ a small Tory Anglican group of families, the *junto* as it was called, had resumed sway. The Dissenters of Cairo Street, reeling under the shock of the academy's collapse and with a succession of obscure and unsatisfactory ministers had shrunk into insignificance. Meanwhile Methodism had secured a firm lodgement in the town: the imposing Bank Street Chapel (1779) and its adjoining manse underlined its significance.

Independency had by this date made an appearance — by the not unfamiliar route of an “orthodox” secession from the now aggressively Unitarian congregation in Cairo Street. This occurred in 1779 and was at first confined to only five members. A small chapel with a graveyard attached was built in Flag Lane, off King Street, a short narrow thoroughfare containing two breweries (an area now occupied by the Golden Square shopping precinct), and membership had by the 1800s reached thirty. Unfortunately one of the regular worshippers at Flag Lane kept his membership elsewhere: John Howard the prison reformer who visited Warrington frequently to see his books through the Eyres Press which published them. John Rylands (1771–1848, generally referred to as John Rylands the elder) whose father had been manufacturing sailcloth in the town since 1760s was, however, a member here even before the family diversified into wire-drawing, while Margaret Armitage who bore a name soon to be distinguished in textile manufacturing and local Congregational circles was baptised at Flag Lane in 1798.⁶

These are small beginnings indeed. A number of factors seemed to be conspiring to render a Congregational cause difficult to establish and even harder to maintain: the pull of an ancient Presbyterian/Unitarian chapel, the distance from a region of firmly based, old-established Congregational Dissent, the smallness and impotence of the town's middle-class, the strength of the Anglican Tory hierarchy and its control of vast swathes of the local economy, brewing, agriculture, law and banking particularly, the highly mixed economy and multiplicity of local industries, always a barrier, as the sociologists remind us, to a successful incursion on the part of Nonconformity, and last but by no means least, the success of Methodism in capturing what “natural” Nonconformist constituency there was.

1850

In 1850 the population of Warrington stood at over 23,000, a 130% increase on the figure for 1800 but not impressive by the standards of other

5. For this controversy see G.M. Ditchfield in *English Historical Review*, Vol.89, 1974, and in *Transactions of the Lancs. and Ches. Historic Society*, Vol.126, 1976.

6. J. Hawthorn, *The Story of Stepney Chapel*, 1947: Warrington Ref. Library p.2465.

Lancashire towns. The town had been awarded an M.P. by the Great Reform Act of 1832 and had become a chartered borough in 1847. Though restrictive landownership inhibited expansion to the north, west and south, it had pushed out in an easterly direction and the new borough boundary was a fair reflection of its geographical spread by the late 1840s. Industrially the factory system had now taken firm hold, and two of the largest cotton mills were owed by Congregationalists, Cockhedge by the Armitages and Rigbys (whose principal home and chapel were, however, at Bowdon) and McMinnies' in Latchford. (Some of this family lived in Warrington though the senior branch was Rochdale-based). But the only other prominent Nonconformist family in the town were the Quaker Crosfields who had built up the soap-works at Bank Quay. The other commanding heights of the town's economy, machine tools, brewing and banking, remained firmly in Establishment hands. So too were local politics: Edward Hornby, son of the rector of Winwick, had held the parliamentary seat for the Whigs from 1832 to 1835, while John Blackburne, the squire of Orford Hall, and Gilbert Greenall the brewer kept the town in unbroken Tory grasp from that date till 1868. Relations between Church and Chapel were here not as embittered as elsewhere: Dissenting activists made little attempt to mount a serious threat to the local establishment and appeared happy enough in a subordinate role. In return Gilbert Greenall, remarkably for a brewer, was not ungenerous when it came to the building of a Nonconformist chapel, especially to the Wesleyans whose "no politics" rule concealed a surreptitious Toryism.

Circumstances were still therefore unpropitious for Congregational Dissent: indeed by 1850 Independency had all but disappeared. Stepney Chapel had not been able to compete with a sturdily growing Wesleyanism or with an equally vigorous Independent Methodism (stronger in Warrington, its original home, than in any other English town, and appealing to a constituency which without it might well have been Independent without the Methodist suffix).⁷ Stepney Chapel moreover had proved to be a turbulent cause, despite the care lavished on it by William Roby of Manchester and his students. There had been trouble over the erection of a gallery in 1802 and a small secession; a larger one had occurred in 1811 which led to the founding of a second Independent cause, Salem, in Golborne Street. The latter was even less stable than Stepney and quickly became a sort of Cave Adullam to which discontented elements from all over the town gravitated. Till the disputatious Salem dissolved and reconstituted itself as a Baptist church in 1855, its unsavoury reputation impeded the progress of Independency in the town, despite its having had a number of notable ministries, including that of the Rev. Edwin J. Hartland, later first secretary of the Congregational Church Aid and Missionary Society. Meanwhile Stepney had briefly enjoyed a happier period in the late 1830s and in 1841 a building committee headed by Mr.

7. Methodism and Independent Methodism had been particularly successful in the surrounding townships which Warrington was one day to absorb: Penketh, Bewsey, Padgate, Martinscroft, Latchford, Grappenhall and Appleton.

Peter Rylands had been formed to plan for a new church on a better site. Alas, troubles soon returned, Peter Rylands and all the male members of the family (though not the women folk) drifted away⁸ and in 1847 a despairing church secretary locked up the building and handed over the deeds to the Lancashire Congregational Union.

A shocked Union, appalled that Independency in a major Lancashire town had come to this, determined on an entirely fresh start. Neighbouring Congregational pastors lent their aid and so too did Dr. Vaughan of the Lancashire Independent College: not for the first or the last time local Non-conformity was nursed through a crisis by the neighbouring theological college. From the proceeds of the sale of Stepney Chapel and by dint of energetic fund raising a 700-seat chapel named Wycliffe costing just over £1,000 and built in a most attractive Anglo-Norman style was erected in Bewsey Street, a growing middle-class suburb of the town, and opened in October 1851.⁹ Preaching at the opening ceremony Dr. Vaughan dwelt on his favourite theme of the harmony of voluntaryism and an urban life style and expressed the belief that after fifty years' traumas Warrington Independency now had an assured future.¹⁰

Meanwhile the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion had made a belated appearance in the town. St. John's chapel (1808) had arisen from a secession from St. James parish church, Latchford, founded in 1777, an earnest Calvinistic cause which dwelt on the borderlands of Church and respectable Dissent and whose first two ministers had been trained at the Countess's Trevecca College. When a third minister nurtured in that tradition could not be obtained a split occurred and the seceders in 1806 took a room in Dallam Lane and moved in 1808 to a new, handsome, classical-style chapel in John Street (now a depository for fruit machines). Here a dignified form of worship using the Anglican liturgy and with robed clergy and vergers was introduced and the chapel formally joined the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, to which denomination it later again reverted after a brief flirtation with the United Presbyterian Church between 1830 and 1833.¹¹ But later Countess ministers were unable to expand or even sustain the work and in 1850 the church was declining fast. It was an impossible distance away from the nearest Countess chapel¹² and the Scots element in the congregation was pressing again for it to become Presbyterian. Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Huntingdonians at St. John's made uneasy bedfellows. Inevitably a split occurred (in 1853), the Congregational element moving

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8. By the 1850s the Rylandses were worshipping at the parish church, but not till 1886 did Peter Rylands finally "go to the bad" (in W.E. Gladstone's phrase) and join the Liberal Unionists.
 9. J. Hawthorn, *op. cit.*, B. Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity, Warrington, Wigan, St. Helens*, 1892, 227 ff.
 10. *Liverpool Mercury*, 26 October, 1851.
 11. The Countess's Wigan and Preston churches had joined the Congregationalists shortly after 1800.
 12. R.S. Robson, *The Story of Presbyterianism in Warrington*, 1914, 38.

away (equally inevitably) to Salem Chapel. The John Street cause appeared to be doomed but Robert Barbour of Bolesworth Castle, the Liverpool shipping magnate, stepped in and purchased the building and reopened it in 1854 as a member congregation of the Manchester Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of England. Better days seemed to lie ahead.

It was evangelistically-minded folk from St. John's with a number of the Countess's followers from Chester who hired a room in Runcorn about 1805. Their efforts were successful and a small chapel was built in St. John Street in 1818 at what was then the eastern extremity of the village. Shortly afterwards William Pennington, a large property owner, concerned at the spiritual destitution of the quarrymen and their families who lived and worked still further to the east in the strange no-man's-land between the Runcorn-Warrington and Bridgwater Canals erected at his own expense a small Congregational school/chapel, hoding about 250, called St. Luke's, formally opened in 1830 and situated at the end of Pennington Row.

It was another quarry owner, John Tomkinson of Liverpool, who was inspired to erect again at his own expense a second Congregational chapel, named Bethesda, in Vicar Road in 1835, situated in what was then a development area to the south of the original riparian community. St. Luke's and Bethesda both prospered, to some extent at the expense of St. John's, which rather like the Countess's church in Warrington declined sharply in the 1840s till in 1849 in accordance with a clause in the trust deed which provided for its settlement in the event of failure, it was handed over to the Welsh Presbyterians. Neither Bethesda nor St. Luke's was sufficiently strong to support its own minister and the latter, a wholly working-class church, was happy enough to become an "outstation" or "town mission" of the former.¹³ In the year 1850 which marks the half-way stage of the seven year ministry of J.T. Jesson, a former missionary in Tahiti, the two Runcorn churches were both prosperous and harmonious, and though both were in receipt of aid from the County Unions¹⁴ their combined membership exceeded 150 and as in the case of Warrington all seemed set fair.¹⁵

But even more conspicuously than in respect of Warrington, Runcorn Congregationalism was a poor relation to Wesleyan Methodism. By 1850 the population of the town was about 8,500 and though a shortlived attempt (1847-50) to secure independence from Liverpool as a separate customs port had failed, the docks were booming, particularly for the chemical trade which was developing in Runcorn itself and even more quickly in Widnes (then known as Runcorn Gap) across the Mersey where the Henderson and Gossage

13. The account of the origins of Runcorn Congregationalism given by F.J. Powicke in his Cheshire Union history is rather confused. A clearer narrative is provided by C. Nickson in his *History of Runcorn*, 1887, 215. St. John's Presbyterian Church later moved to Higher Runcorn where it remains.

14. Till 1885 they looked both to the Lancashire and Cheshire Unions; after that date to Cheshire only.

15. F.J. Powicke, *Centenary History of the Cheshire Congregational Union*, 1907, 137; S.H. Mayor, *Cheshire Congregationalism*, 1957, 27.

enterprises had already begun. In Runcorn, however, the predominant industry was Thomas Hazlehurst's soap works, and Hazlehurst, an ardent Wesleyan, built, endowed and opened an impressive number of chapels.¹⁶ So strong was the Runcorn Wesleyan Circuit indeed that it survived the bloodletting of 1835 and 1849 and the formation of a rival Free Methodist Circuit without too much difficulty. These events strengthened rather than loosened the grip of Methodism on the town.

The Reformed churches had by mid-century made only a partial and inadequate response to the industrialisation and population growth of these two Merseyside towns; their contentiousness both contributed to and was consequent upon their endemic weakness. What success had been achieved was moreover due largely to the dedication of four individuals, Tomkinson, Pennington and Barbour with their generous gifts and Dr. Vaughan, a concerned academic turned fund-raiser. Nursed into some degree of health they would now learn to fend for themselves — or so the two County Unions and the Manchester Presbytery devoutly hoped.

1900

By 1900 the population of Warrington had almost trebled from its 1850 figure to over 64,000. The older traditional industries had expanded and iron-founding as an adjunct to wire-weaving had made impressive strides in the Bewsey, Dallam and Latchford areas in the 1870s, attracting immigrant workers from other parts of the country, especially Staffordshire. P.P. Carpenter, minister of Cairo Street Chapel from 1846 to 1865 had given a fillip to the progressive forces in the town. The Liberals in "good" years like 1868 and 1880 were now strong enough to overthrow the Tory domination in both parliamentary and municipal politics. Market improvements, hospitals, parks and other municipal services had all made gigantic strides. The town was overwhelmingly working-class in social composition for though there were isolated pockets of middle-class residences most families of substance, including the Armitages and Rigbys, had fled to the outlying villages, especially on the Cheshire side.

Something of the expansive spirit of the times was captured when in 1873 following a number of short but successful pastorates Wycliffe outgrew its premises and the Rigby and Armitage families launched an appeal for a replacement. An impressive set of buildings ("in the Byzantine style freely treated") designed by George Woodhouse of Bolton and based on Hope Chapel, Oldham, was erected at a cost of £6,500. Towards this total the Rigbys gave a third, the Armitages a quarter and the McMinnies, Crosfields and Evanses (coal owners of Haydock) most of the rest. The huge tower was obviously intended to dominate the Warrington landscape, and the subsequent erection by Crosfield of the Liberal Club's premises on the other

16. His display cabinet contained ninety-nine silver trowels: he just failed to make the hundredth — H.F. Starkey, *op. cit.*, 150.

side of Bewsey Street underlined the challenge of an alternative culture to the hitherto dominant Anglicanism of the town, G.F. Armitage's personal contributions to designing the interior of the church were similarly intended as a reminder that Nonconformity's claims were cultural as well as political and economic.¹⁷

The speeches at the opening ceremonies in September 1873 are therefore a vignette of this particular phase of Nonconformist triumphalism. After Mr. S. Rigby had presented Mr. Z. Armitage with a silver trowel, the senior deacon, Mr. Murray, observed that they were building a chapel not for the wealthy but for the poor. (If by "poor" he meant the broad working class the remark was unexceptionable). Mr. Rylands eirenically if rather awkwardly spoke of Church and Dissent being engaged in the same kind of work. The Revd. Elkanah Armitage considered that the "heretic" was really a blessing to his age in that Darwin had at least forced everyone to reconsider his views. The Revd. J.B. Johnstone from St. John's Presbyterians bade the congregation look both to "the state of England" and "the state of Warrington". The Revd. J.G. Rogers preached confusedly on the glory of the Puritans, the churches' need for "more freedom and elasticity" and their chronic shortage of money, while Wycliffe's own minister, the Revd. G.S. Reaney, heartily disclaimed sectarianism — Nonconformity was "but an accident" (prophetic words: he was to end his career as an Anglican clergyman). There was a hint that not only the Establishment but even the Roman Catholics of St. Albans across the road secretly wished Wycliffe well.¹⁸ Secure in their magnificent new church which seated 1,100, Warrington Congregationalists could afford to be complacent.

Wycliffe was not the only religious foundation of the Rigby and Armitage families. In 1872 they took over a cottage meeting in Fennel Street and transferred it to a new Cockhedge Mission Room in Brick Street just behind their mill premises, with a day and Sunday school for ragged children actually inside the factory. A succession of lay missionaries was paid for by the proprietors, and by 1900 the mission room, which was returned as a branch station of Wycliffe and seated 150, was regularly filled to capacity.

Meanwhile, Wycliffe, despite its origins in a flamboyant type of industrial paternalism and the presence of its handful of lay grandees, exhibited working-class Congregationalism at its most impressive. G.S. Reaney (minister 1868–1876) was of a humble background, had established a day school in the old chapel as early as 1868,¹⁹ and built up before his departure to the slums of Stepney a vigorous and lively congregational life. His successor, John Yonge (1876–1912) from a similar background continued on the same lines, concentrating especially on the schools, the Christian Endeavour and

17. C. Binfield, *So Down To Prayers*, 1977, 175, 273.

18. *Warrington Examiner*, 6 September 1873.

19. For the poignant love story centred on Jane Sanson, a teacher at Wycliffe School, which links the church with Richard le Gallienne and his Romance of Zion Chapel and her lover, the Rev. T.C. Loudon of Salford, with the Yellow Book circle, see R. Whittington-Egan, *The Quest of the Golden Boy*, 1960, 79 ff.

that necessary adjunct to the late Victorian urban chapel, the P.S.A. By 1900 the joint membership of Wycliffe and Cockhedge was 355 with about 500 scholars, and Yonge, deeply involved in local radical politics, educational and licensing struggles and the activities of the railway unions, was acknowledged as Warrington Nonconformity's spokesman on questions political, social and theological. Great jubilee meetings were held in 1901 and in the presence of the mayor, Henry Roberts, a member of the church, J.D. Jones delivered a powerful address on "What We Stand For": the open door, the open Bible and the open mind. He foresaw the future as a time of uninterrupted progress.²⁰ Flushed with success, the church in 1901 erected the Rigby Memorial Hall in honour of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Rigby, a fitting gesture which, as one by one the moneyed families departed from the town, symbolised the passing of an era.

St. John's under a succession of ministers of Ulster or Scots extraction pursued a dour, unhonoured but probably more solidly-based course throughout the later Victorian years. It stood now at the edge of a notorious slum not far from the local blackspot, "Hell-Fire Corner" and its catchment area was entirely proletarian. Despite the success of James Warnock (pastor 1877-1900) its membership rarely exceeded one hundred and when Warnock died of typhoid in 1900 the future of the church in this particular location seemed in doubt.²¹ Not for this obscure Presbyterian congregation the rosy prospects of its more confident Congregational neighbours across that great social dividing line of Winwick Road which now separated the earnest and respectable working classes from a hefty segment of John Bright's residuum.

In Runcorn the two chapels pursued a routine and uneventful course. The town thrived in the 1850s and 1860s with new alkali, soap, soda and brickworks: it spread eastwards towards Halton, southwards across the Bridgewater and south-westwards to swallow up Higher Runcorn and threaten to engulf Weston village. The railway bridge across the Mersey to Widnes was opened in 1868, thus ending the town's isolation. The Runcorn Improvement Commission (authorised in 1852) had, however, an uphill struggle to prevent the community acquiring the sort of cramped, squalid and smoky appearance upon which the traveller on the new railway gazed down from his carriage window.

After 1870 development and population growth slackened markedly as the Mersey began rapidly to silt up: the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894, an enterprise which on balance adversely affected the town, coincided with its absorption after another brief period of independence into the Customs Port of Manchester, as well as with the conferment of a measure of local government autonomy in the shape of an Urban District Council.²² The two Runcorn chapels accurately reflect these ups and downs. In 1861 with a membership of well over one hundred Bethesda had built schools

20. *Warrington Examiner*, 11 September, 1901.

21. Anon, *St. John's Centenary Booklet, 1854-1954*, 1954.

22. H.F. Starkey, *op. cit.*, 149. ff.

costing £400 behind the chapel and a year later St. Luke's was completely renovated. But in the last three decades of the nineteenth century they scarcely held their own and by 1900 when the town's population stood at 16,500 they recorded a combined membership of only ninety-one. The heady confidence of the Wycliffe church was not shared south of the Mersey.

1950

Warrington in 1950 presented a melancholy aspect. The two World Wars had taken their toll, particularly of the churches, though the demand for barbed wire in both wars and the construction of nearby airbases in the Second War, had considerably stimulated the local economy. Even between the wars the variety of the town's industries had warded off the worst effects of the slump. Nevertheless despite borough boundary extensions in 1933 the population was now static at about 77,000, if not actually declining as the more enterprising families moved to the growing villages outside the municipality, to the west (Sankey and Penketh) east (Woolston and Padgate) and south (Thelwall, Appleton, Grappenhall, Stockton Heath and Walton). Industry too was firmly fixed in the patterns of the past – soap, tanning, textiles, steel and wire. Local authority housing spread rapidly after 1919: The Bewsey estate rose between the wars and Orford, to house 18,000, was Warrington's post war riposte to Manchester's Wythenshawe, believed to be the largest council estate in Europe. The town was drab, depressing in appearance, traditionalist, introverted,²³ and markedly lacking in leisure facilities. A nexus of Labour and trade union families was firmly and, it seemed, after 1945, unshakably in control: four of the most active Socialist families, Poole, Plinston, Edwards and Phoenix, had risen to prominence within the Wycliffe church.

On the whole the churches had survived the testing times of the past fifty years remarkably well. St. John's had boldly put its down-town premises up for sale and moved into a new £1,800 building on the Wilderspool Causeway in 1910. Their enterprise was justified: the membership rose to well over 200 by 1914 and despite the ravages of war new halls at a cost of £3,000 were built in 1929. When the church celebrated its centenary in 1954 membership stood at two hundred and all departments appeared to be flourishing. Meanwhile the Cockhedge Mission had not stood still. It too had moved out to a similar area of "byelaw", three-bedroomed, bay-windowed, mini-gardened terraced housing development in the Padgate/South Orford area, and a school/chapel costing £2,200 had been opened in Elmwood Avenue in 1913, to be supplemented thanks to a grand joint effort with Wycliffe by a magnificent £6,000 new church building in 1934. Elmwood, now with its own pastor, was granted independence from Wycliffe in 1935.

23. A psycho-historian might begin with the phenomenon of a rugby league town sandwiched between two soccer-crazed cities, or alternatively with the "Warrington-Avoiding Railway Line" whereby travellers between the two provincial capitals could shun even the sight of the wretched place which lay halfway along the route.

Meanwhile Wycliffe itself maintained its preeminence as the leading Free Church of the town. A succession of talented ministers, all from working-class backgrounds and nurtured in the best traditions of Congregational scholarship and social commitment, gave devoted service to the church: T.T. James, M.A. (1913–22), Dr. Newman Popplewell, M.A. (1923–33), C.A. Neave, M.A. (1933–49), H.B. Sackett, M.A., B.D (1950–71). But a first warning of impending difficulties for a town-centre church such as this had come in 1911 when the local authority had taken over the building which doubled as a day and Sunday school. The L.E.A. kept it open till 1932 when Bewsey Secondary School was built and then sold it for industrial purposes. The statue of John Wycliffe now surmounted the entrance to a shirt factory. It did so until 1957.

Wycliffe's ministers moreover were hard put to it to determine whether the church's future lay in the Bewsey area itself or within a more dispersed community. Thus when Dr. Popplewell arrived in 1923 the church was hailed by the *Warrington Examiner* as "traditionally the centre of philosophical thought in Warrington, regularly visited by people of other persuasions who desire enlightenment upon the Free Church point of view on questions moral, secular or social". But a more pressing matter for the deacons was whether his pastoral ministry could best be carried out by motor car in greater Warrington or by bicycle in the immediate vicinity.

Nevertheless after a long night of sorrows the austerity years of the late 1940s and early 1950s were not discouraging for the Free Churches, especially in youth and women's work, and in the hopeful atmosphere Elmwood and Wycliffe took up eagerly the challenge of the Congregational Union's Forward Movement appeal. A prime site on the rapidly developing Orford estate was acquired and the two churches between them raised £5,000 towards the initial cost of a church, hall and manse. Amid great rejoicings Orford Congregational Church on Coronation Avenue was opened in 1954 with a missionary, Freda Garner, in pastoral charge.

Runcorn in 1950 was still a dreary industrial town but one with a strong feeling of communal and civic pride. The transporter bridge still clanked and groaned its way across the Mersey and until road communications were improved the town would not expand its population of just under 24,000. The chemical industry, now overwhelmingly Runcorn's largest employer, had contracted sharply in the 1920s and early 1930s and hitherto independent units had been absorbed into the gigantic I.C.I., but there had been some recovery in the later 1930s and the Rocksavage Works had been opened in 1938. There had been little housing development between the wars but after 1945 the Grange Estate was developed to the south-east and several meaner streets in the old town were cleared.

The two churches were in good heart. Bethesda²⁴ had in 1904 by dint of

24. Anon, *Bethesda Congregational Church, Runcorn, Souvenir Handbook 1835–1935*.

a huge fund raising effort opened the Emery Hall behind the chapel, named after Miss Emery, the chief fund raiser and a working woman (a startling contrast with the near contemporary church extension at Wycliffe, Warrington). It had survived the First World War battered but still strong, and impressive centenary celebrations had been held in 1935 in which St. Luke's Mission (itself rebuilt the previous year) had heartily joined.²⁵ Dr. Garvie, addressing the centenary rally, congratulated the church on maintaining a lively witness in difficult circumstances and wished it well in its herculean task of raising the sum of £100.

Unhappily the celebrations coincided with another pastorless period in the church's history. Bethesda and its mission had always had a tradition of welcoming students fresh from college who would cut their teeth in this challenging small-town pastorate (sometimes the teeth were broken: two nineteenth-century ministers had departed for the Church of England and two emigrated). This had led to a succession of very short ministries, some of which lasted little more than a year. But the intervening gaps were getting longer and from 1929 to 1932 the church had been without a resident minister. Soon they would be longer still. After World War II, however, there was the same spirit of qualified optimism as prevailed in Warrington and in 1950, as its response to the Forward Movement Appeal, Bethesda determined to grant St. Luke's its independence. It was a grand but self-defeating gesture for two causes which had trouble enough to support themselves standing together and would find it impossible to stand alone. Relations became at once cooler and more distant, the larger church lending its premises to the smaller for Sunday School Anniversaries and allowing it one ministerial appointment per month.²⁶ Independence had been dearly bought.

1985

By 1965 Warrington was so run down and its bottle-neck traffic problems so serious that a feasibility study on its possible development as a New Town was undertaken. The New Town was designated in 1968 and a master plan produced the following year. This envisaged a community of 200,000 people by 1991 (subsequently revised to 170,000) divided into districts, each of which with its own facilities and isolating road systems would possess a "village" atmosphere. Industrial development would be of either a "high-tech." ("Science Park") or warehousing variety and the balance of private to tenanted housing would be about 7 to 3, with all districts targeted at achieving a sensible "social mix". The religious dimension was not prominent in the planners' thinking, for the churches were lumped together with sports and community centres under the label of leisure amenities. Of all new towns Warrington, which in 1984 had a population of approximately 150,000 is on any reckoning among the more successful.

25. *Ibid.* This shows that the church in 1935 had flourishing services of worship, a choir and a Sunday school, plus badminton and sewing groups.

26. Bethesda Church Records, Cheshire Record Office. Deacons' and church meeting minute books, sub 1950-1952.

It would be true to say that the United Reformed churches (the formation of the U.R.C. coincided with the first felt impact of New Town development) were too preoccupied with their own internal problems to make any adequate response to these developments, despite the urgings of District Council and Provincial Synod to do so. Their situation was parlous. The building of the Orford church had stretched the resources of Wycliffe and Elmwood to the limit and weakened them both in the process. Orford, situated in an overwhelmingly working-class area, would have needed vision, with pastoral and lay leadership of a high order, to get off the ground. Much was done, some of it heroic and unsung, but the times and the social environment were unpropitious: by 1970 the cause had been dissolved and the building sold. It is now a Health Centre. This development was observed with dismay by the Methodists who had hoped to take it over as a mission station. The Anglicans and Roman Catholics with four parishes between them now had Orford to themselves, apart from a small evangelical mission.

Meanwhile the founding churches, Wycliffe and Elmwood, were themselves struggling. Elmwood, situated in the older area of South Orford, was now in a twilight zone of an ageing population with a defensive and introverted communal psychology and a total level of church attendance of less than 2%.²⁷ Problems of finance and upkeep were now uppermost: in 1981 the fine church of 1934, its roof now unsafe, was used for the last time and put on the market. The congregation retreated to the original school buildings next door.

Wycliffe, its days of glory sadly departed, now stood forlornly in a clearance area, though Bewsey Street itself had been carefully restored as office accommodation in the late 1970s. Fewer options were open to Wycliffe than could have been wished. Its status as a listed building deterred potential buyers and made a move to the suburbs difficult; development as a mission centre with a variety of social agencies in the heart of the town had been preempted by the Methodists of Bold Street. Encouraged by a certain amount of house building in Bewsey Road and mindful of the decision of the Methodist Circuit to abandon their Bewsey Road chapel and of the Anglicans to close the nearby St. Paul's, Wycliffe determined to stay. By a process not unparalleled elsewhere the church has moved in the last ten years decisively to the theological right: the faith-healing, hand-clapping, dancing and glossalalia of this small but youthful congregation, most of them converts, would surprise the founding fathers, as would the adoption of believer's baptism. (The restoration of primitive Christianity at Wycliffe was not accomplished without some difficulty: the older members have retreated to the fringe, a bewildered minority). Yet Wycliffe remains loyal to the United Reformed Church and the United Reformed Church, rather nervously, to it.

St. John's meanwhile with some success endeavoured to throw off its image as the church for expatriate Celts ("the little Scots church on the

27. Information from the Warrington Voluntary Action Group (South Orford).

Causeway") and concentrate on its own immediate locality, in cooperation with the other Latchford churches. This has met with considerable success, though much of Latchford is heading the way of South Orford and is hopelessly overchurched, while one of its major population centres, Westy, a deprived and forgotten working-class housing estate, seems impervious to Christian penetration. St. John's remains a vigorous cause, but it has more than once in the past contemplated a move to the southern suburbs (scarcely touched by the Free Churches at all) and this remains a viable and attractive option for the future.

The delimitation of the New Town boundaries brought in one erstwhile village cause: Risley, the 1662 Presbyterian foundation which could be called the church of the narrow squeaks. It was only by a unique concatenation of events that Risley did not, like most old Presbyterian congregations, fall into the Unitarian net in the 1820s and 1830s and stayed loyal to orthodoxy;²⁹ it was little short of miraculous that the small congregation, dispossessed of its historic building in 1970 for motorway construction and sentenced to ten years' wilderness wanderings from mission hut to outhouse and back again survived at all.²⁹ In 1979 the congregation saw the erection of a new Thomas Risley church and manse on prime sites in the largely owner-occupier Birchwood housing area, though the compensation settlement for the Presbyterian day school (1850-1934) had to wait until 1983. Wisely the church and the district council determined to involve Methodists and Baptists in this project, and, though no formal sharing agreement was made or is envisaged, it owes much of its current strength to the support of the other two denominations.³⁰

The population of Runcorn had grown slowly from 24,000 in 1952 to 28,000 in 1964. In that year, with a new suspension bridge across the Mersey at last opened, providing an adequate road link with South Lancashire, the government, pressured into rehousing large numbers of the people of central Liverpool, turned its attention to this old Cheshire town as a possible host for a number of Liverpool families, with an eventual population of 100,000 (subsequently scaled down to just over 70,000). A master plan was drawn up by Professor Arthur Ling and published in 1967. Grave errors were made in the design of the new community: it was a mistake (already perpetrated in Kirby and Skelmersdale) to make provision solely for Liverpool people who are uniquely unassimilable *en masse* because they are uniquely loyal to their city of origin; it was even more short-sighted in view of developing social trends to fix the ratio of public to private housing at 5:1. The result

28. I. Sellers, "The Risley Case", *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, Vol. XVI, No. 4, 1978.

29. It is tempting to believe that negotiations for compensation were deliberately prolonged by the statutory authorities in the expectation that the congregation would fade away.

30. Ethnically the Thomas Risley church would make a fine study in itself. Wholly English till the coming of U.K.E.A. and B.N.F.L. to Risley in the 1940s and 1950s it then became almost entirely Scots: now it is 80% English again.

was predictable. By the mid 1980s Runcorn consists of the old town with a quaint charm recalling the happier days of a living community, and beyond, within and around a gigantic figure 8 express way, the heavily vandalised fantasia of the New Town.

The two Runcorn churches were in many ways more adaptable to change than those in Warrington. St. Luke's was first in the field. In 1968, with the chapel badly in need of rebuilding, the congregation decided to close and purchased a plot of land in the New Town area with a view to removal. Application was made to the Cheshire County Union for financial assistance but in the circumstances of the time none was forthcoming. Sadly discouraged the church disposed of both its sites and disbanded, a handful of members joining Bethesda. Canal Street, the approach to St. Luke's, now terminates at Runcorn Athletic football ground and the whole of the once flourishing area around the chapel, now isolated by an urban expressway, has reverted to the sandy, watery wasteland it must have been before Mr. Pennington and his quarrymen arrived in the 1820s.

Bethesda itself was compulsorily purchased in 1974: it stood in the way of a projected bus lane, though, as so often happens, the bulk of the site was not wanted and is now a public garden. Bethesda was alert enough to the realities of the New Town situation to negotiate with the Anglicans and Methodists with a view to a shared church agreement. The southern district of Palace Fields was chosen as Bethesda's new home, and after worshipping for two years in Palace Fields School a new, dual purpose building was opened in 1976. Bethesda is both a member church of the Methodist Circuit and a sister church of St. Mark's, Beechwood, in the Anglican parish of Hallwood. Its similarity to the situation of Thomas Risley in Warrington is obvious, though close Anglican-Free Church relationships are for complex reasons as feasible in the diocese of Chester as they are frankly impossible in the Deanery of Warrington. Yet in both towns ecumenism is clearly the only way forward.

The nadir of the United Reformed Church in the Warrington/Runcorn New Town seems to have been reached sometime in the period 1976-82 (rather earlier in Runcorn than in Warrington), the years when Dr. Huxtable was predicting that the Church could well expire within the next few decades. Since that time there has been a recovery, slight but significant, from the depths to which the churches had sunk in the hostile climate of the 1960s and 1970s. But what recovery there has been has inevitably, for causes so pitifully reduced to such miniscule numbers, occurred both within an ecumenical context and against a backdrop of indifferent and dismissive New Town officialdom. There is no favoured treatment for churches, nor would they desire such. Christians here are a pilgrim people and out of a common experience of exile and tribulation new expressions of Christian faith and commitment are struggling to be born.

APPENDIX
Membership Statistics, 1900–1984

| | 1900 | 1925 | 1950 | 1972 | 1984 |
|----------------------------|------|------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| Wycliffe } Elmwood } | 364 | 300 100 | 227 180 | 140 130 | 71 60 |
| Risley | 11 | 34 | 36 | 64 | 64(89)* |
| St. John's | 106 | 188 | 199 | 203 | 133 |
| Bethesda } St. Luke's } | 91 | 110 | 120 35 | 60 — | 34(110)* — |

*Total memberships of these united churches shown in brackets.

IAN SELLERS

REVIEW ARTICLE:
THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY REVISITED

The Assembly of the Lord: religion and politics in the Westminster Assembly and the "Grand Debate". By Robert S. Paul. 609 pp. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985.

The appearance of this book is something of a *tour de force*. It is thirty years since Dr. Paul published *The Lord Protector* and more than twenty since he produced a facsimile edition of the Dissenting Brethren's *Apologetical Narration*. Throughout this period he has remained fascinated by the Westminster Assembly. Several of the articles from his pen which have appeared in a number of journals not easily accessible on this side of the Atlantic, as well as the notes to his edition of the *Narration*, have been, to a degree, preparatory studies for the present volume. The first thing, therefore, is to acknowledge a rare fidelity and to congratulate Dr. Paul on his completion of an enterprise beset with difficulties.

The primary source, the three volumes of the Assembly's Minutes preserved in Dr. Williams's Library, exists only in an abbreviated form and with lacunae, and is in a hand, and in places a shorthand, hard to decipher. Fortunately a transcript made by a former Director of the British Museum, Sir Edward Maude Thompson, has turned up in the Library of the Church of Scotland and is now available on microfilm. Dr. Paul has had to relate to these Minutes the official publications put out by the Assembly or by the Dissenting Brethren, together with pieces by other writers approving or controverting these, and also the Assembly's correspondence with the Reformed Churches of Europe.¹ He has had to reconcile with the Minutes the

1. The resultant activity in the Netherlands is summarized by K.L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism*, 1982.

more personal accounts of the Assembly's debates to be found in the *Journals* of one of its members, John Lightfoot, and in the *Notes* of George Gillespie and the *Letters and Journals* of Robert Baillie, two Scottish Commissioners to the Assembly who, though not members of it, had considerable influence, Gillespie as the Scots' "most active spokesman", Baillie indefatigably behind the scenes. In addition, he has had to keep his eye on what was happening outside the Assembly: in Parliament, which had called it into being and on one occasion voted it guilty of a breach of parliamentary privilege, for on the approval of Parliament the determinations of the Assembly depended for any *locus standi* they might have; and also in the country at large, as the Civil War swayed now this way, now that. As successive defeats and victories made Parliament aware of its continued need of the Scots or, conversely, increasingly confident of its own army, there were repercussions, either way, in the Assembly. This political aspect of the subject is of the greatest interest to Dr. Paul: to it he returns again and again.

The result is a book of over six hundred pages. It could with advantage have been shorter. Perhaps because it has been so long on the stocks, repetitiousness has become almost a mannerism. To quote Baillie is irresistible, but one should not constantly quote the same passage two or three times! To describe "old Mr. Wilkinson" (he was born in 1566) as "that exemplar of English Puritan conservatism" hits him off, but when he reappears as "that doughty champion of traditional English ways" the effect is weakened. Stephen Marshall is linked notionally with his "son-in-law"² Philip Nye as many as four times.

But Dr. Paul's interest is in the ideas rather than in their proponents, and especially in the ecclesiology hammered out; and on the parties in the Assembly, and their perpetual shifting and refining and hardening, he is often illuminating. He points to the conservatism natural in men who, as incumbents of livings, ordained by bishops, presented by patrons and provided for by tithes, were implicated in the established order and who also continued to be spiritually responsible for their parishes. Such men would tend to approve of what was constitutional, including the authority of Parliament, and could be drawn towards an Erastian position; equally naturally they might cling to the traditional authority of the rector, in defence of a clerical professionalism. Either way they were not Presbyterians, at least in the Scottish *jure divino* sense; and what Dr. Paul's exposition reveals is, in effect, the gradual conversion of the majority of the Assembly, whether through an appeal to Scripture, the force of logic, political pressures or the need for

2. Marshall was only two years older than Nye! It was Nye's son to whom Marshall's daughter was married. Such slips are few; but Baxter did not have a pastorate in Acton (526, n.7) and the Janeway praised by him was not Andrew but Andrew's brother James (119, n.79); the name of Cromwell's cousin was Lady Masham, not Mashman (128, n.79); Peter Smith's Hertfordshire living was Barkway, not Backway (206, n.37); Ephraim Pagitt's *Heresiographie* ran into 2, not 25, editions in its first year (124, n.63); Goodwin's church at Oxford was in no way limited to his students at Magdalen College (48, n.97).

something to replace the episcopal system in the parishes, to *jure divino* Presbyterianism.

The final rupture between Presbyterians and Independents did not come about, Dr. Paul shows, till late in the Assembly's deliberations, in February–March 1644–5, over the power claimed for the presbytery to excommunicate: "I am for suspension, but for this authoritative power, I am against it"; "that that I question is the word authoritative" (Goodwin). But it had surfaced earlier in debates over the rights of the congregation and the power claimed for synods. "These two notions of power and jurisdiction are separable... our debates here are of authority, but not of jurisdiction" – "A synod has authority but not jurisdiction" (Nye); the decrees of the so-called Synod of Jerusalem "is not an act of Jurisdiction", "not coercive but persuasive" (Goodwin); "that which is of a coercive power those assemblyes have not" (Carter). Ordination, again, is not "an act of Jurisdiction but of blessing, therefor they may call in others" (Goodwin).

Dr. Paul urges at several points that the Independents no less than the Presbyterians believed their position to be *jure divino*. This I find unconvincing. The Independents believed that there was a platform of government for the churches, under the gospel, laid down in the Scriptures, and on this account could align themselves with the Scots against the Erastians; but what was it? They did not have a church order already established in their sights, as the Scots did, they were seeking an order still to come. This is why at the beginning they (unsuccessfully) requested a discussion of the ways whereby to judge what it was; why they exhibited the "principle of mutability" which Baillie found so offensive in them; and why increasingly they insisted that they must have liberty in which to work it out. Here Dr. Paul has not taken the force of the millenarian aspirations which in *Pulpit in Parliament* (1959) Professor J.F. Wilson reveals as a contradistinguishing mark of the Independents, or felt the dynamic quality springing therefrom portrayed by Professor Tai Liu in *Discord in Zion* (1973).³

But whatever reservations one may have about some of Dr. Paul's interpretations, what one returns to in admiration is his majestic tenacity in patient analysis of material which others might put aside as intractable. Here in conclusion are a few nuggets from the debates, drawn almost at random. "What a confusion it will prove to have congregations independent" (White-locke). "We suppose a minister may be a minister that is not ordained" (Nye). "There may be a fundamental error in one age, that is not a fundamental error in another" (Nye). A national synod "Judges all and is Judged of none" (Goodwin). "The greater the church, the more likely to become corrupt" (Goodwin).

The book is attractively produced and comfortable to hold; the notes

3. Professor Liu discusses *Certain Considerations to Disswade Men from Fvrther Gathering of Chvrches in this present juncture of Time*, a piece of interest because of the Independents' names among its signatories, which, though included in Dexter's bibliography (no.945), is not identified here (188).

are at the foot of the pages, and there are excellent indexes of subjects as well as persons; misprints are remarkably scarce. Publisher and printers as well as author deserve thanks for a work in which students of religion in seventeenth-century England, not least those in doubt about the nature of Puritanism, will long quarry.

Geoffrey F. Nuttall

REVIEWS

The Reformation of the Heretics. The Waldensians of the Alps (1480–1580). By Euan Cameron. Pp.291. Clarendon Press. Oxford, 1984, £22.50

On the hillside above the village of Chanfaron in the Piedmontese Alps stands a monument. It commemorates a famous synod in 1532 which supposedly decided that the medieval heretics, the Waldensians, would acknowledge themselves as associates of the European Reformation. The synod plays a critical part in the traditions and history of that interesting, though now much scattered and dispersed community, the Evangelical Vaudois Protestants. Euan Cameron's book — elegant, scholarly and precise — proves convincingly that the plaque commemorates nothing more than an elaborate myth, much of it created by Protestant martyrologists in the sixteenth century and perpetuated among its apologists in the seventeenth century. There was no synod at Chanfaron which decided anything. The process by which the Vaudois were absorbed into the Reformation was anything but easy and automatic — rather it took at least until the 1560s and parts of it were a takeover and not an amalgamation. The patterns of belief among the pre-Reformation Waldensians differed at almost every point from those of later, more "magisterial", Protestant theologians in the Sixteenth Century.

Dr. Cameron never underestimates the difficulty of recovering the beliefs of the Waldensians before the Reformation. He is aware of the distortions caused by relying on Inquisition documents, particularly since, as he notes, Catholic churchmen were very unsystematic in their approach to these heretics. Trials and persecution could be random and predatory or they could be systematic and thorough. But one cannot rely on Protestant commentators either, for the popular nature of Waldensian beliefs was unlikely to receive either their understanding or sympathy. The medieval Waldensians were, above all, from isolated, rural, village communities. They expressed their beliefs not in written confessions and treatises of logical theology but in epithets and proverbs which generated their own form of force, clarity and conviction. "In the other world, you can only go to heaven or hell" was, by implication, an attack on purgatory but the Waldensians did not carry this to any logical conclusion. They continued to pray to saints and accepted the calendar of feast days and were perplexed when Genevan Protestants asked them to desist. "You can as well pray at home as elsewhere" suggested a

rejection of church worship which was not intentional. The Waldensians often worshipped in church but they also had their "barbes" to lead them. These were not the equivalent of Protestant ministers; the evidence tends to suggest that they were the lay leaders of village society or senior tenant farmers. They certainly created little, if anything, of a church organisation or Waldensian "movement" which was in any way a prototype for the protestant reformation. When Waldensians were forced by the Inquisition to write confessions of faith, they proudly demonstrated their loyalty to all the tenets of Catholicism. No wonder the Genevan Protestants treated them with suspicion.

But the early Protestant reformers could not ignore the Vaudois. They were suffering persecution for something and that created a bond of unity through the years of first formal and informal contacts around 1530. Although there was mutual misunderstanding and hostility both Waldensians and reformers were aware that, to some extent, they needed each other. The Waldensians wanted the practical protection which the reformation would afford them; the reformers were grateful to have a clearly hypothetical antecedent to the reformed church which Waldensianism provided for them. But in the years from 1530 to 1580, Protestant reformers working among the Alpine communities of the Vaud would find that the existence of Waldensianism made it little easier to gain the consent of the rural world to Protestantism than it proved to be elsewhere.

Many of the documents utilised by Dr. Cameron were collected by James Ussher, the distinguished professor of theology at Trinity College Dublin in the first half of the seventeenth century and they now exist in British and Irish libraries. He used them to construct his exposition of the unbroken succession of the Christian (Protestant) churches. He would doubtless have turned pale (as some Vaudois may today) to see the case for continuity so completely demolished. But he would have appreciated the skill and professionalism with which it was accomplished. No service can be done to the cause of the reformed communities, or to the study of history itself, if the myths of a previous generation of confessional historians are perpetuated.

M. GREENGRASS

Readers of this *Journal* are perhaps unlikely to have noticed the Royal Society of Chemistry's special publication no.48 *Oxygen and the Conversion of Future Feedstuffs* (1984) — an unpromising title for Nonconformist historians. However these proceedings of the third Priestley Conference include a number of historical articles dealing with Joseph Priestley, the scientist, reformer and Unitarian. Notable amongst them are J.H. Brooke's " 'A Sower Went Forth': Joseph Priestley and the Ministry of Reform", D.M. Knight " 'Fresh Warmth to our Friendship': Priestley and His Circle", D.A. Daventport's "Priestley in America: 1794–1804" and J.W. Ashley Smith's "Priestley and the Dissenting Academies". For those with a taste for satire the illustrated "Priestley in Caricature" by M. Fitzpatrick should prove attractive.

A. ARGENT

Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750–1850. By David Hempton. Pp.276. Hutchinson, London, 1984. £13.95.

Elie Halévy's long-lived suggestion that Methodism saved England from revolution in the nineteenth century has dominated discussion of Methodism and politics for the last eighty years. In 1935 Ernest Taylor in a Cambridge University prize essay sketched the tension between conservative and liberal forces in Methodism, arguing that in the first half of the nineteenth century the latter gradually displaced the former. Dr. David Hempton now offers us a much more sophisticated picture than either of these. The result is a brilliant synthesis of the best of recent Methodist denominational history and the work of secular historians on popular politics, soundly based on original research in the Methodist archives.

The early chapters on the period before 1820 show how the Wesleyan leadership coped with the rapid expansion of Methodism at a time when the Revolutionary Wars made it seem an increasingly dangerous phenomenon. Their almost neurotic anxiety to reassure the government that Methodists were not revolutionary meant that, despite the failure of Sidmouth's repressive bill of 1811 and the (largely Wesleyan-inspired) new Toleration Act of 1812, the government's intention of neutralising radical tendencies in Methodism was achieved. The Wesleyan leaders drove out the radicals from their ranks, and separated themselves from that section of working class opinion for ever. Indeed it is possible that Methodist growth after 1815 may reflect popular Tory sentiment among respectable artisans and shopkeepers as much as nascent liberalism. Such a view would tie in with the emphasis Dr. Hempton places on anti-Catholicism in Wesleyan life. The Roman Catholic Church, especially in Ireland, was seen both as the enemy of constitutional liberty and as the obstacle to missionary advance. Such anti-Catholicism, combined with a residual respect for the Established Church, made Wesleyans extremely suspicious of voluntarist remedies for political problems: thus Wesleyans detached themselves from the attitudes of political dissent on education and the Establishment in the 1830s and 1840s. However, Peel's policy of tactical concession and in particular his willingness to support an increased government grant to Maynooth, the Irish Roman Catholic seminary, meant that Bunting's political hero failed him. By 1850, therefore, despite the effort to maintain discipline by expulsion of dissidents, the scale of disaffection and criticism of Buntingism meant that traditional Wesleyan ministerial Toryism was much weakened. Even so a Tory inclination persisted, though the voting behaviour of Wesleyans was always determined by local as much as national circumstances.

Dr. Hempton's book is fascinating in itself, though inevitably only a hazy picture emerges of the attitudes of ordinary Wesleyan layfolk. It also raises some questions for those readers from other nonconformist traditions. How do we react to the view that "missionary optimism is the main reason why English Methodists in the mass never surrendered to the millenarian speculation of the Reformed churches" (p.77)? Can the difference in emphasis

between anti-Catholicism and voluntaryism illuminate Congregationalist political attitudes in the 1830s and 1840s? How far are nonconformist political attitudes shaped by theological beliefs or by the political consequences of particular institutional affiliations? By so clearly raising these and other questions Dr. Hempton has placed us all in his debt.

DAVID M. THOMPSON

Strategist for The Spirit. Leslie Hunter, Bishop of Sheffield 1939–62. Edited by Gordon Hewitt. Pp.viii, 200. Becket Publications, Oxford, 1985. £3.95.

A study of Leslie Hunter deserves notice in this *Journal* on several counts. Hunter was not just a great bishop who put his diocese on the ecclesiastical map for the first time, he was also a bishop in a new mould, the first perhaps of the modern diocesans, a man whose innovations ("strategies" is not really the right word) and whose disciples have had their effect on all the English churches. The promoter of the Sheffield Industrial Mission and of William Temple College, the episcopal upholder of lay and female ministry, and of what became Christian Aid, must command our attention. More yet, Hunter was at once product and producer of those golden S.C.M. generations whose last outworking is now in the senior ranks of our churchly bureaucracies. He rediscovered for Englishmen the Lutheranism of Scandinavia (which suited him more than that of Germany) and he warmed to the Reformed Churchmanship of Taizé. And he was his father's son.

That is his chief claim to our present attention. Here is not just another bishop reared in a manse. Here is John Hunter's son. John Hunter (1848–1917), of York and Hull, but especially of Trinity Church Glasgow and, though briefly, of the King's Weigh House, was a formative influence for many Congregationalists as Independent, as preacher, and as moulder of worship. Leslie Hunter's notably sensitive biography of his father (1922) is a model of its kind. It contains no hint that this study of a Dissenting pastor is by an Anglican priest. Leslie Hunter as John Hunter's son neither reacted against his father nor developed from him: he reinterpreted him.

This background is described in the collection of essays which Gordon Hewitt has carefully shaped into the next best thing to a proper biography, but it is not their prime concern and therefore questions which we would need answered have not been asked.

Why did Leslie Hunter go to Oxford and not to a Scottish university? Why did he decide to take orders in the Church of England, yet submitted to no formal ministerial training? Had he been a Methodist would he have crossed over? (His wife, incidentally, came from a firmly Wesleyan farming and ministerial family and Leslie would have made a great Secretary of Conference). Why the Church of England rather than that of Scotland? Was it a sense of pulpit inadequacy, for Leslie could be tiresomely dull as a speaker? Was it the degree of sensible snobbery natural, even necessary, to a man with the executive urge? Was it the wider horizons first offered by S.C.M.? Was it a sense of the inadequacy of his father's Independency, for

John, though a great Independent was a poor Congregationalist? These are important questions because though Leslie was no Low Churchman he seems to have had no high or particularly Catholic view of the Church. He was neither pragmatist nor mystic. So what made him a *great* churchman and what was the quality of that greatness? An exploration of this would have enlightened admirers outside the admiring circle. It would also have elicited a distinctive and impressive apologia for a National Church. This the distinguished essayists do not really explore. Very properly, for they represent the able people caught in the legendary snare of the Hunter, they have collaborated in a celebratory volume and they have made a good job of it. The consequent likeness is shrewd enough. It has faint shadows though no real warts. Yet a warty treatment would have liberated Hunter's greatness.

J.C.G.B.