

CORNISH METHODISM, REVIVALISM, AND POPULAR BELIEF, c. 1780-1870D. H. LUKER, JESUS COLLEGE, OXFORD. TRINITY, 1987. [c. 1988]

In this regional study of Methodist development and societal influence throughout the period of industrialisation, recent trends in Methodist historiography at a national level are combined with the research and source material accumulated at a local level, to provide a detailed analysis of Methodist growth in Cornwall between the years 1780 and 1870. The thesis is divided loosely into three sections. In the first, four chapters outline the essential background to interpretative analysis by considering, in turn, recent historiographical developments in Methodist studies; social change in Cornwall during industrialisation; the performance of the Anglican Church in the county as represented in the Visitation Returns for 1779, (as well as historical and structural reasons for its 'failure'); and Methodist growth as expressed through available statistical indices, especially the date of formation of Methodist societies, and the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census. In the second section, one long chapter is devoted to an in-depth, county-wide analysis of Methodist growth, which considers the impact of external factors, particularly socio-economic, and internal circumstances, such as the degree of maturity of pastoral and administrative machinery, and the level of Connexional or lay control over chapel and circuit affairs, on the form and function of Methodism in nine distinct socio-economic regions within the county. In the third section, four chapters concentrate on West Cornwall, where Methodism was strongest, in order to examine the roots of, and reasons for, the distinctively indigenous form of Methodism which developed there. On the one hand, the pastoral and administrative difficulties in exerting adequate Connexional control are considered; while on the other, an interpretation of the 'folk'

(ii)

functionality of revivals and of Methodism as a 'popular religion'
is offered.

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There is an irony in the stimulus which E. P. Thompson gave, and continues to give, to Methodist studies. The present work began, at least in part, from the far from original notion that in The Making of the English Working Class he both exaggerated the degree to which Connexional authorities controlled their 'movement' in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and undervalued the real or perceived threat that religious dissent presented to the social and political Establishment in early industrial England. Above all, it was felt that the essential social functions that Methodism may have performed during the process of industrialisation could be more fully comprehended only by further careful, in-depth research and analysis at the local level.

As the present work developed, two distinct historiographical traditions determined much of the form that it took, and suggested the kind of questions which needed to be answered. In the first place, Methodist studies at the national level over the past twenty years have enjoyed the reinvigoration of fresh insights and new research material and methodologies. In particular, three key historiographical trends can be pinpointed, which together have guided much of this work. W. R. Ward's Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850, and his two-volume edition of the correspondence of Jabez Bunting, penetrated more deeply than previous work into Connexional politics and administration, and provided the basis for a more sustained linkage of Methodist with secular social and political developments between the mid-18th and mid-19th centuries, most recently demonstrated in David Hempton's Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850. Secondly, a concern among social historians with 'mentalities' has helped foster more informed

and complex analyses of Methodist 'experience' at the plebian level, most notably in the work of John Walsh. Deborah Valenze, in Prophetic Sons and Daughters has adopted this approach to understanding Methodism as a social epiphenomenon, combining a sympathetic view of the role of popular religion with the language and methodology of a social historian, in her study of sectarian Methodism in several regions of early industrial England. Thirdly, the utilisation of more sophisticated quantitative methods of analysis and sociological conceptualisation, as by Alan Gilbert and Robert Currie for example, has provided a more detailed and refined picture of church growth by region and occupational class, and generated new theories of Methodism's socio-political effects. One prime aim of this thesis has been to incorporate each of these major advances in recent historiographical methodology and interpretation in a study of one of the key regional strongholds of Methodism in the 19th century.

In the second place, and reflecting the continued vitality of Methodism in Cornwall, the past thirty years or so has witnessed the publication or presentation in theses of a large corpus of local Methodist historiographical material, which has also directly influenced the present work. On the one hand, in a number of instances where themes have been covered adequately elsewhere, as with Anglican-Methodist relations, further mention has seemed unnecessary. In others, as with the Bible Christians or the other local sects and denominations which sprang up from the Wesleyan base, detailed background material has been avoided, for reasons of space, in the knowledge that it can be located in recently published books and pamphlets. On the other hand, and more importantly, it was felt that too much material of significance for the way in which Methodist growth and influence is perceived at the national level, has remained buried in local histories or essentially 'uncovered' in local archives and collections. Much of this material

has been utilised where possible, in particular in Chapter Five, where an attempt is made to describe and analyse Methodist growth across the county in some detail, by dividing it into nine distinct socio-economic regions.

The thesis is loosely divided into three sections. In the first, four chapters outline the essential background to later interpretative analysis. In Chapter One, recent historiographical developments in Methodist studies are considered in more detail, and the theory expounded that the social impact of Methodism might be assessed with greater accuracy if Methodist growth is understood as the partly haphazard result of a constant internal tension between the three distinct but interdependent parts of the Methodist 'movement': the Connexion, the chapel, and the community. In Chapter Two, some aspects of social change during the period of industrialisation are introduced, which affected the form that Methodism took in both mining and agricultural regions of the county. In Chapter Three, an analysis of the performance of the Anglican Church in terms of attendance as represented in the Visitation Returns for 1779, argues that in essence long-term historical and structural factors were primarily responsible for its poor showing in the late 18th century. In Chapter Four, a preliminary analysis of Methodist growth in the county focuses on two sets of data which can be gathered at the level of the parish – the date of formation of the first permanent Methodist society, and indices of attendance recorded in the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census – to introduce endogenous and exogenous factors which assisted and inhibited local Methodist development.

In the second section, the county is divided into nine distinct socio-economic regions, and in one long chapter an in-depth, county-wide analysis of Methodist growth is provided, which considers the impact of 'external' factors such as the size of parishes and population, the

economic and employment base, and the effects of industrialisation, and 'internal' circumstances, such as the degree of maturity of pastoral and administrative machinery, and the level of Connexional or lay control over chapel and circuit affairs, on the form and function of Methodism in each region. The chapter serves three main purposes. In the first place, it supplements the largely statistical and general analysis of church growth provided in Chapter Four with additional colour and tone. In the second, it ties together many of the scattered and often highly localised studies of Methodism in the county which have already appeared – and fills a number of gaps which have remained – to provide the first descriptive analysis of Methodist growth across the whole county. In the third place, it acts as a bridge between the first and third sections which both confirms and expands the introductory analysis that precedes it, and suggests the key themes of the final section.

In the final section, four chapters concentrate on West Cornwall, where Methodism was strongest, in order to examine in more detail the roots of, and reasons for, the distinctively popular form of Methodism which developed there. Preceding chapters having provided a set of factors which help explain why Methodism should succeed in these parts, this section sets out to examine the mechanisms of growth and the popular functionality of local Methodism with more precision. Chapter Six begins with a consideration of how Methodism at the national level metamorphasized gradually from 'sect' to 'denomination' between the late 18th and the mid-19th centuries, and argues that the enunciation of a more clearly defined and magnified pastoral authority was vital to the process of binding local societies more securely into a 'Connexion'. In Cornwall, for reasons which are discussed, both the notion and reality of pastoral authority were severely restricted at least until the 1840s, with the consequence that the local (and popular) dynamic between

Methodist growth continued to operate strongly, despite Connexional efforts to re-direct local Methodism into more orthodox and 'respectable' channels.

One very obvious area of discrepancy between Connexional ideal and local practice appeared with respect to revivals, which are discussed in Chapter Seven. The chapter begins with a consideration of the distinction between Wesleyan and sectarian responses to, and definitions of, revivals and revivalism between 1790 and 1850, and argues that in Cornwall a strong revivalist tradition developed within the Wesleyan chapels which was closer in character to sectarian Methodism than to orthodox Wesleyanism. It is suggested that the development and persistence of this local popular revivalist tradition was rooted in a combination of three basic factors affecting and conditioning Methodism in West Cornwall: the high nominal affiliation to the chapel which developed in mining and fishing villages, the weakness of Connexional control and influence over local Methodist evolution, and the impact of social change due to industrialisation. An attempt is made to dissect the actual mechanisms at work during periods of revival, and the chapter concludes with an interpretation of the possible popular functionality of revivalism, particularly in the mining districts.

In Chapter Eight, some of the administrative and financial realities are introduced which help explain why pastoral authority was so difficult to impose during the first half of the 19th century. It is argued that the combination of revivalistic unorthodoxy and administrative disorder, and in particular the failure of local Methodists to pay for adequate pastoral oversight and instruction, finally forced a response from concerned Wesleyan authorities in the early to mid 1840s. Most directly, two talented and respected Connexional ministers were sent to West Cornwall to spearhead an attempted

re-direction of 'indigenous' Cornish Methodism into orthodox administrative and doctrinal channels. The limited effects of their mission are considered in the latter part of this chapter.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, an assessment is made of the social role of Wesleyan Methodism in West Cornwall during industrialisation. Social historical models which focus on Methodism as a straightforwardly destructive challenge to popular culture and custom are ultimately rejected in favour of a more complex analysis which begins with a consideration of the roots and nature of popular belief. Connections are drawn between indigenous folk beliefs and popular perceptions and utilisation of Methodism, and it is argued that Wesleyan Methodism came to serve important spiritual and social functions as a popular religion in West Cornwall. Following Valenze, it is asserted that Methodism acted as a preservative reflex at a popular level, which provided the spiritual legitimation for the reassertion of the validity of the cottage - or demus - as a socio-economic unit, in the face of modernising pressures. Moreover, it also served to bond together traditionally close-knit and insular mining and fishing communities more explicitly, both socially and spiritually, in the face of essentially 'external' forces of change. Rather than working to underpin the process of social modernisation by offering an ideological and theological ethic which supported industrial capitalism, it is argued that Wesleyan Methodism as a popular religion functioned to uphold the morality and structures of traditional Cornish society.

The resulting work is obviously limited in certain respects. The restriction on word length imposes a framework on the study which is sometimes artificial; while the fact that several distinct methodologies have been synthesized in the overall work tends towards over-simplification^{fi} at a number of points in the text. Chapters One and Three, for example,

can provide only the briefest of outlines of their respective topics, while Chapter Five has been compressed for reasons of space. In Chapter Four, and to some extent Chapter Five, a more sustained theoretical analysis of the quantitative methodologies and techniques which underpin the presented material would have been provided in different circumstances. In the final section of the work, themes have been selected with the prime intention of highlighting a small number of what are taken to be key aspects of Methodist development, and clearly many issues and ways of approaching the study of Methodism have been given scant treatment. Chapter Six presumes that the reader will have some knowledge of the details and the manner of Methodist institutionalisation in the half century or so after Wesley's death. In Chapter Seven, a full survey of revival historiography, and much material relating to specific revivals in Cornwall, has been omitted in favour of developing general theories and describing overall trends. In Chapter Eight, a full-scale study of local financial arrangements and administrative practices based on chapel, circuit, and district records would have been possible given additional space. In Chapter Nine, a working theory of Methodism as a popular religion is outlined, which – hopefully – signposts the way forward rather than offering firm conclusions. It is understood that much more material is needed, for example on the ins- and outs- of chapel life, the political behaviour of members, the ratio of adherents to members and the respective influence of each on the other and on local Methodist developments in general. Moreover, such themes as popular spirituality and 'folk' piety, and the conceptual distinction between 'independence' and 'individualism', which are critical underpinnings to the interpretation of this chapter, need further definition, clarification, and exploration.

Nonetheless, despite these caveats, it is believed that the following

work contributes in a number of ways to our understanding of Methodist growth and Methodism as a social epiphenomenon during the period of industrialisation in England. Firstly, an in-depth utilisation and analysis of available statistical data adds significantly to our still-too-generalised picture of where and when Methodism grew, and to whom it primarily appealed. Secondly, Chapters Six and Eight in particular provide details of a number of financial arrangements, administrative priorities, pastoral difficulties, and preachers' attitudes, which add colour and specificity to the general model of Methodist institutionalization during the first half of the 19th century. Thirdly, and most importantly, in a study of a region where Methodism had a profound and perhaps unmatched effect in the early 19th century, an attempt is made to understand the social and spiritual functionality of what was a genuinely popular religion. It is demonstrated, for example, that the prime dynamic behind revivals was local and lay, and that 'indigenous' Methodism served important preservative functions for Cornish pre-industrial society.

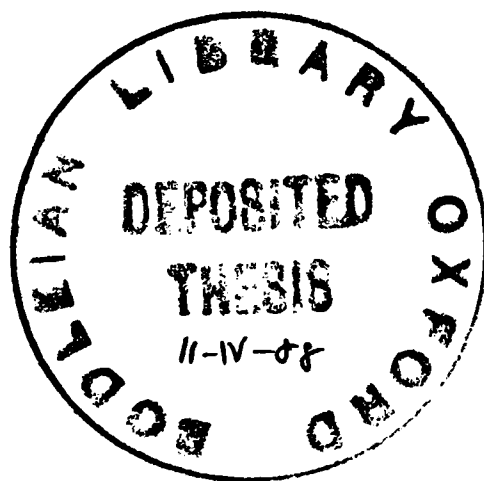
A number of factors specific to Cornwall, which are discussed in the text, help explain why Wesleyan Methodism should become a Volkskirche, and how it retained its popular functionality and ethos for so long. Connexional control was difficult to exert because of the region's 'isolation', its inability to pay for sufficient preachers, and the Connexional policy of allowing local leaders relative freedom to choose their own preachers until the 1840s. Local social and religious factors which may have inhibited religious freedom, such as a strong employer or middle class, an influential squirearchy or an actively oppositional Anglican presence, were not visible or concerned enough to affect local Methodist growth. Instead, the relative socio-economic homogeneity of fishing and mining communities assisted the spread of Methodism, and

weakened the tendency towards division along social class lines which afflicted Wesleyan chapels in many parts of the country from the late 18th century. Finally, the particular regional identity traditionally sensed by the Cornish became more clearly defined and expressed during the 19th century, and as with nonconformity in Wales, Methodism in Cornwall came to serve as a badge of regionalism, and as a buttress to Cornish 'nationalism' in the face of encroaching forces and influences from 'up-country' England.

But though the specific form and level of popular support of Methodism in Cornwall may have been distinctive, it is arguable that the essential pattern of growth during industrialisation was far from unique. Above all else, this study aims to suggest the necessity of further work on the complex and under-researched area of popular belief and popular spirituality in 18th and 19th century England. Such research, by allowing for popular religious experience as a valid, common-place, and often functionally progressive phenomenon, may yet bring us closer to understanding the real social impact of Methodism in early industrial England. It is hoped that this study will at least suggest some of the possibilities of such research.

DAVID LUKER :

CORNISH METHODISM, REVIVALISM, AND POPULAR BELIEF, c. 1780-1870.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

A.M.	Arminian Magazine.
A.M.B.C.	Arminian Magazine (Bible Christian).
C.R.O.	Cornwall County Record Office, Truro.
D.R.O.	Devon County Record Office, Exeter.
J.C.M.H.A.	Journal of the Cornish Methodist Historical Association.
J.E.H.	Journal of Ecclesiastical History.
M.C.A.	Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands Library, Manchester.
M.M.	Methodist Magazine.
N. & Q.	Notes and Queries.
P.P.	Parliamentary Papers.
Proc. W.H.S.	Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society.
R.I.C.	Royal Institution of Cornwall Library, Truro.
W.B.	West Briton.
W.M.M.	Wesleyan Methodist Magazine.

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION.

As Methodism has always received a mixed press, it is no surprise that opinions have divided on the question of its social role during industrialisation. In accounts of Methodism's beneficence as moral regenerator (on a societal or individualistic basis), early Methodists wrote with disarming certainty. To Wesley and the historiographical tradition represented in Methodist biography and institutional histories, Methodism provided the providential key to the spiritual revitalization of England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which effectively countered the socially disintegrative tendencies of the industrialising process. Thomas Jackson, a Connexional leader in the early 19th century, thanked God that in the 18th century:

'there was religious principle in the country to resist the evils which wealth, revolution and war, were pouring forth in one mighty tide; but it was religious principle which, to a considerable extent, was consequent upon the rise of Methodism.'

1

To the legion of early critics, however, the very threat of Methodism was its potential as solvent of social order. In tracts and sermons, as well as in longer works of criticism, Methodism was roundly condemned for encouraging and facilitating the fragmentation of society by its teachings, its structures, and the manner of its dissemination.²

1. Anthony Armstrong, The Church of England, the Methodists and Society 1700-1850, London, 1973, p. 84.
2. Richard Green, Anti-Methodist Publications issued during the 18th century, London, 1902, lists 585 such publications for before 1800.

Methodist preachers preyed upon the weak and unbalanced with their 'composition of enthusiasm, superstition and imposture',¹ all the while engendering much wider psychic and social breakdown by their methods and message. It was argued in particular that they encouraged the poor to 'step out of their province', with doctrines that the Duchess of Buckingham described famously as:

'most repulsive and strongly tainted with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors, in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks and to do away with all distinctions.'

2

Academic analysis of Methodism in the present century has, to a considerable extent, re-moulded but not removed this fundamental interpretative divide. Early defenders of Methodism retained an emphasis both on its morality and its integrative functions, within a broad interpretative context which allowed it a 'progressive' rather than a 'conservative' social role during industrialisation. W.J. Warner, for example, identified Wesley's as an ethical rather than a theological movement, which drew randomly upon 18th century philosophical currents, to propose an ethic of 'humanitarian individualism' which balanced individual freedoms against social responsibilities, in a manner particularly attractive to the rising manufacturing interest.³ The Wesleyan ethic was effect-

1. George Lavington, The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Considered, ed. R. Polwhele, London, 1833, p. 53.
2. Stuart Piggin, 'Religion and the Industrial Revolution: An Analysis of E.P. Thompson's Interpretation of Methodism', University of Wollongong Historical Society Journal, 2 (Mar. 1976) p. 9.
3. W.J. Warner, The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution, London, 1930, p. 56, pp. 63-71.

ively 'progressive' in providing philosophical support to the emerging 'entrepreneurial ideal' which challenged aristocratic control of institutions and society. But, more importantly for Warner, the encouragement to self-improvement implicit in the Wesleyan economic ethic, was qualified by a social ethic which sought:

'the creation of a mood and habit, a sense of personal responsibility for relief of social need—not done in a patronising, condescending way, but as spontaneous impulses of social friendliness and mutual helpfulness, to persons both within and outside the Societies.'

1

This sense of moral responsibility—the 'real achievement of the Wesleyan movement'—was of benefit to the working classes too, as it tempered the human exploitation inherent in industrial capitalism and (to some extent) countered the calculating 'social control' motivation behind traditional paternalism, with a code of moral behaviour and social conduct rooted firmly in a belief in the fundamental value of the individual.

R.F. Wearmouth agreed with Warner in asserting that Methodism 'created a sense of individual and communal responsibility',² but he moved beyond its primary function for the manufacturing interest to consider its more overt contribution to the working classes themselves. Despite the political loyalism of the leadership in the 1790s, which evolved into explicit conservatism during the 1810s, Wearmouth was able to establish a great many links between working class movements and Methodism at the grass-roots. The

1. Ibid., p. 246.

2. R. F. Wearmouth, Methodism and the Working-Class Movements of England, 1800-1850, London, 1937, p. 271.

Methodist class meeting provided an example of democratic structure which 'taught...interdependence'; a sizeable number of popular radical and trade union leaders gained formative experience from the 'many and various opportunities afforded by the Methodists for laymen to exercise their gifts, to assume responsibility, and to occupy official positions.'¹ Perhaps above all, Wesleyan ethics and the doctrine of assurance could be shown to be not only an important inspiration and buttress to the claims of economic liberalism, but-for Wearmouth-to those of political and social democracy too.

On the other hand, the initial critiques of Methodism by conservatives were superseded in the present century by Marxist or materialist interpretations, which ditched earlier models which emphasized Methodism's fissiparous tendencies, for the socially integrative role favoured by its defendants; taking issue instead with the view that such a role could be considered 'progressive'. The Hammonds, for example, had provided Wearmouth with the notion that Methodism appealed to the working classes because of the opportunities it offered for 'self-government' and a 'social life'², but far from representing Methodist doctrine or organisation as a stimulus to social action, they argued that Methodist preaching offered an escape from the real world, and a distraction from the central struggle against industrial capitalism. The Methodist chapel in the new industrial towns offered refuge and a sense of community for the uprooted and the dislocated, but the Methodist message instilled the 'false consciousness' that:

1. Ibid., p.25.

2. J.L. and B. Hammond, The Town Labourer 1760-1832, The New Civilization, London, 1966, p.260.

'heaven was the Fifth Act of a great drama in which patient and pious endurance of afflictions in this life will receive their reward and man's desire for justice its final satisfaction.'

1

In a similar vein, Halévy's famous 'thesis' that 'Methodism prevented revolution' in early industrial England, was rooted in an understanding of the evangelical revival as a rekindling of the Puritan streak in the English character, which compelled individual restraint and self-discipline.²

But much the most sustained and vigorous attack on Methodism appeared in E.P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class.³

Thompson concurred with Warner and Wearmouth-via Weber-in detecting support for Methodism both among manufacturers and workers, but followed the Hammonds and Halévy in representing its effects as the vital bulwark to unfettered, exploitative industrial capitalism. His central task was to explain how industrial capitalism could meet with so little effective opposition to its diffusion, and his coordinating theory depended upon a role for Methodism which was derived by combining resuscitated 18th century charges of 'enthusiasm' with 20th century materialist philosophy. On the one hand, Methodist teaching emphasized patience and submission, and the essential transience of this-worldly

1. Ibid., p.268.

2. E. Halévy, The Birth of Methodism in England, trans. and ed. B. Semmel, Chicago, 1971, p.33ff.; Robert Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics, Cambridge, 1974, p.7; John Walsh, 'Elie Halévy and the birth of Methodism', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 5th series, 25(1975), pp.1-20.

3. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, London, 1968, p.385ff.

suffering;while on the other,the corybantic, orgiastic cottage and chapel meetings which first attracted the proletariat into the clutches of Methodist preachers, effectively siphoned off the energies of workers from political mobilisation.Methodism for Thompson was something that was inflicted upon the working classes-it was for them rather than of them ¹-and while he argued that its natural tendency was to encourage submission and meekness,Thompson asserted that during the critical two decades after Wesley's death in 1791,a new leadership dedicated itself to the eradication of those 'deviant' (proletarian) growths which had emerged within the Church,and to the deliberate exploitation of the acquiescent servitude of their followers in order to cultivate 'the psychic component of the work- discipline of which the manufacturers stood most in need.' ²

In answer to the obvious question why workers should submit themselves to this form of control,Thompson suggested three prime routes by which the industrial workforce fell steadily under Methodist sway.In the first place,like the Hammonds,he recognised the role that the Methodist chapel played in new industrial towns as provider of a sense of community and security for alienated and displaced migrants. In the second,he argued that the Methodists set out to attract and convert the susceptible by a form of evangelistic onslaught which played directly upon fear and the insecurity of the dislocated.Finally,and most originally,the view was expressed that Methodism gained particularly from what Thompson

1. Ibid.,p.41.

2. Ibid.,p.386,p.390.

described as 'the psychic consequences of the counter-revolution', which enabled Methodist preachers to recruit from the labouring classes those who, having failed in radical political protest, turned resignedly to Methodism as 'the chiasm of the defeated and the hopeless.'¹

Thompson's theories marked a watershed for Methodist studies in two senses. In the first place, The Making of the English Working Class was a seminal work in the emerging discipline of social history; and as Methodism played a critical role in Thompson's explanation of social processes in early industrial England, a version or at least an acknowledgement of the 'Thompsonian thesis' was incorporated widely in social historiography. Harold Perkin, in The Origins of Modern English Society, supported Eric Hobsbawm's earlier assertion that the Methodists could not have 'prevented revolution' because of the smallness of their numbers; but he joined Thompson in ascribing to evangelical religion a key function in the industrialising process, arguing that it acted as a form of 'cement', to borrow a phrase from Halévy, which bonded the classes together throughout the period of most disruptive transformation.² Other writers represented the Methodists at the spearhead of evangelical and 'middle class' agencies of 'social control', which campaigned and indoctrinated to weed out the 'picaresque hedonist' popular culture, whose forms and prescriptions stood so antithetical to the

1. Ibid., pp. 411-19.

2. Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880. London, 1981, pp. 347-64; E. J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men. Studies in the History of Labour, London, 1964, p. 31.

capitalistic 'work discipline' and profit motive.¹ In general, Methodism was held responsible for a multitude of sins, from the erosion of popular culture and traditions, to the stunting of 'working class consciousness'; from the forging of a pliable industrial workforce, to the socialization of the labouring classes into Victorian consensual respectability.

On the other hand, Thompson's expansive, challenging theories, (as well as the provocative, combative language in which they were expressed), sounded the siren-call to those who may have been impressed by his methods and questions, but remained unconvinced by his broad-ranging conclusions. Much more detail, it was argued, would be needed in order to flesh out, modify, or contradict what Thompson had so beguilingly offered as theory. During the 1970s, in particular, two developments within the discipline brought seriously into question the essential tenets of Thompson's view of Methodism. On the one hand, his model of class formation in the early 19th century was increasingly challenged—and especially his view that a relatively mature and developed 'working class consciousness' existed by 1830—which removed the need to explain by conspiracy theory the weakness of a revolutionary zeal amongst the industrial workforce, while in a wider sense releasing Methodist studies from the old strait-jacket of the 'Methodism prevented revolution'

1. e.g. Robert Colls, The Collier's Rant. Song and Culture in the Industrial Village, London, 1977, p. 58.; Hugh Cunningham, Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c. 1780–1880, London, 1980, p. 40.; Robert W. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850, Cambridge, 1973, p. 100ff.; Peter Bailey, Leisure and Class in Victorian England. Rational Recreation and the contest for control, 1830–1885, London, 1978, p. 17.

thesis. On the other, the painstakingly detailed research of specialists into specific regions and aspects of Methodist development provided a picture of a phenomenon more complex, varied, and paradoxical than either Thompson or most earlier writers had appreciated. From the substantial corpus of recent Methodist research, perhaps three distinct methodological and substantive approaches can be delineated.

In the first place, the Methodist Church archives have been utilised on a far more extensive and systematic basis to establish with greater clarity and precision the 'official Wesleyan mind' on socio-political issues.¹ W.R. Ward has apparently concurred with Thompson, Wearmouth, and many others, in interpreting a growing authoritarianism and conservatism among Connexional leaders after Wesley's death, but, as he has demonstrated,² their motivation was more complicated, and their success far less complete than Thompson, or many earlier critics, had allowed. In the first place, the Methodist 'Connexion' in 1791 was little more than a nominal construct, and in order both to transform a disparate, uncontrollable, sectarian movement into 'an informal Protestant establishment', and overcome the open hostility of the

1. see especially John Kent, The Age of Disunity, London, 1966; Robert Currie, Methodism Divided. A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism, London, 1968; W.R. Ward, Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850, London, 1972; The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting, 1820-9, ed. W.R. Ward, London, 1972; Early Victorian Methodism. The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting, 1830-58, ed. W.R. Ward, Oxford, 1976; David Hempton, Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850, London, 1984.
2. W.R. Ward, 'The Religion of the People and the Problem of Control 1790-1830', Studies in Church History: 8: Popular Belief and Practice, ed. G.J. Cuming and D. Baker, Cambridge, 1972.

political and social Establishment, Connexional leaders were forced to devise the administrative and ministerial structures which would formalise arrangements within 'the Body', and increase its security from external attack. These developments, of course, had social implications: attempts were made to exert tighter control over the grass-roots, and, wherever possible, to 'weed out deviant growths' which in doctrine or practice appeared to challenge the authority of the leadership. Moreover, as the Church formalised in the early decades of the 19th century its membership and institutional 'persona' shaded increasingly into conservatism. But the motivation behind this process of institutionalisation was essentially 'internal'. Thompson seriously exaggerated the institutional maturity and social and political security of the Methodist Church in the two decades after Wesley's death. The prime objective of the new generation of leaders which inherited Wesley's mantle in 1791 was not to mould a pliant workforce, counter revolutionary tendencies, or indeed to pursue any grandiose, coordinated scheme of social preservation or reconstruction; it was simply to ensure the survival of his 'movement'.

Furthermore, it is clear that Thompson misrepresented the actual success of the leadership in exerting control over the movement. This has been the logical conclusion of traditional Connexional histories, which have tended to focus on the internal conflicts, controversies and secessions which accompanied Methodist development in the first half of the 19th century. Ward, however, analysed more rigorously the essential

conflict and tension between the social roots and the institutionalizing centre of Methodism, and argued that in the case of Sunday schools and revivalism, for instance, Thompson distorted Methodist reality in implying or asserting that each was imposed, essentially, from above. Ward demonstrated that far from respectively operating as crude tools of 'indoctrination' and representing 'the chiliasm of despair', Sunday schools and revivals were in fact manifestations of just that grass-roots vitality and creative dynamism which Connexional leaders were bent on quelling.¹

Thomas Laqueur has pursued this theme in his study of Sunday schools in the early industrial period.² On the one hand, he accepted that the emphasis placed on teaching the virtues of honesty, orderliness, punctuality, and hard work was 'congruent' with the needs of the industrial system. On the other, he asserted that Sunday schools 'from the earliest days were to a large extent a product of the working-class community.'³ In reconciling these two ideas, Laqueur effectively challenged the oversimplified class/culture constructs of cultural Marxists or 'social control' theorists which concentrated on 'class' as a well-formed and critical divide in the early stage of industrialisation; and rejected the notion that evangelical morality and social ethics were entirely a bourgeois imposition on the working classes.⁴ In essence, Laqueur mirrored Warner, but especially Wearmouth, in main-

1. Ward, Religion and Society, pp. 136-40.; 'Religion of the People', pp. 239-44.

2. Thomas W. Laqueur, Religion and Respectability. Sunday Schools and working class culture 1780-1850, Yale, 1976.

3. Ibid., p. 29.

4. Ibid., pp. 237-9, p. 245.

taining the progressive achievements of Sunday school teaching and organisation for the working classes themselves.

The overall effect of this work has been both to emphasize the essentially local-and 'popular'-roots of key Methodist developments such as Sunday schools and revivalism, and (in a broader sense) to controvert those theories of Methodism's all-embracing societal impact based on an exaggerated notion of the extent of Connexional maturity in the early 19th century.

The second recent approach within Methodist studies has similarly replaced earlier generalisations with analyses and interpretations grounded in more detailed (often regionally-based) research. Applying statistical techniques and sociological conceptualisation to the store of Methodist indices of membership growth and occupational structure, a series of studies have furnished more accurate and more specific analyses of Methodist growth at both the 'micro' and 'macro' level.¹ What has emerged from this work is a much more refined understanding of where (and when) Methodism grew, and to whom it primarily appealed, which has been used both to bolster or reject earlier theories, and to introduce new priorities and perspectives to the task of determining Methodism's social role.

1. e.g. Alan D. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England. Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914, London, 1976; Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert, Lee Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers. Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700, Oxford, 1977; Alan Everitt, The Pattern of Rural Dissent: the 19th Century, Leicester, 1972; Clive D. Field, 'The Social Structure of English Methodism-eighteenth-twentieth centuries', British Journal of Sociology, 28 (June 1977), pp. 199-225.

Statistics offering substantive evidence of the socio-economic base of Methodist membership are not entirely satisfactory, drawn as they are from variable and piecemeal sources such as baptismal registers, but a consensual view has been derived that the key constituency for Methodist recruitment in the early 19th century was within what Alan Gilbert rather loosely defined as the 'artisan' class. Gilbert made use of this evidence to challenge from a fresh direction Thompson's view of Methodism as the 'chiliasm of despair', which:

'begs the question why it was not the most 'defeated' and 'hopeless' sections of the society which were mobilised by the movement, and ...minimise its obvious and widespread appeal among individuals and social groups whose economic and social positions were not only adequate, but were actually improving.'

1

Beyond this, the specific social role and impact of Methodism among its 'artisan' constituency has itself been assessed by analysis of the kind of socio-economic conditions which fostered Methodist growth at a local level. Alan Everitt, for instance, has shown from analysis of the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census returns for Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, and Kent, that support for Dissent at the level of the parish was distinctly connected to the nature of landholding, settlement patterns, and occupational structure. In general, he concluded that Dissent was strongest in freehold parishes, in boundary settlements, in decayed market towns and industrial villages; in short, in parishes and communities where relative social freedom and a sense of 'independence' prevailed.²

1. Gilbert, Religion and Society, p.83.

2. Everitt, Pattern of Rural Dissent.

Gilbert argued from similar findings that in many circumstances becoming a Methodist represented a positive rejection of the traditional social order based upon the 'dependency system', with Methodist membership functioning 'as an ideological legitimation of 'status withdrawal', and as a symbolic expression of 'independence'.¹ In a sense, he offered substantive social historical evidence to corroborate Warner's earlier claim that Methodism's 'progressive' role was as moral and philosophical legitimator of the individualistic challenge to the established social and political order.

But in his overall summary of Methodism's social impact, Gilbert was careful to balance the 'costs' and 'benefits' of Methodist membership to individuals and society. While his statistical evidence of Methodist support by occupation and parish/settlement type tended to confirm Warner's assertion that Methodism appealed in particular to rising social interest groups, especially merchants, manufacturers, and freeholders, and while, like Warner, he acknowledged the positive function of Methodism for such groups in both 'legitimizing their emancipation from the 'dependency system', and encouraging and buttressing the ethic of 'self-improvement and economic endeavour', Gilbert found little statistical evidence to support Wearmouth's contention that vital links connected Methodism to the working class. Indeed, he accepted the validity of a number of critical interpretative strands in this area. He saw Methodism satisfying:

'the profound associational and communal needs of

1. Gilbert, Religion and Society, p.84.

people experiencing anomie and social insecurity in a period of rapid social change and dislocation',

but acknowledged few positive contributions that Methodism may have made to the working class in general. On the contrary, he supported the view that Methodism inculcated the values of the 'entrepreneurial ideal' in its general contact with the working classes, and that it operated to challenge, by teaching and action, the structures and practice of popular culture.¹

The third approach, however, has attempted to comprehend popular religious experience in a more sustained manner, and has tended to support Ward's contention of grass-roots vitality in the early 19th century, by asserting the view that, in particular circumstances, Methodism could (and did) operate to serve positive functions at the plebeian level. Occasionally borrowing concepts and methods from anthropology, sociology, and the social history of mentalities, a number of studies have explored the 'popular' spiritual functionality of Methodism in a manner antithetical both to orthodox church historians of the 'dogmatic' or 'institutional' type, and to those social historians who remain convinced that Methodism represented nothing more (or less) than 'religious terrorism' to the labouring classes.² Underpinning the work that

1. Ibid., pp. 81-93.

2. e.g. Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics; James Obelkevich, Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-75, Oxford, 1976; Richard Carwardine, Transatlantic Revivalism. Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865, Westport, 1978; Louis Billington, 'Popular Religion and Social Reform: A Study of Revivalism and Teetotalism, 1830-50', Journal of Religious History. 10 no. 3 (1979), pp. 266-93; Deborah Valenze, Prophetic Sons and Daughters. Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England, Princeton, 1985. The phrase 'religious terrorism' is Lecky's.

has resulted, or at least implied by it, is an understanding that historical interpretations of Methodism have been dependent, to date, to an excessive degree on the literary remains of a small sample of highly committed members, who provide illuminating but often essentially atypical testimony of Methodist experience. To counter the distorting tendencies of those sources which have been used traditionally, a new methodology has begun to be developed which might enable the function and effects of Methodist preaching and practice to be gauged for the uncommitted fringe, the mass of adherents, and the sectarian Methodists who evolved 'unorthodox' beliefs and practices out of their experience of Wesleyan Methodism.

Such a methodology remains incompletely assembled at this point, but the seminal work of Keith Thomas on Reformation England has both convinced historians of the possibility of reconstructing popular mentalities and belief systems from previously neglected literary sources, and inspired their search through similar sources for the 18th and 19th centuries, occasionally acknowledging Natalie Davis's advice to study popular religion not as an 'aberration' of official theology, but as something with meaning and reality in its own right.¹ James Obelkevich, for example, in his study of rural society and religion in South Lindsey, Lincolnshire, in the mid-19th century, made use of folkloric sources on a systematic basis to argue the existence of a wide range of 'non-cultic super-

1. Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, Harmondsworth, 1973; N.Z. Davies, 'Some Tasks and Themes in the Study of Popular Religion', The Pursuit of Holiness in late Medieval and Renaissance Religion, ed. C. Trinkaus and H.A. Oberman, London, 1974, pp. 309-14.

stitutions', that is, beliefs and rituals directed towards non-Christian ends, though he maintained a distinction between official religion and superstition which has been demonstrated to be less clear elsewhere. Robert Moore, for example, in his analysis of Methodism among Durham miners, acknowledged that:

'The 'church' is always more or less in a state of tension with both popular religiosity of an explicit kind and the basic assumptions of the populace. The formally religious too may hold unorthodox beliefs or adhere to 'subterranean theologies'.'

1

The evidence which has been uncovered to date which relates to popular experience of Methodism has important implications for the ways in which the social impact of Methodism throughout industrialisation are perceived. In the first place, it has been argued that Methodism achieved its greatest success in the two areas—Cornwall and the Isle of Man—where pre-Christian religion survived most strongly.² Methodist links with superstition, magic, and other forms of 'primitive irrationality' were, of course, drawn in abundance by early critics of Methodism, and their open avowal by sectarians after Wesley's death embarrassed and impeded Connexional leaders in their efforts to institutionalize and 'dogmatize' the Church. This was one area where Thompson made use of 18th century criticism, arguing that Methodist preachers manipulated popular susceptibility to the invoking of Hell, the Devil, and the spirit world in general in their 'fire-and-brimstone' exhortations. John Rule, in following Thompson, asserted that 'Methodism...did not so

1. Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics, p.25.

2. Currie, Methodism Divided, pp.21-2.

much displace the folk beliefs as translate them into a religious idiom.'¹ However, such interpretations rest uneasily aside the fact that Connexional leaders moved emphatically to distance themselves from sectarians and revivalists who upheld 'unorthodox' beliefs and practices. What appears to have been more likely is that the relationship between Methodism and traditional folk belief was a more complex and symbiotic one, in which Methodism at times reinterpreted indigenous beliefs, but was itself, too, reinterpreted at a popular level to fit folk religious interpretations and needs.²

Such a view is expressed in Deborah Valenze's Prophetic Sons and Daughters, the most sustained attempt to date to reconstruct popular Methodist spirituality in the early phase of industrialisation. Valenze has carried out a number of regional studies which embrace all the major, and some minor, Methodist sects which sprang up from the 1790s, connecting her studies with a coordinating theory that the primary impulse behind the spread of sectarian Methodism lay in the evolution of a particular set of local socio-economic circumstances. Valenze argued, from the evidence of biographical sketches published in the various denominational magazines, that smallholders and cottagers were represented with disproportionate strength in the Methodist sects, and that their religion was developed in part to legitimate protest at the erosion of economic and hence social independence (with the extension of

1. Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, pp. 420-2; John G. Rule, 'The Labouring Miner in Cornwall c.1740-1870. A Study in Social History', Warwick University, D.Phil. thesis, 1971, p. 251.
2. Alan Smith, The Established Church and Popular Religion, 1750-1850, London, 1971, pp. 39-40.

industrial capitalism), and to provide the spiritual and philosophical vindication of their world which was being lost. In the process, they took elements from both Methodist and folk practice to fashion a religion which combined folk functionality with quasi-Methodist forms and doctrine. Most especially, the Methodist cottage meeting was appropriated to counter the industrialising process with a revitalized spiritual affirmation of the centrality of the cottage 'domus' in traditional labouring life.¹

Valenze's study provided an invaluable counterweight to a number of the received wisdoms of standard social historical interpretations of Methodism. In the first place, she asserted that popular evangelical religion had little in common with, say, the evangelicalism of the millowner, and that in many senses each stood antithetical to the other in origin, form, and function. Far from acting as a social cement throughout industrialisation, Valenze argued that while, perhaps, the millowners' evangelicalism proved useful in supporting the 'progress' of industrial capitalism, popular evangelicalism in turn might function as an important preservative reflex, aiding the resistance of smallholders and craftsmen to social and economic change. In the second place, it appears from Valenze's work that Methodism, in some regions and among certain occupational groups, represented a continuity of spiritual experience at the popular level; and that one key reason why sectarians made use of Methodism as their source was the close affinity of its teachings with indigenous folk belief and morality.²

Valenze here implicitly supports Laqueur in confronting those

1. Valenze, Prophetic Sons and Daughters, pp. 28-34.

2. Ibid., p. 247f.

models of 'social control' which depend on the existence of relatively straightforward class divides in the early 19th century, delineated in terms of culture and morality. Against such a view, it might be argued, sectarian Methodism demonstrated that neither evangelicalism nor honesty and hard work were exclusively the property of the 'middle class'.

The overall effect of this specialised research on social historical interpretations in general is difficult to gauge. On the one hand, though 'Methodism' and 'popular' are still found commonly in diametrical opposition, the all-encompassing charges which used to be brought have been qualified or withdrawn to some extent, and the typical 'text-book' treatment of Methodism is generally less abrasive than it was ten years ago.¹ While Methodism is still frequently represented in the guise of 'agent of social control', or 'disseminator of industrial discipline', few would now argue seriously that it 'prevented revolution'. There are indications that some aspects of Methodist historiography, (for example, the work on popular belief), are finding a wider receptive audience; and in general, in a decade when so many internationally-significant social movements have been inspired and fuelled by popular religion—from Roman Catholicism in Poland to Islamic Fundamentalism throughout the Middle East—there is a greater readiness amongst social historians to take religion seriously, and to treat it in a more sophisticated manner. This having been said, however, Methodism is still too often portrayed in general works of social history in

1. e.g. see J.G. Rule, The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, London, 1985.

over-simplified, stereotyped, or plain distorted terms. The present work developed out of the identification of an apparent need to continue the task of specialised research into Methodism and its social role during industrialisation.

Cornwall was chosen for the study because of the unparalleled strength of Methodism there in the 19th century, and from a belief that in many western parts of the county, Wesleyan Methodism developed and retained distinctive popular traits and functionalities throughout the period of industrialisation. Out of this numerical strength a sizeable corpus of historical writing on Cornish Methodism has grown this century, on which the present work has drawn substantially. The Cornish Methodist Historical Association, in particular, has attracted a larger membership than any other county branch of the Wesley Historical Society, and has been uniquely active in the collection of research material and the publication of pamphlets and papers.¹ Thomas Shaw has written histories of Cornish Methodism, and the Bible Christians, and many studies of circuits and chapels which display a mastery of the intricate interweaving of people, places and events, and communicate a profound and vital affection for the subject of his work.² John Probert has collected and published a remarkable quantity of research material, presented with often stimulating insight, which

1. e.g. M.S. Edwards, The Divisions of Cornish Methodism, c.1802-1857, n.p., 1964; S.O. Dixon, The Road to Unity in Cornish Methodism, n.p., 1969; T.R. Harris, Methodism and the Cornish Miner, n.p., 1960; Charles Thomas, Methodism and Self-Improvement in 19th century Cornwall, n.p., 1965; O.A. Beckerlegge, Free Methodism in Cornwall, n.p., n.d.
2. Thomas Shaw, A History of Cornish Methodism, Truro, 1967; The Bible Christians, 1815-1907, London, 1965.

has been gratefully quarried for parts of the present work.¹ In addition, two theses have been concerned directly with aspects of Cornish Methodism, and a third has offered it a major role, in a broader analysis of the social history of the labouring miner in Cornwall.²

However, little work of substance has appeared since the completion of John Rule's thesis, and the publication of John Probert's Sociology of Cornish Methodism in 1971. Moreover, in work which has appeared, and which has been aimed at a general audience of social historians, John Rule, though incorporating substantial quantities of Cornish Methodist material in his analyses of labouring class experience, has tended to remain broadly sympathetic, in terms of theory and interpretation, to the Thompsonian thesis on which his initial research findings were based. He has argued, for example, that Methodism provided important positive assistance to emergent capitalism within the mining industry in Cornwall in three distinct ways: by teaching that idleness and leisure were intrinsically sinful, by encouraging a fatalistic acceptance of this-worldly suffering, and by offering to Methodist converts a new way of life, built on order and self-discipline, which instilled such necessary industrial virtues as hard work, thrift, and temperance.³ Furthermore, he has asserted that

1. J.C.C. Probert, The Sociology of Cornish Methodism, n.p., 1971; The Worship and Devotion of Cornish Methodism, n.p., 1978.
2. H. Miles Brown, 'Methodism and the Church of England in Cornwall, 1738-1838', London University, Ph.D. thesis, 1946; M.S. Edwards, 'Cornish Methodism: A Study in Division 1814-1857', Birmingham University M.A. thesis, 1962; Rule, 'The Labouring Miner in Cornwall', D.Phil. thesis.
3. J. Rule, 'Some Aspects of the Cornish Industrial Revolution', Industry and Society in the south-west, ed. R. Burt, Exeter, 1970, pp. 82-3.

the effects of Methodism were similarly to blunt resistance to change when the aims of the leaders were less direct. Methodists were seen both at the forefront of a campaign by evangelicals and mine-owners to eradicate the remnants of popular culture and tradition, and as a vital force inhibiting the spread of radical political consciousness amongst the miners, through the deliberate opposition of Church leaders, and by diverting potential radical leaders and energies into chapel activity.¹

Such views will be returned to in the ensuing work. The main aim of the present study is not, however, specifically to challenge or contradict Rule's contentions, but to adopt and combine for the first time those methodological and analytical strategies outlined in the preceding summary of recent Methodist historiography, and to apply them to an area which was one of the major strongholds of Methodism in the industrial period. In combining all three recent methodological and substantive approaches, the coordinating premise of the thesis will be that Methodism as a social phenomenon can only be understood if we first accept that Methodist development did not take place in some controlled, or linear fashion, but was the often haphazard result of a constant internal tension between the distinct but interdependent parts of the Methodist 'movement'.

In essence, Methodism operated, simultaneously, in three separate, though interconnected contexts. In the first place, the

1. John Rule, 'Methodism, Popular Beliefs and Village Culture in Cornwall, 1800-50', Popular Culture and Custom in 19th century England, ed. Robert D. Storch, London, 1982, pp. 49-59; 'Methodism and Chartism among the Cornish Miners', Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, 22(1971), pp. 8-10.

Methodist Church was unique among the denominations of New (or for that matter, Old) Dissent in the extent to which it was 'Connexional'. Not only did members commit themselves, on joining the Church, to a set of strict behavioural rules that governed their conduct, but they were also 'governed' in a more specific sense by the appeals and rulings which emanated from the Annual Conference, which were designed to guide and instruct members in their religious duties, and in the appropriate Christian response to political and social developments. In one sense, to become a Methodist involved submitting oneself to a form of centralised governmental control unparalleled in contemporary secular politics, which might well place one at odds with community and custom.

On the other hand, Methodist growth and development was conditioned above all by local factors, and specific local Methodist form and functionality in fact might contradict Connexional orthodoxy, or bureaucratic will. The triumph of Connexionalism in these circumstances was dependent upon the evolution of administrative and pastoral machinery capable of restraining and then re-directing local Methodist energies, but as Ward and others have demonstrated, such a 'denominational ideal' met profound and fundamental obstruction throughout (at least) the first half of the 19th century.

The essential struggle between the centralising tendency and the grass-roots dynamic took place, both openly and by implication, in the third Methodist arena, the circuit and—especially—

the chapel. In order to understand the social function of Methodism during industrialisation, we have to recognise the extent to which the chapel became part both of a local (social) community, and a religious 'Connexion'. On the one hand, there was an important local dimension to chapel developments, which might mirror the fact, for example, that in some instances the chapel served integrative functions for the community during the initial stage of industrialisation, and later suffered divisions and conflicts in line with the fragmentation of classes within the community. On the other hand, the chapel also stood in a kind of ambiguous 'no man's land' between community and Connexion, and specific local developments were also affected, and to some degree conditioned, by an overarching conflict between centralising and local dynamics.

A starting point for a consideration of the social role of Methodism needs to be an appreciation of the extent to which developments within Methodism resulted from the constant conflict and competition between the three contexts—Connexion, community, and chapel—in which it existed. In the ensuing study, each context will first be delineated, before their interaction is analysed, in the belief that once an outline of the mechanics of Methodist development has been ascertained, Methodism's social impact in Cornwall can be more readily assessed. Chapter 2 provides a brief introduction to some of the themes and trends in Cornish social and economic history in the period 1780 to 1870; followed by a consideration of the essential religious context into which Meth-

odism fitted in Chapter 3. In Chapters 4 and 5, local factors which enhanced and explain Methodist dissemination will be pinpointed in a statistical and analytical survey of Cornish Methodist growth by region and parish. In Chapters 6 to 8, the interaction of Connexion, community and chapel will be assessed in an analysis which begins with a consideration of the problems facing the Connexional authorities in exerting control over local developments within Methodism in the first half of the 19th century, and which goes on to view the implications of Connexional weakness for the form which local development took. In particular, Chapter 7 will assess the reasons for the regular periods of revival in west Cornwall, arguing that they reflected an essential 'indigenisation' of Wesleyan Methodism. This concept will then be analysed in greater detail in Chapter 9, when we will return to the question of the 'social role' of Methodism in west Cornwall during the period of industrialisation.

CHAPTER 2 : SOCIAL CHANGE IN CORNWALL, 1780-1870.

The dates 1740 and 1870 form the approximate parameters of Cornwall's industrial phase. Both before and after that period, nature and isolation conspired to ensure that the economy remained primarily local, and often cottage-based. After 1870, it became increasingly dependent on the provision of a range of cottage industries servicing the expanding tourist trade. Prior to 1740, it rested essentially on the farmstead; the typical family involving itself, on a limited scale, in all three major economic activities which the county's resources offered—mining, fishing, and farming—in the quest for self-sufficiency and independence. Between those dates, with the development of the copper mining industry, the Cornish economy was shaped and controlled by forces outside both cottage and county to an extent unknown before, and—in some senses—since.

Of the three traditional economic activities, mining was by far the most important. Andrew Borde had written in 1542 that 'Cornwall is a pore and very barren country of all maner thing, except Tin and Fyssh.'¹ Tin mining and a tin trade which was both national and Continental dated to pre-Roman times ; and the industry was regulated and protected by its own laws and institutions enshrined in King John's Charter of Stannaries of 1201.² But even by the early 18th century, most mining still took place with little organisation

1. A.K. Hamilton Jenkin, Cornwall and its People, London, 1945, p.124.
2. F.E. Halliday, A History of Cornwall, 2nd edn., Letchworth, 1975, p.44, p.48, p.71.

of labour, and nominal capital investment. It remained, typically, an 'adventure', in which 'the working-tinner, though little or nothing worth, shall oftentimes have one thirty-second or one sixty-fourth, and sometimes less share.'¹

Cornwall's industrialisation was dependent above all on a radical transformation in the scale, organisation, and degree of capitalisation of mining in the county; and began and ended with the varying fortunes of the copper mining industry. W.J. Rowe dated the onset of industrialisation to 1740, as copper became more valuable to the Cornish economy than pilchards, and began rapidly to overhaul tin.² The exploitation of copper deposits rested upon the replacement of traditional structures of labour organisation, and capital utilisation, with those common to early industrial capitalism. In the process, Cornish society experienced dramatic repercussions, which were inevitably far-reaching because of the high proportion of the population whose livelihoods were dependent on the mines. Rowe calculated that perhaps one-third of the population was indirectly dependent on the mines in the mid-18th century, and as copper mining expanded, the numbers directly involved rose steadily. In 1801, approximately 75 copper mines employed 16,000 miners; by 1838, more than 200 employed over 30,000. In 1862- a few years before the great crash in Cornish mining- an estimated 340 mines gave employment to about 50,000 men. In the 1841 Census, 27% of the county's male workforce was recorded as engaged in mining, a higher proportion

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1. William Borlase, The Natural History of Cornwall, Oxford, 1758, p.307.
 2. W.J. Rowe, Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution, Liverpool, 1953, p.40ff.

than in any other county in Britain.¹

Three key long-term factors explain the transformation which took place within Cornish mining. In the first place, the traditional landowning ranks of the county were gradually infiltrated during the 17th and 18th centuries by merchants and lawyers, either by simple purchase or following the exclusion of a number of the many local royalist gentry. Such men tended on the whole to view their newly acquired estates in a practical rather than a quasi-spiritual light; as commercial propositions rather than as symbols and securities of gentlemanly status.² In the second place, landowners of all backgrounds were encouraged by the Mines Royal Act of 1689, which freed copper, tin, lead, and iron ore mines from Crown monopoly, and left the door open for the unhindered exploitation of mineral deposits. In the third place, although it was primarily tin which was mined initially, copper ore was increasingly discovered underneath the tin workings; and under the stimulus of a steadily rising demand for copper—for coinage, and in the expanding brass trades in particular—the abundant source of Cornish copper began to be opened up in the early 18th century.³

The discovery of copper ore fundamentally altered the scale and scope of Cornish mining. Because it was found much deeper than tin, its exploitation depended upon improved technology, greater capital outlay, and more sophisticated and organised management.

1. Rowe, op.cit., p.28, p.39.; A.K.Hamilton Jenkin, The Cornish Miner, London, 1927, pp.160-9.; N.F.R.Crafts, British Economic Growth during the Industrial Revolution, Oxford, 1985, pp.4-5.
2. Rowe, op.cit., p.1.
3. D.B.Barton, A History of Copper Mining in Cornwall and Devon, Truro, 1968, pp.11-5.

This in turn fostered the development of much larger mining units, the employment of an increasingly specialised workforce, and a more clearly defined (and divided) role between 'adventurer' and 'labouring miner'. Between 1740 and 1775, the number of mines producing copper more than trebled; and while approximately 6000 tons of copper ore was raised per annum around 1720, by 1770 the figure had reached 29,000 tons. From that point until the turn of the century, the industry—while continuing to expand overall—faced a series of crises precipitated by a national fall in copper prices, and the competitive rivalry of Parys mountain in Anglesey, where open-cast mining was begun in 1768. But after 1800, with the simultaneous expiry of Boulton and Watt's patent on the separate condenser (which had tied Cornish mine-owners to an inadequate source for engines), and the rapid collapse of the Parys mine in both quantity and quality, the Cornish copper industry grew unrestrained to produce the bulk of Britain's—and in the early decades, the world's—copper throughout the 19th century.¹

When the industry collapsed in the mid-1860s, it was both sudden and total. Despite the growth of foreign competition especially from the 1840s, relatively high prices for copper were maintained until 1862. But profits had been falling steadily for a number of years as deposits had dried up, or become more expensive to mine, and by 1865, only twenty seven out of more than three hundred mines were paying dividends. The dramatic collapse occurred in 1866, and by the following spring, with most mines closed, it was

1. Ibid., p.15, p.23, pp.26-40, p.45. See Table 1 at the end of the chapter.

alleged that half the miners in the county were at the point of starvation. Between 1865 and 1880, there was a 75% decline in production of copper ore; while the closure of mines meant the migration or emigration of working miners, and, for Cornwall, the end of the industrial era.¹

The social impact of these developments was wide-ranging and fundamental. In the first place, the rise and fall of industrial Cornwall was very closely mirrored in population figures for the county. After relative stability throughout the 17th century, it was in the 1740s that the population began to expand rapidly. From estimates made by N. J. G. Pounds,² the decennial percentage rise in population between 1744 and 1779 was 5.2%, nearly twice that per decade for the period 1672 to 1744. Thereafter the decennial growth rate increased dramatically: between 1779 and 1841, the population grew at a rate between 14 and 18% per decade. After 1841, however, the trend was reversed, and while throughout the 1840s and 1850s the rate of growth returned to pre-1744 levels, during the 1860s there was an actual decline in the county population.³

This basic demographic pattern ensured that Cornish society faced innumerable strains and tensions from the mid-18th century to 1870; and that in some senses it suffered more and longer from the industrialising process than elsewhere in Britain. In the first place, the onset of industrialisation in Cornwall pre-dated that, for example, in northern textile areas, and yet its transforming

1. Rowe, *op.cit.*, pp. 322-6.

2. N.G.J. Pounds, 'Population Movement in Cornwall, and the Rise of Mining in the 18th century', *Geography*, xxviii, 1943, pp. 37-46.

3. See Table 2 at end of chapter.

process, as elsewhere, was drawn out throughout the whole of the first half of the 19th century. Moreover, just at the point where most of the rest of British industrial society was moving into the 'age of equipoise' in the 1850s, the Cornish had to come to terms with pressures induced by the exhaustion of the mines, which were as disruptive in their social effects as the earlier transforming process had been.

The naturally disruptive tendencies of this dramatic rise and fall in population were in turn exacerbated by the fact of considerable population movement within the county. The origins of this trend lay before the 18th century, and one estimate has suggested that the population of the west of the county doubled between 1660 and 1760, as families flocked to the new mining ventures from contiguous districts.¹ Between 1780 and 1870, - however, there was a more constant movement of population as new mines were opened up, and old ones closed; and as agricultural depression after 1815 forced migration to the mining districts. In 1838, it was said that one was as likely to find a cruiser at the port where one had left her as to find a miner's family at the house which they had occupied on the last visit.² Initially population movement was almost entirely to the west; but from the 1810s, with the development of the china clay industry around St. Austell, and again in the 1840s with the discovery of vast copper deposits in Caradon in the south-east, these areas also experienced a rapid inflow of migrants. To the social 'dislocation' exper-

1. Halliday, Cornwall, p.258.

2. Rule, 'The Labouring Miner in Cornwall', D.Phil. thesis, p.109.

enced in living through industrialisation was added the insecurity and precariousness of not knowing when the next move would have to be made.

With the development of a highly-capitalised copper mining industry, there was also the disruption caused by new work experiences, and the general impact of industrial capitalism on social and familial traditions. Miners found themselves working in very large mines, which of itself reduced their customary independence. In addition, attempts were made to introduce work norms and arrangements, such as a 24-hour shift system, and a new work discipline, which depended on the erosion of traditional holidays and customary working behaviour (based on perceptions of family need, and often amalgamating mining, fishing, and farming activity), and which threatened to destroy traditional ways of life.¹ At the same time as working miners faced a loss of independence from attacks of this kind, they sensed a much more potent insecurity from judging their livelihoods to be increasingly controlled not just from outside the cottage, but from outside the county too. Miners felt very directly the impact of a change in the scale and organisation of the industry, which made the fortunes of a mine far more susceptible to the external control of smelters, adventurers and the fluctuating price of tin and copper. Because smelting required much more coal than tin had done, the operation was largely carried out in South Wales, despite several abortive attempts to establish works in Cornwall, and Welsh smelting interests were able to exercise substantial influence over the

1. Ibid., p.72ff.

market price of Cornish copper ore. Capitalist adventurers in mining were also frequently 'outsiders'-merchants, manufacturers, professionals, and landowners- who saw Cornish copper as a sound (often short-term) investment, and played little role in the actual management of their concerns. To the Cornish, still largely cut off from 'up-country' England in the 18th century, such a growing preponderance of 'external' influences created specific tensions and unease.¹

Moreover, despite a steadily increasing capitalisation of the mines, utilisation of that capital remained often rudimentary and (for the miner) precarious. Because of the risky nature of investment in mines, accounts were presented quarterly-or even each month- and profits divided immediately. Any additional capital required would at this point be 'called', and only provided if the adventurers approved the risk. It was a primitive system of capital provision, designed first and foremost to protect the interests of the adventurer.² What it meant in Cornwall, however, was that mining ventures (as with many similar early industrial ventures throughout the country), remained starved of capital reserves for investment, and dependent upon the constant financial review of external investors. The Cornish copper industry throughout the 19th century rested upon precariously unstable foundations. Because of the low level of reserve capital within mining companies, the industry as a whole was peculiarly sensitive to fluctuations in the

1. Barton, Copper Mining, pp. 24-5; Halliday, Cornwall, p. 255; Jenkin, Cornish Miner, p. 155.

2. Rowe, Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution, pp. 23-5.

price of copper;and throughout the first half of the 19th century its history was dominated by regular cycles of mine closures when prices and profits diminished,and speculative booms when prices soared or rich deposits were discovered.¹ For the labouring miner, the consciousness that the traditional Cornish pursuit of mining was now entirely determined from 'outside' may well have been the most important contributory factor to a widespread awareness of a new-found impotence and insecurity.

In a real sense,the conditions present in Cornwall's industrial transformation fragmented traditional Cornish society and implanted much greater social conflict.The first severe and substantial social dislocation was experienced in the last quarter of the 18th century when,against the backcloth of the extension of copper mining and considerable migration to the west,the need to cut costs (because of falling prices, increased competition,and rising expenses) led to the temporary closure of mines and the first manifestation of the new phenomenon of mass,if temporary,unemployment among miners. In 1787,the price war between the Parys mining concern and the Cornish owners led to the forced suspension of work in some of the major mines in Cornwall,to which the miners responded with a substantial demonstration in the town of Truro.²

During the 1790s,again,a number of mines closed,and the threat and reality of unemployment fanned the fires of unrest already kindled by the continuing hardships of migration,and the growing

1. Ibid.pp.133-9.The arrival of joint stock companies did not make the industry more stable in terms of investment-witness the great period of speculation (and its aftermath) in the mid-1820s.

2. Jenkin,Cornish Miner,p.159.

problem of persistent grain shortages, as local farmers failed to keep pace with the demands of a rising population. At a time of 'the greatest imaginable poverty and distress', there was inevitable unrest and social conflict in the mining heartland of west Cornwall.¹

Throughout the first half of the 19th century, as the industry steadied and flourished, there was both a general undercurrent of social discontent generated by the gradual extension of industrial capitalism, and, spasmodically, more overt social protest whenever cyclical troughs in mining production caused unemployment and particularly intense hardship and crisis.²

What is in many senses remarkable, however, is that throughout the whole of this process, the labouring miners responded with very little organised opposition to general developments, and that a 'working class consciousness' which might have stimulated a political response was very slow to evolve. The Cornish miner was rarely attracted to popular radicalism, Luddism, or Chartism, and trade union organisation remained piecemeal and in general half-hearted. The first 'labour dispute' within the Cornish mining industry did not take place until 1831, and no strike occurred until 1857.³

We have already seen that John Rule attributed much of this apparent quiescence to the influence of Wesleyan Methodism,⁴ and John Rowe has also argued, though from a different position, that

1. Ibid., p.187, pp.156-7.

2. This was reflected in the persistence and regularity of food rioting down to 1847 : see Rule, 'The Labouring Miner in Cornwall', D.Phil.thesis, p.116ff.

3. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, p.30.

4. see above pp.22-3.

Methodism buttressed the socio-economic transformation to industrial capitalism. For Rowe, as for Gilbert and Warner, the primary appeal of Methodism was to the economic beneficiaries of industrial advance:

'The increased pace of social and economic change stimulated a demand for a more dynamic religious faith. The regime of parson and squire was out of place on a mining frontier where fortunes might be made or lost overnight. A fair number of men by providing supplies and services to the growing mining industry achieved wealth greater than that which many landowning gentry could count on from rents or parsons from tithes. With increased economic opportunity, unsatisfied social ambitions were born and antagonisms to the old order developed. These moderately wealthy but socially 'unrecognised' people were naturally attracted by the Arminian theology of John Wesley.'

1

In part, it might be argued from Rowe's thesis that an organised opposition to industrialisation was defused by the fact that large numbers of artisans, craftsmen, shopkeepers, and the nominally 'independent' found appeal in the morality and ethics of Wesleyanism. Such individuals, resting ambiguously between the labouring and employer classes, were essentially diverted from potential leadership of proletarian revolt to uphold the 'progressive' implications of the 'entrepreneurial ideal'. Rowe claimed that in certain respects Methodism directly served the labouring classes themselves, arguing, for example, that mass revivalism in particular 'can only be regarded as egalitarian and democratic', and that the use of class leaders and local preachers of plebeian stock 'emphasized the breach with the old hierarchical

1. John Rowe, The Hard-Rock Men, Liverpool, 1974, p. 15.

order.' He did not state explicitly ,however,whether these facts could be used to support the contentions of either Wearmouth or the Hammonds as to Methodism's specific social role for the working classes throughout Cornwall's industrialisation.¹

However,both Rule and Rowe would allow that factors other than the role of Methodism must be considered in explaining the political quiescence of the Cornish miner.Most critically, by focusing on specific structural features of the developing copper mining industry,it becomes clear that industrialisation in Cornwall did not entail or induce either a total or an immediate social transformation.Instead,the possibility existed for labouring families to hold on to a number of customary cultural and mental baggages while in transit,and indeed once within the new industrial world. The maintenance of degrees of social continuity for labouring families of itself considerably dampened the spirit of social conflict,and softened the dislocating blows of industrial capitalism.

In the first place,the system of employment of miners,in general,remained on traditional lines.Although the size of mining ventures increased substantantially,the typical labouring miner retained some sense of 'independence' within the workings because the 'tribute' system was still in operation.

According to this system,miners bid against each other, and contracted,on an individualistic basis,to work a particular stretch of the mine for a certain percentage of the price raised when their ore was sold.Employers were willing to allow tradition

1. Ibid.,p.15.

to continue, because they believed that the tribute system mollified latent industrial conflict, by encouraging the workforce into a mutual concern, not with wages and conditions, but with productivity and the price of ore. Miners, for their part, continued to work without the security of a steady income, but their defence of custom was based on the perception that by these means traditional (if notional) independence was preserved.¹

In the second place, wherever possible, the miners continued to live as they had lived prior to migration: in isolated cottages, hamlets, and homesteads, which allowed (again) a sense of continuity and independence to be retained. Alternately, they gathered in new mining communities, which displayed remarkable socio-occupational homogeneity, where mining families were able to remain a 'race apart' from other social groups. Wherever they lived, in the main miners either owned their own cottages, or lodged with other mining families, and generally escaped the social controls inherent in a landlord/tenant relationship, or in a dependence on employers' housing.²

In the third place, as already implied, the structure of employment and the nature of settlement ensured that explicit and direct social division was minimal both in the mine and in the village environment. The adventurers who came from diverse social and regional backgrounds were rarely visible 'on the ground'. There

1. Cornish Mining. Essays on the Organisation of Cornish Mines and the Cornish Mining Economy, ed. Roger Burt, Newton Abbot, 1969, pp. 10-11, pp. 154-63.
2. Rule, 'The Labouring Miner in Cornwall', D.Phil. thesis, p. 195.; J. Youings, Sixteenth-century England, Harmondsworth, 1984, p. 32.; Richard Warner, A Tour through Cornwall in the Autumn of 1808, London, 1809, pp. 299-300.

was little management structure within the mining concerns themselves, and the official who the miners came most in contact with-the 'captain'-who was in charge of the day-to-day operation of the mine, had very often begun as a working miner himself, and was generally held in high respect within the mining community.¹

In the fourth place, though an industrial capitalist discipline gradually became apparent, the process of its extension was both slow and incomplete. A shift system was quite successfully introduced in the early 19th century, but traditional holidays and the custom of miners joining the pilchard boats in season, for example, were only eroded over many years, and then primarily for reasons distinct from mine-owners edicts.²

Taken together, these factors alone provide a great many reasons specific to the copper mining industry itself which explain why, despite an often changed working environment, and (above all) a growing sense that their lives were more and more 'externally-controlled', working miners and their families shunned political radicalism and trade union organisation on experiencing industrial capitalism. They were able to maintain, to varying degrees-and as far as possible- traditional life-styles and customary outlooks and attitudes; and to hold on to the sense of 'independence' and the idea of privilege deeply-ingrained within the mining community in general as a legacy of the substantial rights granted to tinners in 1201.³ Though these rights in themselves were effectively meaningless by the 19th century, the consciousness that the miners

1. Rule, op.cit., p.38.

2. Ibid., pp.81-2, p.96.

3. Halliday, Cornwall, pp.115-6.

constituted a 'race apart' lingered on, and itself both reinforced the maintenance of tradition, and helped legitimate the continued regular recourse to the customary form of direct action—the food riot—in times of peculiar hardship. It is fair to say, that as the 19th century progressed there was a gradual erosion of tradition, and even—in the second half of the century—a whittling back of the tribute system of employment.¹ But for the period of this study, the labouring miners in general were in a curious position in the new industrial world. In a very real sense, the economic structures which underpinned their existence were removed and externalised from quite early in the industrialising process; but on the other hand, their day-to-day circumstances in work, community, and cottage could still often seem (on the surface at least) little changed from custom.

All of which has a bearing on the kind of role which Methodism probably performed in early 19th century Cornwall. Both Rule and Rowe in different ways identified Methodism as serving employer or entrepreneurial interests during industrialisation, but both left important questions unanswered in so doing. Rowe, in arguing that Methodism's prime appeal was to a restricted 'artisan' or 'entrepreneurial' class, underestimated popular attachment to Methodism in the mining villages of west Cornwall. Rule certainly recognised the depth of support for Methodism among miners, but misrepresented its effects when he argued that it helped transform the morals and customs of labouring miners in their transference to a more industrialised environment. Perhaps a new interpretation of the

1. Cornish Mining, ed. Burt, pp. 190–1.

popular effects of Methodism amongst miners is called for.

In the other key areas of economic activity—farming, and to a lesser extent, fishing—the industrialising process had similar effects. On the one hand, again, there was often an apparent continuity of customary techniques and practices, and yet the structures within which such activity took place were in fact shifting gradually to erode the vitality of the cottage economy and to impose a much wider market orientation on the Cornish. In agriculture, for example, production had traditionally rested primarily upon the priorities of the cottage and self-sufficiency. There had been relatively little agricultural 'improvement' in Cornwall by the late 18th century, in part because the general poverty of the soil, and the topographical and geological dominance of the great granite backbone of the county, provided little encouragement to the would-be improver.¹ Understandably, the typical landowner tended to concentrate on the rich pickings which might be made from any mineral deposits under the soil, rather than on the often meagre potential of the soil itself. But farming also remained small-scale and traditional because of the relative security of tenure which smallholders and tenants enjoyed in large parts of the county. The exceptional position of the Duke of Cornwall as landowner had meant that historically, and down to the 18th century, a sizeable class of substantial landowners had not emerged within the county, and that in general landowners followed

1. W.G.V. Balchin, Cornwall. An Illustrated Essay on the History of the Landscape, London, 1954, pp. 19-21; Jenkin, Cornwall and its People, p. 125.; G.E. Mingay, English Landed Society in the 18th century, London, 1963, p. 100.

the lead of the Duchy in composing and maintaining their tenurial arrangements. Because of the simple 'isolation' of the county, if for no other reason, the Duchy had traditionally granted its tenants a considerable measure of independence. Duchy tenants held land either as freeholders or as customary tenants, and neither group had lost by the 18th century its traditional right to consider its land as inheritable estate. In particular, the radical transformation in land-holding and land-use which accompanied the decline in customary tenancy in other parts of the country from the 16th century passed largely unnoticed in Cornwall.¹ William Marshall, the agricultural improver, noted that (to his mind) an excessive security of tenure was typical both within and outside Duchy estates in his tour of the county in the 1790s. He asserted that it was normal for tenants to hold their lands on three lives' (or ninety-nine years') leases, and that the right was customarily established to add further lives to their leases upon payment of a small sum. As a result, throughout the 18th century, the county remained divided into plots of a handful of acres, with farmsteads dotted regularly across the landscape.²

On the surface, developments during the first half of the 19th

1. R. Carew, The Survey of Cornwall (1602), ed. F. Halliday, New York, 1969, pp. 122-4.; Robert Fraser, General View of the County of Cornwall with Observations on the Means of its Improvement, London, 1794, pp. 30-1.; Daniel and Samuel Lysons, Magna Brittania; being a concise topographical account of the several counties of Great Britain, vol. iii Cornwall, London, 1814, p. viii, p. lxx.; Fortescue Hitchens and Samuel Drew, The History of Cornwall, 2 vols., Helston, 1824, i pp. 571-3.
2. William Marshall, Rural Economy of the West of England, (1796), 2 vols., reprint, Newton Abbot, 1970, i pp. 43-6, p. 60, pp. 71-2.; Balchin, Cornwall, pp. 15-6.

century left much of this pattern unchanged. A national farm survey in 1946 indicated that Cornwall was classified along with Lancashire and Middlesex as possessing no farms of 1000 acres or more; and in 1957, the total number of holdings in the county was only exceeded in Devon, Lancashire, and the West Riding of Yorkshire.¹

No land was enclosed by Parliamentary Act prior to 1809; and 'improvement' in the early 19th century almost always referred to efforts to reclaim wasteland, rather than reform methods and land-holding arrangements. By the early 19th century-it has been claimed-the general features of landholding and land-use were little changed from those of two centuries before.²

And yet appearances in the countryside, as in the mining communities, were in some senses deceptive. The key reason why traditional farming patterns had been retained into the 18th century was linked to the limitations of nature, rather than to the non-emergence of economic pressures or individual will for change. From the 16th century, there had been moves from the gentry to improve their estates wherever possible. When Leland toured the county in the 1540s, his impressions of the landscape have been described as a 'series of cultivated oases set in large expanses of moor.' As a result of growing population and expanding markets, Carew was able to assert in the early 17th century that Cornish farmers, who had previously failed to meet local demands, were now not only achieving that, but exporting produce too.³ By the 18th

1. H.E. Bracey, English Rural Life, London, 1959, pp. 16-9.

2. W.E. Tate, A Domesday of English Enclosure Acts and Awards, ed. M.E. Turner, Reading, 1978.

3. The Agrarian History of England and Wales vol. iv 1500-1640, - ed. Joan Thirsk, Cambridge, 1967, pp. 72-4.

century, the fertile coastal plains, and parts of the south-east corner of the county, had been enclosed to produce large quantities of corn, creating in the process new patterns of landholding, land-use, and social relations.¹ In essence, the more radical and widespread changes that occurred within Cornish agriculture from the late 18th century merely reflected an acceleration of this slow, long-term trend.

The critical 'pull-factor' which stimulated change was the rapid growth in local population, which made it possible even by the 1750s for the claim to be made that the county had ceased, again, to be self-sufficient.² By the 1790s, it was asserted that: 'This county, in plentiful years, does not supply more than two-thirds of what is consumed in it.'³ In addition to the simple increased local demand for food, farmers began to perceive that, as a result of the nationwide expansion of population, a profitable 'export' market up-country was also increasing the economic potential of much formerly-neglected land. Partly as a consequence of these developments, a number of gentlemen became converted to the views and practices of improvers who toured the county during the 1790s.

As a result of these pressures and developments, Cornish agriculture began a half-century of substantial improvement in 1790s which, as in the mining districts, did much to fracture and disrupt traditional society. In the first phase, the high farm prices

1. R. Polwhele, The History of Cornwall, London, 1816, i pp. 150-5, iii p. 4.; A. L. Rowse, A Cornish Childhood, London, 1974, p. 25.
2. Borlase, Natural History, p. 89. n.
3. Rule, 'The Labouring Miner in Cornwall', D. Phil. thesis, p. 122.

engendered by the Napoleonic Wars provided an additional 'pull-factor' to would-be improvers and stimulated the first efforts substantially to increase agricultural output, by bringing more land under cultivation. Smallholders encroached on marginal and wasteland which bordered their own plots in a piecemeal and haphazard fashion, while several large-scale operations were undertaken by substantial landowners to carve out new smallholdings on the moors. Charles Rashleigh of Duporth, near St. Austell, for example, leased out a considerable part of the wasteland in his possession in small lots; while Lord Grenville, in a similar scheme enclosed Boconnoc Downs by Parliamentary Act. By 1860, it was estimated, between 25 and 30,000 acres of wasteland had been reclaimed since the beginning of the 18th century, most of it in fact during the 19th century.¹

Between 1815 and 1850, however, the second phase of Cornwall's agrarian 'revolution' arrived, as traditional smallholding was set in steady decline by the post-war depression, which finished off a number of over-stretched, debt-ridden farmers, particularly in the north. Simultaneously, a more sustained effort by landowners to increase farming efficiency on land already under cultivation was made easier by this crumbling from within of traditional smallholding. After 1815, but especially from the 1830s, agrarian reforms were introduced on a steadily broadening scale. On one hand, soil quality was improved by the more widespread use of manure, and especially burnt limestone, which was transported across the east of the county on newly-built canals. On the other, landowners sought to

1. Hitchins and Drew, History of Cornwall, i
p.572.; Rowe, Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial
Revolution, p.225.

maximise efficiency by consolidating small farms, and introducing machinery which reduced wage costs. Some consolidation occurred naturally as the smallest farmers went to the wall after 1815, but in other instances it resulted from the economic pressures upon middle-sized farmers which led them to seek any means, in particular the replacement of customary tenure with fourteen-year 'rack' rents, to increase their own economic security.¹

The result of these developments was the steady decline after 1815 of traditional smallholding, and the gradual extension of commercial agriculture which fostered increasing social division within rural communities. In the post-war years, there was unrest and hardship as small farmers particularly suffered; during the 1820s, antagonisms focused on the tithe-exacting Church.² From around 1830, conflict became more clearly 'class-based', as medium and large farmers put through their plans for reform, and smallholders either turned over to wage labour or migrated. In the so-called 'winter of discontent' of 1830-31, when half the males entered in the Census as agricultural labourers in the parish of Morwenstow in north Cornwall, for example, were said to be at work on the parish roads because of the lack of farm employment, several 'Swing' attacks on corn-ricks and machinery were threatened.³

From the mid-1830s onwards, the first substantial wave of enclosure by Parliamentary Act was undertaken, and by the mid-1850s, great change had been effected. Farms had been consolidated,

1. Rowe, Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution, pp. 255-8.
2. Ibid., pp. 243-4.
3. Ibid., p. 246.

machinery introduced, wages kept low, and many small farmers and labourers forced into neighbouring mining districts or overseas. For those who remained, the period from the mid-1850s to the late 1870s was one of prosperity and relative calm, as farmers reaped the benefits of improvement. But in the processes leading to this mid-century rural tranquility, many smallholders had been forced from their traditional livelihoods.¹

Change in the countryside during the first half of the 19th century was therefore, in general, more complete and in some senses more traumatic than in the mining regions. A more clear-cut class division emerged between 1830 and 1850. For smallholders the loss of a traditional cottage livelihood was often more complete than for the miner, who at least retained his cottage and the tribute system, even if his independence was reduced. For many smallholders, independence was entirely destroyed. And yet, again, actual conflict in the countryside, as in the mines, was surprisingly rare. Swing riots were threatened in 1830, but never materialised. Antagonisms during the 1820s were directed more against the Church than against large farmers. In general the migration from the land was undertaken with apparently remarkably little protest.

Again, Methodism might be interpreted as playing some role in this relative social quiescence. Methodism, and especially sectarian Bible Christianity spread rapidly among the small farmers of the north at just that point where the post-war depression was creating most unrest.² In general, it was during the first half of the 19th

1. Tate, Domesday, ed. Turner ; Halliday, Cornwall, p. 289.

2. John Thorne, James Thorne of Shebbear. A Memoir, London, 1873, p. 24ff.

century, as traditional rural society began to break down, that Methodism first spread into the rural districts, and exerted social influences. But again, as with the miners, there is a need to analyse more closely what was actually happening in the countryside throughout this period before the role of Methodism can begin to be determined.

In the first place, despite all that has been said about fundamental change in the countryside, there were parts of the county where nature continued to impose severe restrictions on any programme of improvement, and in some instances left the smallholder free to eke out an existence in traditional ways. In the second place, there was the counter-attraction of a life in mining which, for all its dangers and uncertainties, offered a continuity of a cottage existence, and the potential of financial recompense. From the 1830s onwards, migration, and increasingly emigration, provided a valuable safety-valve, which probably did most to release rural social pressures at the points of greatest tension.

But, as with the miners, there was probably also a more general over-arching popular interpretation of economic change in the countryside during this period which focused not primarily on evolving local social divisions, but on the notion that the economy as a whole—and all Cornish, irrespective of rank or class—were in the process of becoming increasingly dependent on 'foreigners' and more and more 'externally-controlled'. The emotional appeal of Cornish nationalism throughout industrialisation was of itself an important means of retaining bonds between an ever-more fragmented

society, and effectively channeled latent local antagonisms into a more forceful xenophobic critique of 'foreigners' from up-country, and hence away from growing communal divisions.

The relationship between Cornwall and the wider world during the industrial period is complex. The Cornish had evolved historically in virtual isolation from the rest of England, in a Celtic fringe where their own language was still spoken in the 18th century. John Rowe described them as 'a race apart from those who lived east of the Tamar', who were typically 'individualistic' in their day-to-day existence, but remarkably 'clannish' in their relations with the world external to Cornwall.¹ The process of industrialisation tied Cornwall much more definitely into a wider world; and such increased contact could, in certain circumstances, be interpreted as positively beneficial. Emigration from the county, for example, became the most common form of escape from economic hardship during the 19th century, and between 1871 and 1881, something like one-third of the mining population left the country to settle in the United States, Australia, South Africa and South America. Furthermore, there were those, particularly mine-owners, improving landowners, and increasingly the middle class in general, who interpreted the growing influence of up-country England as a progressive development, improving the economic potential of the county and its inhabitants, widening social and cultural horizons, and dispersing traditional Cornish insularity and obscurantism.²

1. Rowe, Hard-Rock Men, p.1.

2. Within local Methodist circles, for example, a number of the leading laymen in the town societies increasingly emphasized the Connexional (that is, national), rather than the purely local dimension to their religion. See Chapter 8.

However, throughout the period of industrialisation, a far stronger and more vigorously expressed view focused on all external influences in a negative light, as essentially harbingers of destruction, rather than transporters of progress, and the increasing influence of 'external' forces and 'foreigners' on the local economy in fact probably had the effect of rallying the Cornish together (in general), in defence of a distinctive culture and custom.¹

Despite economic trends, the simple fact of the geographical isolation of the county ensured that Cornwall remained 'cut off' from up-country England in many ways down to 1870, which assisted the retention of many distinctivenesses of social, economic, cultural, and religious form. Travelling by road was extremely tiring and limited, and even with the improvement and development of roads by Turnpike Trusts in the 18th century, there remained just two arterial roads through the county, linking the major market towns and boroughs in a haphazard and winding way.² Prior to the 1870s, the few visitors to Cornwall had specific, and sometimes pressing aims in mind: from religious revitalisation with John Wesley and George Whitefield, to agricultural improvement with Robert Fraser and William Marshall. A small number of travel writers and topographers also made the journey in the late 18th and early

1. Again, it will be argued later that this often subconscious, but sometimes overt process gave local Methodism some of its vitality and purpose. See especially Chapters 7 and 9.
2. Impressions of the Old Duchy, Book I 1795 Through Cornwall by Coach, ed. I. D. Spreadbury, Mevagissey, 1971, p. 6.; Lysons, Magna Britannia, pp. cxcii-cxciii.; Hitchins and Drew, History of Cornwall, i pp. 579-80.

19th centuries, but failed to inspire popular imitation, even when they incorporated a considerable romantic emphasis on the picturesque in Cornish villages and the landscape.¹ There was certainly the beginnings of the development of bathing resorts in the county, with the cutting off of the Continent during the Napoleonic Wars, and Bude and Penzance were early frequented: the former for summer bathing, the latter especially as a recuperative centre for invalids throughout the winter. But such developments were on a small scale, and before the opening of Brunel's Tamar bridge in 1859, which finally linked Cornwall to the national railway network, it was only the most enterprising and motivated who visited the county.²

Wilkie Collins' significantly titled Rambles Beyond Railways published in 1851 began with the premise that Cornwall was a county 'too rarely visited and too little known.'³ In a similar vein, the author of A Londoner's Walk to the Land's End published in 1855 began his venture into Cornwall with the words:

'You land at Torpoint...A few minutes take you clear of the houses, and then at once you are struck with the difference between the county you are in, and the one you have left.'

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1. see e.g. Stebbing Shaw, 'Tour to the West of England in 1788', The British Tourist's or Traveller's Pocket Companion through England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, vol. iii, 3rd edn., London, 1809; William George Maton, Observations Relative Chiefly to the Natural History, Picturesque Scenery, and Antiquities of the Western Counties of England, Made in the Years 1794 and 1796, 2 vols., London, 1797; George Lipscomb, A Journey into Cornwall, through the counties of Southampton, Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset and Devon, Warwick, 1799; Richard Warner, A Tour through Cornwall in the Autumn of 1808, London 1809; F.W.L. Stockdale, Excursions in the County of Cornwall, (1824), reprint, Truro, 1972.
2. Balchin, Cornwall, p. 93.; N&Q ser. xiv 1930 p. 346.
3. W. Wilkie Collins, Rambles beyond Railways, London, 1851, p. 2.
4. Walter White, A Londoner's Walk to the Land's End, London, London, 1855, pp. 166-7.

Most pertinently, he found a Cornish village visited early on his tour had 'a foreign look about it'; that Looe was 'a place of foreign aspect'; and that in general:

'Frequently did I fancy myself out of England while in Cornwall; and any one able to use his eyes may well be pardoned for the illusion.'

1.

To the Cornish themselves, this detachment from a wider society was almost certainly of vital importance, and -by the mid-19th century - still very real. The 1851 Census demonstrated that a higher proportion of Cornish still resided in the county of their birth, than inhabitants of any other English county.² Similarly, the actual number of outsiders who had essentially infiltrated Cornish society remained very small. This fact alone provided significant comfort to Cornishmen of all classes. It meant that, despite local socio-economic change, the maintenance- indeed strengthening- of a traditional sense of regional distinctiveness- was very often able to overcome local social fragmentation. It meant also, that a vital socio-cultural resistance existed to many economic changes which were identified as non-Cornish in origin, which in many senses explains why alternative means, such as trade unionism and radicalism, were so rarely sought.

It was only once the railway link was established that Cornish identity came to be effectively challenged. By the 1880s, popular

1. Ibid., p.175, pp.17-8.

2. Rule, 'The Labouring Miner in Cornwall,' D.Phil. thesis p.6.

practical tourist guides proliferated.¹ In the late 19th century, hotels, boarding houses, and other tourist amenities were added or introduced in Penzance, Falmouth, Newquay, Looe, and St. Ives, as Cornwall's fading fishing ports began to be transformed into seaside resorts. The twin processes of mass emigration of Cornish mining families, and influx of holidaymakers, very rapidly decimated in the last quarter of the 19th century not only the 'isolation' of Cornwall, but much of what was distinctive about its people in terms of attitudes, beliefs, customs, and practices. Antiquarians and folklorists plundered the county to record the remnants of folk beliefs and practices long since gone in most parts of up-country England. And in so doing they complemented the growing corpus of tourist writing, whose stories of Cornish wreckers, pirates, and pixies helped reinforce the romantic view of the county's history, while contributing to the demise of the real vitality and practice of Cornish culture.²

In the late 19th century, the Cornish could do little by way of protest. Their traditional livelihoods had finally been eroded, and for those who remained, the tourist industry became the means of survival. But by the 1920s, the situation had stabilized, emigration had all but dried up, the great mining collapse had been over-

1. e.g. S.D. Ludlum, Exploring Cornwall One Hundred Years Ago, London, 1985.
2. e.g. Walter Tregellas, Tourist's Guide to Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, London, 1878; William Bottrell, Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall, 3 vols., Penzance, 1870, 1873, 1880; E. Bonham, A Corner of Old Cornwall, London, 1896; Enys Tregarthen, North Cornwall Fairies and Legends, London, 1906; Robert Hunt, Popular Romances of the West of England, 2 vols., London, 1865; I.T. Tregellas, Peeps into the Haunts and Homes of the Rural Population of Cornwall, Truro, 1868.

come. Simultaneously, the first truly substantial wave of holidaymakers arrived. Under these circumstances, a now explicit and forthright Cornish nationalist revival began, which focused initially on the resurrection of the Cornish language and preservation of remaining folk customs and festivals. The pre-1870 world had, in fact, been lost forever. But what is most remarkable—and in attempting to understand processes of social change during industrialisation most significant—is the extent to which traditional popular Cornish culture endured so long.

Table 1 : Decennial production of fine copper in tons,1801-80.

Decade.	Cornwall.	United Kingdom.	World.
1801-10.	60,597.	65,000	91,000.
1811-20.	67,030.	73,000.	96,000.
1821-30.	91,295.	106,000.	135,000.
1831-40.	116,161.	143,000.	218,000.
1841-50.	115,499.	138,000.	291,000.
1851-60.	121,548.	142,000.	505,999.
1861-70.	90,614.	116,000.	900,000.
1871-80.	36,224.	47,000.	1,189,400.

Source : Rowe,Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution,p.128.

Table 2 : Population of Cornwall,1779-1871.

Date.	Population.	Decennial % increase.
1779.	148,729.	
1801.	192,281.	13.3.
1811.	220,525.	14.7.
1821.	261,045.	18.4.
1831.	301,306.	15.4.
1841.	342,159.	13.6.
1851.	355,558.	3.9.
1861.	369,390.	3.9.
1871.	362,343.	-1.9.

Sources : The figure for 1779 is taken from Pounds,'Population Movement';figures 1801-71 from abstracts of Census Returns (Parliamentary Papers).

CHAPTER 3 : THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN CORNWALL.

By whatever gauge one might apply, the Church of England was 'failing' in Cornwall in the 18th century. Studies of surviving episcopal Visitation Returns for the county reveal a steady decline in performance throughout the century, in terms both of numbers of parishioners attending communion, and of residence on the part of the clergy. In 1779—the starting point for the analysis of this chapter—the replies to Bishop Ross's Visitation queries reflect an institution just part-way down a slippery slope, which begins to bottom out only in the 1820s. Yet they provide a gloomy picture of religious provision and attendance; and clear-cut proof of the incontestable failure of the ideal of Anglican monopolism in Cornwall.¹

It has been customary for contemporary and later critical views of the 18th century Church to focus on individual abuses and a general clerical malaise as the root cause of the declining influence of the Church. Cornish clergymen, in this respect, were as much, if not more, afflicted by the twin evils of non-residence and pluralism as their colleagues nationally. In 1779, just 28% of Cornish parishes possessed a resident incumbent who served that parish alone. In a further 13%, he was resident, but also served

1. H.Miles Brown, The Church in Cornwall, Truro, 1964, pp.66-7.; G.C.B.Davies, The Early Cornish Evangelicals 1735-60, London, 1951, p.25. ; H.Miles Brown has utilised a study of the 18th and early 19th century Visitation Returns in his thesis, 'Methodism and the Church of England in Cornwall, 1738-1838', London University Ph.D. thesis, 1946. Methodist entries are summarised in H.Miles Brown, Episcopal Visitation Queries and Methodism, n.p., 1962.

elsewhere; or—in the case of two parishes—actually served nowhere. In just over half the parishes, the incumbent was non-resident; in 38% he was both non-resident and non-serving, duties falling generally on an under-paid curate. In only half of the parishes did parishioners find their own appointed clergyman—whether incumbent or curate, resident or non-resident—tendering to their souls alone.¹

Clearly a strong a priori case could be made linking poor attendance at the parish church to lax, insufficient clerical provision. The case is strengthened by evidence of frequently low standards of pastoral care and responsibility amongst those clergymen who did reside. Cornwall in the 18th century had its share of hard-drinking, fox-hunting clergy, like Parson Kemp of Helston, or the infamous Thomas Wills of Wendron, reputed never to have entered his church to take a service.² In the early 19th century, William Pye, the rector of Blisland, was said to be living 'in concubinage with a cobblers' wife in the village by whom he had a long family, all illegitimate.'³ In a more prosaic but nonetheless significant vein, the literary Reverend Richard Polwhele defended pluralism and the practice of farming out the work of the Church to curates, on the grounds that it left rectors free to concentrate on their studies.⁴

1. Calculated from 'Bishop Ross's Visitation Articles, 1779, Replies to Queries', D.R.O. MS. Chanter 232, a, b.
2. Brown, 'Methodism and the Church of England in Cornwall', Ph.D. thesis, p. 44.
3. H. Miles Brown, The Catholic Revival in Cornish Anglicanism. A Study of the Tractarians in Cornwall 1833-1906, St. Winnow, 1980, p. 15.
4. R. Polwhele, Traditions and Recollections, 2 vols., London, 1826, ii pp. 579-80.

But there is a need to avoid over-emphasizing the degree of personal responsibility for Anglican shortcomings in the 18th century. Despite compelling statistics and colourful anecdotal evidence, two important countervailing arguments challenge the apparent irresistibility of the 'lax standards' thesis. In the first place, the statistics themselves hide an extraordinary range of individual motivations and circumstances, and limitless degrees of conscientiousness and ability. The Cornish clergy included a number of strong and devoted Evangelicals, like George Thomson and John Bennet, who welcomed the Wesleys into their vicarages and churches in the north-east of the county in the 1740s and 50s, or Samuel Walker, who initiated a Holy Club for devotion and discussion at Truro, which attracted significant numbers of neighbouring clergymen. Fox-hunting sinners cannot quite be matched in 18th century clerical anecdotes by Evangelical saints; but the numbers and influence of the former have unquestionably been exaggerated by popular legend and folklore, and especially by 19th century Evangelicals with a vested interest in painting a dark and grisly picture of their clerical forbears.

In the second place, although pastoral standards within the Cornish Church were generally low in the 18th century, contemporary social expectations of clergymen were often no higher. As G.F.A. Best has remarked, it was not the norm for a clergyman to devote himself entirely to the Spirit, but that 'unless seriously affected by Evangelicalism, he could farm, fish, and shoot just like his lay neighbours and relations.'¹ Apart from instances where non-

1. G.F.A. Best, Temporal Pillars. Queen Anne's Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the Church of England, Cambridge, 1964, pp. 47-8.

residence or individual lassitude created practical obstructions to churchgoing, it is in fact difficult to prove that parishioners ceased to attend church simply because of clerical torpor and indifference. This at least is one interpretation which can be drawn from careful analysis of attendance recorded in the 1779 Visitation Returns. A host of methodological and statistical problems arise when attempting such an analysis,¹ but the general pattern which materialises does allow tentative conclusions to be made. Taking an average 'communicant density' (proportion of adult parochial population as Anglican communicants) for each form of parochial clerical provision, it can be demonstrated—surprisingly—that the Church recorded highest returns in parishes served by a neighbouring clergyman, and lowest where the curate or incumbent resided.

Table 3 : Average Communicant Density (C.D.) by type of parochial clerical provision. (Source: Bishop Ross's Visitation Articles, 1779).

Service provided by :	Number of parishes:	Average C.D:
Neighbouring clergyman.	9.	26.4.
Non-resident incumbent.	26.	22.2.
Res.incumbent, also serves elsewhere.	24.	18.8.
Non-resident curate.	23.	17.9.
Res.incumbent, serves no other parish.	56.	15.6.
Resident curate.	25.	13.0.

1. Apart from the dangers of inferring too much about church attendance in general from communicant figures, the figures themselves include obvious flaws, inaccuracies, and lacunae. Moreover, the methodology adopted in estimating adult populations of parishes has been simply to double the figure for the number of families listed in each Return. Nonetheless, though not accurate guides to actual church attendance, the figures do have value as a means of comparing the performance of the Church on a parish basis.

Of course, such statistics do not preclude the possibility that the abuses of non-residence and pluralism may have had a cumulative effect over several generations which caused long-term damage to the status and drawing power of the Church at the parish level. But nonetheless, two interesting themes still propose themselves. In the first place, it would appear that some degree of selectivity conditioned churchgoing, and that a particular clergyman was neither viewed nor judged simply on the criterion of whether he resided or not. But, of far greater significance, no apparent connection existed between the most widespread manifestation of clerical abuse- non-residence- and low church attendance. At heart, then, it would seem that the problems for the Church in Cornwall lay deeper than in inadequate pastoral standards. From the 1779 Returns, it would appear, the notion of a resident clergyman having sole charge for the spiritual guidance of his parochial flock - itself the very basis of the Anglican universalist ideal - had failed to rally large segments of the Cornish population as a whole. Explanation of the 'failure' of the Church in Cornwall has to be sought, not -initially- in worsening standards of clerical oversight during the 18th century, but in long-term and deep-seated institutional and structural factors specific to the Cornish Church as a whole. Lax standards, and specific problems of pastoral provision in the 18th century may have aggravated the situation, but they by no means explain the weaknesses of Anglicanism in the county at that time.

The roots of the problems for the Church in Cornwall were in

fact laid with the actual foundation of Christianity in the county. Evidence suggests the existence of a Christian influence in a number of coastal communities in the 4th century, but the extensive and permanent Christianization of Cornwall began in the 5th century following the arrival of Celtic missionaries from Ireland and Wales. Altogether, around one hundred and seventy of these 'saints' are memorialised in Cornish placenames, a number of them common to Wales and Brittany.¹ The distinctively Celtic origins of the Cornish Church conditioned subsequent Christian history in the county, and in particular assured later institutional and pastoral problems for two interconnected reasons. In the first place:

'The Celtic Church had its own peculiar usages, derived partly from its long isolation from the rest of Christendom, and partly from a strand of tradition which seems to bear a similarity to Eastern Church customs. These differences created suspicion and difficulty later on when Celtic and Saxon Christians confronted one another.'

2

In the second, the initial impetus behind the spread of Christianity within the Celtic fringes of Ireland, Wales, Brittany, and Cornwall in the 5th century, would appear to have been the need to integrate and defend Celtic communities against the threat of pagan Saxon advance following the Roman withdrawal. Because Cornish Christianity emerged to help preserve Celtic identity, it acquired specific folk functions and vitality which were reflected, for example, in the frequency with which pre-Christian religious sites and forms (in particular, carved stone crosses and

1. Brown, The Church in Cornwall, pp. 14-5.

2. Ibid. p. 19.

holy wells), were adapted to Christian use.¹ The apparent folk functionality of the Celtic Church created insurmountable difficulties for the (now-converted) Saxons and Normans when they set about establishing a 'national' Church. On the one hand, the inevitable discontinuities in religious form and facilities, and the disruption to traditional religious provision and practice which assimilation ensured, not only weakened the habit of church attendance, but generated positive popular antipathy to a Church both seen as destructive of traditional culture and, in a sense, an alien impost. On the other, paradoxically, because the process of transformation was never carried through with total commitment or effectiveness, the new Church was always hamstrung by its dependence upon inefficient and incomplete institutional structures.

The Saxons and Normans began the process of assimilation by introducing new liturgical forms and other practices within buildings and institutional structures which often (for practical reasons) retained an element of continuity. The original Celtic missionaries, for example, had often built their chapels and monastic cells on existing sites of veneration, such as holy wells and springs, and later Saxon and Norman church building very often maintained this continuity of site. But for two critical reasons, the new Church was unable to function effectively within the structures of the old. In the first place, the new parochial

1. Ibid. pp. 19-21.; J. Meyrick, Holy Wells. A Pilgrim's Guide to the Holy Wells of Cornwall and their Saints, Falmouth, 1982 ; L. Gougard, Christianity in Celtic Lands, trans. M. Joynt, London, 1932 ; T. Taylor, The Celtic Christianity of Cornwall. Diverse Sketches and Studies, London, 1916 ; Halliday, Cornwall, p. 98.

network established by 1100 had been modelled from about one-third of the original sites adapted or adopted by the missionaries, and the resulting parishes were, in general, very large.¹ Only 20% of them were under 2000 acres; nearly 60% over 3000. In fact, almost one in three of the parishes initially created, and still in existence by the 18th century, contained over 5000 acres.² This conformed to a national pattern in which the average size of parishes in the more outlying parts of England and Wales was considerably higher, in the early 19th century, than in those south of a line from the Severn to the Wash, and east of the Tamar.³ Although a degree of continuity was retained in Cornish Church structures, therefore, this in itself militated against effective pastoral oversight. In very simple terms, the larger the parish, the less easy it was for the incumbent to oversee; the more unlikely it was that the parish church would appear as the focal point of the parish. As Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley concluded, for the fringes in general: 'For this reason, Christianization was by no means complete by the Reformation.'⁴

This problem was compounded by the fact that the site of the parish church often bore little or no relation to local patterns of settlement; and that, even after the building of the church, the

1. Brown, op.cit., p.27.
2. Out of a total of 204 parishes, only twelve were under 1000 acres ; 31 were between 1000 and 2000 ; 40 were between 2000 and 3000 ; 76 were between 3000 and 6000 ; and 45 over 6000 acres: Tithe Commutation figures, 1836, listed in J.Polsue, Lake's Parochial History of the County of Cornwall, (1867-73), 4 vols., reprint, n.p., 1974.
3. Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert, Lee Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700, Oxford, 1977, p.59.
4. Ibid. p.59.

Cornish continued to live, typically, in their customary manner, in small villages, hamlets, and farmsteads. Most conspicuously absent from their settlement types was the large nucleated village of Anglo-Saxon origin, which centred on the church, the vicarage, the squire's house, and the village green. Except where the Saxons made direct incursions into the north of the county in the 8th and 9th centuries, leaving a legacy of English placenames and settlements, the Celtic 'underwriting' of hamlet and homestead survived through to the 18th century.¹

As a result, the parish church sometimes stood alone, or— more often— was located within what was known as a 'church-town', something:

'quite apart from the parish at large, a 'town' which in some instances possesses but one house, and is divorced alike in spirit and situation from the other far more populous groupings which may lie within the parish boundary.'

2

A visiting rector from Worcestershire in 1837 explained that the 'church-town' in the extensive and populous parish of Wendron was composed merely of the vicarage, a farmer's house, the vicar's tenant, a blacksmith's shop, and a small public house. At the same time, he counted no fewer than seventy-four hamlets within the parish boundary, some of them quite large settlements.³

The isolation of the parish church, both geographically and 'in spirit', meant that in many instances Cornish parish life focused neither on the church building nor on church activities. Even in

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1. Balchin, Cornwall, pp. 15-8.
 2. Jenkin, Cornwall and its People, p. 319.
 3. N&Q, ser. xiv, 1930, p. 329.

some cases where the building was not, in fact, far distant from the main community within the parish, the sense of detachment was still present. The church in Mevagissey for example, was viewed by locals as in some 'sequestered corner', even though it was within sight of the northern end of town.¹ In general, the simple fact that the parish church was frequently detached from the community it served meant that the task of bonding cottagers and inhabitants of dispersed hamlets with a sense of parochial loyalty was often simply insurmountable. Even in the best of conditions, the Report of a Parliamentary Commission on church buildings in 1853 supposed that - given good roads and weather - people might travel up to a mile to attend church. The visiting Worcestershire rector found many hamlets in the parish of Wendron at a distance of six or seven miles from the parish church, and concluded: 'Were it not for numerous methodist chapels, the poor miners would be in the state of heathens.'²

The Reformation in Cornwall had the general effect of reinforcing negative historical trends by fostering a new round of institutional discontinuity, pastoral inefficiency, and popular alienation. The most dramatic 'event' in the county occurred in 1549, when the introduction of the Book of Common Prayer, and the replacement of the traditional Latin liturgy with one in English, provoked an uprising in Cornwall where - in the west at least - 'many... could not understand the English even as much as the Latin.'³ The revolt in one sense symbolized the final death-pangs

1. Hitchens and Drew, History of Cornwall, ii p.473.

2. N&Q, op.cit., p.329.

3. Brown, The Church in Cornwall, pp.46-7.

of the folk roots of the ancient Cornish Church; but it was the less dramatic, underlying changes of the time which most affected subsequent Church history in the county.

In particular, the sale of substantial tracts of Church land served to create and promote a much more influential gentry class in Cornwall, who exercised considerable authority in the 17th and 18th centuries over many aspects of county life, including that of the Church.¹ By the 18th century, laymen held the rights to nominate to almost one-half of the Cornish incumbencies - the Crown and Duchy controlled perhaps 15%, while the Bishop and Dean and Chapter of Exeter together had patronage of less than one-quarter.² Not content to control the rights of nomination to so many benefices, the gentry also became deeply involved in what Christopher Hill has called 'the plunder of the Church': the progressive diversion of traditional clerical income into their own pockets, in particular by the impropriation of tithes.³ The economic exploitation of the Church attenuated clerical effectiveness by reducing the incomes - and hence social status - of many of the clergy; thereby discouraging still further the entry into local clerical ranks of educated 'gentlemen', who had always been loath to take up appointments 'in the wilderness'. As Alan Gilbert summarised:

'The dictum that the labourer is worthy of his hire had proved, in the case of the Anglican parochial system, to have an ominous corollary: where the hire

1. Halliday, Cornwall, p. 208.; Carew, Survey, ed. Halliday.
2. Figures calculated from Davies Gilbert, The Parochial History of Cornwall, 4 vols., London, 1838, refer to the period around 1730.
3. Gilbert, Religion and Society, pp. 5-6.

had become a pittance, worthy labourers had become fewer and farther between.'

1

Many Cornish benefices had become of such little value by the 18th century that pluralism was at times a necessity. The richest living at this point was St. Columb Major, worth around £400 per annum; but almost three-quarters of the parishes were included within livings worth less than £100 per annum.² In 1808 almost one in five Cornish benefices were returned to the Queen Anne's Bounty Commissioners as of less than £50 annual value.³ The large-scale diversion of funds also caused damage to the Church fabric: the absence of a house fit - or considered to be fit - for a clergyman to live in was frequently cited in 18th century Visitation Returns to explain non-residence.

The growing influence of the gentry over the fortunes of the Church did not of itself necessarily lead to a decline in church attendance at the national level. In many instances in the 18th century, parishioners attended church because squire and parson deliberately allied to emphasize their joint formal and informal influence within the community, and the extent to which most individuals were locked into a 'dependency system'.⁴ But in Cornwall, pressures to induce churchgoing could only function adequately in a minority of parishes. Because traditional patterns

1. Ibid. p.5.

2. Cyrus Redding, An Illustrated Itinerary of the County of Cornwall, London, 1842, p.232ff.

3. The Diocese of Exeter in 1821. Bishop Carey's Replies to Queries Before Visitation vol I Cornwall, ed. Michael Cook, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, new ser.3(1958).

4. Gilbert, Religion and Society, pp.12-3.

of landholding persisted into the 18th century, the unbroken ownership of a small plot of family land allowed the retention of a sense of social 'independence' from squirearchical or clerical influence; while encouraging further rejection of an Anglican Church increasingly appearing to uphold the values of traditional hierarchical society, by re-emphasizing the theory of the 'great chain of being', and the need for the poor to remember their dependency on their 'betters'. The arrival in the last decade or so of the 18th century of what G.F.A. Best called 'a new version of establishment theory' in which clergy and gentry interlinked in defence of the Church and traditional authority, had a usually detrimental effect on churchgoing in Cornwall.¹

For historical and structural reasons, then, the Church in Cornwall rested upon weak and insecure foundations; and when the processes of industrialisation began to exert influences on the county from the 1740s, they brought in their train fresh problems for the Church. The substantial growth in population by itself put greater strains on a virtually static pool of clergymen, while the acceleration of migration to the fast-developing mining districts accentuated profoundly the age-old structural defects of the Church. From the mid-18th century onwards, the basic parochial network, and the specific siting of churches, grew ever more out of line with population distribution. At the same time, one social effect of industrialisation was to put enormous pressure on the relatively few parochial 'dependency systems' which did exist in

1. Best quoted in Gilbert, op.cit., p.13. ; R. Polwhele, Poems, Truro, 1810, v p.56.n.

the county. The process of migration obviously played a role here; but of greater significance was the changing character and make-up of the gentry class in general. The Reverend Richard Polwhele argued that a 'revolution in the little moralities of life' was taking place in late 18th century Cornwall, the result of a decline in status and numbers among the traditional landed gentry in the face of the competitive influence of 'new money' being made in the mines, or being poured into the expanding county-wide activity of 'borough-mongering'. Polwhele drew a direct causal link between the decline of landed wealth and an apparent collapse of social deference. In his own rural hinterland, for example:

'Scarcely a gentleman now resides in the whole peninsula of Meneage. Its inhabitants (generally speaking) are all upon an equality. Unaccustomed to the presence of gentlemen, they have gradually lost their respect for rank. They are governed solely by inclination; and what repeated improprieties and occasional enormities must arise from the inclinations of unformed minds, may be easily conceived. Nor are the inconveniences to which the clergy are subjected in such a situation less obvious: scattered as they are over the different parishes, they have abundant reason for lamenting their unsupported state.'

1

The realisation that the Church was growing ever more out of touch was certainly present within clerical circles in the 18th century; but the only real substantive approach to the problem was an attempt to provide more churches in the areas of greatest population growth by local lay initiative and benevolence. This had been tried before in the 16th and 17th centuries when a number of

1. R. Polwhele, The Old English Gentleman, A Poem, London, 1797, p. ii, pp. 98-9. n.

towns, in particular on the coast, had grown in size, and had acquired chapels-of-ease.¹ The clerical provision for those chapels, however, had been generally poor, with services either depending on a lowly curate or becoming the responsibility of the incumbent in whose parish the chapel was located (who, for all manner of reasons, habitually neglected this part of his duties). In the 18th century, as indices of population and pastoral provision continued to diverge, little changed in either the haphazard, voluntary means by which new churches were funded, or in the quality and quantity of religious services which they offered.²

In most instances, however, religious provision remained unchanged. A visitor to the burgeoning town of Marazion wrote in 1808:

'It was with concern we learnt that a population of between two and three thousand souls should have the public services of their religion performed to them only once in a fortnight or three weeks! Can we wonder, my friend, at the increase of Sectarists, when no better attention is paid to the interests of the Established Church?'

3

In the mining heartland of west Cornwall, incoming families settled in their thousands, both in new industrial villages, and in small cottages dotted across the wastes and downs, frequently several miles from their parish church. Even in the long-established mining town of Redruth, a Methodist preacher wrote enthusiastically in 1800 that:

'The Methodists have Redruth to themselves, theirs may be called the established religion; for the church is a considerable way out of the town.'

4

1. Halliday, Cornwall, p.258.; Carew, Survey, ed. Halliday, p.137.
2. Lysons, Magna Brittania, p.xxiv.
3. Warner, Tour through Cornwall, pp.185-6.
4. The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers Chiefly Written by themselves, ed. Thomas Jackson, 6 vols., 3rd edn., London, 1865, v p.90.

The performance of the Church in Cornwall as documented in the Visitation Returns of 1779 therefore reflects the effects of both long-term structural and historical faults and weaknesses within the Church, and the early impact of the industrialising process which was just underway. But can we quantify the 'performance' of the Church in that year? Cursory consideration of individual replies made to the bishop's queries certainly fosters the impression that in very few parishes could the Church be deemed in a state of prosperity at the time. Again, more detailed analysis of the Returns presents problematic statistical and methodological obstacles; but a very rough estimate might suggest that in 30% of parishes in 1779, not more than one-tenth of the adult population were Anglican communicants, while in 70% of parishes- in total- the figure was no higher than one in five. In only a handful of parishes can it be clearly assumed that attendance at communion was a majority activity.¹

The best church attendances were recorded in parishes which conform almost exclusively to a small number of types. The north-east of the county was the region most effectively 'Anglicized' from the 8th century; here the Church performed particularly well in parishes with small, slow-changing populations, and especially in

1. Sample of 170 parishes taken from 'Bishop Ross's Visitation Articles, 1779, Replies to Queries', D.R.O. MS. The figures themselves, of course, tell us nothing about a commitment to religion: see Currie, Gilbert, Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers, p.19.

those which represented the best examples of 'nucleated' settlement in the county. In one of these—the parish of Tresmeer—an estimated 71% of the adult population attended communion, a higher proportion than in any other Cornish parish. The Church also fared well in the cultivated coastal plains: around the river Alan on the north coast, and in the Roseland peninsula to the east of the Fal, for example. Here the increasingly commercial exploitation of land, and the erosion of customary tenurial systems from the late 16th century, helped create a social structure and pattern of social relations more in line with typical lowland England; which allowed some form of 'dual alliance' of squire and parson to operate with greater effectiveness than elsewhere. The parish of St. Minver, for instance, which as an extremely large parish in acreage might have been expected to return a low communicant density, probably owed its strong church attendance in 1779 to the fact that it was an 'improved' agricultural parish, and home to several families of landed gentry. Similarly in the Roseland peninsula, the cluster of small, agriculturally-advanced parishes returned consistently high church attendance rates in 1779. The presence of a well-defined hierarchical social structure probably helped the Church, also, in some of the long-established boroughs, market towns, and trading and administrative centres of the county. The good church attendance recorded, for example, in Lostwithiel, St. Ives, Padstow, Fowey, Truro, Saltash, and Tregony, contrasted sharply with the low returns in towns such as the fishing port of Mevagissey or the mining town of Redruth, which were both much more 'plebeian' in composition and

outlook. In general, it appears that the Church was most in its element in relatively slow-moving, traditionally prosperous regions, such as improved agricultural parishes and old borough towns. Most particularly, the highest communicant densities occurred in parishes which were small in acreage, with low or stable populations, preferably concentrated in a single major settlement, and defined by clear-cut hierarchical social relationships.¹

By contrast, the lowest communicant densities were recorded in what, in fact, were more common types of Cornish parish: those of large acreage, with multiple or scattered settlement, very often in areas of little agricultural improvement, and where substantial population growth was occurring. The deanery of West, in south-east Cornwall, for example, might be divided geographically, and in parish typology, into three horizontal bands. In the northern segment, the parishes were on moorland, and tended to be very large in acreage and thinly inhabited. In the central section, a small group of agricultural parishes contained relatively few acres and inhabitants. In the south—along the coast—ranged a number of small and medium-sized fishing villages, and the major concentrations of population in the deanery. It comes as little surprise—following the logic of the foregoing analysis—that the Church obtained considerably higher support in terms of attendance in the central band of the deanery.

The most westerly deanery of Penwith, in particular, returned an average communicant density far lower than that of any other deanery in the county. Here, all the factors inhibiting the Church

1. See Tables 4 and 5, and Map 1, at the end of the chapter.

coincided to greatest effect. The western tip of the county was the region where Celtic traditions and consciousness had survived at their strongest, and where, consequently, the Anglican Church appeared most alien. From a practical perspective, many of the western parishes were large moorland parishes, with relatively high populations, often dispersed in multitudinous settlements. The deanery of Penwith had also suffered more in general than other Cornish deaneries from the inadequacies of the institutional structure of the Church in Cornwall, and from the ensuing poverty of clerical provision.¹ Because of its especially isolated location, the deanery was both the most remote from the thoughts and control of the bishop in Exeter, and the least attractive proposition to the educated clergyman from 'up-country'. Finally, and most importantly, however, it was in the west that the bulk of mining activity was undertaken, and where the massive inflow of population, and the industrialising process in general, swamped completely the already-inadequate parochial system.

The most clear-cut impression from consideration of the Returns overall is not so much that the Church was in 'decline' (though in relative terms it was), but that an institution which historically had faced enormous obstacles in establishing a strong influence within the county, was, in the last third of the 18th century, in the midst of challenges of a fundamentally new magnitude. Industrialisation, in its socially disintegrative effects, loosened many of the remaining traditional

1. e.g. see C.G. Henderson, Essays in Cornish History, Oxford, 1935, pp. 43-4 ; C.K. Francis Brown, A History of the English Clergy 1800-1900, London, 1953, pp. 14-5.

bonds that tied parishioners to the Church, and presented the clergy in general with an inescapable and often nightmarish dilemma.¹ On the one hand, many local clergymen worried about the social implications of industrialisation, and sought, by whatever means, to reassert the traditional conservative social role of the Church.² On the other hand, the structural and historical basis from which they set out militated against any wide-scale, permanent success. In fact, however, a dramatic revival in religious adherence did go hand in hand with industrialisation in Cornwall; but it was not to the Church of England that the Cornish flocked. In the 1740s, John Wesley had identified west Cornwall in particular as one of the spiritually benighted spots in the land; and it was the Methodist 'movement' which came to exert the most profound religious influence on the people of Cornwall between 1780 and 1870.

1. By the 1820s, it was noted in the town of Hayle that 'there is not so much deference paid to the higher ranks. Aforetimes no person left the church after the service was over until the parson had walked out and he received the obeisances of the congregation as he went down the aisle. Now the congregation leave at once without waiting for the parson.' C. Appleby, 'Wesleyan Methodism in Hayle-1826', J.C.M.H.A., vol. 7 no. 1 (1985), p. 15.
2. see R. Polwhele, The Rural Rector; or a Sketch of Manners, Learning and Religion in a Country Parish, 3 vols., London, 1831.

Table 4 : Average Communicant Density by Parish Size,1779.

Acres.	Communicant Density.		
	0 - 10%	11 - 20%	Over 20%
0 - 2000.	15.	36.	49.
2 - 4000.	25.	39.	36.
4 - 6000.	27.5.	52.5.	20.
6000 +	58.	31.	11.

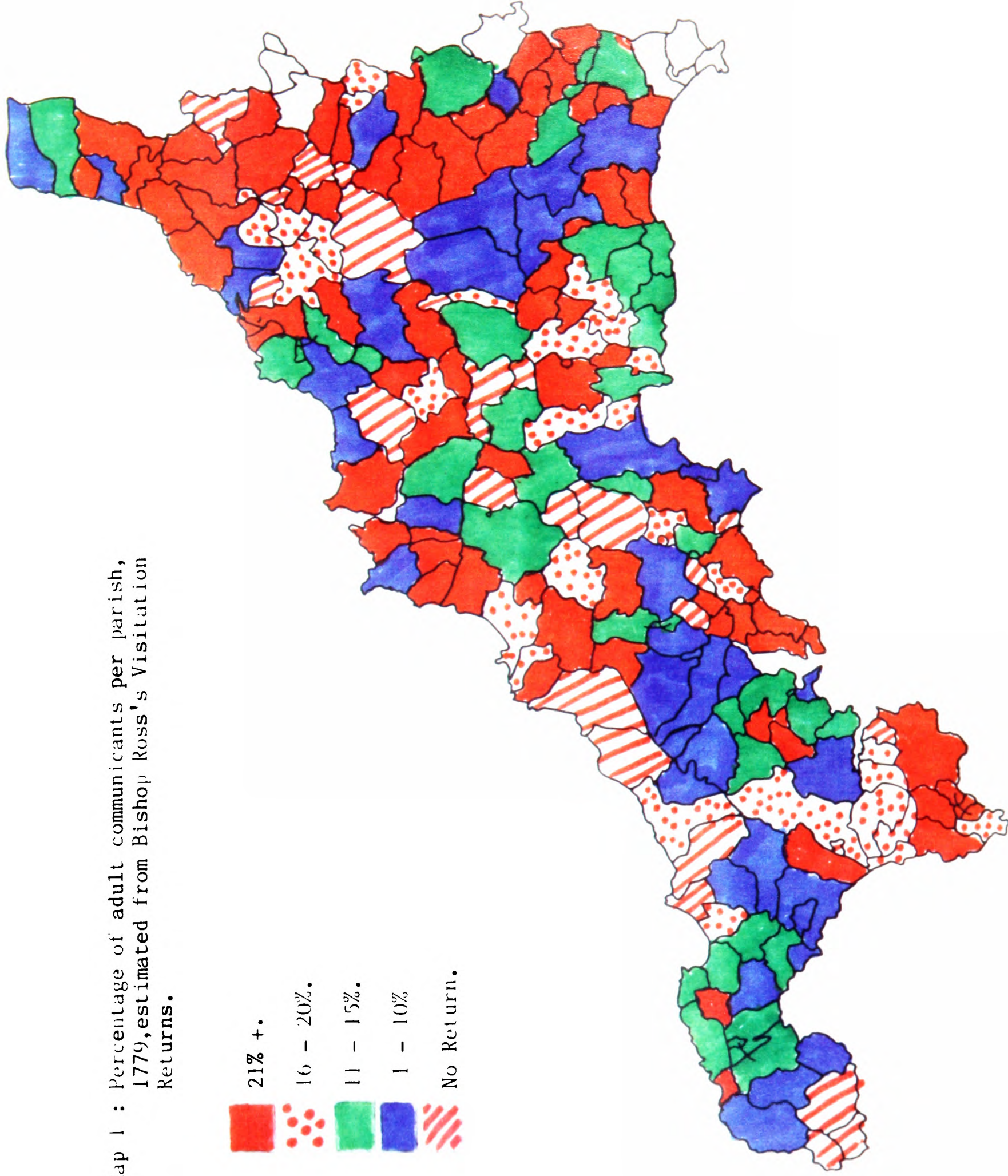
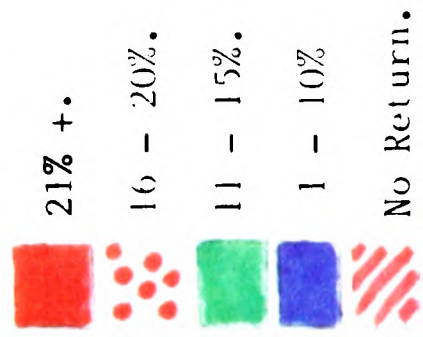
Note : Reading across, this table shows the percentage of parishes of a certain size which fall into each of the Communicant Density categories.

Table 5 : Average Communicant Density by Parish Population,1779.

Population.	Number of Parishes.	Average C.D.
0 - 100.	8.	39.5.
101 - 250.	35.	26.9.
251 - 500.	47.	18.6.
501 - 750.	30.	13.7.
751 - 1000.	21.	12.4.
1001 - 2000.	16.	9.1.
Over 2000.	13.	5.8.

Source for both tables : 'Bishop Ross's Visitation Articles,1779, Replies to Queries',D.R.O. MS.

Map 1 : Percentage of adult communicants per parish,
1779, estimated from Bishop Ross's Visitation
Returns.



CHAPTER 4 : METHODIST GROWTH IN CORNWALL TO 1851.

i. Early Methodist Dissemination.

To a remarkable extent, it is no exaggeration to portray the religious history of Cornwall in the industrial era in terms of the 'failure' of the Church of England, and the 'success' of Methodism. The spiritual vitality of Cornish Methodism was noted by some within the movement from the late 18th century; and that spiritual strength was progressively transformed into numerical support in the early 19th century. By 1824, one in nineteen of the county's inhabitants was a Methodist member, a higher proportion than in any other English county.¹ In 1827 it could be written of two typical west Cornwall towns that they contained no household without a Methodist.² According to one analysis of the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census, the 'index of attendance' at Methodist chapels on the day of the census stood at 43.8% of the adult population of the county, a figure surpassed only in North Wales. Moreover the proportion of all church attendants on that day who attended Methodist chapels (64.5%), was considerably higher than in any other county.³

1. W.M.M., xlvii (1824), pp. 377-83.
2. Camborne and Hayle. Shaw, History of Cornish Methodism, p. 11.
3. B.I. Coleman, The Church of England in the mid - 19th century. A Social Geography, London, 1980. Analysis of the Ecclesiastical Census using the 'index of attendance' (I.A.) as a comparative tool was developed by K.S. Inglis, 'Patterns of Religious Worship', J.E.H., xi (1960). Other counties with high Methodist I.A.s included North Wales (48.9%), Lincolnshire (29.5%), North Riding of Yorkshire (28.8%), Bedfordshire (28.2%), East Riding of Yorkshire (27.8%). North Wales (56.4%) followed Cornwall in terms of the 'percentage share' of total church attendants who were Methodists.

Horace Mann noted in his initial analysis of the returns that 'England furnishes a striking picture of sects and creeds almost supreme in one part and absolutely unknown in another', yet faced with explaining this phenomenon he concluded:

'Scarcely anything, indeed, is more curious or puzzling, than the attempt to trace the causes why particular doctrines or religious parties should find one soil favourable and another adverse to their propagation and success.'

1

In one sense Mann was right: religious behaviour at the parish level was determined by so many factors - institutional, social, and personal; accidental and deliberate; historical and immediate - that a meaningful analysis of church growth by denomination or parish typology, of necessity, must be bound by qualifications and restrictions. On the other hand, in the case of Cornwall, as with other recent regional studies, it has been found possible to pinpoint a number of general trends and specific factors which help explain the phenomenal success of Methodism.² In this, and the following chapter, the consideration of Methodist church growth in Cornwall to 1851 will incorporate recent methodological and statistical advances, while taking on board the implications of Mann's apposite remarks.

1. H. Mann, 'On the Statistical Position of Religious Bodies in England and Wales', Journal of the Statistical Society, xviii (1855), p. 155. Quoted in John D. Gay, The Geography of Religion in England, London, 1971, p. 45.
2. c.f. Robert Currie, 'A Micro-Theory of Wesleyan Growth', Proc. W.H.S., xxxvi (1967-8), pp. 65-73.; Valenze, Prophetic Sons and Daughters; Everitt, Patterns of Rural Dissent; B.A. Greaves, 'An Analysis of the Spread of Methodism in Yorkshire in the 18th and early 19th centuries, with special reference to the environment of the movement', Leeds University, M.A. thesis, 1960-1.

Methodist growth can be understood and interpreted at both the 'macro' and 'micro' level. At the county level, a number of overarching and general factors operated to condition the appeal and success of Methodism. In one sense, it might be argued that Methodism succeeded because of the very weakness of Anglicanism; and that Methodism filled the lacunae in religious provision left by the long-term structural weaknesses of the Church, and by its inadequate response to industrialisation.¹ Alternatively, it is possible to focus on the notion that Methodism provided the means for a revival of latent or dormant 'Celtic' spiritual needs and practices, which had been squeezed from the original Celtic Church by the long process of national assimilation. Thomas Shaw, for example, argued that:

'There was a distinctiveness about the Celtic Christianity of Cornwall, which survived post-Reformation Anglicanism and found a new expression in Cornish Methodism.'

2

Interpretative conclusions at the 'macro' level, however, can best be reached by first analysing growth at the 'micro' level. In the following survey, this will be attempted first by relating two specific sets of Methodist data which can be traced at the parish level - the date of the formation of the first permanent Methodist society, and the 1851 'index of attendance' - to a range of factors conditioning both parochial environment and Methodist response. Both sets of data in themselves present great problems of validation and

1. Currie, 'A Micro Theory', p.69.

2. Thomas Shaw, Methodism in the Camelford and Wadebridge Circuit, 1743-1963, n.p. 1963, p.6.

interpretation: it is often difficult, for example, to ascertain precisely the date of permanent Methodist arrival in a parish, and a whole range of questions have been raised regarding the 1851 Census, which tend to restrict its applicability.¹ For this reason, in addition to the recognition that statistical evidence by itself has many limitations, the present chapter will simply provide the guidelines for a study of Cornish Methodist Church growth, by focusing on the general trends and patterns of growth, and by offering some preliminary interpretative suggestions. In Chapter 5, this framework will be built upon substantively, by dividing the county into nine regions, and providing a more detailed, 'on-the-ground' assessment of factors influencing Methodist evolution.

We might begin our analysis by examining data relating to the formation of the first permanent Methodist societies in each parish. Table 6 provides, firstly, an impression of the overall chronology of Methodist dissemination in the county. In the parishes for which the appropriate data is available - which amounts to around 90% of them - Methodism spread with considerable speed from the first, so that close to one-third (31.4%) of all parishes had a Methodist society by 1785. However, that initially rapid process of

1. In establishing the date of permanent Methodist arrival in a parish, a wide range of combined sources has been utilised, including circuit records, chapel licences, biographical material, chapel and circuit histories, and other source material collected by Thomas Shaw and deposited in the R.I.C., Truro. Some of the problems raised by the Ecclesiastical Census are discussed in W.S.F. Pickering, 'The 1851 religious census - a useless experiment?', The British Journal of Sociology, 18(1967). ; D.M. Thompson, 'The 1851 Religious Census : Problems and Possibilities', Victorian Studies, xi(1967-8). ; R.W. Ambler, 'The 1851 Census of Religious Worship', The Local Historian, xi(1974-5).

dissemination accelerated markedly between 1785 and 1815, and over one-half (51.4%) of all parishes actually acquired a Methodist presence for the first time during this thirty year period. In all, by 1815, over 80% of Cornish parishes contained a permanent Methodist venture; and by 1830, the proportion was over 90%. Thereafter, very few of the tiny minority of parishes so far without Methodists succumbed in the period to 1870.

Table 6 : Formation of first permanent Methodist Society by parish type : a. Communicant Density, 1779.

Dates.	No. of parishes where first permanent society formed where C.D. =			
	1 - 10.	11 - 20.	21 - 30.	31+.
1743 - 1785.	24.	23.	5.	3.
1785 - 1815.	9.	34.	31.	16.
1815 - 1830.	3.	4.	2.	7.
1830 - 1870.	-	-	1.	1.
No Soc. Pre-1870.	2.	1.	1.	8.

This basic chronological pattern to the spread of Methodism becomes more expressive if it is linked to Anglican parochial communicant densities estimated from the 1779 Visitation Returns. In the period 1743-1785, nearly one-half (43.6%) of the parishes where a Methodist society was formed returned an exceedingly low Anglican communicant density (between 1 and 10%) in 1779; the vast majority of them (85.4%), returned communicant densities (c.ds.) of between 1 and 20%. By contrast, during the period 1785-1815, Methodism began to make more steady progress in parishes where Anglicanism was stronger: only 10% of new Methodist causes in this

period were in the lowest c.d. category (1-10%); just over one-third (37.8%) fell into the next category (11-20%); while one-third (34.3%) were in parishes with c.d. levels in 1779 between 21 and 30%. Altogether, just over one-half of the parishes where Methodist societies were formed between 1785 and 1815 recorded c.ds. of over 20% in 1779, compared with less than 15% between 1743 and 1785. Even parishes within the top c.d. category (31%+) were often influenced by Methodists in this later period, with around 45% of them acquiring a Methodist society. Nonetheless, it is hardly surprising that it was this type of parish which remained, in general, most resistant to Methodist advance: more than 20% were still without a Methodist society by 1870.

Two central and relatively straightforward trends to early Methodist dissemination therefore suggest themselves. In the first place, Methodism appears to have made rapid progress from the initial visit of John Wesley in 1743,¹ but from the last two decades of the 18th century, that substantial rate of advance in turn accelerated. In the second place, it would appear that Methodism made earliest gains in parishes where the Church of England was generally weakest, but again from the last two decades of the 18th century, it began to compete far more openly in parishes where Anglicanism was stronger. Three long-term factors underpin these trends, which taken together provide the key to understanding the phenomenal success of Methodism in Cornwall. By disentangling and explicating each in turn, the processes underlying early Methodist

1. For the collected Cornish entries from the Journals of John and Charles Wesley see The Wesleys in Cornwall, ed. John Pearce, Truro, 1964.

growth will be made more clear.

In the first place, the historical and structural weaknesses of the Church of England, and the degree to which clergymen were isolated from their parishioners, hampered and largely negated potential Anglican opposition to Methodist dissemination. It has already been suggested that clerical residence by itself did not positively affect church attendance; and by the same token, neither did it impede early Methodist infiltration. This is difficult to prove statistically, but a comparison of parishes in terms of clerical provision in 1779 suggests that the fact of residency or non-residency made little difference to the success or otherwise of Methodism. 24.4% of parishes with a resident incumbent in 1779 also possessed a Methodist society, compared with 33.3% of those with a resident curate, but only 18.1% of those where the clergyman was non-resident.

Table 7 : Methodist dissemination by parish type :
b. Clerical provision, 1779.

	No. of parishes :		
	Resident Incumbent.	Resident Curate.	Non-Resident Incumbent.
With Methodist Society.	21.	9.	13.
Without Methodist Society.	65.	18.	59.

The most significant indication from these figures is that the resident clergyman was unable to exercise consistent formal and informal influence within his parish, which would enable a successful 'dependency system' to operate. The very features of parochial structure which were most damaging to Anglican clerical

effectiveness were found to be most conducive to Methodist dissemination. The larger the acreage of the parish, for example, the more likely it was that Methodist infiltration would succeed. 59% of parishes of over 8000 acres already had Methodist societies in 1785, compared with 34% of those between 5000 and 8000 acres. Thereafter, the proportion continued to drop as parochial acreage diminished: 32% of parishes between 3000 and 5000 acres had a Methodist society, compared with 28% of those between 1500 and 3000 acres, and 19% of those between 750 and 1500. In the parishes of smallest acreage—under 750 acres—62.5% actually possessed Methodist societies in 1785, but, as these were populous town parishes, here other debilitating pressures on Anglican influence were at work.

Table 8 : Methodist dissemination by parish type : c. Acreage.

	No. of parishes with Methodist society, where acreage =					
	Under 750.	750–1500.	1500–3000.	3000–5000.	5000–8000.	8000+.
1743 – 1785.	5.	4.	15.	18.	14.	13.
1785 – 1815.	2.	5.	28.	28.	25.	8.
1815 – 1870.	1.	3.	5.	8.	1.	1.
No Meth. Soc.	–	9.	5.	2.	1.	–

Comparison of Methodist dissemination by parochial population confirms this basic trend. In 96% of parishes of over 2000 inhabitants, Methodists were already present in 1785, compared with 69% of those between 1000 and 2000, 26% of those between 500 and 1000, 17% of those between 250 and 500, and just 3% of those under 250. The pattern of subsequent dissemination, however, mirrors

that suggested from communicant density figures,with the Methodists beginning to make dramatic gains even in the smallest parishes between 1785 and 1815.By the latter date, all parishes with more than 2000 inhabitants possessed a Methodist society,as indeed did virtually all (97%) of those with over 500.But even in the smallest parishes, Methodism had made significant advances: 72% of those of 250 to to 500 inhabitants,and 40% of those of under 250 inhabitants containing Methodists by 1815.

Table 9 : Methodist dissemination by parish type : d.Population.

	No. of parishes with Methodist Society where popn. =				
	0-250.	250-500.	500-1000.	1000-2000.	2000+.
1743 - 1785.	1.	8.	17.	20.	24.
1785 - 1815.	13.	26.	47.	8.	1.
1815 - 1870.	7.	9.	2.	1.	-
No Meth. Soc.	14.	4.	-	-	-

Quite clearly,a direct correlation existed between parochial environmental factors which inhibited Anglican effectiveness,and the early spread of Methodism.Put simply, it was very unusual for the Anglican Establishment to be in a position to exert sufficient control at the parish level to obstruct Methodist dissemination.By 1815,it was only the most compact parishes,in terms of acreage and population,which remained resistant to Methodist penetration.

Specific Anglican weaknesses,however,were compounded by the absence of an effective,authoritative gentry presence in many parishes.The practice of a 'dependency system',after all,rested upon an often coordinated alliance between squire and parson.It was

the combined social feebleness of clergy and squirearchy which allowed Robert Currie to assert that 60% of John Wesley's converts came from the eleven counties where organised Christianity was weakest 'because in these areas communities can be gathered and chapels built without persecution or disruption by squire or parson.'¹ Gentry influence in Cornwall was restricted by two factors. In the first place, despite widespread landownership across the county, the gentry were in fact generally thin on the ground. A list published in the county history in 1814 gave notice to the fact that there was no 'gentleman's seat' in over half of the parishes (107 out of 202); while Cornwall came thirty-sixth out of thirty nine English counties in a table of counties in order of density of county seats per acre in 1865.² But, more importantly, even in those parishes where a gentleman commonly resided, it can be shown, as with clerical residency, that gentry presence of itself made little difference to Methodist dissemination.

Table 10 : Methodist dissemination by parish type :
e. Gentlemen's seats, 1814. (Source : Lysons.)

	No. of Methodist societies formed in parishes with				
	0.	1.	2.	3.	4+. gent's seats.
1743 - 1785.	35.	19.	8.	3.	5.
1785 - 1815.	49.	27.	15.	-	3.
1815 - 1870.	13.	4.	2.	-	1.
No Meth. Soc.	10	7	1	-	-

1. Currie, Methodism Divided, pp. 21-2.
2. Lysons, Magna Brittania, pp. clxxv - clxxviii.;
F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society in the 19th century, London, 1963, p. 30.

This table in fact presents a number of difficulties, because it fails to take into account other vital factors regulating gentry influence at the parochial level—in particular acreage, population, landowning and holding, and settlement patterns. It has not been found possible to quantify and tabulate the combined effect of these factors in definitive form, but enough has been said already in this respect to suggest that they rarely combined in a way favourable to gentry interests, as they did, for example, in many 'closed' parishes of lowland England. In particular, the common retention of customary or freehold tenure, the typically dispersed settlement patterns, and the absence of a significant 'improved' agrarian system which went hand in hand in so many Cornish parishes, tended to militate against the development of a pattern of social relations based on the mechanism of gentry paternalism and tenant deference.¹ For structural reasons similar to those inhibiting Anglican reaction, therefore, the gentry of Cornwall were frequently in no stronger position to resist Methodist advance.

Despite these weaknesses, there was early opposition to the Wesleys. When Charles Wesley first visited the county in 1743, the curate at Towednack warned his congregation 'to beware of false Prophets', while at nearby St. Ives he found: 'The priests stir up the people, and make their minds evil affected towards the

1. The peculiar pattern of landholding in Cornwall, in fact, makes any attempt to categorize parishes as either 'open' or 'closed' on the basis of landownership unfruitful. For a consideration of this dichotomy see Dennis Mills, 'English Villages in the 18th and 19th centuries: A Sociological Approach', The Amateur Historian, 6 (1963-5) pp. 271-8.; B.A. Holderness, 'Open' and 'Close' Parishes in England in the 18th and 19th centuries', The Agricultural History Review, 20 (1972) pp. 126-39.

brethren.'¹ In 1743 and 1744 especially, mobs frequently disrupted and broke up Methodist meetings, while John Wesley himself often faced their threatening fury. The earliest Methodist meeting houses in St. Ives and Gwennap were actually pulled down by demonstrators; while in 1744, one of Wesley's 'helpers' was arrested by magistrates, and temporarily imprisoned.² Mob-activity and other opposition seems to have stemmed from two distinct sources. Some of it came from 'below', especially in close-knit fishing villages, where it represented above all spontaneous communal xenophobia at the intrusion of 'outsiders' and 'external' interests.³ Most of it, however, appears to have been inspired and coordinated from 'above', reflecting genuine fears within the squirearchical and clerical elite of the potentially subversive nature of Wesley's message and motives. The Reverend Walter Borlase, for example, was one of the most persistent and powerful of Wesley's early opponents, combining the authoritative roles of magistrate, local gentleman, and clergyman.⁴ Mobs were mobilised to drive Wesley away, and to disband his early followers, by tapping xenophobic fears, or by simply filling empty pockets.⁵ In the early 1740s, especially, at just the time that the Wesleys made their initial appearance in the county, rumours that the French were about

1. Wesleys in Cornwall, ed. Pearce, pp. 29-30.

2. Ibid. pp. 80-1, pp. 90-3.

3. John Walsh, 'Methodism and the mob in the 18th century', Studies in Church History vol. 8 : Popular Belief and Practice, ed. G.J. Cuming and D. Baker, Cambridge, 1972, p. 222.

4. Wesleys in Cornwall, ed. Pearce, pp. 14-7.

5. A famous entry in the churchwardens accounts for the parish of Illogan in 1743 reads 'expenses at Ann Gartrells on driving out the Methodists 9s. 0d.', Wesleys in Cornwall, ed. Pearce, p. 36.n.

to land in support of the Stuart cause made it relatively easy to whip up a mob, on the coast especially, by denouncing them as 'Popish emissaries', Jacobites, even the Pretender himself.¹ More generally, vocal and physical opposition to the Methodists could be engineered by manipulating the natural suspicions engendered by any new religious movement. Methodists were frequently accused of dividing community and family; of taking women from their homes to secret meetings where 'the members sometimes passed the whole night in the most passionate devotions.'² Wesley himself was portrayed as socially- disruptive and destructive, as a sorcerer and a fraud; as a man likely to talk indecently to household maids, and to upset pregnant women to the point of miscarriage.³

But what was most significant about this persecution and opposition in Cornwall (which, after all, confronted the Wesleys wherever they travelled) was the early date by which most of it had dissolved. After 1745, very little large-scale opposition hindered Methodist dissemination in the populous west of the county: the demise of squire- and clergy- fuelled mobs reflecting once more the essential weakness of 'social control' mechanisms in the county. With the failure of the Jacobite rebellion in 1745, the parishes of west Cornwall lost the temporary social bonding of a heightened consciousness of communality which had welled from a commonly- perceived threat of invasion. Thereafter, in general,

1. Ibid. pp.15-7.

2. Lecky quoted in Armstrong, Church of England, Methodists and Society, p.67.; John Stevenson, Popular Disturbances in England 1700-1870, London, 1979, pp.32-3.

3. The Bishop of Exeter's Answer to Mr. J. Wesley's Late Letter to his Lordship, London, 1752 ; Wesleys in Cornwall, ed. Pearce, p.110.

parishioners once more became unpliant to the pressures and inducements of squire and parson. Opposition by no means disappeared after 1745, of course, and as the Methodists began to move increasingly into rural parishes with a stronger squire-parson influence from the 1790s, they stimulated fresh outbreaks of mob-violence. There was also a relatively continuous undercurrent of often more subtle obstruction, which indicated a largely impotent Establishment doing all it could to register disapproval of Methodism.¹ Nonetheless, it remains the case that the basic structural and historical weakness of Anglicanism in the county, combined with the general inability of the gentry to exert social controls of compensatory magnitude, meant that initial Methodist dissemination was ineffectively restrained from 'above'. Furthermore, as both clergy and gentry were thrown increasingly on the defensive by the processes of industrialisation, so those elements of influence and control which had existed in the early 18th century, in turn, increasingly withered.

The decline of community-based opposition, however, is in some senses more interesting, suggesting a rapid transformation in popular perceptions of Methodism from a reflex fear that it represented suspicious, perhaps ominous 'external' meddling and interests, to the more considered view that—at the least—its presence denoted no social or communal threat. In mining and fishing communities whose insularity and exclusivity were especially renowned, this transmogrification was particularly remarkable. In explaining it, we have to move beyond the simple fact of Anglican

1. e.g. by refusing to sell or rent land on which the Methodists intended to build a chapel.

ineffectiveness in opposing Methodism to consider additional factors which positively assisted its spread.

The starting point for such an analysis has to be a consideration of the role of John Wesley himself. Realising that Cornwall offered both the objective conditions of clerical neglect and inadequacy which had initially inspired his nation-wide itineracy, and a particularly large and responsive audience for his preaching, especially among the tin and copper mining population of the west, Wesley regarded the county as one of his key target areas. In all, he visited the county thirty-two times between 1743 and 1789, and only stayed away once for more than two consecutive years. Insofar as Methodism was Wesley's creation, he determined the scale and form of its initial dissemination; and he particularly contributed three ingredients which ensured its 'success'.

In the first place, the message which he took to the people was based on the revival of two vital elements of Reformation theology, which had enormous potential appeal. He embraced wholeheartedly the doctrine of Justification by Faith, maintaining that once an individual was made aware of his state of sin, he could be pardoned by God simply through faith that Christ had died for the forgiveness of sin. Furthermore, he espoused the doctrine of Universal Redemption, believing that Christ had died for all, and that Justification was universally obtainable. Put simply, the doctrines appeared disarmingly attractive, and because Wesley set out to use theology as merely a means to the greater end of the spiritual revitalization of the land, he ensured that he did just

that. John Walsh has explained that 'Methodism was a potent blend of traditionalism and novelty', with much of the 'old religion' of Dissent re-packaged and presented afresh in bold, direct and populist form.¹ In his role as evangelist, Wesley constantly took deliberate, painstaking steps to appear as 'one of the people': from the simple way in which he dressed, to the idiom in which he spoke. In espousing his message, he became something of a 'folk-theologian', bent on communicating his intrinsically irresistible doctrines in a language and form which all could understand. As he himself explained:

'I write as I generally speak, ad populum - to the bulk of mankind - to those who neither relish nor understand the art of speaking... I design plain words for plain people; therefore, of set purpose, I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations, from perplexed and intricate reasonings; and, as far as possible, from even the show of learning.'

2

But it was not simply the message that appealed, or the way in which the message was communicated. There was also something intrinsically attractive about Wesley himself, a charismatic quality to his character and bearing, an indefatigable energy and sense of mission which commanded awe and respect. There was a considerable degree to which he came to be revered by his followers as a 'saint'; but even for a wider audience, a kind of folk mythologization of his persona took place, attributing all manner of 'levelling' aims and mystical powers to the small-framed preacher

1. Walsh, Elie Halevy, p.6.

2. Preface, Sermons on Several Occasions, 1746, quoted in A.C. Outler, 'John Wesley : Folk Theologian', Theology Today, xxxiv no.2(1977), pp.150-1.

from 'up-country'.¹

But as well as his message, Wesley provided an extensive disciplinary and organisational framework which was vital to holding together his early converts. To a remarkable extent, moreover, Wesley's creation remained under his own personal control and supervision throughout his life.

With such a high degree of personal responsibility for, and control over, the Methodist 'movement', it was inevitable that Wesley's specific aims would largely condition early Methodist dissemination. His overriding task, as he saw it, was to 'fill the gaps' left by inadequate Anglican provision, and in contrast to Anglican clergymen, to go directly to the people with the gospel of Christ. But he did so as an Anglican clergyman himself, convinced that he was involved in a process of revivification of the Church of England. At first his attention was fixed on the places where it seemed such revitalization was already occurring locally within the Church, independent of his own efforts. A small religious society in the western town of St. Ives, for example, welcomed the visits of both Charles and John Wesley in 1743, and became the early base for John Wesley's itineracies in the west of the county.² The following year, he met John Bennet, and in 1745, George Thomson, who were both Evangelicals holding several benefices in the north-east of the county. For several years, he preached in their parish churches on his annual visit to the county.³ But from the first, Wesley also

1. Thomas Shaw, S. Petroc and John Wesley : Apostles in Cornwall. An Examination of the Celtic Background of Cornish Methodism, n.p., 1962, pp.12-3.

2. Shaw, History of Cornish Methodism, p.14.

3. Thomson had a small itineracy of his own at the time in the north-east of the county. Ibid. p.15.

preached outside the fabric and auspices of the Church, on the downs and wastes of west Cornwall where the tanners lived 'beyond the pale', as it were. Even on his first visit in 1743, driven by a commitment to go where he was needed most, Wesley concentrated on this part of his work; and with the death of Bennet in 1750, and an estrangement from Thomson on theological and ecclesiological grounds, Wesley focused almost exclusively on the west. It was there, after all, that the bulk of the population lay, and where the poverty of clerical provision was most acute. It was in these parts that Wesley felt he could provide the greatest legitimate service to the Church, by preaching to the masses on the open downs, and by organising small groups of the affected and converted for further spiritual assistance.

As Methodist 'societies' began to emerge, Wesley was adamant that they were entirely supplementary to the Church. He expected his members to attend the local parish church, and whenever possible would lead the local society to worship on Sunday morning. In 1760, the same year that he was generally grumbling about how the local work had degenerated in his absence, he warmly commended the members at Port Isaac for regularly trudging up the steep hill to reach their parish church two miles out of town.¹ His principal aim—to improve clerical provision and religious commitment where it was weakest—would seem to be reflected in the fact that the bulk of early Methodist societies were formed where Anglican communicant densities were lowest.

By his death in 1791, a Methodist presence had been

1. Wesleys in Cornwall, ed. Pearce, pp. 132 – 3.

established in approximately 42.6% of the parishes of Cornwall (86 out of 202), and clearly John Wesley himself played a critical - and often highly personal - role in the overall process. In nearly 40% of these parishes, for example, the first Methodist society was actually formed at some point (usually rapidly) after the visit of either Charles or John Wesley.

And yet, even from the origins of Methodism in Cornwall, Wesley did not determine Methodist dissemination alone. The religious society which he visited in St. Ives in 1743 may already have been 'Methodist' before his arrival.¹ Whatever its exact provenance, its simple existence tends to support the view - encouraged by the immediately dramatic effects of Wesley's initial preaching - that not only did he provide a religious 'supply', but he also allowed a vital local religious 'need' to be met. His very first meetings on the downs and elsewhere in the west attracted audiences (by his own calculation) of several hundreds, but within a month, as word spread, he was preaching at Gwennap where 'it was supposed there were ten thousand people.'² Wesley felt able to write of the county as early as 1747 that:

'a great door...is opened now, almost in every corner of this country. Here is such a change within these two years as has hardly been seen in any

1. J.J. Beckerlegge, Two Hundred Years of Methodism in Mousehole, n.p., 1954, p.10 suggests that a class ticket dated 1739 authenticated the position of St. Ives as the headquarters of Methodism in Cornwall four years before Wesley's first visit. George Smith, History of Wesleyan Methodism, 3 vols., 2nd edn., London, 1859-62 i p.192, p.321 stated that the ticket came from Penzance and probably from another religious society, not Methodist. Smith is probably right : Methodist classes were not officially instituted until 1742.
2. Wesleys in Cornwall, ed. Pearce, p.75.

other part of England.'

1

By 1750, nearly thirty Methodist societies were in existence in the west, with a smaller number of isolated ones- in Port Isaac, Camelford, Trewint, and Launceston- in the east.² In west Cornwall, at least, it is apparent that John Wesley had tapped a strong religious demand, which of itself immediately influenced Methodist dissemination. Although the Wesleys might be deemed responsible for planting the seed in nearly 40% of parishes with a Methodist cause by 1791, the remainder of them either received a visit subsequent to a society being formed, or were not visited at all.

In a sense, it was inevitable that once John Wesley had provided the spark, the work would develop primarily from local impulses. Because he only visited Cornwall once a year at most, for maybe two or three weeks on average, Methodism developed for the remainder of the year largely independently of him. From the first, he had concentrated on the western mining regions of the county, but from the 1750s his attention was almost exclusively there.³ From this early stage, his visits became increasingly routinised. In place of extemporary preaching to the masses on the downs, Wesley focused more and more on visiting existing

1. The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, ed. John Telford, 8 vols., London, 1931, ii p.107.

2. Shaw, History of Cornish Methodism, p.15.

3. R. Symons, The Rev. John Wesley's Itineracies in Cornwall, Truro, 1879 contrasted the number of times Wesley visited his most-frequented towns in east and west. In the west, St. Ives (43), St. Just (35), Gwennap (35), and Redruth (35) came top; in the east, Launceston (22), Camelford (20), Port Isaac (17), and St. Austell (14).

societies, the occasional settling of a particular dispute or matter of discipline punctuating a more general 'review of the troops' designed both to boost morale amongst the membership, and to keep Wesley in touch with local developments. From the 1750s, Wesley rarely 'blazed the trail', evangelistically, into the dark recesses of the county, largely because of the size of his organisational commitments; and soon curtailed his open-air preaching to the annual formality of a service in the natural 'amphitheatre' of Gwennap Pit.

It was because of the interplay of two more fundamental long-term factors, however, that Wesley's initial aim of providing the means to revitalize the Church, was steadily supplanted by the actual creation of an alternative evangelical religious institution, whose growing self-confidence and identity was reflected in the rapid expansion in its parochial influence from the 1780s. The first was the fact that Methodism uncovered, and began to satisfy a real religious 'need' at the local level. Because Wesley's appeal was wide - ranging, and because his own organisation provided the opportunity for local religious demands to be voiced, the Methodist 'movement' was from the first an ambiguous phenomenon, riddled with internal conflicts and tensions. The core of the early membership, for example, might well have been composed of those dissatisfied by the spiritual vacuity of the Church, but his open-air preaching drew crowds of thousands, many of whom were untouched by institutional religion. While the cottage meetings of his societies were in theory

supplementary to the services of the parish church, for those uncommitted to, or maybe ignorant of, the Church, they were the one and only form of religious worship and provision. Thomas Vivian, curate of Redruth, explained to his bishop in 1747 that 'there are two sorts of people usually styled Methodists':¹ the religiously experienced and the interested fringe. To a considerable degree, Methodism was functionally malleable; it could become all things to all people. To those loyal Anglicans who sensed an experiential vacuum in standard worship, Methodism provided a much-needed spiritual uplift; to others with less attachment to the Church, it proposed an interpretation of Christian doctrine they could understand, and a form of worship that appeared worthwhile and 'relevant'. To still others, it was possible to draw links between Methodist practice and preoccupation and residual non-institutional 'popular' beliefs.

With this rich mix in the composition of Wesley's early listeners, the function of the weekly meetings of the societies remained unclear. Wesley understood what was lacking in the Church to be a sense within the congregation that something was happening, or about to happen; that they were to meet with God, and God with them. He tried to recreate that missing spirit of expectancy within his societies, and introduced several novel forms of service, or means of grace, aimed at increasing general awareness of religion as something to be experienced, including monthly watch-night services, 'love-feasts', and public prayer meetings.² All these

1. quoted in J.C.C. Probert, The Worship and Devotion of Cornish Methodism, n.p., 1978, p.2.

2. J. Bishop, Methodist Worship in Relation to Free Church Worship, London, 1950, pp.6-7.; F. Baker, Methodism and the Love Feast, London, 1957.

forms of worship, along with Charles Wesley's vast corpus of new-style hymns, were designed to prepare his followers, spiritually, for the taking of the sacrament at their local parish churches, by providing something of that spirit of expectancy which was lacking in the Church service. But it was inevitable that many of Wesley's followers, mixed in composition and religious motivation as they were, should increasingly regard his innovations in worship as complete in themselves. Well before the 1790s, when the final and symbolic sacramental link with the Church was broken, there was a widespread feeling that Methodist worship was distinct from that of the Church, and something sufficient in its own right.

But in fact, Wesley himself aided the process of the institutionalisation of Methodism much against his own will. For Wesley, initially inspired by the conviction that his God-given task was to save as many individual souls as possible, was at one and the same time a supreme and almost obsessive organiser. It became natural for him to devote great attention to creating the administrative and pastoral machinery which would both secure the souls of those affected, and convince those yet to be won. In so doing, he established an effective and coordinated national system of administrative and pastoral oversight which, despite his involved and fervent denials, appeared increasingly in direct competition with the parochial system.

The starting point for the development of such a system lay, again, in Wesley's doctrinal beliefs. His theology in fact provided for a well-defined and linear course of individual

spiritual growth, which could only be truly nurtured within the confines of his own organisation. Conversion was the beginning not the end of one's spiritual development according to Wesley's doctrinal schema. Once justified, one was expected to be propelled on a further spiritual journey in which faith would deepen and continue to enrich the soul until a state of 'Christian Perfection' had been reached. At this point the soul would be restored to its 'primitive health', and one would love God with all one's 'heart, mind, soul, and strength.' As Wesley summed up, Christian Perfection:

'... implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions, are governed by pure love.'

1

Because the Methodist convert was expected to embark on a sustained and intense spiritual quest for perfection, his religious behaviour, as much as his beliefs, marked him out from the regular Church attendant. He was in theory obliged to withdraw from much of what was customary and normal in the secular community. As Thomas Vivian explained in his letter to his bishop, Methodists in pursuit of perfection would strictly avoid 'not only gross sins, but every approach of evil', including 'any sports, revels, diversions, etc.' The committed Methodist found himself at odds with communal activities and customary moral standards, and might indeed feel it incumbent upon himself to reprove others 'for singing idle songs, talking of worldly matters on going or coming from

1. Smith, History of Wesleyan Methodism, i p.589, p.613, p.619.;
W.E. Sangster, The Path to Perfection. An Examination and Re-statement of John Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection, London, 1943, p.27, p.71, p.30.

church, being angry, irregularly merry, etc.' In a sense, the embracing of Wesley's theology in a wholehearted fashion set one apart from one's neighbours, and indeed one's fellow church-goers, and it was only natural in this situation for the core of Methodist members to seek increasing mutual support in their individual spiritual quests, and to delineate more clearly their own alternative communities where 'they call each other Brother or Sister, seem to be linked together in the strictest friendship, and make it an invariable rule to tell each other if they think or suspect anything to be amiss.'¹

At this point, John Wesley's other preoccupation - with organisation - helped formalise the establishing of Methodist societies as 'alternative communities'. Converts became members of a society, and of a 'class' and a 'band' too, and membership of each body required certain spiritual qualifications and carried rigid disciplinary and behavioural obligations. Both were instituted to enable converts to receive mutual encouragement and assistance in their spiritual quest. Ideally composed of a dozen people, class meetings were open initially to non-members, but quite soon became the means for 'proving' conversion, and encouraging spiritual growth amongst members. The class leader was expected to examine each person with respect to the state of his soul, and to offer appropriate admonition or help. The bands were smaller groups of five to ten members, specifically designed to provide even closer spiritual assistance towards Perfection.²

1. Probert, Worship and Devotion, p.3.
2. Ibid. p.4.; A New History of Methodism, ed. H.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman, and George Eayrs, 2 vols., London, 1909, i p.285.; A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, ed. R. Davies and G. Rupp, London, 1965, vol. i p.223.

The society met weekly, with unconverted 'adherents', to pray and sing hymns, and to listen to the discourse or sermon from one of Wesley's helpers, or from an approved local preacher. Initially they would meet in cottage parlours or kitchens, but sheer numbers determined that from an early date houses specifically for the meetings be acquired, rented, or built. Thomas Vivian estimated that as early as 1744, between six and nine hundred people were attending Methodist meetings in Redruth, and in that year a number of preaching houses in St. Ives, Gwennap and Morvah, already existed in the west.¹ From the 1760s chapel building gradually began to gather momentum so that between 1779 and 1789, around thirty one chapels were opened in the county, as against maybe twenty during the preceding forty years. By Wesley's death, William Myles suggested, Cornwall possessed 64 Methodist chapels.² This gradually - evolving chapel - orientation, combined with the growing view that Methodist worship was by itself sufficient, naturally helped foster a sense of independence from the Church.

So Wesley simultaneously provided the means to succour the individual's spiritual development, and the machinery to stimulate a collective Methodist consciousness of independence. And the fact that he tied his societies together nationally into a 'connexion', so that pastoral oversight might adequately be assured, only furthered this burgeoning spirit of autonomy.

1. Probert, op.cit., p.4.; Shaw, History of Cornish Methodism, pp.21-2.
2. W.Myles, A Chronological History of the People Called Methodists, 4th edn., London, 1813. ; Shaw, op.cit., p.35. ; and see C.E.Welch, 'Meeting-house Licences at Quarter Sessions', J.C.M.H.A. vol i no.2. pp.30-3.

Therefore, although initial Methodist dissemination was primarily the result of the personal mission and commitment of Wesley himself, as the 'movement' evolved, it grew beyond his own ideal as a regenerative instrument for the Church, to become a religious institution in its own right. The basis of the long-term success of Methodism was that it both met local religious 'needs' (however defined), and provided a structure of organisation and oversight effective enough to mobilise, and maintain support.

The third long-term factor influencing Methodist dissemination was social change. John Wesley arrived in the county at just that point where Cornwall's 'industrial revolution' was beginning, and the subsequent extension of both Methodism and industrialisation coincided chronologically. The earliest Methodist societies were concentrated in those parts of west Cornwall where the most rapid development of the mines was occurring from the 1740s, and the economic pressures and social change accompanying the industrialising process providing a specific contributory element to initial Methodist dissemination. Subsequently, the rapid acceleration of Methodist infiltration into new parishes from the 1780s coincided with the wide-spread 'take-off' of industrial capitalist development within Cornish mining. At this point, some Methodist societies had existed for forty years; and the generally more established and substantial nature of local Methodism allowed it to acquire wider socio-religious functions during the period of greatest social dislocation. Similarly, in the countryside, the fragmentation of many of the 'dependency systems' which operated in

the smaller rural parishes provided the critical backcloth to the spread of Methodism from the 1790s, and especially after 1815.

But how did the industrialising process influence early Methodist dissemination? And what social functions were attached to the Methodist movement from the late 18th century? It is hoped that the more detailed regional analysis of church growth undertaken in the following chapter will begin to provide some guidance towards answering such questions. At this point, it is only necessary to prepare the ground for that analysis by introducing two preliminary themes. In the first place, it is certainly arguable that the immediate religious need which John Wesley apparently uncovered on his early visits to the west was partly the reflection of new, broad-ranging social pressures produced by the expansion of mining. In the second place, however, the subsequent social functions of Methodism were obscured and complicated, to an extent, by the fact that the 'movement' - for all its local appeal - was still, as a religious institution, at an early stage of internal development. Local Methodism, we have seen, initially attracted in general 'two sorts of people.' By the 1790s, as a result of the gradual institutionalisation of the 'movement', there were three: a small minority who still remained loyal to the Church, a preponderant body of 'religious' Methodists with no attachment to Anglicanism, but an undoubted hold on Christian doctrine, and the interested fringe, a considerable, but fluctuating group of 'popular enthusiasts and fanatics', whose understanding of orthodox Christianity was often slim, and whose impact on Methodism between

1790 and 1815 was said to be most in evidence in secessions and revivals.¹ Throughout the period of greatest social dislocation, each group felt committed to Methodism for different reasons, and perceived their religion to satisfy separate functions. Methodism remained functionally malleable; its composition of members and adherents truly mixed. Inevitably as the process of institutionalisation progressed, and in particular as Wesley's 'Connexionalism' was gradually formalised into a system and structure of Church government and administration, the tensions and conflicts within the movement became more overt and unavoidable: as the secessions and controversies which dominated Methodist institutional history between 1791 and the mid-1850s were to demonstrate. But in delineating and explicating the 'social role' of Methodism in Cornwall throughout industrialisation, this plurality of perceptions of Methodist functionality needs to be kept in mind.

1. Report from the Clergy of the Diocese of Lincoln, 1799, quoted in Lavington, Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists, p. lxxxv.

ii. The Ecclesiastical Census of 1851.

Hence, introductory remarks have been made which establish both reasons for early Methodist dissemination, and the general course that it took. While Methodism from the first became rooted in a significant number of parishes, it was between 1785 and 1815 that the process of diffusion accelerated to incorporate a sizeable majority (around 80%) of all parishes. Thereafter, though some further evangelism added another 10% of parishes to the Methodist list by 1830, the primary feature of Methodist extension in this period was the consolidation and growth in existing Society memberships.

Table 11, drawn from analysis of the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census, provides an initial breakdown of the level of support Methodism had acquired by 1851. The first feature of these statistics is that they confirm the extent of Methodist growth suggested by the analysis of the initial section of this chapter. Only 7.4% of parishes in all (15 out of 202) were without some form of Methodist service on the day of the census. But they also go further to indicate the actual quantitative level of Methodist support, by parish, in 1851, suggesting not only that Methodism had been easily disseminated in the years before 1815 in most parts of the county, but that its subsequent growth rate was also generally high. In only 3% of parishes, for example, was the Methodist 'index of attendance' between 1 and 9% of the parochial population; in over one-half it was 30% or more. In almost one-third (29.2%) of parishes in fact, the total Methodist index of attendance was at least 50%.¹

1. The 'index of attendance' represents the total attendance at all Methodist services during the day, and is obviously primarily of value for comparative

Table 11 : Methodist indices of attendance on a parish basis,1851.

Index of Attendance.	Percentage of parishes within I.A. range.							ALL METHS.
	WES.	BC.	PM.	WMA.	TWM.	MNC.	WREF.	
0.	18.3	44.1	89.1	70.8	96.0	98.0	98.0	7.4
1 - 9.	8.9	18.3	8.4	7.4	2.0	1.0	1.5	3.0
10 - 19.	16.8	17.8	1.0	6.4	1.0	0.5	-	8.9
20 - 29.	18.3	4.5	0.5	6.4	-	-	-	12.9
30 - 39.	15.8	4.5	-	4.0	-	-	-	21.8
40 - 49.	7.4	1.5	-	0.5	-	-	-	10.9
50+	7.4	2.5	-	1.5	-	-	-	29.2
No Return.	6.9	6.9	1.0	3.0	1.0	0.5	0.5	5.9

Note : WES = Wesleyan; BC = Bible Christian; PM = Primitive Methodist; WMA = Wesleyan Methodist Association; TWM = Teetotal Wesleyan Methodist; MNC = Methodist New Connexion; WREF = Wesleyan Reformers.
(Source : '1851 Ecclesiastical Census, Transcript of Cornish Methodist entries', R.I.C. MS.)

Table 12 : Methodist I.A. by parish type : a. Anglican C.D., 1779.

C.D., 1779.	Percentage of parishes in C.D. category with I.A.:					
	0.	1 - 9.	10 - 19.	20 - 29.	30 - 39.	40+.
1 - 10.	2.6	2.6	7.9	13.2	21.4	52.6
11 - 20.	-	1.8	9.3	22.2	25.9	40.7
21 - 30	5.3	5.3	15.8	13.2	18.4	42.1
31+.	18.2	9.1	3.0	9.1	27.3	33.3

Table 13 : Methodist I.A. by parish type : b. Gentlemen's Seats, 1814.

No. of Gent.'s Seats, 1814.	Percentage of parishes in category with I.A.:						
	0.	1 - 9.	10 - 19.	20 - 29.	30 - 39.	40 - 49.	50+.
0.	5.9	3.0	10.9	14.8	22.8	11.9	30.7
1.	13.2	1.9	7.5	13.2	24.5	9.4	30.2
2.	4.0	8.0	12.0	4.0	28.0	24.0	20.0
3.	-	-	-	33.3	33.3	-	33.3
4.	-	11.1	11.1	33.3	11.1	-	33.3

If Methodist I.A.s are analysed on a parish - by - parish basis, it does initially appear as though the basic environmental factors which assisted the speed of Methodist dissemination, also affected the subsequent level of Methodist support. Just 2.6% of parishes which returned Anglican c.d.s of between 1 and 10% in 1779 had no Methodist service in 1851, compared with 18.2% of those with c.ds. of over 31%. By contrast, slightly over one-half (52.6%) of parishes in the lowest c.d. category returned Methodist I.A.s of 40%+, compared with one-third of those in the highest band.¹ The general pattern suggested from the figures is that the very strongest Anglican parishes still remained resistant to Methodist dissemination by 1851, but that in parishes of all types there was a likelihood that, once established, the Methodist cause would flourish.

Much the same impression is obtained from a similarly updated comparison of Methodist I.A.s with the presence or non-presence of 'gentlemen's seats' within the parish.² Using the 1814 list as only the roughest of guides, it can be demonstrated that in a handful of parishes which possessed a single resident gentleman in that year, no Methodist service took place in 1851. However, the more abiding impression from the figures, again, is that Methodism secured high attendance in the preponderance of all parishes, whatever their categorisation.

purposes. Nonetheless, these proportions are very high. Inglis calculated that the average I.A. in all places - taking all denominations together - was 61%. Inglis, 'Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851', pp. 79-80.

1. See Table 12.
2. See Table 13.

Table 14 : Methodist I.A. by parish type : c.Division of property.
(Source: John M.Wilson,The Imperial Gazeteer of England and Wales,
London,1866,vol.i.)

Parish type.	No. of Parishes.	Percentage of parish type with I.A.:						
		0.	1-9.	10-19.	20-29.	30-39.	40-49.	50+.
One owner.	1.	100.	-	-	-	-	-	-
Much/most prop- erty has single owner.	2.	-	-	-	-	50.0	-	50.0
Divided among a few.	54.	5.6	5.6	13.0	18.5	22.2	9.3	25.9
Subdivided.	24.	4.2	4.2	8.3	12.5	25.0	16.7	29.2
Much subdivided.	34.	-	2.9	8.8	20.6	14.7	14.7	38.2

Table 15 : Methodist I.A. by parish type : d.Acreage.

Acreage.	No. of Parishes.	Percentage of parish type with I.A.:						
		0.	1-9.	10-19.	20-29.	30-39.	40-49.	50+.
Under 750.	7.	14.3	-	-	14.3	42.9	-	28.6
750-1500.	22.	31.8	-	-	4.5	27.3	4.5	31.8
1500-3000.	48.	2.1	4.2	14.6	20.8	22.9	10.4	25.0
3000-5000.	54.	5.6	5.6	13.0	7.4	16.7	14.8	37.0
5000-8000.	36.	5.6	5.6	5.6	19.4	22.2	16.7	25.0
8000+	21.	-	-	4.8	19.0	28.6	19.0	28.6

Table 16 : Methodist I.A. by parish type : e.Population,1851.

Population.	No. of Parishes.	Percentage of parish type with I.A.:						
		0.	1-9.	10-19.	20-29.	30-39.	40-49.	50+.
Under 250.	21.	52.4	-	-	9.5	19.0	-	19.0
250- 500.	31.	3.2	6.4	16.1	16.1	25.8	-	32.3
500-1000.	30.	4.0	2.0	10.0	14.0	24.0	20.0	26.0
1000-2000.	38.	2.6	5.3	7.9	18.9	13.2	23.7	28.9
2000-3000.	24.	-	4.2	8.3	16.7	25.0	16.7	29.2
3000-5000	10.	-	10.0	-	10.0	50.0	10.0	20.0

A breakdown of Methodist I.A.s in relation to the basic pattern of property division within the parish also conforms to this general formula.¹ Whilst parishes which were 'much subdivided' returned relatively higher I.A.s than those which were 'divided among a few', the essential feature of parishes within each category of property division was that they were more likely to record high than low I.A.s.

A final cursory consideration of Methodist I.A.s by parochial acreage and population completes the picture.² It was only in the most compact, non-urban parishes, of between 750 and 1500 acres, that any residual resistance to Methodist dissemination continued to operate in 1851. However, even within parishes of this size, once a Methodist cause had been begun, it often succeeded in much the same degree as in the larger parishes. Similarly, nearly one-half of parishes with 5000 or more inhabitants returned a Methodist I.A. of at least 50%, while just over one-half (52.4%) of those with under 250 still had no Methodists at all. But, despite this contrast in levels of Methodist support at the extremes of this particular parochial category, the most pertinent fact, again, was that Methodism obtained substantial I.A.s in most parishes in every population band, above the very low threshold of 250 inhabitants.

The general inhibiting effect of structural parochial features on overall Methodist performance in 1851 was thus, unsurprisingly, very limited. In a tiny minority of parishes, Methodist progress remained obstructed by long-term parochial environmental

1. See Table 14.

2. See Tables 15 and 16.

factors, but in most they played a relatively insignificant role. While a partial correlation can be detected within the foregoing statistical analyses between factors especially conducive to early Methodist dissemination and subsequently strong Methodist affiliation, it is not necessary to conclude that those factors by themselves continued to play the critical determining role. The pattern of Methodist dissemination between 1785 and 1815 has already suggested that by this time the inherent strengths of the other long-term influences on Methodist growth - evolving Methodist denominationalism, and processes of socio-economic change - played a larger part in this respect than inhibiting factors of parochial environment. In the same fashion, it was primarily the interplay of these positive underlying trends which conditioned the level of Methodist support by parish in 1851.

For example, it was largely the case that the highest Methodist attendance rates in 1851 were recorded in general in parishes where Societies had been earliest established, which tended to be those where Anglican support was weakest. But that trend was primarily explicable in terms of two factors largely incidental to local Anglican influence. In the first place, the initial success of Methodism in such parishes was substantially dependent on the existence of a very real, and clearly - defined parochial religious 'need', which in turn was partly triggered by the socially disruptive consequences of economic change. It was the western mining areas, in particular, which fuelled the greater part of this initial demand for a more explicit form of spiritual support, and

which became the focal point of early Methodist dissemination. Partly because such regions continued to experience the most profound social instability and uncertainty throughout the first half of the 19th century, that religious 'need' was still alive in 1851, and the strength of Methodist support in that year reflected the fact that it retained specific popular functionality.¹

At the same time, such regions obtained steadily improving pastoral service and attention from Methodist authorities as a result of the implications of a gradual shift in Connexional priorities after Wesley's death - and especially from 1815 - away from committed evangelism towards institutional consolidation. Increasingly concerned with financial worries and the need to exert effective control over the 'movement', the prime preoccupation of the leadership became to intensify pastoral oversight and provision for those where Methodism was already well established, rather than to extend the 'good work' into new, or ill-trod territories.² The travelling preachers focused increasing energy on improving the effectiveness of the existing institutional apparatus of circuits and chapels, rather than on devising means to spread the message wider; and inevitably, the basic regional pattern of Connexional provision influenced considerably the variations in Methodist support in 1851.

Map 2 provides an overview of the regional patterns of total Methodist support (all denominations), as returned in the 1851 census. A few isolated parishes recorded very low Methodist

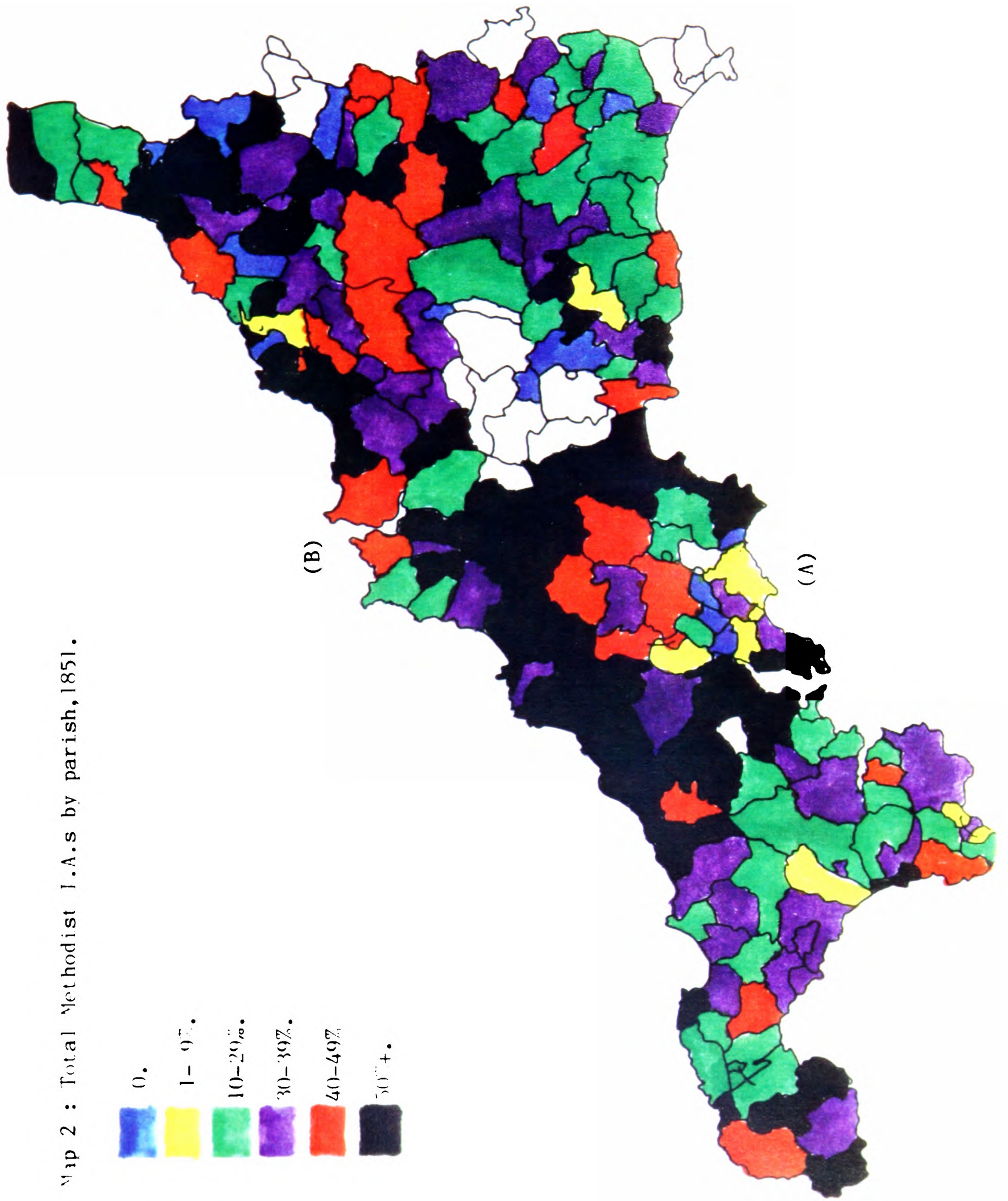
1. This theme will be developed subsequently, especially in Chapter 9.

2. Ward, 'Religion of the People', pp. 251-2.

attendance, but only in two small areas did poor Methodist performance extend over several parishes. In both— the agriculturally-advanced regions of the Roseland peninsula (A), and the south-east of the county in general—some limited form of 'dependency system' still operated by the mid-19th century. By contrast, Methodist I.A.s of 40%+ were returned widely across the county, and especially concentrated in three extensive areas. In two of them—the predominantly mining districts of west and west central Cornwall—significant early Methodist dissemination was consolidated numerically following the confluence of positive factors as suggested above. In the third, however, this basic explanatory pattern of Methodist success cannot be applied. In the largely rural north of the county, Methodist infiltration in the 18th century was haphazard and often negligible, and Connexional attitudes after 1815 less than enthusiastic. Nonetheless, by 1851 as many as seventeen parishes in the northern triangle above the river Alan (B) returned Methodist I.A.s over 50% in 1851.

Methodist growth down to 1851 clearly did not materialise simply out of a happy convergence of perceived local 'needs' and evolving Connexional priorities. Inevitably, there were occasions when the two trends appeared hopelessly at odds with each other. In general, considerable friction existed between the priorities of many local Methodists and those of their Connexional leaders. Unfulfilled religious 'need', for example, continued to be detected by local Methodists, and indeed, in many senses, progressively expanded as the dislocating economic processes in both industrial

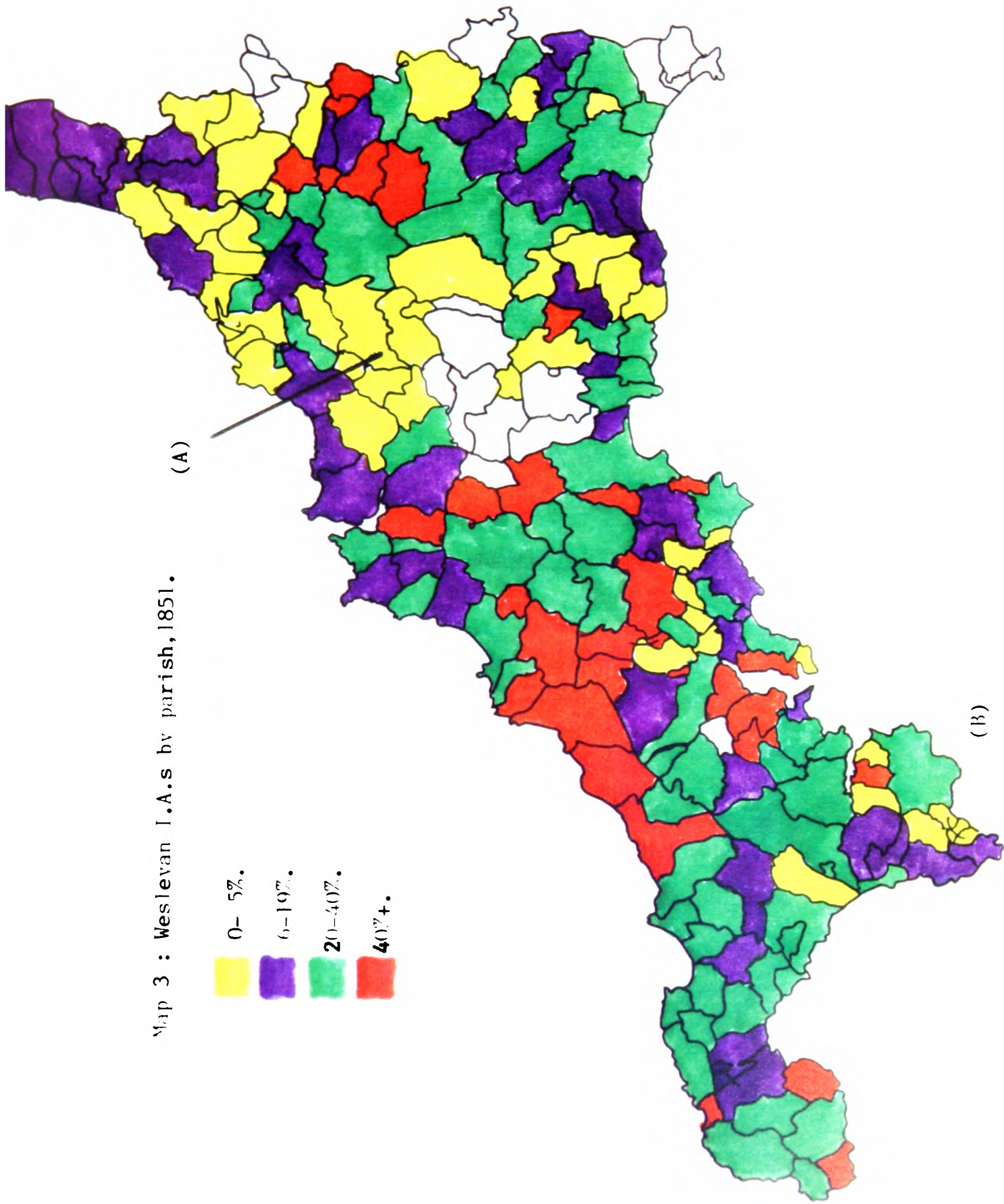
Map 2 : Total Methodist I.A.s by parish, 1851.



and agricultural contexts unwound throughout the first half of the 19th century. A Connexional preoccupation with mature administrative efficiency and order seemed curiously out of place in a social environment decidedly immature and disordered. Methodist growth after 1815 did not simply follow patterns essentially laid down by Connexional priorities, but also reflected the success of particular local pressures or initiatives, both from within the Wesleyan body, or if necessary, following secession.

The important secessions which occurred within Methodism in Cornwall, as elsewhere, were primarily motivated by one of two fundamental interpretations of the manner in which the Connexion was developing in the early 19th century. In the first place, sects such as the Bible Christians, the Primitive Methodists, and in part the Teetotal Wesleyan Methodists, were inspired by the belief that Connexional preoccupations with administration and order were at best misguided, because they effectively sapped the revivalist spirit from the roots of the 'movement'. In the second, splinter organisations such as the Wesleyan Methodist Association, the Wesleyan Reformers, and the smaller New Connexion, and Wesleyan Protestant Methodists, were fuelled by growing local antagonism, often among lay leaders and officials, to an increasingly authoritarian and autocratic Connexional interest in controlling the workings of local Methodism. Taken together, both types of secession obviously influenced the overall pattern of local Methodist growth to 1851.

Map 3 : Wesleyan I.A.s by parish, 1851.



Clearly, the Wesleyans (Map 3) remained the predominant influence in the county in 1851, despite internal conflicts and divisions. They were absent from only 18.3% of parishes in all, and returned I.A.s consistently between 20 and 40% in all parts of the county. Nonetheless, overall Wesleyan support varied considerably across the county, and in general it was significantly higher where dissemination had been most immediate, particularly in the western mining districts. There were, in fact, sizeable areas of the county where Wesleyanism was a largely insignificant influence in 1851, the result for the most part of the convergence of relatively inhibiting parochial factors with a more important Connexional unwillingness to provide the resources for further home missioning after 1815. In the northern agricultural region, for example, the travelling preachers had simply not missioned in the fringes prior to 1815, and after that point, they did so with inadequate structural support. On the Bodmin Moors (A), and the Meneage peninsula (B), the difficult terrain and small populations persuaded Connexional authorities against the 'cost-effectiveness' of substantial missioning or pastoral provision.

The Bible Christians (Map 4) exerted the next most significant Methodist influence within the county as a whole, and their origins were linked directly to this Connexional unwillingness to mission after 1815. William O'Bryan, a Cornishman and a Methodist local preacher, left the Connexion in that year to pursue unfettered the task of continued evangelism.¹ By 1851, the

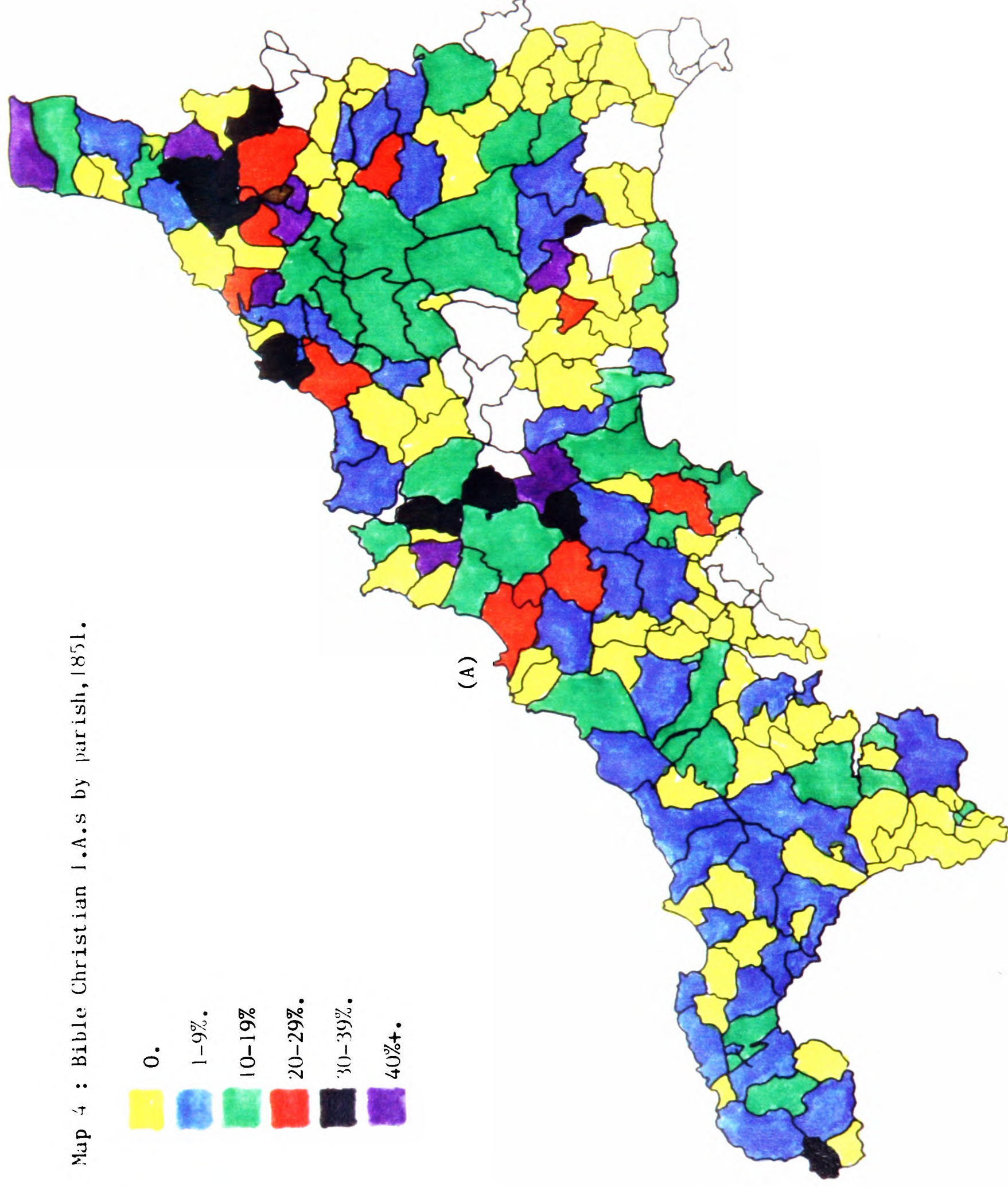
1. F.W. Bourne, The Bible Christians : Their Origins and History (1815-1900), London, 1905. ; Thomas Shaw, The Bible Christians, 1815-1907, London, 1965. ; S.L. Thorne, William O'Bryan, 2nd edn., Plymouth, 1888.

Bible Christians were holding services in just over one-half (55.9%) of all parishes, and although they had relatively few real strongholds (only eight parishes returned I.A.s of 40% or over), they were nonetheless spread across the whole of the county. Their basic pattern of support, however, clearly still reflected their initial inspiration. To a large extent, the Bible Christians were strong where the Wesleyans were weakest. In the St. Columb Minor area (A), and the north-east in general, they tended to take over the evangelistic mantle at the fringes of Wesleyan territorial influence; and on the Bodmin Moors, again, their relative success reflected different priorities within the pastorate.

Other sects and denominations locally were far less important. Only the Wesleyan Methodist Association was able to obtain support across the region as a whole, and in places, in substantial numerical terms. Consideration of these less significant splinters, however, will be undertaken at the appropriate points in the following chapter, as will a more detailed analysis of both Wesleyan and Bible Christian growth.

Before then, there is only the need to return to the 'macro' interpretations with which this chapter began. Having analysed Methodist dissemination and growth in relation to a range of parochial conditioning factors, there still remains the question of whether factors operating at the level of the county rather than the parish might, too, help explain the overall success of Methodism in Cornwall. In large part, the initial success of Methodism on a county basis might be said to have reflected the poverty of

Map 4 : Bible Christian I.A.s by parish, 1851.



Anglican provision, and the weakness of other inhibiting factors to Methodist growth on a 'macro' as well as a 'micro' level. The fact that Methodism apparently did not increase the proportion of churchgoers in the county in 1851 in comparison with, say, Devon, would seem to add weight to the view that Methodism essentially 'filled the gaps' in religious need left vacant by Anglican inadequacy.¹

But, nonetheless, is it still possible to argue that, once established, Methodism came to function in some sense as a 'county-based' religion? At this point, no final answer can be deduced, but an initial pointer might be interjected. It has already been shown that one of the critical underlying trends in Cornish history throughout the process of industrialisation was the gradual erosion of regional isolation and identity in the face of external pressures and influences of all kinds. We have also seen in this chapter, that in communities especially renowned for their exclusivity and hostility to 'outsiders', Methodism was almost immediately accepted. Because of the continued difficulties of communication between Cornwall and 'up-country', it was inevitable also that Connexional control of local Methodism would be limited. It is possible that while Anglicanism - as in Wales - had long been spurned on a popular level as inappropriate and alien, Methodism, through its capacity to broaden out and adopt indigenous traits and functions, was embraced as an alternative popular establishment, and - among other things - as a buttress to

1. Thomas Shaw, The Pastoral Crook. The State of Religion in the Diocese of Exeter in the 19th century, n.p., 1970, p.7.

Cornish traditionalism and regional distinctiveness in the face of external threats. Fuller analysis of this concept, however, must await the additional information and interpretation of the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER 5 : A REGIONAL ANALYSIS OF METHODIST GROWTH.

In order to assess Methodist growth in Cornwall with greater precision, the county has been divided into nine regions, which although by no means existing as self-contained units, nonetheless display sufficiently distinct and idiosyncratic socio-economic and topographic features to allow comparative generalisations to be made. The regions are shown on Map 5, and decennial population changes noted in Table 17. In mere outline terms, they might be introduced as follows:

Region 1 : West Cornwall - a traditional tin mining area, of relatively high population density, with small cottagers typically also involved in farming and fishing. The most 'Celtic' part of the county, which was increasingly affected by the expansion in copper mining, especially from the 1820s.

Region 2 : West Central Cornwall - the copper mining heartland; the area most fundamentally disrupted by industrialisation. By far the most densely populated part of the county.

Region 3 : The Meneage peninsula - moor and farmland, with some small fishing coves. Thinly populated, with a steady decline in the proportion of the county's inhabitants accounted for first by the migration

to the copper mines to the north, and second by the gradual consolidation of farms, in particular in the 1850s.

Region 4 : The Roseland peninsula - one of the few rich agricultural regions in the county, containing generally small parishes with few inhabitants.

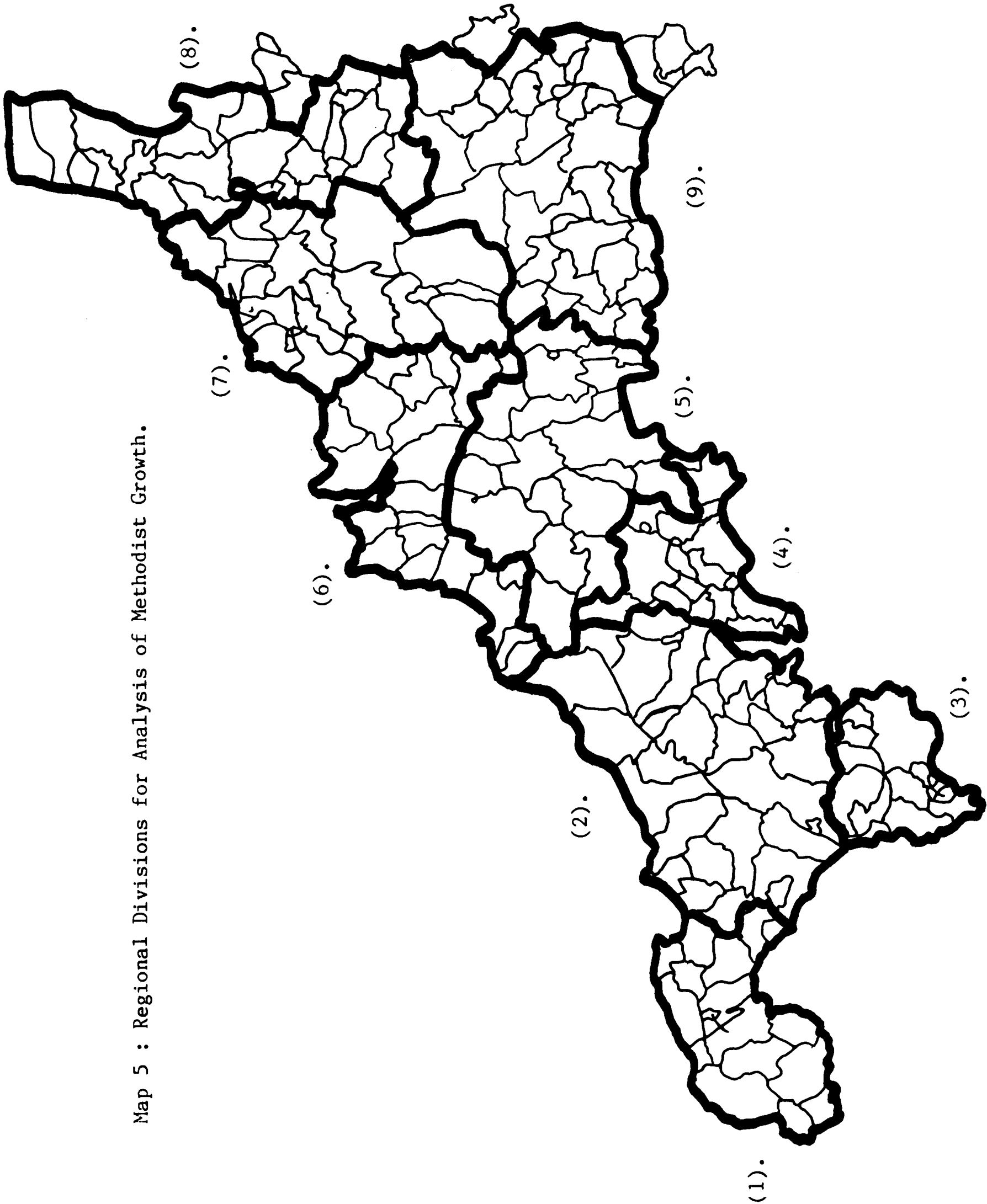
Region 5 : St. Austell - traditionally a tin-streaming and farming region, which underwent a dramatic population rise in the 1810s and 20s with the development of mining and particularly the china clay works to the west of St. Austell.

Region 6 : North Central coast - thinly populated coastal region of significant agricultural worth, steadily improved throughout the period.

Region 7 : The Bodmin Moors - the most substantial, largely sterile tract of moorland in the county, with a small, slow-changing population engaged in eking a living from quarrying, tin-streaming, fishing, and whatever farming the soil would allow.

Region 8 : North Cornwall - the most 'Anglicized' part of the county, containing some good agricultural land, in a generally rural environment. The population

Map 5 : Regional Divisions for Analysis of Methodist Growth.



began to decline in the 1850s following the final collapse of many of the traditional small farmers.

Region 9 : South-east - a large, diverse region, with good farming land in the central band fringed by moorland to the north and fishing villages on the coast. A sudden rise in population in the 1840s followed the discovery of rich copper deposits at Caradon which attracted many mining families from the west.

We can begin to draw out the pattern of Methodist growth in the county by looking more closely at each of these regions in turn.

Region 1:

If the extreme tip of the county west of a line from St. Ives to Mount's Bay still retains a unique, enclosed character, in the 18th and 19th centuries it was far more pronounced. It was in these most Celtic parts that the Cornish language survived the longest; the famed Dolly Pentreath - accounted the last Cornish speaker - being buried in Paul churchyard in 1778. With few visitors, only one outside newspaper, and little travelling outside the region (except to sea), a remarkably self-sufficient material and spiritual culture existed in the 18th century, which bred tales

Table 17 : Population of Cornwall by regions, 1779-1871.

Region.	1779.	1801.	1811.	1821.	1831.	1841.	1851.	1861.	1871.
1. a.*	17963.	21420.	25700.	31745.	37866.	47662.	51060.	51996.	51843.
b.*	13.0.	12.2.	12.4.	12.7.	12.0.	14.4.	14.9.	14.7.	14.9.
c.*		11.3.	14.6.	23.5.	19.3.	25.9.	7.1.	1.8.	-0.3.
2. a.	44684.	65428.	76446.	91859.	112364.	130254.	131759.	140582.	135773.
b.	32.4.	35.7.	36.9.	36.7.	38.5.	39.3.	38.4.	39.8.	39.1.
c.		21.1.	16.8.	20.1.	22.3.	16.0.	1.2.	6.7.	-3.4.
3. a.	4287.	6074.	6337.	7651.	7676.	7876.	7459.	6560.	6377.
b.	3.1.	3.3.	3.1.	3.0.	2.6.	2.4.	2.2.	1.9.	1.8.
c.		19.0.	4.3.	20.7.	0.3.	2.6.	-5.2.	-12.0.	-2.8.
4. a.	9117.	11011.	11960.	13412.	13467.	13520.	13060.	12231.	11918.
b.	6.6.	6.0.	5.8.	5.3.	4.6.	4.1.	3.8.	3.5.	3.4.
c.		9.4.	8.6.	12.1.	0.4.	0.4.	-3.4.	-6.3.	-2.6.
5. a.	14299.	18784.	20346.	27822.	35508.	40216.	41298.	42331.	39617.
b.	10.4.	10.2.	9.8.	11.1.	12.2.	12.1.	12.0.	12.0.	11.4.
c.		14.3.	8.3.	36.7.	27.6.	13.3.	2.7.	2.5.	-6.4.
6. a.	10554.	13389.	14757.	17614.	19692.	21534.	22418.	21981.	22398.
b.	7.7.	7.3.	7.1.	7.0.	6.8.	6.5.	6.5.	6.2.	6.5.
c.		12.2.	10.2.	19.4.	11.8.	9.3.	4.1.	-1.9.	1.9.
7. a.	7645.	9208.	10412.	12177.	13584.	15156.	15553.	14578.	15098.
b.	5.5.	5.0.	5.0.	4.9.	4.7.	4.6.	4.5.	4.1.	4.4.
c.		9.3.	13.1.	17.0.	11.6.	11.6.	2.6.	-6.3.	3.6.
8. a.	11284.	12949.	15598.	19103.	19955.	21548.	20162.	18578.	18864.
b.	8.2.	7.6.	7.5.	7.6.	6.8.	6.5.	5.9.	5.3.	5.4.
c.		10.7.	11.9.	22.5.	4.5.	8.0.	-6.4.	-7.9.	1.5.
9. a.	18018.	23064.	25456.	29208.	31387.	33408.	39889.	44285.	44782.
b.	13.1.	12.6.	12.3.	11.7.	10.8.	10.1.	11.6.	12.5.	12.9.
c.		12.7.	10.4.	14.7.	7.5.	6.4.	19.4.	11.0.	1.1.

* a. = Population.

* b. = Percentage of county population in region.

* c. = Percentage decennial rise in population.

like that of the old St. Ives woman who, on clambering up nearby Trencrom Hill to hear George Whitefield preach, surveyed the countryside to the east and exclaimed that 'she never knawed the world was so big before.'¹

Despite its remoteness, the region was relatively populous, with 12 - 15% of the county's population living here throughout our period. For the most part, they were concentrated in just four parishes: Madron, St. Ives, St. Just, and Paul. In the first was Penzance, in the process of transformation in the 18th century from an 'unremarkable market town'² to a bustling, cosmopolitan port and popular resort for the old and infirm, whose population had reached 3382 by 1801 and over 10,000 by 1871. To the north, St. Ives contained a busy fishing port, which rose to pre-eminence in the county's pilchard trade in the final third of the 18th century following the construction of a new pier.³ The parish of Paul was primarily a fishing parish, notable for its two substantial communities of Newlyn and Mousehole; while further west, the large parish of St. Just had long been mined for tin, but grew markedly in population from the early 18th century, as a number of new ventures were undertaken. Together these parishes contained just over 60% of the inhabitants of the region in 1779.

At the start of the 18th century, although fertile soil in the coastal regions had encouraged a small number of well-cultivated estates, most land was divided into smallholdings.⁴ Landowners

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1. Jenkin, Cornwall and its People, p.147.
 2. Carew, Survey, ed. Halliday, p.234.
 3. Lysons, Magna Brittania, p.148.
 4. Fraser, General View, p.27, p.38.; Hitchins and Drew, History of Cornwall, ii p.532.

traditionally had been more interested in 'adventuring' in tin mining than in agricultural improvement, while the bulk of the population eked a living from the combined occupations of small-scale farming, pilchard fishing through the summer months, and 'tinning' in the large number of small mines dotted across the region from St. Just in the west to St. Hilary and Perranuthnoe in the east. However, beginning early in the 18th century, and accelerating in the last thirty years, the increased scale of organisation and capitalisation of first tin, and later copper mining, disrupted the essentially cottage-based local economy, and reduced the traditional 'independence' of the local tinner. The substantial rise in population as migrants were attracted to the new mines drove up rents and destroyed local self-sufficiency.¹ In general, life for local inhabitants became more precarious.

As throughout the country in general, the defenders of tradition eventually lost out to the new economic realities imposed by industrial capitalism, but here, well into the 19th century, the battle was still in progress. New mining enterprises, on one hand, never dominated the local economy as they did a few miles to the east. The retention of the tribute system, on the other, allowed for a sense of continuity and independence to remain, even if employers and the vagaries of external markets increasingly minimized its reality. But of probably greatest significance was the simple fact that the continuing remoteness and isolation of the region allowed local inhabitants to withstand socio-cultural

1. Between 1779 and 1811, the local population grew at 10-15% per decade; from 1811 to 1841 at between 20 and 25% per decade.

externalising influences even though their economy was increasingly linked to the outside world. The external economic pressures, indeed, helped consolidate and make explicit a spirit of local identity which allowed pre-industrial tradition and culture a peculiar persistence and resonance. By the 1810s, for example, though the tradition of lighting Midsummer Eve bonfires had largely died out throughout the county as a whole, it was still widely maintained in the towns and villages of Mount's Bay. When William Bottrell came to gather material for his three-volume work on the Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall, published between 1870 and 1880, it was within this region in general that he uncovered considerable evidence of still vital popular beliefs and practices.¹

It was in this region, too, that Methodism was first established in the county. Wesley's interest in the area was sparked by a Methodist sea-captain from Bristol who discovered a small religious society in St. Ives after docking in the harbour.² Two lay preachers were soon sent by Wesley to investigate the prospects for Methodism in west Cornwall, and Charles Wesley followed immediately in July 1743. The local clergy and gentry tapped xenophobic fears to raise mobs against him, but he obtained the useful assistance of the Presbyterian mayor of St. Ives, and was warmly welcomed by the society in the town.³ Having been howled out of the market-house by a mob he travelled from the town, and

1. Polwhele, History of Cornwall, i p.50.n. For more of Bottrell see Chapter 9.
2. W.M.M., xlvii (1823), p.204.
3. Wesleys in Cornwall, ed. Pearce, p.29.

preached on the Keneggy and St.Hilary Downs to the south-east, and in the coastal parishes westward to St. Just. Both areas at the time were experiencing population influx, and the growth of new mining settlements; and in both Wesley's preaching in the open-air attracted large audiences of tanners and their families.¹ Within a month, John Wesley was in St.Ives, numbering the society - which became officially Methodist - at around one hundred and twenty. Like his brother, he used St.Ives as a base from which to launch out to the downs, and again preached in St.Hilary in the south-east, and Morvah, Zennor, and St. Just to the west. In Morvah he met an 'earnest, stupid attention in the hearers', at Zennor 'much goodwill...but no life', but in the more populous, and socially more disturbed parish of St.Just he preached 'to the largest congregation (I was informed) that ever had been seen in these parts... The people trembled, and were still. I had not known such an hour before in Cornwall.'²

A pattern was immediately established. Over the next decade, John Wesley returned each summer to St.Ives, concentrating his efforts on the arc of parishes round to St.Just, and gradually extending the work also in the area between St. Hilary and Newlyn.

By 1767, already twelve small societies existed in the region. The first five - St.Ives, St.Just, Morvah, Zennor, and St.Hilary - were founded by the Wesleys in 1743 and 1744; and gradual expansion thereafter occurred from a combination of missioning by 'helpers' (most notably local men), and requests for preaching from local

1. Ibid.p.33,p.12.n.; Rowe,Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution,p.39.
2. Wesleys in Cornwall,p.69,pp.71-2.

inhabitants. Lelant, for example, was missioned from St. Ives, and had a room when Wesley first visited in 1757; the Newlyn area was first missioned in 1746, to be succeeded the following year by Wesley preaching on the green between Newlyn and Penzance. A small cause was begun in Sancreed, on the other hand, after Methodist helpers were invited to preach in a cottage around 1750.¹

In general, early Methodist dissemination was aided both by the weakness of inhibiting factors and the availability of positive factors as outlined in the previous chapter. Establishment structures were often tenuous, and although the Reverend Walter Borlase and Stephen Usticke of Botallack, St. Just in particular worked to whip up mobs against the Methodists from 1743, their success declined dramatically after 1745. In part, there was the simple problem of a shortage of resident clergymen and squires in the district; Anglican weaknesses here were notorious and although the county history in 1814 listed eleven gentlemen's seats in the region, all but three were in the single parish of Madron.² But more generally, the lack of 'closed' parishes, and the large number of independent mining and fishing communities provided soil typically favourable to early Methodist preaching.

On the other hand, positive benefits were derived from the historical failure of the Church of England to establish an effective spiritual basis in the region; so that in one sense John Wesley was able to fill the gap in local religious need. Moreover, he gave the region considerable attention, especially in

1. A.M., iii(1780), p.300.

2. Lysons, op.cit., p.clxxv-clxxviii.

the initial years of his itineracy. The use of local men to spread the word, along with Wesley's undoubted empathetic qualities helped Methodism overcome natural indigenous resistance to 'external' influences. Perhaps most importantly, the rapid growth in mining already under way in the 1740s provided a milieu of dislocation, and uncertainty especially conducive to early Methodist advance.

And yet we should be careful not to pre-date or exaggerate the popular impact of early Methodist activity. A circuit book for 1767¹ lists nine of the twelve local societies, and although St. Hilary had 95 members and St. Ives 84, the rest had only between 20 and 40 members. Approximately 45% of male members were registered as 'tinnners', representing nearly one-sixth of total membership, but they numbered only 66 altogether; whereas Wesley's reports of his early preaching on the downs had estimated audiences of several thousand tinnners as typical. Moreover, those tinnners who had become members may well have been the more established, and settled; which fits in with a male membership pattern of over 25% tradesmen and skilled artisans, and 7% farmers, to suggest that the overwhelming majority of male members in 1767 could be defined in terms of occupation which announced - even if in practice it did not guarantee - a level of socio-economic 'independence'. Wesley's preaching had certainly attracted large numbers of working men, but the leap into Methodist membership was so far resisted, for whatever reasons.

1. 'West Cornwall Circuit Book 1767', C.R.O. MS. AD 350 has several pages missing, so that the societies in St. Just, Mousehole, and (probably) St. Burian are unfortunately excluded from the ensuing analysis.

Table 18 : Occupations of Members Listed in West Cornwall Circuit Book, 1767,
(Region One). (Source : C.R.O. MS. AD 350.).

Category.	Men.		Women.		Total.	
	Number.	Percentage.	Number.	Percentage.	No.	%.
Gentry.	-	-	2.	0.8.	2.	0.5.
Farmers.	10.	6.8.	4.	1.6.	14.	3.5.
Tradesmen/Merchants.	19.	12.9.	23.	9.2.	42.	10.6.
Artisans	19.	12.9.	-	-	19.	4.8.
Tinners.	66.	44.9.	-	-	66.	16.6.
Fishermen.	5.	3.4.	-	-	5.	1.3.
Textile Workers.	2.	1.4.	44.	17.6.	46.	11.6.
Labourers.	4.	2.7.	3.	1.2.	7.	1.9.
Servants.	3.	2.0.	7.	2.8.	10.	2.5.
Old/ Widowed.	-	-	13.	5.2.	13.	3.3.
Young/ Unmarried and at home.	9.	6.1.	39.	15.6.	48.	12.1.
Married and not employed.	1.	0.7.	24.	9.6.	25.	6.3.
Married and spouse's employment listed.	-	-	53.	21.2.	53.	13.3.
Poor.	1.	0.7.	3.	1.2.	4.	1.0.
Others.	8.	5.4.	33.	14.0.	43.	10.8.
Total.	147.		250.		397.	

Of greater significance, however, was the fact that almost two-thirds of local members in 1767 were women. Nearly one in ten were tradeswomen - mostly shopkeepers - and almost 18% worked as seamstresses, spinners, and makers and menders of fishing nets. But over two-thirds were not defined in terms of occupation. Around 5% of women members were widows, another 15% young girls, unattached, and living with their parents, probably over 40% married and without paid employment. Hence, Methodist members at this point tended to conform to particular types: the man whose employment conferred a degree of social status and stability; the adolescent and the widowed, in many senses most spiritually susceptible, or in most religious need; the married woman who found in the class meeting that outlet for social intercourse and emotional satisfaction fulfilled for her husband in employment. The overall impression of the Methodist societies in 1767 is of small, but robust communities committed to the spiritual and practical hardships of strict membership because of the religious and emotional rewards. Some of them undoubtedly remained loyal, or returned, to the Church of England; that at least is suggested by the relatively high Anglican communicant levels returned, in particular, in Zennor and Morvah in 1779.

But around the core of religiously committed membership, there was nonetheless already a much larger, less dependable fringe, who are not accounted for in the 1767 circuit book. And during the last two decades of the 18th century, as Methodism broke most of its links with the Church of England to become a well-defined, auto-

nomous denomination, that fringe became both more influential to, and increasingly influenced by, local Methodism. The starting point for this process was a dramatic revival in the parish of St. Just during 1782, which inspired and sparked off similar outbreaks in at least six other societies over the next two years, and doubled local membership which for fifteen years had been almost unchanged.¹ The revival began at a cottage prayer meeting in December 1781, when:

'several began to cry aloud, and would not be comforted. And some struggled as in the agonies of death: one of whom fainted away. They continued in prayer till the preaching began at five in the morning: and six of the mourners found peace with God.'

2

Throughout the spring, prayer and class meetings were the venues for similar occurrences, and by March the revival had peaked as 'four score persons were justified in one week.'

The revival took place within the strongest local Methodist society, which had quickly acquired a self-confidence and self-reliance from the influence and control of a small group of close-knit families. In 1750, Wesley described it as 'still the largest society in Cornwall; and so great a proportion of believers I have not found in all the nation beside.'³ From such a society came both the will and the ability to 'extend the work'. By the late 1770s, the first generation of young adults was emerging within the society who had actually been raised within a Methodist

1. Society memberships are recorded in 'Circuit Stewards Account Book, West Cornwall Circuit 1774-1796', C.R.O. MS. MR/T/17.
2. A.M., vii (1784), pp. 211-2.
3. Wesleys in Cornwall, p. 109.

environment, by parents and leaders who had imbibed Wesley's message of 1768 that 'unless we take care of these children the present revival of religion will be res unius aetatis: it will last only the age of a man.'¹ With a fixed determination to remain identified as Methodists, and with an additional youthful zeal to win converts to their faith, this generation helped revitalize the society as a whole at least one year before the actual revival broke out.² An appropriate climate of commitment and expectancy was created within the society which itself helped inspire the revival; and the events in the St. Just cottage in December 1781 focused the energies and expectations of local members more keenly, generating services and cottage meetings designed to capitalise on the excitement and wide religious interest aroused.

The actual converts during the revival period were drawn largely from the Methodist fringe. Many were those most susceptible to the heightened tension and emotionalism of the meetings. Children between the ages of seven and fourteen figured prominently, as did recently-arrived tanners - or 'sojourners' as one local clergyman called them.³ But there were also secular circumstances which helped increase the tension within the society, in particular a revived fear of French invasion. A large French cutter had in fact entered St. Ives harbour in the very month that the revival broke out, and it was within the coastal societies

1. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, London, 1862, i p.82.
2. Society membership grew steadily throughout 1781; see 'Circuit Stewards Account Book, West Cornwall Circuit 1774-1796', C.R.O. MS.
3. A.M., vii (1784), pp.266-7; N.J.G. Pounds, 'Population Movement', p.39.

in general that the revival had greatest effect.¹ Joy and fear seemed tangled together among the converted.

The St. Just revival probably occurred spontaneously, but it was immediately followed by similar outbreaks in Buryan, Mousehole, Newlyn, St. Ives, St. Hilary, and Towednack which were directly inspired by events in St. Just. Revivalism instantly opened up great possibilities for a new generation of members alive to the discrepancy between the obvious appeal of Methodism, demonstrated by Wesley's phenomenal drawing-power on the downs, and the apparent reluctance of many to make the commitment of membership. Revivals were inherently popular: services became more exciting and spontaneous, their message and function simplified and direct, while the centrality of the cottage for many of the meetings provided familiar, comforting surroundings for the 'audience' which allowed Methodism a place - as a 'religion of the hearth' - previously reserved for folk religion.² Revivals made it possible for a bridge to be built between appeal and commitment; they suggested a means by which Methodism could be truly 'indigenised'.

Wesley was very interested to hear of the revival, but he was concerned by the extent to which it had been generated by an essentially lay local dynamic. He advised his helpers to ensure that the work was 'genuine', and to spread tracts and to concentrate on the bands for this purpose.³ Nonetheless the work continued to

1. Polsue, Parochial History, ii p.269.; R. Treffry, Memoirs of Mr. John Edwards Trezise of St. Just, Cornwall, London, 1837, pp.41-4.
2. G.L. Gomme, Folk-lore relics of early village life, London, 1883, p.96.; William Bottrell, Stories and Folk-lore of West Cornwall, Penzance, 1880, p.17.
3. Letters of John Wesley, ed. Telford, vii pp.138-9, p.143, p.145.

spread largely independent of the helpers control.¹ The response of Connexional authorities was to improve pastoral oversight, and the original Cornwall West circuit which served an area from Lands End to east of Truro was divided, with St. Ives becoming the station for the new western circuit. From 1785 to the turn of the century, the impression of local Methodism is of a burgeoning denomination, building and improving its chapels, increasingly formalizing its worship, becoming a more common feature of the landscape. Yet within its structures, a growing rift was developing on the critical issue of revivalism.

After the revival period of 1782-85 there were many local Methodists who began to expect repeat performances. An itinerant preacher stationed in St. Ives in 1790 reported a strong 'spirit of awakening' during his time there, and an addition of new members throughout the year.² By 1799, the local superintendent could write: 'Religion has prospered in this circuit the two last years, and of late, I perceived the work deepening in the hearts of many.'³ The actual revival began at Penzance on the Christmas Quarter Day in 1798, when 'the Lord began to breathe on the dry bones, in such a way as never was seen before in Penzance.' Members from around the circuit returned to their own societies full of stories and spiritual inspiration from what had happened in Penzance, and:

'the flame of love that was kindled in the hearts of our brethren who came from various parts of the circuit, that night, was carried into their

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1. see A.M., vii (1784), p. 267.
 2. M.M., xlv (1823), pp. 352-3.
 3. M.M., xxii (1799), pp. 410-1.

respective societies and soon spread throughout the whole.'

¹ Altogether, 1100 new members were added in just three months, and by June, with the revival 'somewhat at a stand', circuit membership had reached 4100, an increase of over 100% since Christmas.

The revival involved much larger numbers, and was more widespread than in 1782 because Methodism had by this time become more firmly established throughout the region, and because advocates of revivalism within its ranks were more numerous and active, and able to propel the work along more successfully than earlier. At the same time, the mood of crisis in local society was again very real, with a depression in local mining on top of accelerated migration into the area, fostering unemployment and uncertainty within the mining regions. The Methodist chapels in the mining communities had set up funds for the relief of 'distressed members', which increased the popularity and appeal of Methodism, and helped prepare the context for revival. Outside the chapels:

'This benevolent institution has caused hundreds of prayers to be offered up to God for us, that we might be blessed in our own souls, and that the work of the Lord might prosper in our hands.'

Meanwhile, within the chapels:

'...when I considered the zeal which our brethren manifested for the cause of God, the love they showed to the poor members of Christ, and the fervent prayers which were incessantly poured forth at the Throne of Grace, I could not help saying, "Surely the blessing of such as were ready to perish must come upon this Circuit; and he that heareth in secret, will reward us openly, and fulfil all our requests."'

2.

1. Ibid. pp. 410-13.; Samuel Dunn, Memoirs of Mr. Thomas Tatham, and of Wesleyan Methodism in Nottingham, London, 1847, pp. 143-5.
2. M.M. xxii (1799), pp. 410-11.

The effects of the revival were also more far-reaching than in 1782. An immediate additional circuit subdivision was made, although on the surface the gains from the revival year were soon all but lost. The particular set of circumstances which inspired mass conversion gradually dissolved, and took with them many of the temporary members of 1799 and 1800. But all was not lost in this process of withdrawal. By the early 19th century, twenty seven Methodist societies existed within the region, and several parishes already had as many as three. Around nine chapels were built or enlarged as a result of the revival, and perhaps five new societies came into existence. In 1801, with membership already declining after the revival peak, an estimated 9% of the total regional population were registered as Methodist members.¹

1.

The analysis of Methodist growth and estimates of membership which underpin this chapter are based on a combination of sources. Annual Circuit figures for all denominations are available in the various Minutes of Conference, etc. Circuit memberships are then broken down into quarterly figures for each of the constituent societies in a number of Circuit records, especially Wesleyan Circuit Schedules and Bible Christian Quarterly Meeting Minutes and Account Books. Other sources, such as Local Preachers Meeting Minutes, Circuit Stewards Account Books, Circuit Trust Schedules, and Circuit Plans, provide additional information on the distribution of societies, dates of chapels, and so on. This basic material has been supplemented by the utilisation of published circuit and chapel histories, Visitation Returns and Meeting House licences, and by reference to Thomas Shaw MSS. - especially 'Files:Places' - deposited in R.I.C. Because a combination of sources has been used, and because the methodology adopted for each region has been similar, beginning with an analysis of available Circuit records, and then proceeding to additional sources as listed above, it has been felt that to footnote every reference, for example, to numbers of chapels in existence, or estimated proportion of Methodist members in the region, at a given point, is unnecessary, and would make for an impracticably unwieldy and disjointed text. The key Circuit sources which have been utilised, however, are listed in the Bibliography under C.R.O.

The circle of adherents, temporary converts, and those who had been otherwise brushed by the chapel certainly increased this proportion, though it is impossible to say by how much.¹

However, the aftermath of the revival also brought to the surface the conflict which had been growing within local Methodism since the St. Just revival. In origin, this was between Connexional authorities, increasingly preoccupied with administration, order, and the suppression of lay unorthodoxy, and local Methodists who proclaimed the righteousness of their 'primitive' spiritual expression and conversionist zeal. But increasingly bound up in the conflict were growing local social divisions resulting from economic change, and a more general heightened awareness that external or 'alien' forces - outside investors, migrants, external markets, even the war - were destroying tradition and social stability. For some, it began to seem possible to identify Connexional authorities as part of this external offensive.

Certainly, the significant shifting of the circuit station in 1791 from John Wesley's old headquarters in the fishing port of St. Ives, to the increasingly respectable and culturally 'refined' town of Penzance suggested how Connexional attitudes were changing.

The despairing, cautionary tone of itinerant preachers' diaries in the aftermath of the 1799 revival captures a loss of patience with revivalism.² For some local members, the apparent hardening of will by Connexional authorities, to take control of the 'movement' from

1. Various estimates have been made of the likely ratio between adherents and members; perhaps it lies between two and three to one.
2. See M.M., xxxi(1813), pp.166-8.; M.M., liii(1830), p.363.

the advocates of revivalism, seemed like the perfect opportunity to begin to use it as an external, but progressive modernising influence, which might help 'civilize' and broaden the horizons of local inhabitants in general. A guide to the area published in 1815 affirmed that this, indeed, had occurred:

'The Methodists in Western Cornwall are very numerous, and of a respectable description; the changes which they have effected in the morals of the miners is really incredible, and the habits of society and order which they have happily introduced, have tended as much to the mining interest as to the quiet and comfort of the neighbourhood.'

1

In fact, many qualifications need to be made to a passage such as this, and a much fuller analysis of the social role of Methodism will eventually be made in the final chapter. But Connexional 'modernisers' by no means had things all their own way. On the contrary, just as the region's isolation and remoteness allowed for a sustained resistance to all manner of external influences, it also assisted a formidable defence of an increasingly popular form of Methodism, most apparent in revival, in the face of greater Connexional exertions. Indeed, this 'indigenous' Methodism increasingly functioned to buttress the traditional way of life, based on a sturdy independence and a closeness to nature; Methodism provided an inner discipline and a sense of spiritual immediacy which both satisfied religious needs and helped establish personal bulwarks against external pressures.²

1. A Guide to Mount's Bay and the Lands End, (1815) quoted in T.R.Harris, Methodism and the Cornish Miner, n.p., 1960, p.10.
2. This theme will be clarified and analysed later, especially in Chapters 7 and 9.

So in the 1820s the local conflict within Methodism continued.

On the one hand, the increasingly fashionable congregation of Penzance with their 'large and elegant building, in a very respectable part of the town',¹ stood as a beacon of Connexional orthodoxy and 'modern' social values; the building of larger chapels with rented pews, the escalating adoption of Connexional 'causes', and the persistence of 'loyal' itinerants fanning the message to the fringes. A critic of Penzance Methodists argued that a church whose members had been initially 'generally poor and few', had now 'grown cold' with new-found social respectability.² Itinerant preachers did not necessarily directly oppose the revivals which continued to break out locally, but they took pains to channel them into Connexional acceptability. In Penzance in 1822, the itinerant reported, without apparent irony, 'a noiseless revival.'³

On the other hand, however, 'indigenous' Methodism survived outside the town of Penzance, and indeed gained in popular support especially in the Methodist strongholds of St. Ives, St. Just, and Mousehole. These societies remained as important counterbalances to the growing influence of Penzance. In the fishing village of Mousehole where 'most of the inhabitants were on the same footing economically',⁴ Methodist services were held in a cooper's kitchen until the first small chapel was built in 1783, but even then the

1. Vindicator, An Impartial View of the State of Religion in Penzance and its Vicinity, Penzance, 1824, pp. 31-2.
2. W.M.M., xliv (1826), pp. 193-4.; Vindicator, op.cit., p. 31-2.
3. W.M.M., xlv (1822), p. 50.
4. R. Treffry, Memoirs of Mr. Richard Trewavas, Senior, of Mousehole, Cornwall, to which is prefixed, an account of Methodism in Mousehole, London, 1839, pp. 5-6.

Methodist cause remained firmly home-spun. The chapel was built by communal effort:

'They raised the stones out of the upper part of the old hill, and rolled them down to the spot, by dint of strength: they also fetched the timber from Marazion in their own fishing-boats.'

1

A revival in 1813 brought the majority of villagers into membership, and fifteen years later the next large-scale revival did much the same for the succeeding generation.² Methodism became, and remained, a community religion, which helped to hold the village together in the face of commonly-shared crises, from poor fishing seasons to the pressures from multifarious forces eroding tradition.

Although the community received itinerant preachers warmly, (as 'the angels of God'), and gave remarkably liberally to Connexional causes - particularly foreign missions - they clung rigidly to a 'primitive' Methodist piety and a revivalistic spirituality.³

Much the same was true of the societies in St. Ives and St. Just. At the opening of the new chapel in St. Just in 1833, the collection raised £140: some indication of the degree of commitment of the community to 'their' chapel. One itinerant preacher wrote to the editor of the Wesleyan Magazine, with all the startled response of the 'outsider' which indeed he was:

'To see the enthusiasm with which these fine,

1. Ibid., p. 17.

2. R. Treffry, Memoirs of Richard Trewavas, Junior, of Mousehole, Cornwall, 2nd edn., Penryn, 1815, pp. 48-9.; William Carvosso, The Efficacy of Faith in the Atonement of Christ. Exemplified in a Memoir of Mr. William Carvosso, sixty years a class-leader in the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion, 2nd edn., London, 1835, pp. 249-51.

3. Treffry, Memoirs of Richard Trewavas, Senior, pp. 47-9.

intelligent, but ragged men regarded, on the day of the opening, their own handy work - was highly exciting: it was like a border-clan gathering round the proud hold of their feudal chieftain.'

1

In nearby Morvah, the original simple, cottage-like chapel built in 1744, was kept unchanged and unreplaced until the 1860s; in Bussolow chapel, women and men sat separately - as Wesley had encouraged - until the Second World War.² Benjamin Carvosso, himself a Cornishman, wrote, on being stationed to the circuit in 1830, that:

'Some of my best friends seemed almost to shudder for me, at my coming to this circuit, where Methodism is, or has been, considered to be great, and stiff, and acrid, and critical; but I find that plain old Methodist doctrines, delivered with a measure of fervour and unction, are the things wanted, and clamoured after by all, or nearly all, the influential.'

3

By the early 1830s, Methodism in general was exerting considerable influence in the region. The Reverend W. Grylls, the vicar of Crowan, delivered the annual Visitation sermon at Penzance in 1833, in which he declared: 'We have lost the people. The religion of the mass is become Wesleyan Methodist.'⁴ In a lengthy passage perhaps too declamatory for his sermon, but inserted for its publication, Grylls drew out the popular basis of local Methodist success:

1. 'John Carne - T. Jackson, Penzance, 6 Nov. 1833', M.C.A. MS. PLP 22.47.1.
2. Cornishman, 6 April 1978.
3. George Blencowe, The Faithful Pastor : A Memoir of the Rev. Benjamin Carvosso, London, 1857, p. 183.
4. W. Grylls, A Sermon Preached at the Annual Visitation of the Clergy of the Deanery of Penwith at Penzance, Wednesday June 12, 1833, London, 1833, p. xiii.

'I will suppose a stranger to arrive in these parts, having no other acquaintance with the ecclesiastical polity of this state, than that it is based upon an establishment. Let him now survey our towns, our villages, our scattered hamlets! He will see, indeed, the most impressive spectacle on this earth - every where a growing population, and every where beside it, a house of worship, growing with its growth, and inviting it, as it were, to be good, and holy, and happy : sensibly struck with the parental care that he thinks must have fondly watched for these million souls, what if he shall now be told that all, or nearly all, is the work of their own hands, and the thought of their own hearts; that, out of their own hard earnings, and by a little sweat from their own brow, they have provided a priest, and an altar, and a temple unto themselves - and all this because, in a state consecrated to the gospel, during a long series of years, little or no respect was paid, to one of the great tests of its true mission - this gospel shall be preached to the poor.'

1

It was during the 1830s, in fact, that the region experienced its greatest population influx as local copper mines were opened up to their maximum extent, and throughout the decade regional population increased by 25%. In this period of especial social turmoil, with Methodist chapels now well-established within local communities, two substantial revivals took Methodist membership in 1841 to a peak of around 11.3% of total regional population. The first - as in 1799 - broke out at the Christmas Quarter Day in December 1831 at Penzance, spreading throughout the circuit as 'revitalized' members returned home. Though many of the converts, again, were adherents, the revival also attracted new arrivals to the area, especially in St. Just, where the most rapid expansion in mining was in progress. In St. Just:

1. Ibid. pp. 24-5.

'The report of what was going on soon spread through the town; and the people came out of the public- houses, as well as their own, to see this strange sight. Though many came to look, none mocked; but rather stood amazed.'

1

The revival gave many of the newcomers and the young perhaps their first - or at any rate, their most significant - experience of chapel life; and though they might have remained unconverted at this point, many acquired the habit of chapel- attendance. The religious excitement in fact continued throughout 1832, and into 1833, partly because of improved pastoral care, partly because of the magnitude of social dislocation at this time; but it was the outbreak of cholera around Penzance and Newlyn in the autumn of 1832 which more than anything sustained it for so long.² At the end of the decade, the second major revival occurred, centring on St. Ives, confirming the continuing indigenous flavour, and popular functionality, of local Methodism.

These revivals, and the substantial rise in membership which resulted from them, convinced Connexional authorities of the need to improve local pastoral and structural facilities: both to hold on to the latest converts, and to exercise a greater controlling influence over the form and substance of local Methodism in general. A much greater concern was apparent at the highest levels within Methodism that revivalism in west Cornwall was both damaging

1. W.M.M., lv(1832), pp.362-5.; R.Treffry, Memoirs of the Rev. Richard Treffry, junior : including extracts from his correspondence to which are appended select remains, London, 1838, pp.103-4.; Treffry, Memoirs of John Edwards Trezise, p.87.; Blencowe, The Faithful Pastor, p.197.
2. Blencowe, op.cit., pp.208-11.

to administration and sometimes spiritually 'unorthodox'.¹ The Penzance circuit was split in three, the number of itinerant preachers 'planned' was doubled from three in 1830 to six in 1839, and a considerable chapel-building programme was put into operation. In the first half of the decade, eleven new chapels were built to replace earlier chapels, while five more represented totally fresh concerns. A further spate of building following the revival around St. Ives in 1839 realised seventeen more chapels. But though these chapels were in general affectionately welcomed in the villages (in Mousehole, for example, fishermen agreed to 'tithe' their catch to the chapel fund), the corollary to their appearance was a more sustained attempt by the Connexion to extend its control through the introduction of pew rents to help financial administration, and the formation of ancillary Sunday schools and Tract Societies.² These developments split many congregations, fighting an increasingly rearguard action against more general social change, and the perception that these new chapels were more 'Connexional' than their forerunners, and that Connexional forces as a whole were set on implanting a more orthodox 'outsider' ethos on chapel-life, brought the long-running conflict between indigenous and Connexional traditions to a head. In 1841, first in St. Ives, and then in many surrounding villages, the 'Teetotal Wesleyan Methodists' broke loose from the Connexion.

This secession, in fact, did not represent the first local challenge to Wesleyan Methodism. The Bible Christians had

1. See Chapter 7.

2. W.M.N., lvi (1833), pp. 520-3.

missioned the area much earlier, in the wake of the 1814 revival, and had formed a number of small societies by 1818 in the north west around St. Just and Sancreed, and in the east in St. Hilary and Perranuthnoe.

In Ludgvan and Lelant, also, small societies which had left the Connexion in the secession led by John Boyle joined the Bible Christian cause.¹ Adopting an explicitly revivalistic approach, with free- and plain- speaking preachers, many of whom were women (William Lovett was not alone in being temporarily attracted into Bible Christian membership by the 'novelty of their female preachers'),² the Bible Christians were able to attract Wesleyan 'backsliders' from the 1814 revival, who had fallen away as emotional, ecstatic revival serices had given way to normal, 'routine' worship. A circuit was established with two itinerant preachers, based on Morvah; and though Penzance became head of the circuit in 1823, its centre of gravity remained in the north-west of the peninsula.³

The Bible Christians, then, made their entry into the region essentially by soaking up Wesleyan backsliders. But subsequently, they never seriously competed with the already well-established Connexional chapels. Regional membership fluctuated between just 200 and 500 up to 1860. Some of their chapels, it is true, were built in villages where a Wesleyan chapel already existed, but in Newlyn, Mousehole, and Penzance, for example, there

1. For Boyle, see Region 2 below.

2. William Lovett, Life and Struggles in Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom, London, 1876, p. 22. And see The Diocese of Exeter, ed. Cook, Return for 'Perranuthnoe'.

3. J.C.C. Probert, The Sociology of Cornish Methodism, n.p., 1971, p. 44.

was no Bible Christian chapel before 1851. St. Ives was missioned for the first time as late as 1849,¹ and, indeed, the majority of local Bible Christian chapels were built in small villages and hamlets without a Wesleyan presence. Put simply, there was very little demand locally for Bible Christianity. In the 1820s and 30s in particular, their own brand of revivalistic spirituality and primitive piety remained deep-rooted and openly-expressed within indigenous Wesleyan Methodism.

More significant, perhaps, had been the arrival of the Primitive Methodists. Although they came to attract very similar numerical support to the Bible Christians, their advance (and appeal) was somewhat different. Missioning the area from 1826 onwards, from an established base in the Redruth area, the Primitives targetted their audience more consciously and with greater success. Consequently, while their resulting membership figures were very similar to those of the Bible Christians, they were contained within far fewer local societies. While Bible Christianity, like indigenous Wesleyan Methodism, tended to bolster traditionalism, it is arguable that Primitive Methodism appealed primarily to those for whom the pressures of economic change were irresistible, and perhaps most keenly felt. Much of their support came from miners - not the traditionally independent 'tinnners' - but migrant labourers pouring into the region between Penzance and St. Ives in search of work. Analysis of the occupations of fathers in the circuit baptismal records shows a steadily rising proportion of miners

1. A Jubilee Memorial of Incidents in the Rise and Progress of the Bible Christian Connexion, London, 1865, pp. 212-3.

amongst members, as local workings were exploited in Castle Dennis, Nancledra, Trowan, Hellesvoer, Badgers Cross, Lelant Downs and Halsetown.¹ Primitive Methodist membership perhaps signified a growing 'class' rather than a 'community' consciousness; a point supported by the fact that the remainder of Primitive growth occurred in urban centres, where a combination of population expansion and capitalistic economic pressures was destroying community solidarity and creating class conflict. In Penzance, for example, the ever-growing respectability of the Wesleyan congregation allowed the Primitives to attract working and lower-middle class support from labourers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, carpenters, coachmakers, and small tradesmen, when they missioned the town in 1826-7.² The greatest impulse to their cause locally came with the missioning of St. Ives in 1829. Although a Wesleyan stronghold, a crisis in the pilchard fishing industry was precipitating widening social divisions within the community. The over-capitalisation of traditional seine fishing combined with several especially poor fishing seasons - particularly in 1829 and 1830 - had the effect of driving out the smaller 'independent' seiners in the face of competition from the larger and more organised drift fishing concerns.³ To some extent, the growing social unease of the time was reflected in a rise in Wesleyan membership in the town

1. Analysis of the occupations of fathers listed in 'St. Ives Primitive Methodist Baptismal Register, 1832-70', C.R.O. MS. MR/I/140, shows that the proportion of miners increased from around 14% of all entries between 1832 and 1845 to 36% between 1856 and 1865.
2. J.C.C. Probert, Primitive Methodism in Cornwall, n.d., n.p., pp. 105-6.
3. Rowe, Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution, pp. 290-4.

from 241 in 1823 to 317 by 1828. But the Primitives arrived at just that point where communal tension was highest; and after the Reverend Joseph Grieves had attracted an audience of around one thousand on only his second week of preaching in the town, the Primitives planned a whole month of open-air preaching. The following year, they had 123 members in St. Ives.¹ At this stage, they were not necessarily siphoning off discontented Wesleyans, whose own membership had risen by more than 100 to 434 by 1831. But the arrival of the Primitives in St. Ives did mark the existence of growing social divisions within the town, and the inevitable breakdown of a communal consensus underpinned by indigenous Wesleyanism.

It is against such local social developments - as well as the increasing tendencies towards Connexional control in the 1830s already suggested - that the Teetotal Wesleyan Methodist secession should be viewed. The escalating espousal of the cause of teetotalism within local congregations - especially in St. Ives - from the mid-1830s, was essentially a response to the growing confluence of two distinct pressures on the traditional worship and ethos of indigenous Methodism. On the one hand, it represented a direct riposte to the tightening grip of the Connexion, countering a primary emphasis on the role of administration, finance, order, and education in the life of the church, with a reminder that the 'primitive' heart of Methodism lay in the Spirit and in the individual. It was no accident that the psychological process which led to the individual 'signing the pledge' was very similar to that which led to conversion; nor that the causes of teetotalism

1. Probert, op.cit., pp. 65-6.

and revivalism were intimately linked by teetotal advocates.¹ On the other hand, growing local class conflict, increasingly present within the Wesleyan chapels, was also important to its progress. While middle class morality tended to stress the virtues of moderation, self-restraint, and temperance, working class teetotalism could operate both as a form of attack on the pretentious, often surface morality of the bourgeoisie, and as a practical demonstration of their own inner resolve and alternative 'respectability'.² Again it was no accident that the more plebeian Primitive Methodists of St. Ives staunchly supported the teetotal cause.

The actual secession was finally sparked by a Conference ruling against support for the teetotal cause in 1841, which led around 250 members in St. Ives to break away, followed immediately by a further 150 in Goldsithney, St. Just, Lelant, and Halsetown. Within a year, a circuit had been formed which embraced twenty miles of countryside around St. Ives.³ In simple numerical terms, the secession did little damage to local Wesleyanism. Membership was buoyant at this time in any case after the 1839 revival; but no Society was actually wound up as a result of the split. One itinerant, William Burt, had estimated in September 1841 from

1. A Vindication of the Case of the Tee-total Wesleyan Methodists of St. Ives, Cornwall: with an incidental exposure of the domination of Wesleyan priesthood, Penzance, 1842, p. 6.; Billington, 'Popular Religion and Social Reform',; B. Harrison, Drink and the Victorians. The Temperance Question in England 1815-72, London, 1971, pp. 31-2.
2. T.R. Tholfsen, Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England, London, 1976, pp. 67-72.
3. A Vindication of the Case, p. 23, p. 29.

Penzance 'that two thirds of our society in town and country are pledged to the teetotal system at least of the men',¹ but when it came to the crunch, most of them chose to remain within the mother church. The Teetotal Wesleyan Methodists enjoyed a rather precarious existence until 1860, when most of the circuit was admitted into the New Connexion: three remaining societies entering instead the small local Free Methodist circuit.²

Yet in a real sense, despite the minimal loss of membership from the split, the teetotal secession represented the beginning of the end of the Methodist heyday in the region. Although membership figures locally remained significantly high down to 1870, with the Wesleyans alone accounting for a steady 8% of total population, they did not advance beyond the proportion of inhabitants returned in 1841. Increasing social divisions within communities, the eventual inevitable crumbling of traditional independence in the face of economic change (which forced many to emigrate), and the insidious progress of Connexional control all weakened the hold of indigenous Methodism, and lessened its popular appeal. One final, dramatic revival period began in St. Just, St. Ives, and to a lesser extent Marazion, in 1859/60, which lasted through to 1863 largely because of the sustained revivalist campaigns of William Booth, then a New Connexion minister, in 1861 and 1862.³ The interdenominational form and effects of much of the revival period, however, highlighted the universality of the socio-economic preoccupations which essentially

1. 'William Burt - Jabez Bunting, Penzance, 4 Sep. 1841', M.C.A. MS. PLP 21.13.11.

2. O.A. Beckerlegge, Free Methodism in Cornwall, n.p., n.d., p.15.

3. J. Edwin Orr, The Second Great Evangelical Awakening in Britain, London, 1949, pp.114-5.

maintained it for so long. The final collapse of the local mining industry in 1865/66, on top of the steady contraction in pilchard fishing which had been in progress for some time, ensured the onset of economic depression which could only be overcome by massive migration from the region. In the process of evacuation, the local Methodist chapels not only lost large numbers of members, but also - in many instances - much of their residual popular function. The struggle to preserve custom and 'independence' was finally over.

Region 2:

The large west central region of Cornwall contained a population of approximately 45,000 in 1779, which had doubled by 1821 and reached three times that figure by 1841. The steady growth rate of between 16 and 22% per decade throughout this period, ensured that the proportion of the county's inhabitants who resided within the region increased from around 32.4% in 1779 to 35.7% in 1801, and hovered between 38 and 40% from 1831 to 1871. These two basic demographic facts - the initially high population, and its dramatic growth for sixty years after 1779 - reflected the fact that this was the real mining heartland of the county. Tin mining locally had been undertaken over large areas for many centuries,¹ but with the excavation of the first copper mines around Redruth from the early 18th century, migration to the region was encouraged on an unprecedented scale.² By 1725, Redruth had become established as the town where copper ore was 'ticketed', or bid for by agents of the Swansea smelters. Between 1720 and 1740, several large new mines were opened, particularly to the south and east of Redruth. In 1757, the discovery of rich deposits near the surface at Wheal Virgin in Gwennap led to the rapid development of copper mining in that parish. Between 1750 and 1770, local output of copper ore increased three-fold. During the 1770s, the first major Cornish foundry was established in Hayle; while at the same time the first Boulton and Watt engines were

1. e.g. William Hals, Compleat History of Cornwall, Exeter, 1750, p. 3, p. 139, p. 155.
2. Barton, Copper Mining, pp. 14-28.

installed in the county. At this point, already 12-15,000 people in the area were mainly dependent on the mines for their livelihood.

The social dislocation associated with rapid industrialisation was already manifest by the mid-18th century; but from the 1770s onwards, the steadily accelerating size and scale of local copper mining attracted more and more migrants to the region, and caused increasingly profound and extensive social unrest. In the last two decades of the century, tension came openly to the surface with the onset of a local mining depression induced by the competition from the Anglesey mines, and local overproduction. In 1788, the agreement reached by a combination of local adventurers, grouped together in the Cornish Mining Company, to close the massive North Downs and Dolcoath mines in a bid to allow copper prices to recover, led to the first major demonstration of unemployed miners, and James Watt's remark that troops ought to be stationed in Truro and Redruth.¹ In general, it has been written that:

'The last twelve or fourteen years of the 18th century saw the condition of the tanners at the very worst that has ever been known in the history of Cornish mining.'

2

From the beginning of the 19th century, however, local fortunes picked up as the Anglesey mines declined, demand continued to rise, and local production became increasingly organised on a larger scale. Local population soared. Between 1801 and 1841, the number of inhabitants in the seven parishes of St. Agnes, Perranzabuloe,

1. Ibid. pp. 37-8.; Frank Mitchell, Annals of an Ancient Cornish Town, being Notes on the History of Redruth, 2nd edn., Penzance, 1978, p. 54.
2. Jenkin, Cornish Miner, p. 156.

Kenwyn, Redruth, Illogan, Gwennap, and Camborne increased by 122%. In Illogan by itself, the increase was as high as 170%. Miners cottages blanketed the wastelands, and small villages were turned into over-crowded 'frontier' towns. In Gwennap, for example, the small hamlets of St. Day, Carharrack, and Lanner became bustling towns of upwards of 1000 inhabitants; by 1841, the parish overall was the most populous in the county.

The heart of the copper kingdom was actually located in a comparatively small area. Gwennap alone, throughout much of the period, produced one-third or more of the total output of Cornish copper; and practically the whole of the copper mining heartland was located within eight miles of the summit of Carn Brea, to the south of the town of Redruth.¹

To the west of Redruth, the growth of Hayle as the key port for the industry stimulated the development of mining in the neighboring parishes; and in the south-west, a group of parishes west of Helston had long been mined for tin. But to the south-east of the mining heartland, the countryside provided a contrasting aspect. In the parishes immediately surrounding the town of Truro, a number of local gentlemen had established estates; while the town itself, in the 18th century, had acquired 'all the advantages of a provincial metropolis', with an Assembly Room (opened in 1772), Georgian terraces of town houses belonging to local merchants and gentry, a large variety of shops, and well-paved streets.² George Maton in 1794 deemed it 'the handsomest town in

1. Rowe, Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution, p. 66.

2. Lysons, Magna Brittania, p. 310.

Cornwall', while a visitor in 1824, impressed with the recent additions of a modern water system and gas lighting, found it 'more comfortable than any other town in the county.'¹ In one sense, Truro was a world apart from the mining heartland to the north, exuding an air of genteel respectability and conspicuous prosperity strangely at odds with much of the nearby landscape. But in another, Truro was increasingly drawn into the mining world, its prosperity dependent on the fortunes of the mines. From the last two decades of the 18th century, the town increasingly functioned primarily as a port, market, and meeting place for local mining interests; so that the reality of life in Truro through the first half of the 19th century tended to belie the gentility and order of its 18th century architecture and layout.

To the south of Truro, along the Helford river, parishes were smaller, and the population growth throughout the period less dramatic. There were some mines in the area: at Carnon, four miles south of Truro, for example, important and extensive tin streams were worked well into the 19th century, and a large tin smelting house was opened nearby in Perran Wharf in 1791. But the local economy overall was much more mixed in this area, with more land, especially south of Falmouth, turned over to agricultural purposes.²

Nonetheless, even here, the local economy was increasingly influenced throughout the first half of the 19th century by the expanding copper industry to the north. The parishes of Stithians

1. Maton, Observations, pp. 171-2.; Stockdale, Excursions, pp. 57-9.
2. Impressions of the Old Duchy, ed. Spreadbury, p. 20.

and Ponsanooth were worked for copper, while the local ports found their trade increasingly bound up with the products and demands of the mining industry. The building of a tramroad from Gwennap to Devoran in 1824 enabled both Devoran and Falmouth to operate as vital suppliers of raw materials and food for the mining heartland, and as exporters of the ores and smelted tin.¹

Not surprisingly, on their first visits in 1743, the Wesleys focused immediately on the area around Gwennap and Redruth where population growth was already substantial; and the impression that can be gleaned from their accounts is that their impact was both more immediate and extensive than further west. Their audiences on the downs were certainly larger. Charles Wesley preached in Gwennap 'to near two thousand hungry souls', half of whom (he supposed) were tinnerns from Redruth, 'which, I hear is taken.'² The same year John Wesley estimated his audience in Gwennap at around 10,000, which even with the rapidly rising local population, and allowing for Wesley's quirky methods of numerical calculation, was still a phenomenal number.³ Societies were immediately established in Redruth and Gwennap, while in the surrounding parishes of St. Agnes, Illogan, and Camborne, further societies had been formed by the 1750s.⁴

The intense excitement generated by the Wesleys' preaching in 1743, along with the crowds of tinnerns and their families massed on the downs, caused considerable unease amongst those in authority

1. Barton, op.cit., pp.49-50.

2. Wesleys in Cornwall, p.32, p.34.

3. Ibid. p.75.

4. Probert, Worship and Devotion, p.3.

locally. Immediate attempts were made to suppress Methodism. Charles Wesley was prevented from preaching a second time in Pool, Illogan by a zealous local Churchwarden; when he returned to Gwennap he found the local gentry from Redruth out in force. In Gwennap a mob pulled down the meeting house, while in Redruth the sympathetic curate was replaced by a new rector, John Collins, who combined his role as local magistrate to attack the Methodists by whatever means he could, including reputedly planting agents in Methodist meetings to obtain information, and disrupt activities.¹ In St. Agnes, the incumbent wrote to his bishop for advice on how to deal with the Methodists, after the 'sober part' of his congregation had pressed him to call in the magistrate to suppress them.² But very early it became clear that civil and religious authorities were largely powerless to prevent the spread of the Methodist phenomenon. Legal sanctions could not be used to control the fast-expanding and dispersed population; patrolling cottages for signs of unlicensed meetings was simply impracticable. But more fundamentally, the informal influences and social controls which held parishioners in check wherever 'dependency systems' operated, had only negligible effect in the mining districts as a whole. It is significant, for instance, that it was the gentry from Redruth who had to travel to investigate early Methodist activity in Gwennap, there being no resident gentry of any order present in the parish itself.

In the mining heartland, where population was densest and dis-

1. Wesleys in Cornwall, p.36, p.41.; A.M., i(1778) pp.230-1.; J.C.C. Probert, Methodism in Redruth until the death of John Wesley, n.p., 1965, pp.4-10.
2. 'James Walker - Bishop of Exeter, 6 July 1747' : reference in Thomas Shaw, 'Files:Places' R.I.C. MS 'St. Agnes'.

location most severe, the arrival of the Wesleys in 1743 had an impact beyond their own expectations. Charles Wesley was genuinely surprised at the effect of his preaching in Crowan in 1744, where 'the poor people were ready to eat us up', and on his subsequent return to Gwennap that year he wrote:

'Here a little one is become a thousand. What an amazing work hath God done in one year! The whole country is alarmed, and gone forth after the sound of the Gospel. In vain do the pulpits ring of 'Popery, madness, enthusiasm.' Our preachers are daily pressed to new places, and enabled to preach five or six times a day. Persecution is kept off till the seed takes root. Societies are springing up everywhere; and still the cry from all sides is, 'Come and help us'.'

1

The magnitude and immediacy of the local response to Methodism clearly reflected the existence of a strong religious demand stimulated at least in part by uncertainty and alienation in the face of economic change. This sense of a local spiritual need ensured that the work initially sparked by the Wesleys' visits would be maintained by indigenous initiative. Local helpers 'sprang up', in John Wesley's words, from the first; three were operating from Gwennap parish by 1744, four by 1746.²

In other parts of the region, not yet undergoing social transformation, the initial Methodist appeal was considerably less. In the tin mining area to the south-west several Methodist societies were early established, the work being inspired by the preaching of the Wesleys on the St. Hilary downs to the west, and largely carried forward - again - by local initiative. In Sithney, a small society

1. Wesleys in Cornwall, pp. 43-4.

2. Ibid. p. 51.

was formed in the cottage of a Mrs. Pascoe after she had been converted by a tinner preaching in a neighbouring village; in Wendron, Charles Wesley discovered a class already meeting in the parish when he visited in 1746. Similarly when John Wesley first preached in the town of Helston in 1755, a local society was already in existence.¹ But the work here tended initially to be more confined, less public; and in Sithney, for example, the first society soon collapsed in the face of squirearchical pressure.

Elsewhere, beginnings were smaller still. In the north-west of the region, not yet a significant mining area, the local cause started in 1760 with the establishing of preaching in Gwinear parish.² In Truro, John Wesley avoided preaching because of the work being undertaken by Samuel Walker in the town, and when he finally preached there, in 1755, it was to Samuel Walker's society, although local pressures soon led to the formation of a small, independent Methodist society. In the south-east, the excitement in Gwennap spilled over into Stithians, where a temporary society was formed in 1744, but otherwise early Methodist dissemination was restricted to the towns of Penryn and Falmouth, both visited by John Wesley.

By 1767, seventeen local societies were recorded in the circuit book,³ five already possessing chapels, and two more building them. Nine of them were within the Redruth mining heartland; three more in the south-west. In most senses, the overall pattern of membership was quite similar to that further west, although the split

1. A.M., xxiv(1801) p.483.; A.M., xvii(1804) p.195.;
M.M., liv(1831) pp.657-8.
2. A.M., xviii(1795) pp.42-6.
3. 'West Cornwall Circuit Book 1767', C.R.O. MS.

Table 19 : Occupations of Members Listed in West Cornwall Circuit Book, 1767,
(Region Two). (Source : C.R.O. MS. AD 350.).

Category.	Men.		Women.		Total.	
	Number.	Percentage.	Number.	Percentage.	No.	%.
Gentry.	4.	1.2.	–	–	4.	0.5.
Farmers.	34.	10.2.	1.	0.3.	35.	4.8.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	43.	12.9.	7.	2.0.	50.	6.9.
Artisans.	37.	10.8.	–	–	37.	5.1.
Tinners.	156.	46.9.	3.	0.8.	159.	22.0.
Schoolkeepers.	2.	0.6.	4.	1.1.	6.	0.8.
Textile Workers.	1.	0.3.	10.	2.6.	11.	1.5.
Labourers.	6.	1.8.	–	–	6.	0.8.
Servants.	7.	2.1.	19.	4.9.	26.	3.6.
Poor.	–	–	14.	3.6.	14.	1.9.
Spouses Employment Listed.	–	–	126.	32.3.	126.	17.4.
Others.	43.	12.9.	207.	53.1.	250.	34.4.
Total.	333.		391.		724.	

between the sexes was more even. Nearly half the male members were tanners, and most of the rest farmers, tradesmen, and artisans. Far fewer women were defined in terms of occupation though, the majority either being classified by their husband's occupation (over half of whom were tanners), or as women without paid employment. The most significant difference between the memberships was that in this region a far stronger identification of Methodism as a 'miner's religion' was already apparent. In the major mining parishes (Redruth excepted), nearly 40% of all members - male and female - were tanners. The most important similarity, however, was that despite the dramatic scenes and support when the Wesleys first appeared, overall membership remained relatively low. Despite the fact that here, from the first, Methodism seems to have met greater and more widespread social needs, and that Methodist chapels perhaps already functioned (to some degree) to provide comfort and a sense of community to the socially dislocated, as yet only a small core had committed themselves to make the critical leap into Methodist membership.

By 1780, apparently little had changed. There had been no real increase in local membership, and few new societies had come into existence.¹ Perhaps significantly, the smaller, tighter Methodist communities in the towns of Helston, Truro, Penryn, and Falmouth had maintained their levels of membership, while many mining societies actually suffered losses. This can be explained in a number of ways, but probably reflects the fact that Methodist rules

1. 'Circuit Stewards Account Book, West Cornwall Circuit 1774-1796', C.R.O. MS.

and discipline, and perhaps above all financial commitments, were often unduly difficult to maintain in mining communities, faced with countervailing economic and social pressures.

And yet we should not make too much of membership figures alone. As further west, an obvious discrepancy existed by 1780 between the levels of attendance at Methodist chapels in the mining villages, and the actual numbers of members recorded on their books.

And in a similar pattern of growth, during the last two decades of the 18th century, a combination of processes brought much larger numbers of adherents and others into membership, and assisted the essential indigenisation of local Methodism. The culmination of those processes was a large-scale revival in 1799 which ensured that while 1.8% of the total population of the region had been Methodist members in 1779, by 1801 the proportion had reached 6.7% (while the local population as a whole had increased by over 50%). Three key developments principally underpinned this transformation in the level of Methodist support.

The first was an evolving denominational assertiveness from pastorate and laity, and a more general self-assurance from the Methodist societies, many of which were by this time thirty or forty years old. The second was the fact that the basic network of classes and chapels which served the mining heartland by 1780 demonstrated that Methodism had been accorded some form of accepted role within the structures of the mining communities. By the early 19th century, at least twenty two chapels dotted the landscape from Hayle to Falmouth. More importantly, though the number of actual

societies increased little in the last three decades of the 18th century, most of them developed complex and extensive strings of classes in the surrounding hamlets and cottages; and as those surrounding communities expanded, so the classes tended to grow with them, and to eventually break away from the parent society once their own chapel had been built. In St. Agnes, for example, a class formed in a blacksmith's shop in the small village of Blackwater around 1767 had become a society with its own chapel by the early 1800s. In Porthtowan, Illogan, a class was established in 1796 by the society in Bridge, which had built its own chapel by 1820. The society in Tuckingmill in 1799 had a vast cobweb of classes which stretched several miles from Pengegon to Illogan Highway, many of which in turn became independent societies.¹

The real catalyst for growth, however, was the intensification of social unrest and anomie provoked by the combination of continuing long-term migration and industrial expansion with short-term mining depressions caused by competition and overproduction in the 1780s and 90s. Throughout these two decades of most profound social change and unease, the local Methodist chapels enjoyed a steady rise in membership which peaked in 1799/1800 with the onset of the revival. Growth was particularly high in times of most intense socio-economic crisis. Great demonstrations took place against unemployment in 1785, 1788, 1793, and 1795, and on each occasion Methodist membership increased significantly in the mining districts.² In the early 1780s, it was the societies in the mining

1. Shaw, 'Files: Places', R.I.C. MS. 'Blackwater'.; Thomas Shaw, Foolish Dick and his Chapel, n.p., 1966.; Thomas Shaw, Methodism in Illogan 1743-1958, n.p., 1958, p.15.
2. Mitchell, Annals, p.53, p.57, p.61.; 'Circuit Stewards Account Book, West Cornwall Circuit 1774-1796', C.R.O. MS.

parishes of Illogan, Redruth, St. Agnes, and Kerley which witnessed most growth,¹ while in Truro, the substantial increase in membership reflected the town's growing connection to the mines. In the late 1780s, growth occurred in Redruth and Gwennap, and again in 1795, though this time it spread also into Illogan, Truro, and Kerley. In that year, the Reverend Joseph Benson preached to audiences of 2000 near Truro, 5000 in St. Agnes, 8-10,000 in Gwennap, around 15,000 in Redruth, and an estimated 20,000 in Gwennap Pit, a natural amphitheatre caused by mining subsidence which John Wesley had turned into a Methodist shrine.² From that point on, a steady accumulation of new members across the region prepared the societies for the revival which finally broke out in late 1798. One month before its onset, an itinerant preacher had written to a colleague from Redruth:

'We have here a very large field for action indeed - our congregations are astonishingly large. I think the largest on a week day of any Cirt. in England - at Redruth and within three miles of the adjacent country we have 1600 or 1700 Methodists - very few Congregations of another sentiment to interfere with in the West of Cornwall.'

3

In the mining heartland, Methodism had become strongly established by 1800. The area was served by at least fifteen large societies, almost all with substantial chapels, and with their wide-embracing networks of classes covering the surrounding countryside.

1. Probert, Methodism in Redruth, p.30.
2. R. Treffry, Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Benson, London, 1840, pp.200-3.; John Wesley and Gwennap Pit (Brochure), n.d., n.p.
3. 'George Dermott - Daniel Tatham, Redruth, 31 Oct. 1798', M.C.A. MS.PLP 33.51.8.

And until the 1840s, membership grew at a steady rate. In the first three decades the local metamorphosis from class to society occurred at the rate of seven or eight new societies per decade, while in the 1830s thirteen new societies were created. In 1830, there were said to be twenty two Methodist chapels within three and a half miles of Camborne.¹

But simple structural developments do not best illuminate the strength and form of local Methodism. The precise mechanisms at work in the 1799 revival will be analysed in a later chapter,² but the basic pattern of Methodist growth during the 1780s and 90s reflected the development of a popular functionality in mining Methodism, which continued until 1850. Methodist membership appealed to many because of the spiritual and disciplinary commitment it entailed, but it was the extremely high rate of nominal affiliation to the chapel in the mining communities which indicated that Methodism was also beginning to serve more widely as a 'popular religion'. In 1808, a visiting clergyman opined that a religious sentiment, due to Wesleyan Methodism, was well nigh universally diffused among Cornish miners; while in 1839 it was claimed that 'in many parts of Cornwall, nine-tenths of the grown population of the villages regularly attend the Methodist ministry.'³ This level of adherence demonstrated that the chapel came to serve both spiritual and social functions within the mining communities, and that perhaps Methodism provided miners, who lived

1. W.M.M., liii (1830) p.164.

2. See Chapter 7.

3. Warner, Tour through Cornwall, pp.300-2.; Treffry, Memoirs of Richard Trewavas, Senior, p.19.

in a kind of limbo between industrial capitalism and traditional independence, with a socio-spiritual buttress to tradition, which asserted the validity and 'meaning' both of the miner's individualistic independence and the notion of miners collectively as 'a race apart'. Mining congregations presented a distinctively serious and homogenous character. The congregation at Bolingey, Perranzabuloe, for example, was described as:

'composed of an evidently intelligent people - chiefly miners, and their wives and families, with here and there a farmer. Almost all were well-dressed - not over-dressed - but well-dressed...'

¹ In Camborne, an itinerant preacher remarked upon:

'the thoughtful, earnest countenance of the working men who filled the whole space under the gallery on one side of the chapel, sitting very close together, and apparently devouring the word of life.'

2

The associational and socially representational, as well as the spiritual, basis of mining Methodism demonstrated its utility in buttressing tradition and a sense of community; and the large-scale revivals which swept across the mining heartland in 1814, 1824, 1832, and 1849 indicated how important a function the Methodist chapels performed. Each revival occurred at a point of peculiar communal strain, when frequent and intense cottage and chapel meetings provided both spiritual comfort and support to individuals, and an intensified social role in binding communities together in the face of 'external' threats. The relative social homogeneity of the region assisted the spread of the revivals, as

1. W. Davis Tyack, The Miner of Perranzabuloe, London, 1866, p. 5.
2. H. W. Williams, Life of the Rev. Joseph Wood, London, 1871, p. 89.

well as critically underpinning the indigenisation of mining Methodism.¹ Chapel-life was much the same wherever you went in the mining region. The towns of Redruth and Carharrack, for example, which both became 'stations' of Connexional circuits, were fully integrated within the mining community as a whole, their congregations showing broadly similar social compositions and outlooks; from neither came the kind of social attitudes and pressures which in other parts engendered serious conflict between 'town' and 'country' congregations, or at any rate not before the 1830s, and then in a qualified form.

Greater social diversity in other parts of the region militated against Methodism acquiring these 'mass' functions, though in many places a strong 'primitive' spirituality was maintained well into the 19th century. In Truro, the small society had opened a chapel by 1768, and in the last two decades of the century - as the town population grew by more than 50% - the Methodist cause began to flourish. On both occasions when membership increased significantly - in 1783 and in 1795 - a new chapel was built to replace the now- inadequate one. In part, Truro's expanding mining connections extended to its Methodist chapel too, and the town society became drawn into each of the periodic revivals which broke out down to the 1840s. But Truro was not Redruth. For all its mining links, it remained 'one of the prettiest towns... in England', while Redruth was merely 'a long town, near a mile long, in a vale in the centre of mines, so that it

1. See Table 20 at end of Chapter for breakdowns of fathers' occupations as recorded in local baptismal registers.

is in a cloud of smoke.'¹ The growing 'middle class' respectability and cultural detachment of the Truro congregation was signalled with the building of the large, ornate chapel of St. Marys in the town centre in 1830, which was later described as 'not simply a church, but a Methodist Cathedral',² contrasting sharply with the simple, rough-and-ready chapels in the mining communities. Three years later, a second substantial town chapel was opened, whose congregation was described as 'quiet and genteel, with among the leading members of Society some men of considerable refinement and culture.'³ It was leading laymen such as these who, from the mid-1830s, were at the forefront of a sustained campaign to persuade Connexional authorities to exert greater efforts to take control of local Methodist forms and practices.⁴

In the south-east, the original societies in Stithians, Penryn, and Falmouth were added to in the last two decades of the 18th century with seven new societies. The industrial development of the Perranarworthal area, and the growing self-assurance and definition of the Falmouth society helped spread the cause from a fairly insubstantial base in 1780. The pattern, as further north, began with the formation of networks of class meetings. William Carvosso, a Mousehole Methodist, arrived in the parish of Gluvias in 1780 to find:

'Here...my outward religious privileges were widely different from what they were at Mousehole; it was like being brought from the land of Goshen into a

1. Impressions of the Old Duchy, ed. Spreadbury, p.11.
2. Reminiscences of the Ministerial Life of the Rev. T. Withington (Octogenarian), Devonport, 1895. pp.15-6.
3. Williams, op.cit., p.108.
4. See Chapter 8.

dry and barren wilderness. There was no chapel in the neighbourhood; but at a farm-house, about three-quarters of a mile distant, we had preaching once a fortnight.'

1

Carvosso took charge of a class, and established prayer meetings in his house, and with this individualistic stimulus, on top of accelerating economic change, a society was soon established in Ponsanooth.

Falmouth, like Truro, experienced a rapid growth in membership at this time, which led to a grand new chapel appearing in the centre of town in 1815.² Again, thereafter a respectable urban chapel-culture was increasingly fostered in the society, which - more than in the case of Truro - was diffused into the surrounding 'country' societies, especially once Falmouth had been made head of a small, compact circuit in 1818. This was especially true in the agricultural parishes in the south, where Methodism was not strong, but where four small societies were formed in the 1830s as a result of initiatives from the circuit station.

In the south-west, where Wesley and his helpers had initially met an enthusiastic response, the cause did not grow in the last two decades of the 18th century to anything like the extent around Redruth. In simple terms, the area experienced none of the 'underlying processes' in the magnitude which allowed for such dramatic gains to be made. Perhaps above all, because it remained principally a tin-mining region, it suffered neither population growth nor social upheaval to the same degree. Hence there was

1. Carvosso, Efficacy of Faith, pp. 42-3.

2. W.B. 6 Jan. 1815.

room in the early years of the 19th century for Cornish-born itinerant Richard Treffry to strive assiduously to extend the work in the locality. In the parish of Sithney, for example, he arranged with 'one of the first farmers in the parish' for an old cottage to be rebuilt for preaching, and in Breage a house was set up in the village of Trewithick.¹ The work also continued from local initiatives. A member since the 1790s invited the preachers to her home in Nancegollan, which led to a society forming, and eventually a chapel being built in the village in 1813.² However, despite the gradual extension of the work by these means, only an estimated 2.6% of the total population were Methodist members in 1811.

For the region as a whole, it is difficult to be precise about the proportion of inhabitants as members at any one time, but from the level of 6.7% of total population in 1801, there was an inevitable decline in the aftermath of the revival. By 1821, a more 'normal' year, a similar level was being recorded. Thereafter membership levels reached 8.7% by 1831, and peaked around 10% in 1841. These are substantial proportions. They suggest, at its peak, that well over 20% of the adult population for the whole region were actual members. If we consider that there were strongholds in the mining heartland where membership was considerably above average, and that nominal affiliation may have been up to three times the level of membership, we can assume that in large parts of the region an overwhelming majority of adults attended Methodist chapels in 1841.

1. Proc. W.H.S. xviii pp.30-2.

2. M.M., xl(1817), pp.609-10.

The many local disputes which to varying degrees rent the Connexion from the early 19th century reflected, and in a sense were caused by, the popular nature of 'indigenous' Methodism. The first, in Redruth in 1802, was sparked by the decision of the chapel trustees to introduce pews (and pew rents) into the town chapel.¹ Dr. William Boase, an influential class leader, took his own class out of the Connexion over the issue, and encouraged other leaders to do the same. In all, 381 members left the society, while just 146 stayed. The split registered a protest at what were seen as developments likely to damage the spiritual communality of chapel worship. Pews symbolized the introduction of social divisions into the chapel, and signified that the ordinary man, woman, and child was diminishing in value (in all senses) to the chapel leaders. Protesters roasted the chapel Bible on a spit, and destroyed the candlesticks, which seemed to encapsulate the perceived increase in variance between current chapel ethos and primitive spiritual piety.² Although many of the seceders soon rejoined the parent chapel, the nearby chapels at Redruth Highway and North Country for a time joined the cause, and when William O'Bryan, the Bible Christian founder, visited the town in 1815, he found a small congregation still meeting led by Dr. Boase's son.³

Meanwhile, a small sect of revivalists sprang up in Truro, after the separation of two women from the Wesleyan society, whose jumping, shouting, and accounts of visionary experiences during the 1814 revival were deemed unacceptable to the authorities.⁴ Also in

1. J.C.C. Probert, Dr. Boase of Redruth, n.p., 1965.

2. Ibid. p.10.

3. Ibid. pp.14-6.

4. 'Diary of Anna Reynalds 1775-1840', R.I.C. MS. Thomas Shaw transcript, '5 Mar.1815'.

Truro and its environs, an ex-itinerant preacher named John Boyle had been able to establish three chapels and a number of preaching rooms from 1814, with his own brand of home-spun revivalism.¹ Boyle's small cluster of societies maintained a precarious existence until 1817, when they asked to be admitted into the Bible Christian Connexion. By these means, Bible Christianity appeared in the region, located within a small circuit centred on Truro.

The Bible Christian preachers attempted to evangelize the area, and although the Wesleyans were already thick on the ground, they occasionally found hamlets and cottages such as Brea, Illogan, where the Wesleyans had failed, and where a small Bible Christian society began in the early 1820s.² During that decade, several chapels were built within the mining heartland between Truro and Camborne, and preaching was also established in Breage, to the west, and in Falmouth. Most Bible Christian societies, from the first, however, were centred on Gwennap.³

Bible Christianity appealed because of its out-and-out revivalism. Although the Wesleyan societies experienced periodic wide-scale revivals, in Bible Christian meetings a revival was expected every time. Indeed, to many attracted to the sect, this was what institutionalised religion was probably all about. A Bible Christian meeting could provide all the spiritual intensity, excitement, and immediacy reserved for only special occasions within the

1. M.S. Edwards, 'Cornish Methodism : A Study in Division 1814-1857', Birmingham University M.A. thesis, 1962, pp.46-7.
2. Shaw, Methodism in Illogan, p.29.
3. See Table 20 at end of Chapter.

Wesleyan chapel. An over-simple understanding of doctrinal or theological underpinnings to Christianity which was frequently brought by converts concerned even O'Bryan; as for example, on a visit to Hicks Mill chapel in 1825:

'In the evening I met a class at the chapel, it was a shouting time. One young woman declared she was as shure(sic) of heaven as if she had been already there. Afterwards when alone I asked her a reason for this hope? She answered that she felt her soul happy in God; and knew she was cleansed from all sin. I asked her if she had any revelation for this her final perseverance? She said no, she had no revelation but being very happy, and was pained in mind for my putting these questions to her, thinking that I doubted her present experience; and said to Eliz.ⁿ Carne one of the travelling females that she did not care for me nor devils. I perceived she did not know much about the words she used about final perseverance.'

1

Revivalistic Bible Christianity probably appealed primarily to those already touched to some extent by the now-widespread Methodist culture and language, but whose understanding of the conceptual framework behind the language was often rooted in pre-Methodist 'folk' religious precepts. Billy Bray, for example, the most celebrated local convert, whose evangelising efforts led to the construction of three chapels in the 1820s and 30s, was the product of a Methodist environment: his grandfather had built the chapel in his birthplace, Twelveheads, and his wife was a Methodist 'backslider'.² But his own understanding of Methodist doctrine was clearly very slim. In his youth he shunned the chapel, and was actually 'converted' as a result of reading John Bunyan's vivid

1. 'William O'Bryan Journal', M.C.A. MS. 7 July 1825.

2. 'The Original Journal of William Bray', M.C.A. MS. p.2, p.13.

Visions of Heaven and Hell, which caused him to reflect on his own mis-spent youth and on his new-found responsibilities as a recently-married man. Bunyan's vision made sense to Bray, whose simple spiritual conceptions were based on a clear-cut demarcation between the worlds of 'good' and 'evil'; and his superficial contact with Methodist language allowed his own spiritual dilemma to be resolved by a straightforward Methodistical 'conversion', and by renouncing 'evil' for 'good'. Bray's religion began and ended with the experience of conversion, and though he joined the Bible Christians his subsequent religious development was essentially home-grown, resting on the reading of the Old Testament, and the conviction that - with his past life behind him - he was now a 'new man' joyously assured of reaching Heaven.¹

The immediacy and emotionalism of this kind of religion, of course, was far from unknown in the Wesleyan chapels, and Bray himself developed and maintained strong links with them. A revival which began in a Bible Christian cottage meeting, for example, was continued in the local Wesleyan chapel; when the Bible Christians established teetotal meetings, several Wesleyan chapels opened their doors to the speakers.² But the gradual formalisation of Wesleyan worship, alongside the inevitable growth of administrative and financial considerations, meant that even though in many senses local Wesleyan Methodism remained a 'popular religion', it entailed more than a simple thirst for new converts. And though Bray might meet with empathetic support from within many mining congreg-

1. Ibid. pp.11-27.

2. Ibid. pp.165-6, p.198.

ations, there was a gulf between his own religious comprehension and approach, and those of, say, the upper social echelons of the Truro society, and the Wesleyan pastorate. Bray found it wonderful to report that two men were dancing and shouting for joy in the Bible Christian chapel, but in Truro, the Wesleyan superintendent 'was speaking evel(sic) of these two happy men.'¹

The divide was both religious and cultural. While the Wesleyan superintendent condemned the extravagant emotionalism of the Bible Christians, Bray countered with a lunge at the vanity and pride of the Wesleyan:

'Just at that time the Long Beards came in fashing and he had one of the newest fashand he was proude and he cold not Be hapey for the Lord will fell the hamble with good things and the proude he will send empty away.'

² Although a Wesleyan local preacher made every effort to hear Bray preach whenever possible, his religious and social sensitivities persuaded him to leave before the end of the service when Bray and his congregation would indulge in what Bray called a 'victory through the Blood of the Lamb', which involved singing, shouting, and dancing, to celebrate God's love, without the presence of 'a pope or a priest.'³

By 1831, the Bible Christians had attracted around 900 local members; by 1841, perhaps 1,300. Their heart remained in the smaller mining communities, so that Helston, for example, was only reached by 1860; as also, somewhat surprisingly, was Redruth, after members from Gwennap moved into town, and set about building a

1. Ibid. pp.78-9.

2. Ibid. p.81.

3. Ibid. pp.83-4.

chapel.¹ By the 1840s, however, under the dual pressures of a growing formalisation of worship, and inevitable financial worries about how the rising number of chapels would be paid for, the Bible Christians, like the Wesleyans before them, found their own brand of revivalism becoming increasingly ossified. There began a regular re-drawing of the local map of circuits, in a desperate bid to make each one financially viable. By 1868 a minute book surveying a circuit's 'spiritual state' could read much like its Wesleyan counterpart, with its central theme of chapel debts. The obvious dilemma for local leaders, reluctant to let go of revivalism, yet haunted by the need to maintain a consistent level of members and inflow of funds, comes through from the summation to their report:

'Our great want is, not less feeling, but more principle; not less fervour, but more faith; not less service, but more sincerity; not less singing, but more praise; and in some instances a little less noise, and more devotion...'

2

The local Primitive Methodists had much in common with the Bible Christians. In a similar fashion, they first appeared in the region following a request from an ex-Wesleyan local preacher, who had set up in a small way as an unattached evangelist. William Turner, who also had a spell as a Bible Christian itinerant, established several small societies in and around Redruth with his wife, but asked William Clowes to visit in 1825, and to amalgamate the societies into the Primitive Methodist Connexion.³

1. J.C.C. Probert, The United Church Redruth: The History of Treruffe Hill Methodist Church 1863-1967, n.p., 1968, p.2.
2. 'Redruth and Camborne Bible Christian Circuit Pastors Minute Book 1867-1877', C.R.O. MS. DDX/607/31 1868.
3. Edwards, 'Cornish Methodism : A Study in Division', M.A. thesis, pp.98-101.

The Primitives, like the Bible Christians, appealed with a brand of immediate, revivalistic religion; a Cornish correspondent to the Wesleyan Protestant Methodist Magazine asserted in 1834 that 'the extravagances of both have been their ruin.'¹ Clowes indeed, like O'Bryan before him, was shocked by some of what he experienced in local chapels, in particular a proneness to laughter amongst his congregations.² Where the Bible Christians used cottage meetings, the Primitives tried Camp Meetings, and near Redruth in 1826, an audience of 7000 was drawn out onto the downs. But like the Bible Christians, the Primitives were largely restricted to the mining heartland, and acquired very similar numerical support.

In certain important respects, however, the two sects differed in form and purpose. The Primitives were far more confined to the large towns than the Bible Christians. This was partly accidental.

Turner had established his societies in and around Redruth, and it was natural that Primitive missioning would focus on these more heavily urbanised parts. Yet, it does appear that here, as further west, while the basic appeal of Bible Christianity might be characterised as a bulwark to fast-vanishing 'traditional' society, the Primitives grew best where class divisions were making most headway. By the 1830s, Redruth and the larger mining settlements were beginning to cease being homogenous, unified 'communities', because of population expansion and social change consequent to a maturing industrial capitalism; and the Wesleyan chapel was fast losing its ability to act as social solvent and

1. quoted in Ibid. p.91.

2. John T. Wilkinson, William Clowes 1780-1851, London, 1951, p.62.

communal support and rallying-point. In Redruth, where congregational sensitivity to Connexional interference was already made clear in the Boase secession, the opening of a grand new chapel in 1826 was perhaps seen by some to represent a significant shifting of local emphasis and ethos in the direction of Connexional orthodoxy and 'respectability'. The following year, a rival Primitive Methodist chapel - the first in the county - appeared in Redruth at Plain-an-Gwary. Class-conscious authorities demonstrated their concern. Local magistrates ordered a summons to be served on the Primitive preacher, which the constable refused to do; but two local gentlemen took the law into their own hands, when they broke open the chapel door while a prayer meeting was in progress.¹ Despite such persecution, however, the Primitives established a permanent congregation in the town from the first.²

The local Primitives overall were probably more administration-conscious than the Bible Christians, though they are frequently (and rightly) portrayed as financially naive in their chapel-building. Their circuit reports in the 1830s already were laying stress on the priority of 'attention to discipline' as a means to the spiritual prosperity of the local cause; while John Wesley's prime question of his helpers - 'have their labours led to conversions?' - came next to last on a list compiled for circuit reports on the Primitive itinerants.³ Camp meetings continued, but probably before the 1850s their function had essentially formalised

1. Probert, Primitive Methodism in Cornwall, p.8.

2. See Table 20 at end of Chapter.

3. 'Redruth Primitive Methodist Circuit Reports 1833-1932', C.R.O. MS. MR/R(4) 13-248, April 1834, March 1835, March 1840.

as part of the chapel 'calendar': designed as a local festival and to raise funds, rather than as a means to conversion. Entering an already strong Methodist environment, and attracting primarily poor mining families into membership (whose incomes fluctuated with the cycles of the economy), the Primitives began with the realisation that they needed to muster up, first and foremost, a hard core of reliable, stalwart members to pay for chapels and preachers. Their dilemma, of course, was that they could not push too far in the direction of administrative formalisation without jeopardising their appeal as a religion of the Spirit. When the Bible Christians did finally arrive in Redruth in 1860/61, two Primitive Methodist preachers, and a number of members deserted the cause; as the circuit report reflected ruefully, the Bible Christians, 'like other "new things" have made a stir for the present.'¹

The arrival and appeal of the Primitives, however, reflected the fact that increased local social divisions were straining relations within even the Wesleyan mining chapels by the 1830s. A battle inevitably ensued over both character of worship, and the control of the church. During the 1830s, in fact, three separate movements of secession took place within the region. In 1830, a small number of members around Helston left the Connexion to join the Wesleyan Protestant Methodists, who had come into existence in protest at the way Conference handled the Leeds organ dispute. In 1834, a small New Connexion circuit was established following a secession from the Truro society. Most importantly, in 1836 several hundred members in the Helston circuit left to join the Wesleyan Methodist

1. Ibid. March 1861.

Association.¹ By 1838, this cause had reached Redruth, where the undercurrent of local unease had been building again from late 1833, when a popular local preacher and class leader had been suspended from office on a charge of drunkenness. The majority of the society's class leaders seceded, and it appears that many of the faces from the 1802 split were again in evidence.² By around 1842, Helston and Redruth had become heads of separate circuits, containing together something like 900 - 1000 members. Subsequent to further disturbances from 1850 onwards, the local Association and Reform branches merged into the United Methodist Free Church in 1856, which was easily the second largest Methodist denomination in the region, claiming 2000 members in its heyday.³

There was certainly an important local context to these secessions. Significantly, they all began, and remained preponderantly, within the large town societies - Truro, Helston, and Redruth - where growing social divides within congregations were most sharp, and where attempts to foist greater Connexional control on the region were most direct and influential. The dispute which

1. Edwards, 'Cornish Methodism : A Study in Division', M.A. thesis, pp.119-24.; Early Victorian Methodism, ed. Ward, pp.151-3.; 'A Friend of Methodism as it was', An Apology for those Wesleyan Methodists who dissent from the Conference Interpretation of the Law of Exulsion. Being a Reply to a Pamphlet by the Rev. George Taylor, entitled, "An Address to the Members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society in the Town and Neighbourhood of Helston", London, 1836.
2. Beckerlegge, Free Methodism, pp.10-2.; Blencowe, The Faithful Pastor, pp.227-31.; J.C.C. Probert, Fore St. Methodist Church, Redruth 1865-1965. A Social History, n.p., 1965, pp.1-5.; 'MS. on Origin of Redruth U.M.F.C. Society' (1867), C.R.O. MS. MR/R/62(b)9.
3. Samuel Coley, The Life of the Rev. Thomas Collins, 2nd edn., London, 1869, pp.308-10.; Thomas Garland, Memorials Literary and Religious, London, 1868, p.350-1, p.358, p.368.

brought the New Connexion to the region, for example, began in Truro in 1828, when the superintendent announced that the Connexional constitution as established during the 1790s was intended to be binding on the people, but not the Conference.¹ A local preacher, William Moyles, set up an independent chapel as a result, inviting sympathetic local preachers to signal their dissatisfaction with Connexional authority by preaching there. The succeeding superintendent determined to root out this dissension on his arrival in 1833, by removing two prominent and popular class leaders - James Sawle and William Scott - from office. The following day, Sawle and Scott met their ex-classes, and took seventy or eighty members out of the society; amalgamating themselves with the New Connexion in recognition of their common bond as opponents to Connexional 'despotism'.²

At the same time as Connexional authorities set out to tighten control in the area, the rise of a local lay elite determined to assist the national leadership in re-directing popular 'indigenous' Methodism also engendered greater local frictions. Thomas Garland and Dr. George Smith, for example, were two such prominent local laymen, who stood out in the 1840s and 50s as high-profile representatives of the Connexional cause, both at the local and national level.³

But it would be wrong to suggest that the splits from the

1. Edwards, 'Cornish Methodism : A Study in Division', M.A. thesis, p.120.
2. Early Victorian Methodism, ed. Ward, pp.63-71.
3. see Garland, op.cit.; and Letters on the Recent Agitations in Wesleyan Methodism, London, 1852.; George Smith, The Wesleyan Ministers and their Slanderers, London, 1849.; The Polity of Wesleyan Methodism Exhibited and Defended, n.p., 1851.

1830s seriously damaged the Methodist cause in the region, or indeed that the Wesleyan chapels ceased overnight to perform important socially binding functions in all communities. It is true that they sign-posted the impossibility of any long-term Wesleyan consensus being able to maintain such social functions in the future, in the face of countervailing pressures from local social change and from Connexional leaders. But throughout the 1830s, when the splits began, local Wesleyan membership actually grew at its fastest rate. Even in the 1860s, in the revival period which fore-shadowed the dramatic mining collapse of 1865-66, Methodism showed itself still performing important individualistic and communal functions in a period of crisis. Overall, the fact that so many splits occurred within the region confirmed how profoundly the local population was attached at heart to its religion. The basic and enduring strength of the local Methodist environment was what allowed the Bible Christians, the Primitives, Dr. Warren and Samuel Dunn to make such impact.

Region 3:

The Meneage peninsula was a contrasting region, both in its socio-economic appearance, and in its experience of Methodism. Much of the land in the twelve small parishes essentially cut off from the mining heartland by the Helford river, was agriculturally productive, especially in an eastern arc between Mawgan and Lizard Point. Mawgan and St. Keverne in particular were described as fine, fertile parishes of corn and grass in the 19th century.¹ The central and western parts of the region, however, were less productive: the parish of Mullion in the 1820s, for example, being defined as one-third tillable, and the rest moor and waste.² Across the heart of the region, the Goonhilly Downs were of little value beyond grazing and breeding grounds for sheep, bullocks, and horses.³ Inevitably, the small population tended to fringe the moorlands, dotted in small fishing and farming villages, essentially locked in to small-scale family subsistence production. No market town existed within the region itself.

The contiguity of the mining heartland meant that a steady migration from the region occurred throughout our period. According to N.G.J. Pounds,⁴ local population actually fell between 1744 and 1779, and while a little over 3% of the county's inhabitants lived here at the start of the 19th century, by 1871 the proportion had

1. Redding, Illustrated Itinerary, p.140.; Hitchins and Drew, History of Cornwall, ii p.457.
2. Hitchins and Drew, op.cit., ii p.506.
3. Gilbert, Parochial History of Cornwall, iii p.128.
4. Pounds, 'Population Movement', p.42.

fallen below 2%. During the decade 1811-21 there was actually a substantial rise in the local population of around 20%, in line with growth across the county as a whole, but thereafter, a dramatic decline in growth occurred, and from the 1840s there was a net loss of population. To the attractions of the mines by this time were added the effects of agrarian change, and the eventual capitulation of traditional smallholders, forced to either seek wage-labouring work on local farms or to leave the area altogether.

Methodist dissemination and growth here was fundamentally conditioned by the smallness of the population and the isolation of the region. Methodism began locally as a result of a small farmer, probably Thomas Triggs, hearing John Wesley preach in the nearby market town of Helston in 1760, and returning to establish a cottage meeting in his farmhouse at Angrouse, Mullion.¹ Two years later, Wesley made his only entry into the peninsula specifically to inspect the Angrouse society, and recorded his impressions of a membership and congregation inspired with a simple, but zealous piety.² The early society of small farmers, husbandmen, artisans, labourers, and their wives,³ continued meeting in a private house until around 1791, when a small chapel was built. The roots and early form of Methodism here were almost entirely indigenous.

The small society in Mullion gradually acted as a magnet to the religiously inquisitive and 'convicted' in the region. Although

1. Triggs' house is mentioned in 'Replies and Queries, 1771', D.R.O. MS. Principal Registry Basket C.5. He was also the first Society Steward: 'Circuit Stewards Account Book, West Cornwall Circuit 1774-1796', C.R.O. MS.

2. Wesleys in Cornwall, p.139.

3. 'West Cornwall Circuit Book 1767', C.R.O. MS.

the majority of members in 1767 came from the parish of Mullion, there were those who travelled from all over the peninsula, from St. Keverne and St. Anthony in the east, through Manaccan and Ruan Major, to Gunwalloe in the west.¹ Those members, in turn, were the prime means by which small Methodist cells were slowly established throughout the region. By 1800, however, only one other society had been formed, though several cottage class meetings were held in the outlying parishes.

In the 18th century, therefore, the only impulse behind Methodist dissemination had been local, uncoordinated, and - in terms of actual numbers of societies and members - unsuccessful. The first real Connexional bid to develop the work here came only after the division of the massive west Cornwall circuit based on Penzance in 1799. With Helston from this point a circuit 'station', and with an ebullient denominational assertiveness alive to the north, a more regular plan of missioning and preaching was immediately devised for Meneage. The Wesleyans picked an opportune moment. 'Social controls' in the area had traditionally not been strong, but in the last years of the 18th century, the local squirearchy was squeezed by the neighbouring mining industry, which both offered counter attractions to the quiet life on the old estate, and fostered new 'monied interests' keen to purchase local property. By the 1790s, the Reverend Richard Polwhele, vicar of Manaccan, complained that none of the traditional gentry were left in the peninsula.²

1. Ibid.; and see R. Polwhele, Anecdotes of Methodism, to which is added a Sermon on the Conduct that becomes a Clergyman, London, 1800, pp. 24-5.

2. Polwhele, Old English Gentleman, pp. 98-9. n.

The county history in 1814 listed four gentlemen's seats locally, one of which was held by a dissenter. Again according to Polwhele, by this time only one magistrate resided in Meneage, and he was very old.¹

The Church of England had obtained consistent support across the region in 1779: the southern band of parishes from Mullion to St. Keverne recorded communicant densities over 20%, and nowhere did the proportion fall below 16%. But the social change which Polwhele highlighted had detrimental effects on local churchgoing.

The 1821 Visitation Returns, for example, revealed a sizeable drop in the proportion of parishioners attending communion throughout the region.²

So with an evangelistic commitment from the Wesleyan pastorate, and the weakening of inhibiting social controls, gradual dissemination occurred in the early 19th century. A small satellite society from Mullion was established in Gunwalloe, and a house licensed for preaching in 1807. A class meeting was begun in Cury, which in time evolved into a society. At Lizard, Richard Treffry mentioned that preaching had been 'lately established' in 1802; while nearby in Ruan Minor a spill-over society was created after a small revival in the Lizard society in 1808. In Mawgan a society was established by a former Mullion resident who was able to give up attending classes in Helston 'having appropriated a house' for preaching in his new home-parish.³ By 1810, at least

1. Lysons, Magna Brittania; Polwhele, Traditions and Recollections, p. 374.

2. The Diocese of Exeter, ed. Cook.

3. Thomas Shaw, 'File of Preaching House Licences' R.I.C. MS. ; Proc. W.H.S., xviii, pp. 30-1.; Ivor Thomas, Methodism in Mullion, Penzance, 1978, p. 14.; 'Helston Wesleyan Circuit Collection Book', C.R.O. MS. MR/H/9.

eight of the twelve parishes had some form of Methodist meeting.

Over the next decade, several more cottage meetings made the transformation into societies. At the same time, St. Martins acquired its first Methodist presence. In all, at least three new chapels were built to add to the existing two in Mullion and St. Keverne. The local cause was also stimulated by the visit of Richard Hampton (or 'Foolish Dick'), an immensely popular evangelical local preacher, who preached in Gunwalloe, St. Keverne, and Cury in 1812.¹ By 1821, around ten established societies existed.

And yet, overall, Wesleyan Methodist influence throughout the region by this time was insubstantial. In 1810, only five societies actually returned membership figures, and though Mullion had fifty two members, and Ruan Minor thirty, total membership in the region stood at just 111.² Moreover, links with the local Anglican church were in at least several cases still maintained by 1821. In the Visitation queries of 1812, two respondents registered their Methodists as 'churchgoers'; while according to a circuit plan for 1821, no society within the region was as yet celebrating the sacrament of communion. By contrast, on a plan for 1877, one service of sacrament took place during the quarter in all the main chapels.³

How do we explain this relatively poor Methodist showing? The first part of the answer lies in the actions and attitudes of the itinerants, and the circuit officials in general. Greater attempts certainly were made to mission the region after 1799, but the

1. S.W. Christophers, Foolish Dick : The Pilgrim Preacher, London, 1873, p.51.

2. 'Helston Wesleyan Collection Book', C.R.O. MS.

3. 'Copy of Replies to Bishop's Queries, 1812', C.R.O. MS. AD 59/75.; Probert, Worship and Devotion, p.10, p.22.

terrain was difficult, and the reward slight, for trekking several miles to reach a congregation of only a handful; especially when it was remembered that the Helston circuit overall had limited resources in terms of itinerant preachers, and much more accessible and populous areas on which to concentrate endeavours in the north. Simple practical obstructions to evangelism presented themselves even if the will was there. In 1850, one itinerant preacher complained that the Helston circuit was 'physically more laborious' than any he had previously travelled in.

The difficulties were compounded, however, when Connexional policy towards evangelism began to change after 1815. From this point, the kind of doubts about the wisdom of devoting substantial resources to missioning such an isolated and sparsely populated region which had naturally arisen from 1799 onwards, were allowed to be explicitly stated, and used to construct an alternative strategy for circuit preaching. That strategy was borne of the increasing financial preoccupations of Wesleyan authorities, and meant inevitably that the greater priority, in terms of preaching and pastoral care, would be given to those societies and areas which 'paid the piper'.¹ Meneage inevitably suffered from the new reasoning that to try to mission further, in relation to the numbers of people who might be reached, made little financial sense. As a poor giver, it was likely to be increasingly neglected. And its poverty was clear to see. Within the Helston circuit, the public collections for foreign missions in 1835 raised £64. Just over half of that total came from the Helston society alone; around 17%

1. Ward, 'Religion of the People', p. 252.

from all the societies in Meneage.¹ But Methodist dissemination was also held up by local parochial circumstances. Even without explicit gentry-led opposition, the Methodists faced simple practical problems in establishing themselves in small parishes with low populations; perhaps especially in obtaining a site, and acquiring the finance, to build a chapel. There was also the fact that though the number of Anglican attendants as a proportion of the total population was in decline, there remained nonetheless a strong residual habit of churchgoing which the Wesleyans found difficult to break, and indeed for many years came to live with.

For these reasons, having made small inroads in almost all the parishes by 1815, Wesleyan authorities from this point on concentrated on consolidating and endeavouring to expand the societies which already existed, rather than on spreading the work by further evangelism. Itinerants were planned to a small cluster of established societies, all of which possessed their own chapels by 1825.² Between 1821 and 1871, except in St. Keverne parish, no new Wesleyan society was brought into existence. A steady drift into denominationalism took place within the Wesleyan chapels, with increasing formality in worship, and with financial and administrative priorities, increasingly colouring chapel life and activities.

But the decision to consolidate set up tensions between the locality and its Connexional leaders after 1815. Almost immediately,

1. 'Helston Branch Missionary Society Accounts 1818-1847', C.R.O. MS. MR/H/11.
2. Thomas Shaw, 'Cornish Methodist Source Material vol. iv', R.I.C. MS. 'Cornish Circuit Plans 1825 (Marriott Collection)'.

the local cause lost some of its vitality. On a tour of the region in December 1822, William Carvosso found 'a dark cloud of unbelief to pervade the minds of God's people' in Mullion.¹ Wesleyanism certainly weakened its popular potentiality by its rapid transition from a largely cottage-base, to a centralized, parochial chapel-chapel-base. And it did so at just that point in the region's history when a social climate especially conducive to conversionist preaching was created by the post-war agricultural depression. Evidence of a local religious awakening, in fact, can be found in the Visitation returns for 1821, which list at least seven meeting houses, and additional meetings in private houses, in the parish of St. Keverne. But it was not the Wesleyans who capitalised on this socio-religious phenomenon. St. Keverne was the one parish where a Bible Christian presence was noted in 1821.²

Significantly, it was a disaffected Wesleyan member, Alice Rule of Ponsangath, who first opened her cottage door to the Bible Christian preachers.³ The Bible Christians made initial progress essentially by stepping into the vacuum created by the withdrawal of Wesleyan missioning. Without concern for chapel debts and administration, they were able to engage in intensive itinerancy within the parishes, rather than jumping rapidly from parish to parish which was the Wesleyan itinerants' wont. Furthermore because their local cause began in the parish of St. Keverne, when a circuit was formed in 1819, it was centred there, and even after the circuit assistant had been moved to Breage in 1823, the work

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1. Carvosso, Efficacy of Faith, pp. 166-8, p. 175.
 2. The Diocese of Exeter, ed. Cook, 'St. Keverne'.
 3. Bible Christian Magazine, (1871) p. 173.

remained concentrated in the Meneage peninsula. In contrast to the Wesleyan circuit, whose heart always - and increasingly - lay outside the region, in 1829, for example, six out of the seven societies in the Bible Christian circuit were actually in Meneage.¹

Bible Christianity appealed as a forthright, down-to-earth cottage religion; and for some, like Alice Rule, it represented a surrogate for a now-threatened 'traditional' Methodism. But, in general, the sect appears to have filled gaps left by the Wesleyans, rather than to have directly 'poached' disaffected Wesleyan members. Their strength was always heavily concentrated in the eastern half of the peninsula, where Wesleyanism had always been weaker; and in particular in the large, populous parish of St. Keverne, whose nineteen 'principal villages' were often outside the orbit of the local Wesleyan chapels.² Indeed, in eight parishes where the Wesleyans were already established, no permanent Bible Christian society appeared.

The Bible Christians were also numerically weak in the region.

Their societies fluctuated in number between four in 1831 and eight in 1841, but remained static at seven for much of the period. Membership stood at just 26 in 1831, jumped to 135 by 1841, and thereafter undulated undramatically to arrive at 143 in 1871.³ By the 1840s, the Bible Christians had ceased missioning, and like the Wesleyans, built their chapels and evolved administrative priorities.

1. 'Breage Bible Christian Circuit Books 1830-70', C.R.O. MS. DDX/396/1.
2. Lysons, Magna Brittania, p.159.
3. 'Breage/Helston Bible Christian Circuit Books 1830-70', C.R.O. MS. DDX/396/1-3.

Nonetheless, despite their limited geographical spread and numerical success, there was a sense in which the arrival of the Bible Christians after 1815 seriously affected local Wesleyan congregations. Above all, it served to reinforce doubts about the wisdom and effects of new Connexional priorities, and tended to split the societies on the issue of the progress of denominationalism. Local traditionalists had important weapons in their armoury, not least the fact that the itinerant preachers so rarely visited the region. In the case of the dominant society of Mullion, moreover, the chapel built in 1815 by William Foxwell, a small farmer and local preacher, was erected on his own freehold, and vested in the trustees rather than the Conference.¹ Within the chapel deed there lay a clause allowing any Christian sect acceptable to the majority of the trustees to use the chapel for worship.

A strong sense of autonomy over chapel affairs therefore pervaded a number of local congregations, along with an ambivalent attitude towards the Connexion as a whole; and in consequence it was perhaps not surprising that when the Helston circuit experienced the Association secession in 1836, it was the societies in Meneage which were most seriously affected.² In several cases, local leaders (including Foxwell) took both chapels and supporters over to the Association cause. Interestingly, as with the Teetotal Wesleyan Methodists in St. Ives, the cause of

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1. Thomas, Methodism in Mullion, pp. 26-8.
 2. Beckerlegge, Free Methodism, pp. 7-10.; S.O. Dixon, The Road to Unity in Cornish Methodism, n.p., 1969, p. 8.; Thomas, op.cit., pp. 28-34.

teetotalism was strongly advocated and supported by the seceders.¹ Protest focused not just on the fact of increasing Connexional control, but on the devotional and spiritual losses inherent in accepting Connexional priorities.

The Wesleyans suffered greatly as a result of the secession, and though replacement chapels were hastily erected, and no society was entirely disbanded, nonetheless the effects of the split on membership were still apparent at the end of our period. In the parishes where divisions were sharpest, in particular in Mullion, Cury, Gunwalloe, and Mawgan, Wesleyan membership was decidedly below the regional average in 1871.²

1. Dixon, op.cit., p.7.

2. e.g. In Mullion, where there were three Free Methodist societies in 1871, Wesleyan membership stood at around 7.2% of the parish population; in Mawgan, where there were two such societies, Wesleyan membership was around 4.0%. By contrast, in St. Keverne, Manaccan, and St. Martin, where there were no Free Methodist societies, Wesleyan membership stood around 14.4%, 18.3%, and 14.1% respectively.

Region 4 :

This area of seventeen parishes contained some of the most productive agricultural land in the county, most consistently in the Roseland peninsula between the Fal estuary and Veryan Bay. Probus to the north was declared 'the best-farmed parish in the county',¹ in the mid-19th century; while in general farming was more heavily market-oriented than in the county as a whole. Richard Polwhele, in the early 19th century, drew attention in his county history to the 'rich enclosures' of Roseland, which were 'abundantly productive of all the fruits of the earth.'²

Nestled in the midst of this agrarian prosperity, the two small market towns of Grampound and Tregony had actually been decaying in importance from the middle of the 18th century, as local produce was increasingly transported further west, or indeed exported 'up-country'. The only other local town was Mevagissey, which by contrast was expanding throughout the 18th century, both as a port and as a pilchard fishery. A number of smaller fishing villages also dotted the coast, in particular in Gorran; but in the region in general, fewer opportunities existed for the 'traditional' smallholder to eke a living from soil and sea than further west.

The population of the region was roughly twice that of the Meneage peninsula, but was still inconsiderable. From 1821, local growth virtually ceased, as the post-war decline in corn prices, and the fall-off of local pilchard fishing squeezed those smallholders

1. White, Londoner's Walk, p.197.

2. Polwhele, History of Cornwall, iii p.4.

who did exist ,and paved the way for further agricultural 'improvement'. Between 1841 and 1871,local population actually fell by nearly 12%, as the process of farm consolidation continued.

Overall,even from the late 18th century,social stratification within the region was relatively pronounced. A number of the largest county landowners had seats in the area,including Lord Falmouth,who owned the small parish of St.Michael Penkevil where his residence of Tregothnan was located. Other prominent early 19th century local residents included Sir Christopher Hawkins,baronet and Member of Parliament, Admiral Thomas Spry,and Francis Gregor.¹ Polwhele noted that the local gentry had established what they called the 'Powder- Club',a social club revolving around books and dining; while a visitor to the county in the early 1820s paid particular attention to the large number of elegant, spacious, and lately improved mansions and grounds in the area.²

The Church of England,not surprisingly,registered strong support in 1779,especially in the Roseland peninsula where communicant densities were universally above 20%. Only in two parishes did the level fall below 10%: in the growing fishing community of Mevagissey,and the large,populous parish of Probus. By the same token,early Methodist dissemination was generally slow and patchy. By the 1780s,a few small societies had been formed on the very fringes of the region,where either Wesley,or news of Wesley had so far penetrated. In Grampound,where Wesley preached

1. Lysons,Magna Brittania,pp.clxxv-clxxviii.

2. Polwhele,op.cit., iii p.98.; Stockdale,Excursions,pp.50-8.

in 1757 and 1762, a small cause was established;¹ in Tregony, Richard Rodda preached in the streets in 1772, two years after a local farmer had reportedly 'become serious'.² In Probus, a Methodist society was formed around 1780 in Tresillian Bridge, a village which straddled two parishes and which, like Grampound and Tregony, was on the county turnpike.³ In Mevagissey, a small cause was begun when a local preacher visited the town in 1752.⁴

This was probably the sum of Methodist dissemination by 1780, and even in these few, mainly town, societies, persecution of preachers and followers was still occurring. Mevagissey was something of an exception. As with the close-knit fishing villages further west, when a local preacher had arrived in 1752, he had met spontaneous opposition from the community; preaching from the town bridge, he was pelted with dirt and rotten eggs, until rescued by a Quaker who took him to her house. The next year, when Wesley visited the fledgling society, he too faced xenophobic reaction, in the shape of a mob 'as fierce as lions'.⁵ But, once the initial opposition had been overcome, Methodism became implanted within the community in a rapid and extensive fashion. When Wesley returned to Mevagissey in 1757, he preached in the streets 'to all the inhabitants, and all were still as night'.⁶

Elsewhere, opposition was not so easily evaded. In Probus, when a young woman, Elizabeth Dabb, joined the society in

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1. Wesleys in Cornwall, p.130, p.138.
 2. Thomas Shaw, Richard Treffry Senior, n.p., 1969, p.5.
 3. Thomas Shaw, Methodism in Probus 1781-1961, n.p., 1962, p.6ff.
 4. Samuel Dunn, Memoirs of Mr. Joseph Allen of Mevagissey, Cornwall, London, 1838, p.6.
 5. Dunn, op.cit., p.6.; Wesleys in Cornwall, p.117.
 6. Wesleys in Cornwall, p.130.

Tresillian Bridge, 'a person raised a scandalous report concerning her'; and having persuaded her father to allow preaching in his home in the heart of the parish, 'evil reports were raised and circulated', the parson gave orders to some poor men to take down the steps which led into Dabb's house, and mobs were formed during Methodist preaching.¹ The cause was only secured because Dabb's employer, Sir Christopher Hawkins M.P. came to his defence; but due to Hawkins' local influence both as employer and landlord, even though a small Methodist chapel was built in 1788, the practice of attendance at the parish church was retained well into the 19th century.² In fact, even in Mevagissey it would be a mistake to exaggerate the independence of the Methodist community. Meetings were held in lofts and cellars until a substantial rise in membership in 1785 necessitated the construction of a chapel. However, because the eminent local landowner, the Duke of Buckingham, objected to such a development, no chapel actually appeared in the town for another twenty years.³

In the Roseland peninsula itself, there was no society in 1780.

John Wesley never visited the area, and though Richard Rodda preached in the streets of St. Mawes in 1772, there is no evidence that he made an abiding impression.⁴ Local Methodism is said to owe its origins to Elizabeth Tonkin, a Methodist member who moved to Feock (on the opposite side of the Fal) in 1782, where she occasionally preached. Her business took her over to

1. M.M., xxxvii (1814), pp. 454-6.

2. Shaw, Methodism in Probus, p. 11.

3. Samuel Dunn, The Life of Adam Clarke LL.D., London, 1858, pp. 22-3.

4. A.M., vii (1784) p. 465.

Roseland, where - 'shocked at its godlessness' - she persuaded a local preacher to visit, as well as preaching herself. By dint of her own efforts, several small classes were established, and from the mid-1780s, itinerant preachers began to arrive.¹ By 1800, four small societies existed at the tip of the peninsula; although the one chapel which had been built by this time, at Trewartha, in Veryan, was significantly located 'in the wilds'.²

Throughout the first half of the 19th century, the varied societies within the region experienced contrasting histories. In the north-west, for example, Probus and Tresillian Bridge were part of the Truro circuit, and enjoyed profitable links with a well-established and generally zealous society. Both witnessed rapid membership growth during the circuit revival in 1824; and the Probus society especially came to exert considerable local influence, located as it was in the centre of a large and populous parish. At its peak in 1824, society membership stood at 279.³ Likewise in Mevagissey, the society steadily accumulated members in the early 19th century. In 1805, a chapel was opened, and two years later a revival broke out, to be followed ten years later by a second which added 150 new members. Samuel Dunn, the town's most famous Methodist son, was responsible for the missioning of the surrounding villages, and the formation of two small Methodist causes in the contiguous parish of Gorran in the 1810s.⁴

1. O.A. Beckerlegge, Methodism in Roseland, n.p., 1966, pp. 3-4.; Mark Guy Pearse, The Ship Where Christ was Captain, London, 1926, p. 93.
2. Beckerlegge, op.cit., p. 13.
3. 'Truro Wesleyan Circuit Collection Book, 1814-35', C.R.O. MS. MR/T/16.
4. Robert C. Murrish, A History of Mevagissey Methodists 1752-1980, n.p., 1980, pp. 17-8, p. 20.

In Roseland, inevitably, Methodism grew more sedately, without stimulating popular revival. Nonetheless, between 1800 and 1820, the number of local societies doubled from four to eight, and in St. Mawes, where a chapel was built in 1803, society membership at times already passed the one hundred-mark.¹ After this point, however, further expansion was definitely restricted. The eight societies of 1820 had become only ten by 1870, a number of new attempts having failed. Between 1831 and 1871, with the exception of the single year of 1841 when the area actually experienced its one and only revival, the proportion of the total population that was Wesleyan Methodist remained remarkably consistent at around 5%.

Two prime structural factors, both 'internal' and 'external' to the Methodist church, essentially conditioned the parameters of its growth in Roseland. In the first place, pastoral provision was always bound to be less than completely adequate. The Roseland peninsula was first included in the Redruth circuit, which meant that it was almost entirely neglected; and although there was an initial improvement in 1799 when the area was transferred to the auspices of St. Austell, pastoral provision from that circuit deteriorated from the 1810s in the face of pressures from other more healthy or promising parts of the circuit. In consequence, St. Mawes was made head of a Roseland circuit in 1826, which certainly improved pastoral oversight; but at the same time, introduced new problems which impinged on pastoral effectiveness. Because the circuit was so small, it was dependent from the first on an annual grant from the Contingent Fund, and although the

1. Beckerlegge, op.cit., p.4.

amount was steadily reduced throughout the period, financial rather than spiritual preoccupations inevitably prevailed amongst circuit leaders.

In the second place, parochial environmental factors continued to inhibit the spread of Methodism after 1820. Throughout the region as a whole, with the one exception of St. Anthony parish, no parish with a population under 300 during the period to 1871 - six in all - acquired a Wesleyan presence. On the whole, these parishes were within the Roseland peninsula. The five parishes where Wesleyanism made most progress - Gorran, St. Just, Mevagissey, Probus, and Veryan - were far and away the most populous parishes in the region, and in general large in acreage too.

To characterise and explain Methodist growth for the region in general is not easy; but it is clear that prior to 1800, Methodist dissemination was hindered both by inhibiting factors within the parochial environment (in particular, small populations, and a strong and active squire/parson presence), and by the rudimentary nature of Connexional and pastoral structures. Progress made during that time was mostly patchy, and confined to the towns and the populous parish of Probus. To a considerable extent, the initial spreading of the word was dependent on local lay initiative, which in the case of both Probus and Roseland was provided by women.

Between 1800 and 1820, however, improved Connexional provision, and a gradually evolving local denominational maturity assisted a more steady and general growth in societies and membership across the region as a whole. In the north-east, and to a

lesser extent in Roseland, improved circuit organisation was the key to better pastoral provision; while in Mevagissey, an expanding denominational self-assurance was coalesced, with the opening of a new chapel in 1805, into organised missioning of the surrounding parishes during the 1810s.

Broader social change certainly helped too, though in the absence of detailed evidence, such as of members' occupations, its exact effects remain unclear. In general, local agricultural advance in the first two decades of the 19th century undoubtedly increased the number of moderately prosperous farmers and freeholders, to whom Methodism may have appealed as both symbol and practical expression of 'status withdrawal' from traditional deferential social relations.¹ On the other hand, the continuing process of enclosure, and in particular the effects of post-war depression, may have attracted smallholders to a religion offering social and spiritual support in a time of profound economic crisis.

The actuality was probably that Methodism, to some extent, appealed to both groups simultaneously; and that until the 1830s, in the same way that rural class divides remained blurred, so the form and function of local Methodism stayed ambiguous.

From that point, however, local class conflicts were increasingly introduced into the chapels, with the result that the ethos and objectives of Wesleyanism became for the first time somewhat more defined. The process was perhaps first apparent in Mevagissey where, as in St. Ives at this time, rising communal tension caused by capitalistic pressures on the pilchard fishery found its

1. Gilbert, Religion and Society, pp. 84-5

way into the Wesleyan chapel. In November 1826, a reference was made to

'some unpleasantness between the persons concerned in the seine-fishery and the drift-net fishery, which has made its way into the chapel, and produced shyness among some of the brethren.'

¹ Within a year, a small Primitive Methodist society had been established in the town, no doubt attracting some of the more plebeian members from the Wesleyan chapel.² In Probus, where the Primitives also set up a short-lived society in 1829, the Wesleyan chapel began to develop its own social distinctions, with the more substantial farmers increasingly dominating all aspects of chapel life. The choir, for example, had become by the late 19th century almost the preserve of the leading farming families.³

Most dramatically, however, the levelling off of Wesleyan growth in Roseland in the 1830s occurred alongside the arrival of the Bible Christians; and both developments might be seen as mirroring more clear-cut class fragmentation in the rural parishes. The Bible Christians missioned the countryside from Mevagissey to St. Mawes in the early 1820s, but without exception made impressions only in those parishes where the Wesleyans were already established.⁴ In part, this was simply because fewer restraints on evangelism operated in these parishes; but it probably also reflected the fact that growing social divides within the Wesleyan congregations provided a market for a sectarian alternative. While the Wesleyan chapels became increasingly farmer-oriented, one-third of male

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1. Dunn, Memoirs of Joseph Allen, p. 27.
 2. Probert, Primitive Methodism in Cornwall, p. 92.
 3. Shaw, Methodism in Probus, p. 30.
 4. Beckerlegge, op.cit., pp. 39-56.

members listed in the Bible Christian circuit baptismal register up to 1870 were farm labourers .Just over one-fifth were also fishermen and sailors,who perhaps also sensed a growing gap between their own needs and the Wesleyan chapels.¹ It would seem that part of the appeal of Bible Christianity was a 'class' appeal,and that in particular it drew into its ranks the 'dispossessed', whether they be smallholders or traditional seiners. This is supported by the appearance of a growing number of small farmers in the circuit baptismal book,at just that point where farm consolidation and mechanization were exerting greatest pressure during the 1850s.

1. See Table 20 at end of Chapter.

Region 5 :

At the heart of this region stood the town of St.Austell, which had grown steadily throughout the 18th century as the commercial centre of the local tin mining industry, but had mushroomed from the late 1790s, as large scale mining enterprises began to develop nearby. The greatest stimulus to St.Austell's initial growth had probably been the accelerating exploitation of the massive Polgooth tin mine two miles west of the town, which Borlase had described in the 1750s as financially the most successful mine in the county.¹ As local tin production in general increased from this point, high population growth was encouraged in the parishes of St.Mewan, St.Ewe, and St.Austell.

The region as a whole had never been overwhelmingly a mining district, although tin 'streaming' by small groups ('pares') of peripatetic tanners had been practiced traditionally across large expanses of the moorland.² To the east of St.Austell - as one traveller remarked - 'the country begins to appear more fertile',³ with respectable estates and orchards, the small, neat market town of Lostwithiel, and the fishing port of Fowey. To the north, the boroughs of Mitchell and St.Columb Major were each surrounded by fertile farming land. But with the expansion of local mining which began in the late 18th century, the region was exposed to the transforming effects of profound socio-economic change. St.Austell

1. Borlase, Natural History, p.189.; Celia Fiennes had estimated in 1695 'at least twenty miles, all in sight, which employ a great many people at work almost night and day', to exist within a mile of the town. Jenkin, Cornish Miner, p.89.
2. Jenkin, op.cit., pp.62-3.
3. Impressions of the Old Duchy, ed. Spreadbury, p.21.

itself, for all its steady growth, could still be described in the early 1790s as a small place with little to recommend it; but by 1799 it had become a bustling, expanding town, containing 'many large shops, in different branches of trade, which seem to have sprung up within these few years.' By 1814, it was reckoned a 'considerable market town', and in 1824, an important commercial centre, whose 'inhabitants were noted as an industrious, thriving people.'¹

It was during the 1810s in particular that the local mining industry grew most markedly. In the early years of the century, copper began to be exploited for the first time, and by 1814 the Crinnis mine near St. Austell had become one of the most productive in the county.² Then in the 1820s, the vast china clay deposits of St. Dennis and St. Stephens in particular began to be opened up in immediately intensive fashion. By the following decade, mines and quarries producing tin, copper, china clay, lead, granite, and silver pock-marked the landscape.³

The dramatic escalation of large-scale industrial mining is best highlighted in population statistics. Before 1811, population grew at a steady, but unexceptional pace, but during the 1810s it expanded by 36.7%, the largest decennial rise in the county in the 19th century. In the 1820s, it grew again by 27.6%, as migrants were attracted from the western mines and the rural district to the south. The massive influx of population transformed existing

1. Maton, Observations, .169.; Impressions of the Old Duchy, ed. Spreadbury, p.21.; Lipscomb, Journey into Cornwall, p.249, p.255.; Lysons, Magna Brittania, p.20.; Stockdale, Excursions, p.48.
2. Rowe, Hard-Rock Men, p.19.; Lysons, op.cit., p.ccix.
3. N.J.G. Pounds, 'The Discovery of China Clay', Economic History Review, 2nd series i(1948).

communities in size and nature. Mining villages such as Sticker, Polgooth, and Trewoon, were stretched and extended, while St. Austell itself sprawled out in all directions. Mining families also sought to acquire small plots of land on the downs, as further west, and several schemes were undertaken by local landowners to enable them to clear wasteland in return for a three-lives lease on a few acres of land. A commentator in the 1830s, with one eye on Ireland, expressed deep concern at the economic precariousness of the local population of subsistence smallholders, narrowly dependent as they were on the mines and the potato.¹

This combination of severe social change and dislocation, and the traditionally-'independent' spirit of miners and mining communities, again proved conducive to Methodist growth. Before the onset of radical economic change, progress had been slow. Methodism began in the already populous tin mining area in, and to the west of St. Austell; in the town itself, for example, preaching and prayer meetings were being held in a private house from about 1748, which attracted 'people of the lowest degree and meanest capacities.'² By the following decade a small chapel was in use, and thereafter John Wesley made a point of preaching regularly in the town, his more frequent visits from the late 1760s reflecting the growing size and importance both of St. Austell and its Methodist community. To the west, he preached outdoors four times to the tanners of St. Mewan and three times in St. Ewe between 1748 and 1757, and two Methodist

1. Fraser, General View, pp. 57-8.; Hitchins and Drew, History of Cornwall, ii p, 52.; Gilbert, Parochial History of Cornwall, iii p, 453.
2. 'Thomas Hext - Bishop of Exeter, 1748', R.I.C. MS. Thomas Shaw, 'Files: Places', 'St. Austell'.

societies quickly appeared in the villages of Polgooth and Sticker.¹

From this base,missioning by Wesley and his helpers gradually spread the word across the region. Local preachers travelled west into St.Stephens in the 1740s,and in Roche a cottage meeting was begun in 1763,and a chapel built soon after.² In the east,Wesley was invited to preach in the courtyard of a farmhouse at Methrose,Luxulyan in 1755,which led to a small class being formed in the farmhouse of Mary Cock of Bodwen. Around 1757,the mother of William O'Bryan,later founder of the Bible Christians,joined the small Methodist society in the parish.³ To the north,helpers reached the small town of Indian Queens in 1751,while Wesley himself preached a couple of times in St.Columb Major. By 1784,preaching had also been established in Lostwithiel, Fowey, Tywardreath, and Bokiddick(Lanivet),so that a basic framework had been generated, which linked the towns with Methodist preaching.⁴ But in very few places could the Methodist society be described as strong and well-established; even in St.Austell in 1785 it could be written that 'the 'reproach of the Cross' had not...ceased. To become a member of the Methodists' Society, subjected the individual to contumely,and sometimes to persecution.' Put simply:'Many were disposed to regard a connexion with the Methodists as a proof of mental imbecility.'⁵

The situation began to change in 1785,however,when a revival

1. Wesleys in Cornwall,p.107,p.120.

2. Thomas Shaw,'Files:Places', R.I.C. MS.,'Roche'.

3. Thorne,O'Bryan,pp.19-21.

4. Shaw,'Files:Places', R.I.C. MS.,'Cornwall East Circuit',

5. J.H.Drew,The Life,Character and Literary Labours of Samuel Drew A.M. by his eldest son,London,1834,pp.68-9.

broke out in St.Austell which (as in St.Just three years earlier) did much to stimulate the local cause,and to enhance its appeal at a popular level. Again,a confluence of factors internal and external to the Methodist society explain its occurrence. As in St.Just,the 'internal revitalization' of the society itself was a necessary precursor to revival,and the chief agent of this was probably Adam Clarke,a young,assiduous,talented preacher,who set to his task as an itinerant with willing determination, by one estimate preaching 568 sermons during his first year in the circuit.¹ Most of the 'converts' of the revival, again,were adherents and children,especially vulnerable to the heightened expectancy and excitement of chapel life. This is borne out both by the evidence of Clarke himself, and by the personal experience of Elizabeth Shaw,whose parents were both members of the society,and who obtained her membership note at this time,at the age of eleven.²

But most importantly,the revival showed for the first time local Methodism taking popular form,and perhaps acquiring popular functionality. Adam Clarke's role here again was important.The style and form of his preaching meshed with popular religious precepts and perceptions in a way which led one local member,for example,to hear him 'with surprise and attention'. Most significantly,'he gave us no dogmas; he forced upon us no doctrines; but he set us a thinking and reasoning because he thought and reasoned with us himself.'³ Clarke was able by his

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1. Dunn,Life of Adam Clarke,pp.13-4.
 2. Ibid.p.19.; Robert C.Barrett,"Long Life and Peace" :
Memorials of Mrs. Elizabeth Shaw,London,1875,p.5.
 3. Drew,Life of Samuel Drew,p.31,p.181.

preaching to 'cross over': to reinvigorate existing members while simultaneously attracting attention from those on the Methodist fringes and beyond.

He was critically assisted in this process by the social tensions abroad at the time. A large new mine had been discovered near St.Austell around 1781, which immediately sparked off a renewed population influx into the area. Once the revival broke, it carried instantly and significantly to the mining villages of Sticker and St.Ewe.¹ The early 1780s, in general, witnessed the beginnings of a new form of social uncertainty as the industrialising process got under way. Hence, the potent amalgamation of renewed spiritual zeal and denominational assertiveness from within the Methodist societies, with the intensification of social pressures and unease outside, fostered the revival itself, and pointed the way forward to an upsurge in popular support.

In three very simple ways, the revival stimulated the local Methodist cause. In the first place, it consolidated the denominational character of the St.Austell society by fostering the construction of a new chapel and dwelling house for the itinerant preacher,² as well as encouraging more confident and high-profile evangelism from both pastorate and laity. In the second, it was the means by which a new generation was brought into Methodist membership; when Adam Clarke returned to the area in 1807 he pronounced: 'It is strange, but the chief members, in almost all the Societies round about, were convinced and brought to God under my ministry.'³

1. The Cornish Banner : A Religious, Literary and Historical Register, for the West of England, July 1847, pp.354-5.

2. Dunn, op.cit., p.18.

3. J.W.Etheridge, The Life of the Rev. Adam Clarke LL.D., London, 1858, p.226.

Such members not only provided the future local lay leadership for the church, but were often convinced, through their collective formative experience, of the valid, if not vital role that revivalism should play in local Methodist evolution. In the third place, as in the west, the revival acted as a bridge between popular religious needs and formal Methodist devotion and discipline, and suggested the means for the rapid transmission of Methodism within the mining communities.

This triad of underlying factors enabled Methodism to make substantial gains in the afterglow of the revival. By 1801, at least twenty four societies existed, containing an estimated 6.7% of the total population as Methodist members. The new societies were scattered widely across the region as a whole so that by 1800, all of the parishes except the two containing the smallest populations (St. Sampsons, and Withiel) possessed at least one Methodist cause. But progress was most dramatic in the St. Austell tin mining area. In the town itself a further revival broke out in 1791, and in general local congregations were kept fomented and large by the destabilised socio-economic environment.¹ The chapels in part became places of refuge for alienated migrants, and references point to their use (perhaps for the first time) by large numbers of the 'poor' at this time. Converts in a revival at Sticker, for example, were described as 'poor people', while Elizabeth Shaw, now a stalwart member in St. Austell avowed: 'I do not know that I ever felt so much love to the poor before. I could embrace them as my fellow travellers in the kingdom and patience of Jesus.'²

1. A.M., xix(1796) p.56.

2. Barratt, "Long Life and Peace", p.23, p.29.

Subsequent Methodist expansion rested upon natural extension from this solid base. In the first three decades of the 19th century, the number of local societies approximately doubled. St. Austell and its environs, again, saw most new societies, in particular during the population flood of the 1810s. A large-scale revival in the St. Austell circuit in 1826/27 pointed up the 'popular' nature of the local cause, as well as leading, practically, to the enlarging of several chapels, and the construction of at least three.¹ Nonetheless, in contrast to the west central mining region, where a similar proportion of the total local population as members in 1801 was steadily increased from 1820 onwards, here little change occurred down to 1871. Why, we may ask, was Wesleyan Methodism apparently less successful here than in Region 2?

The answer in part is that such comparisons ignore the fact that actual population growth here in the early 19th century - in percentage terms - was far greater than further west. But it is arguable, nevertheless, that important differences in Methodist circumstances and characteristics in each region to some extent determined contrasting experiences. In the first place, local Methodist development by 1800 was one generation behind that further west. The most obvious indication that Methodist structures still remained rudimentary was the fact that the St. Austell circuit at that time encompassed most of central and eastern Cornwall, and it took itinerants three weeks to do the 'round'. It was the low level of administrative and pastoral organisation in 1810 which persuaded William O'Bryan, then a local

1. W.M.M., 1(1827), p.471.

preacher, to begin visiting places, for example in Newlyn and St. Enodor, so far untouched by the itinerant preachers.¹ The local class network was also not so well defined, providing much less overt and established social and pastoral structures of support in the burgeoning mining districts. But the most important implication of the relatively late start in expanding the cause locally was that Connexional authorities were by that time in a position to exercise considerably greater control in directing the form that it took than was the case in the west. Despite the existence of a strong popular revivalist influence within local Methodism, an alliance was forged in the early 19th century between chapel officials and Connexional leaders which managed with some success to deliberately restrict evangelism (and to some extent, tame revivalism) for the sake of financial (and devotional) order. It was the controlling influence of such an alliance, of course, which propelled O'Bryan into independent efforts at evangelism in the 1810s.²

In the second place, despite the growth of mining and population in the early 19th century, the fact that some parts of the region were less seriously disrupted than others ensured that levels of Methodist support would not be consistent. In approximately 40% of parishes in the 1840s, around 5% of all parishioners were Wesleyan members, but elsewhere support varied significantly. In the predominantly china clay and tin/copper parishes primarily to the west and north of St. Austell - St. Mewan, St. Stephens, Roche,

1. A.M.B.C., ii (1823) p.109.

2. see Ibid. pp.81-5.

St.Wenn, St.Dennis, Newlyn, St.Blazey - Wesleyan membership was well above average. To the east of St.Austell, on the other hand, parishes less connected to large-scale mining - Tywardreath, Fowey, Luxulyan, Lanlivery, St.Enoder - returned much lower levels of support (between 1.4% and 3.4%.)

But, thirdly, even in the heavily mining districts, it is arguable that Methodism functioned less as a 'popular religion' than it did further west. This was largely because a less clearly delineated and articulated sense of 'community' existed amongst local miners - as a 'race apart' - than was the case in west Cornwall. The miners in the region, in general, had less consciousness of tradition and self-regarding 'independence'; their life-style was invested with fewer ideals and customary supports. The china clay workers, in particular, were viewed by tanners in the west as miners of very low status, if not as hardly miners at all.¹

In part this was because they were a genuinely migrant population; described in the census returns for St.Ewe in 1821 as 'mere sojourners, should the mines fail they must remove.'² As far as possible, they established themselves in small family plots, but mostly they drifted into the temporarily inflated mining villaes like Sticker, Polgooth, Trewoon, Nanpean, St.Dennis, and Treviscoe. As such, of course, they were little different from migrants further west. But in contrast to the west, mining in this area had been traditionally less extensive and on a smaller scale of organisation and production, so that fewer structures of community and tradition

1. Rowe, Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution, pp.324-5.

2. The Diocese of Exeter, ed.Cook, 'St.Mewan', and 'St.Ewe'.

existed to provide support and encouragement. Moreover, because the period of sustained 'capitalised' mining exploitation began much later, alternative neo-capitalist structures of labour organisation and relations were more mature. The mining population in this region, in general, might be considered more 'working class' than that further west; pinched and moulded as it was by mine adventurers determined, in this newly-developed region, to implant capitalistic mores, for example by reducing the use of the 'tribute' system in favour of the more straightforwardly wage-labouring 'tut' system. Significantly, the first labour dispute in Cornish mining, in the sense of an open collision between the interests of capital and labour, took place here in St. Blazey in 1831.¹

All of this impacted on Wesleyan Methodism in the region. As further west, Wesleyanism could offer social and spiritual support to the displaced, but it could not go on, to the same extent, to operate in a wider sense as a preservative buttress to traditionally independent mining families caught in the pincers of economic change. Simply because the local mining population was often displaced, transient, and without an articulated sense of independence, Wesleyan Methodism could hardly function to preserve or defend something which had already been lost.

Instead of acting to unify the local population, the Wesleyan chapels increasingly refracted its divisions. Growing class divides became explicit during the severely dislocated 1810s over the issue of revivalism. Tensions are clear in Benjamin Carvosso's summary of his year as an itinerant preacher in the St. Austell

1. Rowe, op.cit., p.143.

circuit in 1817-18:

'In the different parts of the circuit, the friends vary much in their taste as to preaching; hence it is not likely that any one man will be extensively useful amongst them...In the society at St. Austle, there is in many much steady piety, and depth of knowledge, but several are wanting in simplicity and charity.'

1

In his remarks, Carvosso pointed to a division already forming between 'town' and 'country' congregations, the latter stressing the experimental, emotional spirituality of a 'simple' piety, the more 'middle class' town congregation desiring discipline, order, and learning. In this situation, greater opportunities existed for sectarian Methodism than further west, where such clear-cut distinctions between 'town' and 'country' rarely appeared before the 1830s. The Bible Christians were first on the scene, in the 1810s, exploiting the limitations of local Wesleyanism. By 1831, their membership represented around 1.8% of the total local population, but by 1841 it had reached 3.5%, thereafter fluctuating between 4 and 5% down to 1871. Therefore, from the 1840s, the Bible Christians were only marginally less successful than the Wesleyans in the region in terms of membership, while in some parts, such as Luxulyan and to the south of St. Columb Major, they represented the major Methodist influence.

Local Bible Christian roots were laid by William O'Bryan's initial spurt of independent evangelism in 1810-11, and on his permanent exclusion from the Wesleyan Connexion in 1815, he gained considerable support from those brought into membership by his own

1. Blencowe, Faithful Pastor, p.42.

efforts. In his own local society in Luxulyan, for example, many left the Connexion to follow him.¹ A small Bible Christian circuit was formed in O'Bryan's home-ground in the rural east of the region, but by 1818 the work was extending westwards into the high-growth areas, reaching St.Austell, Roche, and Paramoor to the south-west of St.Austell. In June 1818, the very first Bible Christian chapel was opened at Menadew, Luxulyan, with an estimated congregation of 800 inside, and a further 200 outside.² In 1819, 'the word ran like fire among stubble' in the east, and at the first Bible Christian Conference held that year, the Luxulyan circuit was granted seven itinerants, two more than any other circuit.³ Following the Conference, and into 1820, the local awakening continued and moved to the west; in March 1820, one of the itinerants, William Reed, claimed 110 new members in the quarter, with the promise of a further shower in some parts of the circuit. The following year, he experienced similar 'good work' in the newly-formed St.Ervan circuit, which stretched into the northern-most parishes of the region. As he himself explained: 'Go into any house there is generally some one concerned about salvation.'⁴

By intensive missioning from the first, the Bible Christians established a wide network of small classes across the region. In 1826/27 they profitted from the Wesleyan revival, which spilt over into the Bible Christian societies, adding 600 new members in the

1. A.M.B.C., ii (1823) p.109.
2. A Jubilee Memorial, pp.47-9.; F.W.Bourne, The Bible Christians : Their Origins and History (1815-1900). London, 1905, p.78.
3. Bourne, op.cit., p.81.
4. James Thorne, Memoir of William Reed, Bible Christian Minister, Shebbear, 1869, pp.15-6.

Luxulyan circuit.¹ The following year, the western societies were formed into a separate circuit based on Mevagissey, while in April 1828, the largest chapel in the denomination to date was opened in St. Austell. Seven years later, St. Austell itself became head of a circuit carved out of the Luxulyan circuit and in 1843, St. Columb became head of another containing the southern societies in the old St. Ervan circuit. By the 1840s, already, the pastoral and administrative structures of the local Bible Christians matched those of the Wesleyans.

Part of the appeal of Bible Christianity was based on its ability to compete with local Wesleyan chapels for the support of the displaced, not only during the critical 1810s, but throughout the whole of the first half of the 19th century, as a large, transient population shifted within the region from parish to parish with the varying fortunes of local mines. The Bible Christians could both devote considerable energies to evangelism and offer a straightforwardly revivalistic religion without the constraints imposed upon Wesleyanism by Connexional authorities and growing class friction within the chapels.

But it is likely that the Bible Christians did not simply offer support for the dislocated; they also acquired a strong core of permanent members of increasingly working class stock. Male members represented in circuit baptismal registers were overwhelmingly labourers and miners.² In the Mevagissey circuit, 43% of recorded fathers were miners, 26% labourers; in St. Columb, 54.7%

1. Bourne, *op.cit.*, p.179.

2. See Table 20 at end of Chapter.

labourers (mostly farmworkers), 13.4% miners; in St. Austell, 54.2% miners, 16.4% labourers, and 11.2% claymen and stone cutters. The steady growth in membership from the 1830s was significant, reflecting not only the effectiveness of now-established pastoral structures, but also the fact that local class divisions, both in mining and rural areas, were becoming increasingly explicit. It would seem that, as in the Roseland area to the west, the appeal of Bible Christianity was at least in part its symbolic value as a form of social protest.

Region 6 :

With the exception of Bodmin - and from 1841, Padstow - no parish in this region contained more than 2,000 inhabitants throughout our period. Most had less than 1,000. Bodmin stood out as the only significant town, with a population of around 2,000 in 1801, and twice that by 1841. As an ancient ecclesiastical and civic centre, it had been the most populous town in the county until the 16th century, though by the late 18th century it was somewhat in decline. Still, in the first half of the 19th century, it enjoyed a revival as an administrative and commercial centre; the decision to hold the whole of the county assizes and sessions in the town, and the opening of new mining ventures close by helping its recovery.¹

Otherwise, the small number of settlements of any size tended to be on the coast. Padstow as an ancient port, could be described in 1808 as a town of wealth and respectability, though further development was largely circumscribed by the shallowness of the harbour and its distance from the mining heartland. Port Isaac to the north, and Port Haven to the south were smaller ports, the former importing coals and exporting slate and pilchards, the latter essentially a fishing village. Newquay began to grow in the early 19th century, although its real expansion as a 'watering place' was first noted only in the 1871 census. Wadebridge, mid-way between Bodmin and Padstow, existed as a small local market town, which also benefitted from a river link to Padstow, which enabled imports to be shipped down river and sold in the town.²

1. Henderson, Essays in Cornish History, p.24.;
Redding, Illustrated Itineracy, pp.44-5.
2. Warner, Tour through Cornwall, pp.324-5.; Hitchins and Drew, History of Cornwall, ii p.217.

But it was farmland and agriculture which dominated the local landscape and economy. Robert Fraser in 1794 described the whole area from the banks of the Camel and Allen south to Cubert and north to Lanteglos as a very fertile district: as the 'Grannary of Cornwall', producing vast crops of barley.¹ In fact, it was the parishes immediately surrounding the Camel estuary and the river Allen which were most productive, but the whole region can safely be characterised as 'agricultural'. Enclosure and 'improvement' was well under way when Borlase was writing in the mid-18th century, and a resulting fall in local population has been estimated for the period 1744 to 1779.²

Not surprisingly, the Church of England registered relatively good attendance in 1779, with communicant density levels exceeding 20% in eleven out of the twenty parishes. In only three parishes, did levels fall below 10%. Again, by the same token, the early spread of Methodism was slow and patchy. Wesley himself was relatively unattracted to the area because of its developed agrarian nature, its small parochial populations, and the apparent adequacy of Anglican pastoral provision. He did make several visits to the major settlements of the region, and by 1780 about ten small societies existed, most prominently in the towns (Bodmin, Padstow, Wadebridge, and Port Isaac.) Early missioning (and, indeed, pastoral supervision) from Methodist itinerants, however, was slight, and in a number of instances Methodist societies actually owed their origins to impulses from

1. Fraser, General View, p.26.

2. Pounds, 'Population Movement', p.42.

within local Anglicanism. In Port Isaac, for example, the society grew out of the fortnightly visits of the evangelical George Thomson,¹ while in Egloshayle, Sir Harry Trelawney's Methodist-style class meetings inspired the formation of a Methodist society which drew much of its support from Trelawney's followers once he had left the parish.² Richard Vercoe, a Methodist migrant to the area in around 1769, attended Trelawney's class and Bodmin parish church, as well as joining the Methodist society in the town.³

Much of this early advance was also dependent on the efforts of local lay individuals. Vercoe himself established a class meeting in his home village of Ruthern Bridge near Bodmin, and was responsible for the formation of several small societies, especially in St. Issey.⁴ The work spread also without being actively directed at all: Ann West, later a class leader, was perhaps not unusual when she simply 'strolled into' the Methodist meeting house at Trevanson near Wadebridge in 1799, 'I know not by what inducement.'⁵

Inevitably, although some Anglican impulses were positive, there was considerable, and often productive opposition to early Methodism. James Cory, rector of St. Breock, for example, encouraged persecution of early Methodists in Wadebridge which ranged from pelting them with rotten eggs to laying gunpowder under the cottage where they met. The ploy of withholding employment, however, from a group characterised as 'so poor' was probably most successful in

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1. Shaw, Methodism in Camelford, pp. 26-7.
 2. Ibid. pp. 23-4.
 3. M.M., liii (1830) p. 507.
 4. Ibid. p. 508.
 5. Mary Higgs, Living Christianity. A Brief Memoir of Ann West, Wadebridge, 1873, p. 6.

forcing the temporary demise of the society in the early 1730s.¹ Ann West, before joining the Methodists, had been filled with prejudices against them by her 'respectable' farming parents, and once a member, her family and friends sought to 'win her from error and infatuation.' Her parents locked her out of the house one night, and an uncle advised horse-whipping some sense into her. Finally, a spell at the uncle's house was hit upon, but after three weeks of ridicule and entreaty, he sent her home hopelessly 'incurable'.²

Despite the several links with Evangelical clergymen, the overall parochial environment in the region ensured that the early Methodist societies tended to be marginalised in both social and religious terms, which set up tensions within the societies in the late 18th and early 19th century between those who accepted Methodism's increasingly 'dissenting' demarcation, and those who wanted to remain attached, in some form, to the Church. Sometimes protection for the cause was best acquired by sealing off the society and existing as a sectarian cell; at others, as in Wade-bridge when the society was re-formed, survival was linked to obtaining the vital support of the rector (in this case, also a magistrate) by convincing him of the orderly nature of the meetings.³ The essential divide within the Societies was hence very different to that further west, with the 'fringe' here exercising probably very little influence over the form or nature of Methodist development.

1. Ibid. p.17.

2. Ibid. pp.19-20.

3. Ibid. p.18.

The shift into more clear-cut and self-assured denomination-
alism took place over the first two decades of the 19th
century, partly as a result of local trends such as the gradual
maturing of Methodist societies, but also because Connexional
structures appeared in the region for the first time in well-devel-
oped form. At the beginning of the 19th century, when a local
membership of about 380 represented 2.3% of the total regional
population, twelve out of the thirteen local societies were included
within the vast St. Austell circuit. In 1803, Camelford became head
of a smaller, though still extensive circuit which ran from
Davidstow to Ruthern Bridge along the fringe of Bodmin Moor, and
from St. Gennys to Padstow along the coast. The following year,
this circuit was further subdivided, with Bodmin becoming the
station for the western half of the region.

The improved pastoral oversight and provision allowed Meth-
odist societies to become more clearly defined and more independent
of the parochial environment, by helping to structure an alternative
Methodist environment. During the 1810s in particular, the work
spread, so that by 1821 all the parishes with the exception of the
smallest, Little Petherick, had been penetrated to some extent.
But, though the work spread, still overall it rarely deepened.
Despite (or perhaps because of) improved pastoral provision, local
opposition did not disappear. In 1809, William O'Bryan visited the
parish of Mawgan in the west, intending to find a cottage from which
to preach:

'I went from house to house among the Farmers,
requesting house room to preach in; but they had an

excuse, which was, a fear that they should offend the Parson!'

1

Moreover, although pastoral provision improved markedly, it was still patchy and inconsistent. In the east, even after its division in 1804, the Camelford circuit remained a vast, straggling 'round' with an established four-week circuit of itineracy for the preachers.² In the west, O'Bryan had visited Mawgan, along with Newquay, St. Mabyn, and St. Eval, simply because the Methodist itinerants were not preaching there themselves.³ The minute book for the Local Preachers meetings in the Camelford circuit also points up their own frequent neglect of preaching, especially in the late-1810s.⁴

Both because of local inhibiting circumstances, and because of Connexional priorities after 1815, the pastorate increasingly concentrated on consolidation rather than evangelism from that time. A formal, respectable pattern of worship evolved (or in some places continued) which both suited Connexional tastes and meshed satisfactorily with the local social and religious environment. In 1816, Benjamin Carvosso found that 'experimental religion is very low among the generality of the members of society' in Padstow, while an 'awakening' in St. Tudy parish in 1819 was maintained by the quiet, private means of pastoral visitation rather than by noisy, public revival meetings.⁵

1. A.H.B.C., ii(1823) .76-8.

2. 'Subscriptions and Members, Camelford Circuit 1807-35', C.R.O. MS. MR/CW/11 lists a plan of the circuit for 1810.

3. Bourne, Bible Christians, pp.16-7.

4. 'Minutes of Local Preachers Meetings, Camelford Wesleyan Circuit 1816-71', C.R.O. MS. MR/CW/7.

5. Blencowe, Faithful Pastor, p.17.; M.M., 1(1827) p.652.

With an early formalism to Methodist worship, it might seem that a gap existed which sectarian Methodism could fill. Connexional preoccupations with consolidation certainly chafed O'Bryan, who as a local preacher had informed the Bodmin superintendent in 1809 of the necessity of forming a class in Newquay, to be met (by his own account) with the disconcerting response: 'form a class yourself.'¹ O'Bryan in fact did form a small number of societies in 1810, and the gulf between his own evangelistic priorities and official Connexional thinking was made explicit when the Bodmin superintendent sent his junior itinerant to win over these societies to the Connexional cause. Above all else, he went, and:

'strongly urged them to conform to the Methodist discipline; by paying quarterage; which before they had not paid...'

2

From 1815, O'Bryan's truly independent missionings began, and this area became an obvious target for the early Bible Christian preachers. A circuit was established in the east based on Michaelstow, and a second in the west, in 1820, centred on St. Ervan, which had profitted from O'Bryan's earlier work. By the early 1820s, a handful of preaching places had been established, a class at Wadebridge was said to be 'alive to God', and a small preaching room had been set up in Bodmin.³

And yet, the work developed very slowly after a flurry of

1. A.M.B.C., ii (1823) p.74.

2. Ibid., p.74, p.83.

3. A.M.B.C., i (1822) pp.107-12, pp.140-6.; Bourne, Bible Christians, p.164.; Thorne, Memoir of William Reed, p.18.

excitement in the late 1810s. During the 1820s, around four chapels or preaching rooms only were built, with perhaps four more in the 1830s. By 1831, less than 1% of the local population had become Bible Christian members, and by 1841, only 1.4%. The Bible Christians faced the same difficulties in making entries into 'improved' agricultural parishes as the Wesleyans had done, and the degree to which the latter opposed them by focusing on their 'ranting', demonstrated their own dependence, in a region with no real tradition of religious 'excitement', on appearing restrained and respectable.¹

Moreover, a specific 'constituency' from which the Bible Christians could draw support did not exist in the region as a whole in the 1810s and 1820s. As in Region 4, local rural class divides often remained blurred before at least the 1830s, and though Wesleyan worship might be restrained and formal, its appeal was not yet class-based. In the Camelford circuit baptismal register, which covers mostly the 1820s and 1830s, 17.3% of fathers were described as farmers or yeomen, and 18.7% as merchants and tradesmen in the towns. But a significantly high proportion (21.3%) were classified as labourers, along with 28% artisans, and 8% husbandmen.²

A letter from the Bodmin superintendent to Jabez Bunting in 1820, explained the financial predicament of the circuit:

'It is true, that we have two families in Bodmin who are said to be rich, but both have very strong prejudices against the expence attending the preaching and the rest in Bodmin and out of it, with very few exceptions, are miserably poor. In the different parts of the Circuit, our members are

1. Shaw, Methodism in Camelford, p.161.

2. See Table 20 at end of Chapter.

generally either streamers or farm servants, working for 14d. per day, and frequently out of employment.'

1

The position of the Bible Christians improved gradually from the late 1830s, as local class divisions in the countryside began to harden. Between 1851 and 1871, they secured a level of support consistently above 2% of the total population. In the Michaelstow circuit we are told that the majority of members were farmworkers and quarrymen, while the circuit baptismal register records 52.4% of fathers as labourers. In the part of the St. Columb circuit in this region, 45.6% of fathers were labourers.²

Increasingly, as in Region 5, it would appear that the Bible Christian chapel began to function as a labourers' refuge as rural change intensified. Regular small-scale revivals punctuated the period - in 1826/7, 1834/5, 1838/9 in St. Ervan, in 1837 in Michaelstow, in 1847/8 in St. Columb and Michaelstow - which, especially in the latter case, coincided with rural distress and hardship.³ Revivalism, nonetheless, was steadily replaced by emigration as the ultimate means of escape.

The most interesting and distinctive development within local Methodism, in fact, was the rise of Free Methodism. Wesleyan membership hovered around 3% of the total population for the whole of the period from 1801 to 1871, yet total Methodist support in the region rose sharply from the 1830s. The gainers were the Wesleyan

1. 'John Hodson - Jabez Bunting Bodmin 12 Sep. 1820', M.C.A. MS.HP 54.46.2.
2. See Table 20.
3. Bourne, Bible Christians, p. 167.; Higgs, Living Christianity, pp. 34-7.

Methodist Association. In 1835 a massive secession took place from the Camelford circuit which decimated the Wesleyan cause from Wadebridge to the north and east. The schism was by far the most serious in the county, with 604 out of 655 members leaving the Connexion, which comprised all of the societies in this region, although a rump in Wadebridge and Port Isaac returned to the Plan within a year.¹ Altogether, twenty nine out of thirty three chapels and preaching places in the circuit were taken over by the Association, and right up to Methodist reunion in 1932 only Wadebridge, Port Isaac, Longstone, Rock, and Burlawn had Wesleyan societies in this part of the circuit.

The split was largely inspired and engineered by one man, Thomas Rosevear, a wealthy merchant and prominent lay member from Boscastle, to the north of the region, but the specific local Methodist environment determined the level of his success. In the first place, despite the fact that circuit organisation was refined and extended in the first decade of the 19th century, Connexional control over certain aspects of local Methodism remained restricted, partly because the extensive nature of the circuit prevented personal supervision of chapel affairs, and partly because of the low Connexional priority accorded to the region in general. As a result, although evolving chapel worship may have been to Connexional taste, a strong spirit of local autonomy in matters of chapel administration remained.

Open conflict within the region was first unleashed when the Connexion sought to extend its control over the chapels by ensuring

1. Shaw, Methodism in Camelford, p.73ff.

that chapel deeds were drawn up and enrolled on the lines of the New Model Deed of 1832. Rosevear responded, and opened his campaign against Connexional interference, by arguing that to abide by Conference ruling on this matter was tantamount to surrendering property belonging to 'us' to 'them'.¹ When the secession eventually occurred, the superintendent reported the fact that out of nineteen chapels in the circuit, only eleven had been made over on the Conference Plan. But even in the enrolled chapels, the trustees provided the critical backbone of support for the Association cause. On a simple, practical level, in ten out of eleven enrolled chapels, the superintendent could not gain admittance once the dispute exploded, because of 'the secretion of the keys.'² Whereas further west the enormous influence of class leaders ensured that a number of Connexional disputes centred on disciplinary and devotional matters, here the local control of trustees focused attention on chapel government.

The fact that a dissenting consciousness had been fostered amongst Methodist lay officers by the strong Anglican environment in which they operated probably also contributed to the dispute. In Rosevear's case (and he was certainly not unique), the repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts (1828) and the Municipal Corporations Act (1834), had signalled a change in the political climate at the national level, which provided the Methodist lay officiate at the local level with the real hope of matching their

1. Ibid. pp. 75-6.

2. Aquila Barber, 'History of the Rise and Progress of the Dissensions among the Wesleyan Methodists in the Camelford Circuit, Cornwall', p. 214. M.C.A. MS. PLP Diaries Box A-Bard.

influential status within the chapels with a more prominent and respected role in local secular society and politics.¹ Connexional attempts to undermine the control of local laymen, therefore, came at just that point where expectations were rising of utilising their solid base as chapel leaders to make substantive progress in local society. In a sense, the local secession was symptomatic of a growing political awareness and self-confidence amongst local lay leaders, and represented their determination to consolidate perceived gains made in 1828 and 1834. A number of links were forged between the seceders and political radicalism. Association supporters were referred to locally as 'Radical Political Religionists', their chapel at Camelford as the 'Political' chapel. One itinerant described the leaders of the secession as followers of Tom Paine, while the local radical M.P., Sir William Molesworth, reputedly an infidel, became a shareholder in the Wadebridge chapel.²

But although 'nearly all the people of property and influence seceded with Mr. Rosevear', so too did the rank- and - file membership. The secession not only reflected the heightened ambitions of lay leaders, but demonstrated dramatically their level of popular support. Latent class divisions, inasmuch as they existed, were overcome by appeals and considerations to overarching bonds of community and Cornish identity which tied the congregations together. Rosevear's critical circular to the local

1. T. Shaw, 'Thomas Pope Rosevear', J.C.M.H.A. Vol. 7 no. 2 (1986), p. 73.

2. Barber, 'History of the Rise and Progress', M.C.A. MS. pp. 326-7, p. 340.; Early Victorian Methodism, ed. Ward p. 232.n.

preachers in February 1835, which invited them to rise en masse against the superintendent, played cleverly upon a range of popular perceptions and prejudices, from a sense of Cornish 'nationalism' to a popular dissenting consciousness; from anti-Catholic prejudice to an identification of local Methodism as 'theirs':

'Hear this, all ye Local Preachers ! Ye disinterested, unpaid, Sabbath-day labourers in the Gospel Vineyard ! and begin to ask yourselves, - In what Land do I dwell? In Popedom, or in the Land of Religious Freedom?? The crime charged is, in short, that deadly offence committed at our last Quarterly Meeting against their High Mightinesses, the Lords of Conference, in advocating the Civil and Religious Liberties of all the King's subjects, together with the right of Petition, which the King himself denies to none... Now, my esteemed Friends, my appeal lies at your door. Will you allow this stranger - I ask you "one and all" - will you allow this "Stranger to our soil" thus to treat your elder Brother..'

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In 1837, four ministers were appointed to the Association circuit for Camelford and Wadebridge, with only Manchester receiving more. By 1844, the circuit was the strongest in the denomination, with 1511 members.² Thereafter, the local cause began to face difficulties, due partly to problems relating to the administration of an increasingly unwieldy circuit, and partly to the onset of local agricultural depression from the late-1840s. Nonetheless, in the north of the region Free Methodism secured the overwhelming support of the local Methodist constituency to the end of our period.

1. Barber, op.cit., pp.101-2.

2. Beckerlegge, Free Methodism, p.10.

Region 7 :

Most county historians and visitors in the 19th century tended to view this region as containing little of note. In the south, the Bodmin moors filled the huge parishes of St. Breward, Altarnun, St. Neot, Cardinham, and Blisland, while to the north the cluster of smaller parishes also contained much dreary wasteland. One visitor, impressed by the romantic legends and location of Bottreaux castle in Boscastle, nonetheless concluded that:

'No situation can more forcibly impress the mind with its absence from what is called "the world", in all shapes. Everything seemed in repose; even names bore evidence to it, for over the first door we saw was, "Francis Sleep, hosier" in large letters.'

1

The same visitor walked for three hours on the Bodmin moors without meeting a soul, and although the southern parishes were especially bleak, the region overall was only sparsely populated. Local population, in fact, doubled between 1779 and 1841, (from 7645 to 15156) but the proportion of the county's inhabitants in the region nonetheless declined steadily from 5.5% in 1779 to 4.4% in 1871. The rise in population over the period, in fact, was largely confined to a handful of parishes, in particular St. Teath, where the development of the Delabole slate quarry more than doubled parochial population between 1821 and 1851. More typical was the parish with a small population which varied little in size throughout the period. Thirteen out of the twenty three parishes in the

1. Redding, Illustrated Itinerary, p.30.

region had under 500 inhabitants for virtually the whole of the period; ten of these had under 300. This partly reflected the generally poor productivity of the soil in agrarian terms, and the relative absence of alternative economic pursuits, beyond the Delabole quarry and a little tin mining. But it was also due to the fact that Duchy ownership of large tracts of the region contributed to a considerable stability in landholding and land use. In Michaelstow, it was noted: 'Its lands, being chiefly included in the duchy exhibit an uniformity in their descent from generation to generation.'¹

The population, in general, was strung out across the landscape in hamlets and farmsteads, engaged for the most part in subsistence farming. Very few estates of note were cultivated; the county history in 1814 listed just eight 'gentlemen's seats' in the region.² Towns, such as they were, tended to be small, dreary, and inconsequential. Camelford, the key market town for the area, was described in the 1820s as a place of little trade, in the 1840s as presenting a scene of 'more than customary dulness.'³ By the 1860s, it had risen somewhat in stature and substance, acquiring a number of the mid-Victorian trappings of municipal improvement: a town hall, new market house, free school, head Post Office, banking office, court house, and - of course - chapels.⁴ But the town and parish had only 1740 inhabitants at its peak in 1851.

Boscastle, the other local market town, was smaller and poorer, while

1. Hitchens and Drew, History of Cornwall, ii p.486.
2. Lysons, Magna Britannia, p.clxxv-clxxviii.
3. Redding, op.cit., p.41.
4. See Wilson, Imperial Gazetteer, 'Camelford'.

Tintagel, Bossiney, and St. Neot were little beyond villages. The basic poverty of local trade in agriculture or mining products, coupled with the absence of local industry explain this lack of urbanisation. The sole exception, again, was Delabole in St. Teath, where the slate quarry stimulated the rapid growth of settlement around its southern and western rim.

Methodism developed from three distinct bases and impulses in the region. In the most compact and agricultural parishes in the north east and along the coast, George Thomson's work and influence created an environment partly open to evangelical preaching. In St. Gennys, both Charles and John Wesley preached in the parish church on several occasions between 1744 and 1753, though early Methodism here tended to revitalize the Church, rather than produce dissenting splinters. By 1789, in fact, only one specifically Methodist society existed, in Tintagel, which itself only dated from around 1784.¹ This was despite a warning to the Bishop of Exeter from the master of the charity school in Bossiney in 1748, that the local vicar was non-resident, which left room for the Methodists 'most of whose teachers are poor Mechanicks and ignorant of orthodox Doctrine, having neither sense nor coherence in their discourse.'² The basic facts of Anglican vigilance and a pre-existing Evangelical tradition (however weak), combined with the inhibiting parochial factors of small populations and slow-paced social change, severely restricted Methodist growth in this part of the region in the 18th century.

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1. Shaw, Methodism in Camelford, p. 25.
 2. 'William Callow - Bishop of Exeter, 1748', R.I.C. MS. T. Shaw, 'Files: Places', 'Bossiney'.

On the great moorland expanses in the south of the region progress was also slow. Methodism began on the moors by accident, as it were, when John Nelson and John Downes, travelling in advance of John Wesley, stopped off at a cottage in Trewint, Altarnun for refreshment, and were invited to preach.¹ Digory and Elizabeth Isbel became Methodists while remaining Anglicans, and their cottage was the foundation of Methodist advance in the south-east of the region. By 1801, however, no society as yet existed outside Altarnun, largely because the Methodists lacked the resources to mission such an extensive, but thinly-inhabited area.

Methodism grew as a distinct institutional religion in the region almost entirely out of small beginnings in the town of Camelford. As the prime market town and concentration of population in the locality, as well as a convenient resting-point on the journey to the west, Camelford became the only significant site at which Wesley preached in the region. Between 1748 and 1757, he preached five times in the streets, and in 1760 he met the fledgling society he had stimulated into existence.² Though membership remained small into the 19th century (around 1783, the society was meeting in 'a chamber'; in 1807, 59 members were recorded),³ the Camelford society was of great strategic and practical importance for local Methodist growth. It was served by itinerant preachers, on a round which covered almost the whole of

1. Wesleys in Cornwall, pp. 65-6.; Herbert Bolitho, Truly Rural. Lights and Shadows on the History of North Hill Circuit 1743-1946, Leeds, 1947, p. 7.

2. Wesleys in Cornwall, p. 132.

3. M.M., xxxix (1816) p. 324.; 'Subscriptions and Members, Camelford Circuit 1807-35', C.R.O. MS.

the eastern half of the county, and acted both as a filter and a magnet to the surrounding parishes, issuing forth preachers and tracts, and attracting the religiously curious, and 'serious'. By 1789, Methodism had been filtered into Michaelstow, St. Breward, and especially St. Teath, where societies had been formed. By the opposite process, a young woman converted in the 1740s (not by the Methodists) in the outlying parish of Lanteglos, first exhorted her neighbours to repent, and then sought the support of institutionalised religion, which she found in the shape of the Methodist society in Camelford. Having joined the society, she established a satellite class in her own village of Trewalder, which in turn became a society.¹

In 1789, the Camelford society acquired a chapel, which served further to stimulate Methodist propagation, and by the early 19th century perhaps fifteen societies existed in the region, of which ten were in the Camelford area, and a further three on the itinerant preachers' trail from St. Austell to Camelford. The two other societies, in St. Gennys and Altarnun, remained in isolation, surrounded by fourteen parishes, in the north-east and on the Bodmin moors, where no Methodist society had been established by 1801.

This pattern of early Methodist dissemination partly reflected the variable parochial conditions which prevailed across the region. Methodism took root in the relatively more populous west of the region, where trade and commerce, (and the growing quarrying concern at Delabole) indicated a degree of economic vitality. By

1. A.M., x(1787) pp. 631-3.

contrast, it was as yet excluded from the vast but largely unpopulated moorlands to the south and east, and from the relatively compact and slow-moving agricultural parishes in the east.

It also reflected the rudimentary level of Methodist organisation in the area at this time. Most of the region was still part of the St. Austell circuit at the beginning of the 19th century, and although the preachers occasionally ventured into the parishes in the north-east, establishing a temporary preaching place in Warbstow in the 1790s, for example, for the most part they were practically forced to concentrate their efforts on the town society in Camelford and its immediate environs. The moors in the south-east were in theory within the orbit of the equally extensive Launceston circuit, but inevitably the itinerant preachers had neither time nor inclination to mission this remote part of the circuit.

Taken together, these factors help explain why Methodism was still weak in the region by 1801, and why, though at least four chapels existed by that point, most Methodist societies still met in farms and cottages, supported by only the bare outlines of Connexional structures.

During the first decade of the 19th century, radical circuit reorganisation was undertaken to improve pastoral provision in the whole of east Cornwall. The divisions made were based on a rational assessment of present needs and practical future expectations, and overall they led to vastly extended pastoral oversight and a substantial rise in local membership. However, in

practice, they tended to underscore the variable support for Methodism within this region, by effectively curtailing future evangelism. The northern parishes were contained within a circuit based on Camelford, which stretched several miles both to the north and south, but because the overwhelming preponderance of members were located in, and to the south of Camelford, the north-eastern area simply remained neglected by the itinerant preachers. Perhaps more importantly, the rest of the region was divided between three circuits, each of which had its station, and the bulk of its support, outside the district: Bodmin in the west, Liskeard in the south, Launceston in the east. This had the simple, but dramatic effect of marginalising the vast area of the Bodmin moors, and of ensuring that the whole moorland region rarely saw Wesleyan itinerants in the 19th century.

Within the Camelford circuit, the Connexional emphasis from the first was on consolidation. A circuit plan for 1810 shows that the itinerants were visiting no place additional to those where societies had been formed in the 18th century.¹ By 1811, all these now well-established societies had chapels, and Wesleyan membership in the six parishes around Camelford represented 5.2% of the total local population.² In the eight parishes to the north, on the other hand, all with populations between 100 and 250, no Methodist membership had as yet been recorded. Over the next two decades a few tentative beginnings were made. In Trevalga, a house was

1. 'Subscriptions and Members, Camelford Circuit 1807-35', C.R.O. MS.

2. The parishes of Lanteglos, St. Gennys, Minster, Tintagel, St. Teath, Michaelstow.

licensed for Methodist meetings in 1812, although local supporters continued attending the parish church, and no society was listed until 1829. In the parishes contiguous to the Camelford neighbourhood - Davidstow, St. Breward, and Advent - Methodism was gradually, if sparsely disseminated. But further east, in Warbstow, for example, various attempts to form societies in the 1820s and 1830s folded very quickly.¹

In general, few attempts were actually made to mission the small north-eastern parishes, the conclusion apparently having been reached within circuit leadership circles that such efforts were bound to go unrewarded. Instead, the cause centred on the west, and in particular on the two burgeoning town societies of Camelford and Boscastle. Analysis of father's occupations in the circuit baptismal book for the period 1800-37 reveals strong support from tradesmen (especially in the cloth trade) in the towns, composing almost one-quarter of entries, with labourers (19.9%) and quarrymen (16.5%) making up a hard core of members in the surrounds.² Probably because so many of the local societies were essentially satellites of the two town societies, when Rosevear led the movement of protest against the Connexion from Boscastle in 1834, all eighteen local societies seceded to the Association.

This might seem like promising soil for the Bible Christians, simply from the point of Wesleyan evangelical lassitude,

1. T. Shaw, 'Files: Places', R.I.C. MS. 'Trevalga'; 'Subscriptions and Members, Camelford Circuit 1807-35', C.R.O. MS.; 'Camelford Wesleyan Circuit Account Book 1811-66', C.R.O. MS. MR/CW/14.; 'Robert Bentham - Richard Reece Launceston 23 July 1836', M.C.A. MS. PLP 8.37.1.
2. See Table 20.

and certainly they set out to mission the region extensively in the late 1810s and 1820s. Their initial circuit organisation gave them structures for pastoral oversight which, in theory at least, were superior to those of the Wesleyans. Most importantly, they immediately divided the northern half of the region, establishing one circuit based on Michaelstow in the west, and a second based on Carnworthywater in the east. They also chose to locate the station of their circuit in the south actually on the moors, in St. Neot. Thus, the Bible Christians from the first chose to link the provision of their preaching much closer to the natural topographical and other divisions in the region than the Wesleyans had done.

Nonetheless, early experiences of Bible Christian preachers varied from one circuit to the next, and in general tended to reflect pre-existing patterns of Wesleyan evangelism. Where the Wesleyans were strongest, in the north west, the Bible Christians also achieved most immediate success, establishing about twelve societies by the early 1820s. In the north-east, by contrast, they faced initial opposition and persecution. In St. Gennys in 1825, for example, two clergymen attempted to ride off without paying a Bible Christian blacksmith for shoeing their horses, and upon being restrained they horsewhipped him and his son, and 'reviled him for being a Dissenter.'¹ In the south, also, early progress was slow, with the natural obstructions of geography rather than man-made persecution explaining why perhaps only two small societies had been formed by the early 1820s.

1. 'William O'Bryan Journal' M.C.A. MS. 23 May 1825.

Ultimately, it is true, the more intensive missioning and pastoral potential of the Bible Christians' circuit organisation paid off to an extent. According to the 1851 Census, the Bible Christians obtained a level of support across the Bodmin moors which was consistently higher than that of the Wesleyans, while in the north-east, they had broken through in two parishes - Lesnewth and Treneglos - to such an extent that I. A.s of over 40% were recorded.¹ Too much ought not to be made of these impressions, however. In a number of the parishes in the north-east, no Bible Christian services took place on Census Sunday, despite improved pastoral coverage, while on the moors, the actual level of Bible Christian support - with I.A.s in the range 10-19% - though better than those of the Wesleyans, still did not demonstrate anything approaching widespread popular attachment.

The simple fact was that where the Wesleyans had calculated that the general environment in the north-east and the south would militate against Methodist expansion, the Bible Christians learned the truth of the calculation by personal experience. In the north-east, for example, they did gradually overcome initial opposition to some extent during the 1830s, when local membership rose from approximately 1.2% of the total local population in 1831 to around 3.0% in 1841. But the simple, practical impossibility of maintaining a circuit based on Carnworthwater, which attracted such a low membership base (by 1841, after gains during the decade, there were still probably just under one hundred members in the area), ensured that as early as 1825 Carnworthywater had ceased to

1. See Maps 3 and 4 above.

be a circuit station, with the task of providing pastoral oversight for the area falling on the preachers from Week St. Mary, well to the east. In the south, also, the relatively small finite membership that could be gathered led inevitably to the shutting down of the station in St. Neot, and its removal to Liskeard in 1845.

Even in the north-west, where the Bible Christians did best, practical priorities tended to blunt the evangelising zeal of pastorate and congregations at a significantly early date. Great membership gains were made during the 1820s, so that by 1831 an estimated 4% of local inhabitants had become Bible Christian members. But the actual fall in the proportion of Wesleyans locally over the same decade suggests that in part the Bible Christians simply tapped into the pre-existing Wesleyan constituency. To disaffected Wesleyans in the societies surrounding Camelford, they offered an opportunity for an alternative chapel life not dominated or controlled by merchants from the town. Bible Christian membership was composed of far fewer merchants and tradesmen than that of the Wesleyans (only 4.8% of fathers in the circuit baptismal register), while on the other hand, the proportion of labourers (30.9%) and quarrymen (30.3%) was much higher.¹

But after this strong start up to 1831, subsequent levels of Bible Christian membership rarely rose down to 1871. In part, this was because the onset of emigration locally began very early, with the circuit report in 1831 already mentioning the loss of two local preachers to the United States.² In part, it reflected the arrival

1. See Table 20.

2. Michaelstow Circuit Report, 1831, in 'Bible Christian Minutes of the Devonport District Meeting 1825-1857' R.I.C. MS. Thomas Shaw Transcript.

of heightened denominational competition in the region following the massive secession to the Association in the mid-1830s. But it was also due to the fact that circuit leaders, just like their Wesleyan counterparts, almost immediately identified the existence of a quite limited constituency of support in the locality, and began to focus on the means for consolidating the gains made during the 1820s, rather than on further sustained evangelism. During the 1830s, the circuit reports have a remarkably 'Wesleyan' ring, with considerable emphasis on the need to build more chapels and Sunday schools, to concentrate on removing chapel debts, and to educate their pastorate.¹ By so doing, it would seem, they hoped to compete with the local Wesleyan and Association chapels on the basis of equality, rather than as sectarians offering 'alternative' religion.

Inevitably, there were those within the congregations opposed to such an early slide into formalism. The circuit reports throughout the 1830s and early 1840s also catalogued with regularity the many 'unpleasant occurrences',² which took place within local societies. In 1845, the circuit report was for the first time explicit: 'The subject of dispute is one of the drinking system. Some of the Preachers are Teetotalers and some drinkers...but the great bone of contention is public house drinking, which some persist in.'³ The teetotal cause at the grass - roots level could be espoused by those anxious to display their continued sectarianism socially, and to issue protest at the increasingly administrative rather than spiritual preoccupations of the circuit leadership.

1. Ibid., see e.g. 'To lay before Conference, 1836'.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

The teetotal issue, it would seem, could split Bible Christian congregations just as well as Wesleyan ones.

Region 8 :

This region was overwhelmingly rural and agricultural. Nearly half of the parishes had less than 500 inhabitants throughout the period, and only four had consistently over 1000. The only significant towns were Launceston in the south, Stratton - and later Bude - in the north. Launceston had some strategic importance as a 'gateway' to the county, but also served local civic and market functions, as well as supporting a coarse woollen cloth manufactory. Stratton was the market town for the northern half of the region, although in terms of size it was steadily overtaken in the first half of the 19th century by Bude, which developed both as a port, and (especially) as a seaside resort, first during the Napoleonic Wars.¹ By the early 1840s, a visitor to the town was relieved that no crowded promenade was in existence, but nonetheless sensed 'that pretension, - the sin of ignorance and the taint of English society, - was budding here.'²

The rise of Bude in a sense served to illustrate the economic transformation of the region during the period. In the mid - to late - 18th century, though farms were generally small, the local agricultural economy was stable, and, where soils were good, which meant, on the whole, in the south of the region, some improvement had been undertaken. Borlase described the country around Launceston as 'well peopled and cultivated'; Maton as 'on the borders of a pleasing and cultivated country.'³ In the north, though

1. Balchin, Cornwall, pp.93-4.

2. Redding, Illustrated Itinerary, p.25.

3. Borlase, Natural History, p.47.; Maton, Observations, p.265.

Fraser in the 1790s found most of Stratton hundred to be waste and bog, large amounts of marginal land were brought under cultivation during the Napoleonic Wars.¹

But the post-war depression hit local farming interests extremely hard, and in the period to 1850 the local economy was found to be far less stable and far more vulnerable than had been apparent in the 18th century. In the early 1830s, the first farm labourers began to emigrate to the United States, with no alternative employment being available locally – a point Borlase had actually been careful to point out in the rather more prosperous 1750s.² Some attempts were made to revitalize the local economy: by developing Bude as a port, and in particular by constructing the Bude Canal (1826), which both linked Launceston to the coast, and allowed sand to be transported inland to serve as manure.³ But for the region as a whole, the depression had a fundamental impact. Inevitably, social tensions and divisions were made more explicit in the rural parishes after 1815, as small farmers were forced to the wall, and larger farmers sought to cut costs and increase productivity. Local social change was rapid and as early as the 1840s, emigration had appeared precipitously as the ultimate culmination of economic trends.⁴

Social change had a dramatic effect on local religious

1. Fraser, General View, p.26.; Rowe, Hard-Rock Men, p.31.
2. Borlase, op.cit., p.47.
3. Redding, op.cit., p.13, p.25.
4. The 1831 Census provides the first explicit allusion to emigration for the region, but the 1851 Census indicated that emigration had been widespread across the region during the 1840s. P.P. 1833 xxxvi pp.70-81.; P.P. 1852-3 lxxxv pp.56-65.

practice. In 1779, the Church of England recorded high levels of attendance across the region; higher overall, in fact, than in any other region, with three-quarters of returns indicating communicant density levels above 20%. The area appeared as prime Anglican territory, with small parochial populations, agriculturally improved land, and perhaps above all a number of 'nucleated' parishes, especially in the north, where the church-town stood out as the single significant settlement within the parish bounds.

Against this background, Methodist evangelism in the 18th century was extremely limited. John Wesley paid scant attention to an area where the Church was obviously holding its own. Both Wesleys preached in the parish churches of North Tamerton, Laneast, and Tresmere, at the invitation of John Bennet, but after Bennet's death in 1750 the visits ceased, except for a single call on Tresmere in 1751.¹ No Methodist society was formed as a result of these initiatives and similarly, having preached several times within the parish of Week St. Mary at the invitation of the rector, John Turner, no Methodist society appeared.²

It was only to the town of Launceston that Wesley made frequent visits - nineteen in all - , and where an autonomous Methodist society grew up as a result. In 1751, Wesley first referred to preaching in 'the room', although the isolation of the small society within the town, without any Methodist network locally, meant that in 1760 Wesley found 'the small remains of a dead, scattered society.'³ However, having revived the cause in that

1. Davies, Early Cornish Evangelicals, pp.40-50.

2. Wesleys in Cornwall p.84.

3. Ibid., p.111, p.132.

year, Wesley could reflect more optimistically on the building of the first chapel in 1764, and twenty-five years later, in the final Cornish entry in his Journal, he reported preaching in the 'new house at Launceston, still too small for the congregation, who seemed exceedingly lively.'¹

Elsewhere, however, few societies existed by this time, with a generally hostile Anglican environment probably restricting evangelism.² Small beginnings had been made in several parishes in the south, the result of preaching and piecemeal missioning from the local societies in Launceston and Altarnun, and the cause was also assisted by circuit re-organisation, especially when Launceston was made head of an extensive circuit in 1794. Once again, in a rural area, the society in the market town gradually attracted the religiously 'serious' from the surrounding parishes: in 1779, for example, a farmer from Lawhitton was reported to attend meetings in Launceston with regularity.³ But by this time, there were only about seven societies in the region located within five southern parishes, and only Launceston had a chapel.⁴

With the improved pastoral administration provided by the circuit re-organisation in 1794, about fourteen societies had been fostered by 1801. Most remained in the south, where eight out of fifteen parishes had been infiltrated by 1801, returning approximately 3.1% of the total local population as Methodist

1. Ibid. p.170.

2. e.g. The incumbent of Whitstone described the Methodists as 'disguised Papists' in 1779, 'Bishop Ross's Visitation Articles, 1779-Replies to Queries', D.R.O. MS.

3. Ibid. 'Lawhitton'.

4. see Bolitho, Truly Rural, pp.7-11.

members. In the north, by contrast, just three out of twelve parishes possessed a Methodist society, and membership stood at 1.6% of local population. This variation in support simply reflected the fact that virtually all effort had been put into missioning the parishes immediately surrounding Launceston, partly because of their proximity, but also because inhibiting parochial factors were generally less severe. Even in Stratton, the main town in the north, for example, although a Methodist society had been established, it was impossible to persuade any landowner to grant a plot of land for a chapel. Ultimately, a local Methodist actually bid for property in the main street without declaring the purpose to which it would be put.¹

But overall, in fact, Methodism had made only slight impression by 1801, and perhaps an interesting commentary on the sense of isolation in an Anglican environment which local Methodists must have felt, is provided by the fact that the Launceston society was the first in the county to request the administration of the sacrament.² Three further local societies had followed Launceston's lead by 1802. Administration of the sacrament within local chapels appeared not only as a necessary token of the legitimacy of Methodist worship, but also symbolised the autonomy of Methodist members from the Anglican Church, in a way which seemed far more important here than in the west, where Anglicanism held less sway.

Successful petitioning for the sacrament, along with further circuit division (the northern half of the region acquired 'home

1. Christophers, Foolish Dick, pp.102-3.

2. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, London, 1862, i p.310.

mission' status in 1809), helped the development of local denominational definition and assurance. However, the prevailing mood of the circuit leadership in the first two decades of the 19th century was probably consolidatory rather than expansionist. Hence, membership in the Launceston circuit rose only slowly after 1801, reaching 488 by 1815. Thereafter, however, membership grew at an unprecedented rate in the locality. Circuit membership reached 600 in 1816, 730 in 1817, and peaked (for the time) at 760 in 1820.¹ By 1821, an estimated 5.7% of inhabitants in the southern parishes had become Methodist members.

Although evidence to link the growth of rural Methodism directly to the onset of economic depression is sparse, the fact that Methodist fortunes locally began to change after 1815 suggests the two were bound in some way. Methodism made inroads during this period into a number of new parishes in the south, significantly those which were smaller in terms of population and acreage than those already with a Methodist society. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly the mechanism of Methodist spread, or indeed the social function which Methodist membership may have performed in rural communities. On the one hand, it might simply be argued that the social unease after 1815 temporarily disrupted traditional rural 'consensus' (or forms of 'social control'), and allowed Methodist preachers opportunities where previously they had faced strenuous opposition. On the other, it is probable that, as elsewhere, a heightened perception of social change induced an increased and more immediate religious 'need', which could be met

1. Circuit figures listed in Ibid.

effectively both by Methodist conversion and worship.

Unfortunately, no occupational breakdown of membership for this period has survived, but it may be surmised that Methodism found its prime constituency between 1815 and 1820 among small farmers and labourers. This is perhaps borne out by the fact that membership dipped in the early 1820s, indicating not only that specific economic circumstances, which had hit the small farmer and labourer hardest, induced some temporary 'conversion' after 1815, but also that many Methodist societies by that time retained a dissenting, socially 'deviant' image within rural communities, which precipitated recurrent opposition once economic normality had been restored. In several instances, for example, the location of a class or society within a parish was forcibly shifted, particularly during the 1820s. In the case of the parish of Tremaine, a small class established in the churchtown in 1815, survived for just two years, and subsequently met in six outlying locations, until it finally became possible to build a chapel in the churchtown in 1846.¹

Wesleyan fortunes revived, however, during the 1830s. In 1831, approximately 4.2% of inhabitants in the south were Wesleyan members, but by 1841 the proportion had reached 6.8%. A similar level of support was then retained until 1871, so that it might be said that during the 1830s local Wesleyanism acquired a more

1. see 'Launceston Wesleyan Circuit Collection Book 1801-26' C.R.O. MS. MR/L/14.; 'Launceston Wesleyan Circuit Preachers Book of Accounts, 1828-34' C.R.O. MS. MR/L/16.; 'Launceston Wesleyan Circuit Schedule Books 1839-70' C.R.O. MS. MR/L/22-4. Also see Lawrence Maker, Cob and Moorstone. The Curious History of Some Cornish Methodist Churches, London, 1935, pp. 59-61.

permanent status within the parishes in general. While perhaps only six chapels had been built in the southern parishes before 1830, during the 1830s and especially the 1840s, a further six appeared. The expansion of the cause perhaps reflected the effects of the next stage of rural transformation, as medium-sized farmers, under increasing economic pressure, signified their detachment from the traditional rural hierarchy by abandoning the Church for the chapel. The process had begun during the 1820s with a mounting campaign against tithes in the area, which was set in motion when farmer Anthony Geake of Trecarrel, Lezant, had successfully sued the rector over a tithe of hay in a civil court, only to have the judgement overturned by an ecclesiastical court which actually sentenced him to imprisonment.¹ Tithe warfare inevitably loosened Anglican bonds within rural parishes, and provided the critical milieu which allowed Wesleyan expansion. The arrival of a Wesleyan chapel within rural parishes in the 1830s and 1840s served not only to highlight the breakdown of traditional social controls or consensus, but symbolised the challenge of the more substantial farmers to established social authority.²

There was a similar pattern of growth in the northern parishes, though for a variety of reasons Wesleyanism came to exert less of a social influence in these parts. By 1801, there was only a negligible Methodist presence of around three societies, and the

1. Rowe, Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution, pp. 243-4.
2. E.J. Evans, The Contentious Tithe. The tithe problem and English agriculture 1750-1850, London, 1976, p. 76, p. 73.; W.R. Ward, 'The Tithe Question in England in the early 19th century', J.E.H. xvi (1965) p. 69.

creation of the Stratton mission in 1809 provided preachers with their first real opportunities to visit a number of local parishes.

Nonetheless, despite improved pastoral administration, real growth, as in the south, did not occur until 1815. In the spring of that year, local membership rose from 93 to 138, and two years later reached 225.¹ These may appear as insignificant figures, but they represent the beginnings of dramatic changes in religious behaviour in the region. The proportion of Wesleyans in the local population actually doubled from around 1% in 1811 to 2.1% in 1821. As in the south, the next decade witnessed little change, but during the 1830s, again, rapid growth occurred, taking membership levels from approximately 3.2% in 1831 to 4.5% in 1841. Thereafter, a similar proportion of the local population was retained in membership down to 1871.

The lower base level of Wesleyan support in these parts is explicable partly by relation to the relative lateness in the development of a Methodist cause, and partly by the subsequent poverty of pastoral provision. From 1818, the Stratton mission was incorporated in a circuit based on Holsworthy in Devon, and that circuit was later divided in 1839 with the formation of the Kilkhampton circuit. But despite re-organisation, the basic difficulties inherent in providing adequate pastoral coverage for a vast rural area, which stretched several miles into Devon, and which contained scattered populations linked by poor communications, were never sufficiently overcome. At the same time, there was a smaller

1. 'Stratton Mission/Holsworthy Circuit 1811-24 Circuit Accounts, Membership Lists', C.R.O. MS. DDX/334/19.

and less clearly defined emergent class of larger farmers to compose the basic constituency of Wesleyan support from the 1830s. Class lines tended to remain more blurred than in the south, with a good deal of local land being of a lower quality, and less readily 'improved'. And connecting all of these points was the fact that the Wesleyans in these parts faced far greater competition from the Bible Christians.

This northern tip of the county, merging into Devon, was in fact the official birthplace of the Bible Christians. During 1814, O'Bryan discovered that there were fourteen parishes in north-east Cornwall and north-west Devon without evangelical preaching, and in January 1815 he set out on his third personal mission to a neglected area of the county. By October, he had been formally excluded from the Wesleyan Connexion for the last time, and consequently he began organising the classes and societies which he had fostered into an independent circuit plan. His impact was apparently immediate and widespread, and his first plan already included meetings in the Cornish parishes of North Tamerton, Treneglos, Warbstow Poundstock, Week St. Mary, Marhamchurch, and Launcells.¹ At the first Quarterly Meeting of the new sect on New Years' Day 1816, 133 members were returned from five Cornish parishes, well above the 74 recorded in the Wesleyan mission at that time.² By mid-1816, the Bible Christians had established meetings in all twelve parishes in the northern part of the region and the

1. Bourne, Bible Christians, p.18, p.21.; A.M.B.C., ii(1823) pp.151-8, p.256.; Thomas Shaw, The Bible Christians, 1815-1907, London, 1965.; A Jubilee Memorial, p.23.
2. A.M.B.C, op.cit., p.267.

work 'intensified as it spread; meetings frequently lasted late - sometimes all night.'¹

The immediacy of the Bible Christian impact is probably explicable primarily in terms of the impact of the post war collapse of farm prices on the small farmer on marginal land. Social and economic tensions were kept close to breaking point by the failure of the local harvest in 1816, which O'Bryan's daughter referred to as 'very calamitous.'² Economic depression both fractured parochial communality and accentuated religious need for those at the sharp end. North-west Devon was one of the areas chosen by Valenze in her study of sectarian Methodism. Here, she argued:

'Bible Christian cottage religion gave voice to dissatisfaction and distress in the countryside - small farmers, racked by the post-war fall in prices, were surrendering to their stronger neighbours. Cottage religion became a weapon in the struggle to defy parson, magistrate and well-established farmers.'

3

Early Bible Christian activity certainly centred on one of the two key behavioural patterns identified by Valenze: a reinvocation of the spiritual functionality of the home (particularly the hearth).⁴ O'Bryan, as 'a farmer himself, ...early made his way among persons of his own class; and it was among them that his earliest and most useful converts were made.' The initial

1. Bourne, op.cit., pp.38-9.

2. 'Diary of Mary Thorne', Thomas Shaw transcript of MS. I am grateful to the Rev. Thomas Shaw for allowing me to use this source.

3. Valenze, Prophetic Sons and Daughters, p.163.

4. Ibid. p.11.

multiplication of the cause occurred from O'Bryan being invited into houses and converting whole families. He immediately discovered that 'God's house is always where the Lord's presence is', which came to mean typically the farmstead. One prominent family's cottage was referred to as the 'church in the house', or elsewhere as a 'spiritual hospital.'¹

Inevitably, there was fierce competition between Wesleyans and Bible Christians, especially in 1815 and 1816. The Wesleyans, after all, had recorded relatively dramatic gains during the first quarter of 1815, and seemed poised to harvest many more discontented small farmers. The Bible Christians, however, not only offered an alternative, but actually poached considerable numbers of recent Wesleyan converts in their initial sweep across the region. Wesleyan membership figures fell sharply from the spring of 1815, and only began to pick up again one year later. The Wesleyan superintendent complained that O'Bryan had stolen eighty members from the circuit, while Thomas Shaw has calculated, conservatively, that 30% of the first recorded Bible Christian members in 1816 were former Wesleyans.²

The competition continued, however, into the 1820s and 1830s, as the character and composition of local congregations remained quite similar. Both Wesleyans and Bible Christians, it would seem, attracted small farmers in large numbers; both depended more on cottage meetings than chapel services. In both strands of local

1. John Thorne, James Thorne of Shebbear. A Memoir, London, 1873, p.24.n., p.83.; A Jubilee Memorial, p.27-8.; Bourne, Bible Christians, p.59.

2. Shaw, Bible Christians, pp.38-40.

Methodism a series of revivals occurred, in the late 1820s and 1830s especially, which in 1829-31 and 1835-36 actually coincided. Splits between congregations only became more pronounced as rural class divisions began to appear more important and hardened.

Gradually, local Bible Christian membership shifted from a small farmer to a farm labourer constituency, though the process moved at different speeds in different parts, as father's occupations listed in circuit baptismal registers suggest.¹

1. See Table 20.

Region 9 :

This varied, extensive region ranged from moorland in the north to fishing coves and villages in the south, but was primarily rural and agricultural until the late discovery of copper deposits in Caradon, St. Cleer led to a sudden and substantial mining boom in the locality in the 1840s and 1850s. Fraser in the 1790s had described the bulk of the region, from Fowey in the west to the Tamar in the east, and stretching up to skirt the moors above the towns of Callington and Liskeard in the north, as a very fertile district, especially for wheat and barley.¹ Marshall at much the same time noted pleasurably the level of productivity and improvement in the area, pointing out that the lower lands were all enclosed, with fields well-sized and well-formed.² The richness of the soil, and the proximity of the large market of Plymouth had long since stimulated widescale enclosure, and the cultivation of some fine estates. The local historian and landowner Richard Carew had drawn attention to the degree of agricultural improvement as early as the beginning of the 17th century.³

In the late 18th century, then, the region was both prosperous and populous, its orchards and farms supporting around 13% of the county population in 1779. Liskeard stood out as the major settlement, a borough with 1860 inhabitants by 1801, whose location close to rich agricultural land made it 'one of the largest market towns in the county' in the 1790s.⁴ Saltash, in the south-east

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1. Fraser, General View, p.26.
 2. Marshall, Rural Economy, ii p.4-9.
 3. Carew, Survey, ed. Halliday, p.177, p.185.
 4. Impressions of the Old Duchy, ed. Spreadbury, pp.23-4.

corner, was a smaller market town and port, while Callington, 'a shabby place', was smaller still, 'a very small borough town of one short street of very poor houses.'¹ The only other settlements of note were on the coast, where several significant fishing ports, most notably Polperro and Looe, were located.

The degree of agricultural improvement ensured that a rural social hierarchy was well-defined and advanced in the late 18th century, although the general prosperity of the region, as well as operating parochial 'dependency systems', tended to take the heat out of latent social conflict. The Napoleonic Wars, however, began to chip away at traditional social consensus, by dislocating the pilchard trade, which caused considerable distress along the coast.² West Looe in 1809 was found to be 'a small miserable town', which, 'despoiled of its trade by war, exhibits little else at present than poverty and discontent.' After 1815, the effects of the post-war agricultural depression took distress and social discontent into the rural parishes, and during the 1820s, local population growth slowed down significantly, as local economic fortunes slumped. In the so-called 'winter of discontent' in 1830-31, Swing riots were threatened in the parish of Morval.

As in other areas, the intensification of rural discontent, and the class polarisation of parochial communities which took place gradually after 1815, had significant effects on local religious behaviour. In the Visitation returns for 1779, the Church of England had recorded an expectedly high turn-out, with one-half of

1. Ibid. p.24.; Naton, Observations, p.273.

2. e.g. see Warner, Tour through Cornwall, p.87.

the parishes producing communicant densities of over 20%, and only Liskeard and St. Germans (an extremely large and quite populous parish) standing out as examples of poor Anglican performance. By contrast, Methodism by this time had made only a few inroads; the Cornwall East circuit plan for 1784 included just six preaching places in the region, in Polperro, Liskeard, Fursnewth (St. Cleer), Pelynt, Lanreath, and Braddock.¹ John Wesley had visited the first three of these, although Liskeard, with six visits, was the only place to which he returned several times. In the east of the region, a few small beginnings had also been made in areas beyond the bounds of the Cornwall East circuit. About fourteen Methodists were reported in the hamlets and villages around Linkinhorne in 1767, Saltash had a few in 1779; in St. Germans, Methodist preaching was introduced into the parish after 1769.² But, as with other parts of east Cornwall, the spread of Methodism in the region, to a considerable extent, was contingent upon a preliminary gestation period in the major town of the region.

The combination of inhibiting social environment and rudimentary pastoral organisation again explains the overall paucity of Methodist advance in the late 18th century. On the one hand, early Methodist members and preachers faced considerable and lengthy opposition and persecution. In Liskeard, early Methodists were treated with 'utmost derision and contempt', and encountered great opposition from those in authority, along with more general assaults with dirt, rotten eggs, and stones.³ In Polperro on John Wesley's

1. Thomas Shaw, 'Files: Places', R.I.C. MS. 'Cornwall East Circuit'.

2. Proc. W.H.S., xxvi pp. 49-54.

3. J.G. Hayman, A History of the Methodist Revival of the Last Century in its Relations to North Devon, London, 1893, p. 79.; Wesley Liskeard 1846-1946. The Story of a Building, n.p., n.d., p. 3.

first visit in 1762, 'an old grey-haired sinner was bitterly cursing at the Methodists.'¹ In St.Germans, Richard Rodda was pelted with eggs by a mob in the mid-1770s, when he attempted to preach in the parish.²

On the other hand, the primitive level of Methodist organisational structures ensured that pastoral support against opposition, as well as the resources to improve local missioning, were seriously lacking. Initially, most of the region was included within the massive Cornwall East circuit, when even Liskeard, we are told, was rarely visited by the travelling preachers.³ The eastern part of the region was included in the Plymouth Dock circuit, where the situation was actually worse. Methodist beginnings here were almost entirely spontaneous and the result of local initiative. In St.Germans, for example, the arrival of a 'pious Methodist woman' to live in the parish led to the formation of a prayer meeting in her house, and a call to the circuit to send itinerants to preach.⁴

By 1801, a slight improvement in the Methodist position was apparent, and about seventeen societies were dotted across the region, but together they contained just 1.5% of the total local population as Methodist members. In around fourteen parishes, mainly grouped at the western and eastern fringes of the region, no Methodist society had as yet been formed. Pastoral oversight, in general, remained very poor, with virtually the whole of

1. Wesleys in Cornwall, p.138.

2. A.M., vii(1784) pp.465-6.

3. Hayman, op.cit., p.79.

4. Proc. W.H.S., xxix p.26.

the region now part of the circuit based on Launceston.

The partial extension to the cause which had occurred in the 1790s was sometimes due to ministerial effort. In 1792, following the revival in the St. Austell circuit, an additional preacher was supplied to the circuit who was responsible for introducing Methodism into a number of fishing villages including Polruan (Lanteglos) and East Looe.¹ But missionary activity was also almost entirely dependent on lay effort. In Saltash, Methodism only became permanently established in the 1790s, when George Coad, a local postman, invited the preachers to the town, 'himself providing food, and a room in his house for their use.'² Coad then took to himself the task of spreading the word in the small, agricultural parishes to the north of the town, accompanying preachers, distributing tracts, organising prayer meetings and occasionally exhorting. 'He preferred visiting places most distant from the parish church, or other means of public instruction. Often did he walk from three to ten miles, and return, after having taken his regular journey as postman.'³

In general, due to the local social environment, Methodism was best established in the town of Liskeard, and a few fishing villages, such as Polperro, by 1801. These two places, in fact, sheltered the only significant societies at this time, each returning memberships of 52 in 1801.⁴ Even in the towns, however, it

1. M.M., liii (1830) p. 502.

2. Oliver Henwood, A Brief Memoir of George Coad, of Saltash Cornwall, London, 1841, pp. 19-26, p. 34.

3. Ibid. p. 31.

4. 'Launceston Circuit Book 1794-1806', Shaw transcript, R.I.C. MS.

would be wrong to exaggerate the stage of development of the Methodist cause. Joseph Benson preached in Liskeard in 1795 and averred: 'Such a wild and apparently stupid congregation...I have rarely seen anywhere, and certainly not in Cornwall.' In the early 1790s, opposition from the Mayor and Bench in Saltash to the arrival of Methodist local preachers culminated in the imprisonment of one on a vagrancy charge, though he was released the next morning 'the mayor being ashamed of what he had done.'¹ Local Methodists tended to acquire a dissenting image, in part because of their paucity of numbers, mostly because of the strong Anglican environment. In several places, such as St. Germans and Looe, they had in fact depended on local Quaker assistance in establishing their societies.² But during the 1790s, dissent also acquired radical connotations in the district, which brought new hardships upon local congregations. In Liskeard, the window behind the pulpit of the new chapel opened in 1794 was smashed by a mob shouting 'Burn Trudgeon the preacher and Tom Paine.'³ The Methodist Magazine later avowed that 'at this time 1800-02 Liskeard formed the most unpromising part of the Launceston circuit owing to the influence of Paine's political and infidel principles upon the people.'⁴

In 1809, the Launceston circuit was finally divided, and Liskeard was made station of a new circuit, which although still impracticably extensive, nonetheless improved pastoral oversight in

1. Treffry, Memoirs of Joseph Benson, .205.; Henwood, op.cit., pp.20-2.
2. A.M., vii(1784) pp.465-6.; M.M., liii(1830) p.502.
3. Paul Bolitho, The Story of Methodism in the Liskeard Circuit 1751-1967, n.p., 1967, pp.4-5.; and see Wesley Liskeard 1846-1946. The Story of a Building, p.3.
4. M.M., lii(1829) pp.583-4.

the region, while perhaps just as importantly, providing the Connexion with the means to exercise far greater control over the form and composition of local Methodism. As elsewhere in the east, the primary effect of improved circuit organisation tended to be to consolidate rather than establish means to expand the local cause. By 1811, even though the actual number of societies had increased to around twenty six, the proportion of local inhabitants as Methodist members remained almost constant at around 1.9%.

By 1821, however, the first sizeable jump in membership had taken place, with approximately 3.1% of the total local population now registered as Methodist members. Again, the sudden reversal in Methodist fortunes would appear to have been the result primarily of economic change. Some of the membership gains, it is true, were made in the fishing villages, where Methodism, as in the west, began to find a prime constituency of support. Membership in the Polperro society, for example, rose from 74 in 1813 to 160 in 1816, and in the early 1820s it was almost twice that in the Liskeard society.¹ But the smaller societies in the ports of Polruan, Looe, and Saltash also began to grow at this time. Gains were also made in the north-east corner of the region, where the development of mining boosted parochial populations, and stimulated Methodist growth. In Linkinhorne and Stokeclimsland, two expansive, moorland parishes, four Methodist societies appeared for the first time during the 1810s; while in Callington, the sudden expansion of the town due to its contiguity to the mines, was reflected in the

1. 'Liskeard Circuit Collection Book 1809-36', C.R.O. MS. MR/Lisk/3.

growth in membership of its Methodist society from 32 in 1813 to 73 in 1822.¹

But Methodist membership also grew at this time, as preaching began to be extended to parishes from which it had formerly been excluded - Morval, Braddock, Pillaton, Southill, Quethiock, Botusfleming - in a manner which reflected the loosening of restraining social controls across a range of rural parishes. In fact, by 1821, the list of parishes which remained resistant to Methodist infiltration had been cut to no more than five.

Subsequent Methodist membership statistics, however, seem to indicate that progress made during this decade was not capitalised on substantially thereafter. Throughout the rest of the period, membership rose slowly, but only rarely topped 4% of the total local population. In part, this actually distorts the level of Methodist development in the region, for in the mid-1830s, a large-scale secession to the Wesleyan Methodist Association occurred, which was followed up by further losses between 1849 and 1851.² The split in fact had much in common with those in the Camel-ford and Helston circuits. In all cases, the circuits were especially large and sprawling, and local societies had maintained strong elements of autonomy, particularly in chapel ownership. In Polruan, for example, where the whole society seceded, the chapel was the property of prominent local member, William Pearse, who had built it on his own property in 1803.³

But local Wesleyanism was directly and continuously hindered

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1. Ibid.
 2. Bolitho, Methodism in Liskeard, pp.17-24.
 3. Maker, Cob and Moorstone, p.76.

in its development by the relative slowness with which traditional rural society actually did change in a number of the more prosperous parishes after 1815. Despite the initial breakthrough which had been made into several rural parishes during the 1810s, the basic environmental features of those parishes militated against considerable expansion in levels of support. In particular, the continued presence of a strong and active squirearchy, involved in the cultivation of their estates, cut across the work of the Methodists in a number of ways. On a purely practical level, in parishes where land was held in a small number of hands, there was the problem of obtaining a site for a chapel. In St. Germans, for example, despite the massive acreage of the parish, two-thirds of the land was actually owned by the Earl of St. Germans, who only relented to allow the Methodists to build a chapel in 1825, after he had been appealed to by his butcher, a local Methodist member.¹ The Methodists tended to rely on obtaining the support of moderate farmers, who could then build chapels on their own land. The consequence of this, however, was just that spirit of local autonomy which was demonstrated in the secession to the Association.

Organisational structures also seriously hampered Methodist development, for until 1840, virtually the whole of the region remained contained within the vast circuit based on Liskeard, which stretched for thirty miles in length and twenty in width, and contained forty six chapels and societies at the point of division.²

1. Ibid. p. 23.

2. 'Liskeard Wesleyan Circuit Plans 1822-92', C.R.O. MS. NR/Lisk/55 1-46.

Because circuit membership remained relatively low and stable, circuit and Connexional authorities felt no pressures to divide the circuit, and perhaps more importantly, detected no likely expansion in the membership constituency which would make division financially feasible. Only in 1840, with the population beginning to grow rapidly in the north-east of the region, was Saltash made head of a separate circuit covering the eastern half of the region.

In 1847, the station location was shifted to the larger base of Callington, much closer to the Caradon mining area where membership gains were beginning to be made.

In a very real sense, in fact, the opening up of the Caradon mining area from the 1840s appeared as a lifeline to the local Wesleyan cause. In the 1850s in particular, local membership patterns and numbers were transformed by the influx of mining families from the west. The Liskeard society itself grew from 196 members in 1851 to 364 in 1861, in Caradon the leap was from 45 to 252, in Menheniot from 37 to 72. In all, perhaps 4.5% of the total local population had been captured as Wesleyan members by 1861, a peak in local membership, though as the mines began to decline almost as quickly as they had appeared during the 1860s, membership fell away too.

Unsurprisingly, in the wake of Wesleyan difficulties in forming societies in a number of parishes locally, the Bible Christians made few permanent impressions in large areas of the region. They established a circuit based on St. Neot in 1817, and in fact in a climate of depression and social tension made immediate impact with

their evangelistic missioning. A bewildering number of classes was instantly formed, and listed in the circuit records for the first two or three years,¹ but the practical difficulties of establishing fixed meeting places, for example, must have contributed to the extremely short-lived nature of many of them. The membership recorded in the first quarter of 1818, in fact, in the first flush of enthusiasm and excitement, was never again attained throughout the life of the circuit, and though efforts at consolidation were made in the 1820s and 1830s, the work was eventually re-organised in 1845 with the formation of new circuit structures based on Liskeard and West Looe. The 1851 Ecclesiastical Census demonstrated that while Bible Christian services took place for certain in eleven parishes in the region, they were entirely absent from nineteen. Without exception, the more agriculturally advanced parishes had no registered Bible Christian presence, especially a large group of smaller parishes in the south-east, and a band of parishes through the centre of the region. Instead, like the Wesleyans and the Free Methodists, the Bible Christians had to seek out support wherever it might be found in the increasingly populous mining districts in the north.²

1. 'St. Neot Bible Christian Circuit Schedule Book 1818-38', C.R.O. MS. Lisk/376.
2. Bolitho, op.cit., p.25.

Table 20 : Father's Occupations as listed in Circuit Baptismal Registers.

Region 2 :

Camborne Wesleyan, 1825-37. (Source : P.R.O. RG/4/555).

Farmers.	8.8%.
Husbandmen.	2.9%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	9.8%.
Artisans.	7.2%.
Mine Agents.	2.9%.
Miners.	56.7%.
Labourers.	5.6%.
Others.	5.9%.

Carharrack Wesleyan (Chapel), 1820-37. (Source : P.R.O. RG/4/409).

Farmers.	1.8%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	4.3%.
Artisans.	8.2%.
Miners.	67.3%.
Labourers.	4.3%.
No Occupation.	12.5%.
Others.	1.8%.

Truro Bible Christian, 1838-63. (Source : C.R.O. MR/T/133).

Farmers.	5.1%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	3.6%.
Artisans.	9.8%.
Miners.	52.7%.
Labourers.	15.7%.
Others.	13.3%.

Falmouth Bible Christian, 1822-37. (Source : P.R.O. RG/4/102).

Farmers.	0.7%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	6.6%.
Artisans.	7.3%.
Miners.	76.3%.
Labourers.	2.8%.
Others.	8.1%.

St. Day Primitive Methodist, 1858-70. (Source : C.R.O. MR/R(3)/6).

Farmers.	5.2%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	0.5%.
Artisans.	5.3%.
Miners.	77.1%.
Labourers.	1.9%.
Enginemen/ Engineers.	3.8%.
Gardeners.	2.4%.
Others.	3.8%.

Region 4 :

Mevagissey Bible Christian, 1838-70. (Source : C.R.O. MR/A/296).

Farmers.	15.7%
Husbandmen.	2.0%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	8.3%.
Artisans.	10.8%.
Miners.	1.8%.
Fishermen/ Sailors.	22.2%.
Labourers.	33.4%.
Others.	5.8%.

Region 5 :

Mevagissey Bible Christian, 1838-70. (Source : C.R.O. MR/A/296).

Farmers.	9.0%.
Yeomen.	15.0%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	4.0%.
Artisans.	2.0%.
Miners.	43.0%.
Labourers.	26.0%.
Servants.	1.0%.

St. Austell Bible Christian, 1839-44. (Source : C.R.O. MR/A/272).

Farmers.	1.0%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	4.5%.
Artisans.	4.9%.
Miners.	54.2%.
Claymen/ Stoncutters.	11.2%.
Labourers.	16.4%.
Others.	7.7%.

St. Columb Bible Christian, 1838-59. (Source : MR/CP/16).

Farmers.	8.5%.
Yeomen.	4.3%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	2.6%.
Artisans.	6.3%.
Shoemakers.	3.7%.
Miners.	13.4%.
Labourers.	54.7%.
Others.	6.5%.

St. Columb Bible Christian, 1859-70. (Includes some parishes in Region 6.).

Farmers.	11.6%.
Yeomen.	0.6%.
Husbandmen.	5.1%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	4.2%.
Artisans.	8.6%.
Shoemakers.	0.6%.
Miners.	11.9%.
Labourers.	49.4%.
Others.	8.6%.

Region 6 :

Camelford Wesleyan, 1800-37. (Source : P.R.O. RG/4/556).

Farmers.	9.3%.
Yeomen.	8.0%.
Husbandmen.	8.0%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	18.7%.
Artisans.	28.0%.
Labourers.	21.3%.
Others.	6.7%.

St. Columb Bible Christian, 1838-59.

Farmers.	14.8%.
Yeomen.	3.3%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	3.8%.
Artisans.	17.6%.
Miners.	5.5%.
Sailors.	8.8%.
Labourers.	45.6%.
Others.	0.5%.

Michaelstow Bible Christian, 1837-69. (Source : C.R.O.).

Farmers.	6.3%.
Yeomen.	3.2%.
Husbandmen.	4.8%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	7.9%.
Artisans.	11.1%.
Miners.	6.3%.
Quarrymen.	3.2%.
Labourers.	52.4%.
Others.	4.8%.

Region 7 :

Camelford Wesleyan, 1800-37.

Farmers.	7.4%.
Yeomen.	8.5%.
Husbandmen.	3.4%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	24.4%.
Artisans.	11.9%.
Miners/ Tanners.	7.9%.
Quarrymen.	16.5%.
Labourers.	19.9%.

Michaelstow Bible Christian, 1837-69.

Farmers.	8.0%.
Yeomen.	7.5%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	4.8%.
Artisans.	10.6%.
Miners/ Tanners.	4.1%.
Quarrymen.	30.3%.
Labourers.	30.9%.
Others.	3.7%.

Region 8 :

Kilkhampton Bible Christian, 1838-69. (Source : C.R.O. MR/DDX/384/13,14).

Farmers.	3.1%.
Yeomen.	9.0%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	10.5%.
Artisans.	9.8%.
Labourers.	61.3%.
Others.	6.3%.

Launceston Bible Christian, 1840-70. (Source : C.R.O. MR/L/118-20).

Farmers.	8.3%.
Yeomen.	7.3%.
Husbandmen.	1.2%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	6.3%.
Artisans.	12.9%.
Miners.	8.9%.
Labourers.	49.5%.
Others.	5.5%.

Week St. Mary Bible Christian, 1838-70. (Source : C.R.O.).

Farmers.	14.5%.
Yeomen.	18.8%.
Tradesmen/ Merchants.	8.4%.
Artisans.	10.5%.
Miners.	1.1%.
Labourers.	44.5%.
Others.	2.2%.

CHAPTER 6 : PASTORAL AUTHORITY AND CONNEXIONALISM.

The form, function, and level of dissemination of Methodism clearly varied from region to region, and from parish to parish, across the county, but an interesting and important contrast between the general pattern of Methodist growth in rural east Cornwall and mining west Cornwall can nonetheless be delineated. In both areas, Methodist fortunes were at least in part dependent upon favourable social and parochial circumstances, however they may be defined. But in the east, because of the relative lateness of widespread evangelism, Methodist development owed far more to Connexional direction and initiative, through circuit organisation and pastoral oversight, than was the case in the west. This had significant effects on the form and ethos of Methodism in the locality. With the important exception of William O'Bryan, it would seem that local Methodists largely accepted the early Connexional elevation of administrative above evangelistic priorities, and settled with relative ease into 'orthodox' patterns of worship and chapel-life. Disputes between the locality and the Connexion tended to centre on the issues of chapel ownership and government, rather than on the more fundamental question of whether the Connexion had in fact decided on the correct priorities after 1815.

In the west, by contrast, popular support for Methodism had increased rapidly in the 1780s and 1790s, before adequate Connexional structures had been laid down, and in subsequent Methodist development in the first half of the 19th century, a

strong native impulse was at work, often directly at odds with Connexional will. This, too, had serious implications for the form and functions of local Methodism, though in a manner in sharp contrast with the situation in the east.

In this Chapter, the concept and reality of Connexionalism will be dissected, and reasons suggested why Connexional control of Methodism in west Cornwall was difficult to secure. In the following Chapter, the implications of the relative freedom of indigenous impulses on Methodist development will be analysed in a study of revivalism. Finally, in Chapter 8, the reasons for the battle which eventually ensued between Connexion and indigenous Wesleyanism will be explained, and an assessment of the outcome offered.

i. Connexionalism.

The evolution of the Methodist Church in Wesley's later years, and more particularly throughout the early 19th century, is easier to recognise than it is to chronicle precisely. The drift from the Established Church in terms of church order became visible from the ordination of Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as deacons, and the consecration of Thomas Coke as 'superintendent' for the work in America in 1784. In the same year, the Deed of Declaration legally established the Methodist Conference with the essential authority to appoint and station all itinerant preachers.

Three years later, Wesley reluctantly but decisively advised all preachers and chapels to be licensed, thereby acknowledging dissent in the eyes of the law; while the Plan of Pacification in 1795 and

the regulations of 1797, enhanced and reflected the process of consolidation by which Methodism became institutionalized. From the turn of the century, the steady metamorphosis continued, as Methodism unfolded from a movement promoting spiritual and scriptural holiness, to an autonomous and confident denomination, overseen by an increasingly professionalised (and from 1836, ordained) pastorate, underpinned by intricate financial arrangements and complex administrative machinery, and symbolised by emerging inner-city chapels, self-congratulatory and 'triumphal' in their permanence and size. Simultaneously, the primary concerns of its leaders naturally changed too. W.R. Ward has written that the abiding impression left from reading large quantities of Methodist correspondence, was 'that in Wesley's late years the matter of overriding concern was religion; in the generation following his death it was politics; and in the generation of Bunting's supremacy it was administration.'¹

Critical to this denominational development was the notion (and actuality) of Connexionalism: a framework of thinking and organisation which 'forced local disputes up to the centre, and central policies down to the fringes.'² The Connexional ideal sprang from Wesley's own itineracy, and the need to maintain oversight of his followers in their societal cells throughout the country during his absence. The Methodist Conference was inaugurated in 1744, to undertake practical administrative tasks - the posting of preachers to their next circuits, the review of the financial health of the

1. Early Victorian Methodism, ed. Ward, p.xi.

2. Ward, Religion and Society, p.75.

Connexion, the introduction of new rules for its' government, the collection of Connexional statistics of membership - as well as measures relating more specifically to the 'promotion of the gospel of Jesus Christ' - the admittance of new preachers into the Connexion, the discussion of ways to extend or revive the 'good work', the theological clarification of Methodist doctrine. The travelling preachers returned to their circuits charged not only with promoting Wesley's doctrines, but with maintaining his rules and discipline, so that Wesley's voice of authority was heard in every circuit through the senior travelling preacher, known as 'assistant', or increasingly, 'superintendent'.¹

Wesley called the preachers together 'to advise, not govern',² and retained virtually absolute power within his movement up to his death in 1791; but thereafter the Plan of Pacification and the regulations of 1797 which settled Methodist polity ensured that Connexionalism would be maintained, with the societies firmly 'under the government of the Conference as supreme.'³ This development did not go unopposed: in 1835, for example, the Conference address to the Societies referred to the agitations in parts of the Connexion over the past year, and reminded members that 'the Wesleyan Methodists are not a number of isolated and independent societies or churches, but of societies united in one body.'⁴ On one hand, Methodism aspired to become 'an informal Protestant

1. G. Smith, History of Wesleyan Methodism, 3 vols., 2nd edn., London, 1859, 1862, i p.250.
2. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, London, 1862, i pp.60-2.
3. Smith, op.cit., ii p.175.
4. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, vii p.593.

establishment' governed by Conference with absolute authority as 'the living Wesley'. On the other, the voices of protest and the long line of secessions from the Kilhamites to the Wesleyan Reformers bore witness to a strong antipathy to centralisation, and a preference for 'a simple democracy of brother Christians in every neighbourhood.'¹

After Wesley's death, however, and particularly during the 1810s, Connexional leaders sought to bring the Methodist 'movement' more effectively under their control and to obscure the initiating purpose of Methodism as a spiritually revitalizing agent by overseeing its institutionalisation. Bernard Semmel has argued that by the beginning of the 19th century, 'Methodism had expanded beyond its power to absorb and discipline those attracted to its message', and that after the threat from Sidmouth's proposed bill 'to explain and render more effectual' the Toleration Act had passed in 1811, Jabez Bunting and Richard Watson in particular set out to focus 'Methodist energies on disciplining the converted rather than extending even further the nominal sway of the Connection.'² In a similar vein, W.R. Ward has suggested that: 'The presence of Methodism within working class movements convinced Bunting that what was needed was less revival and more denominational drill.' For Ward, Connexional authorities faced a three-pronged challenge to their aim to institutionalize Methodism, from revivalism, the effects of social discontent, and the direct impact

1. Ward, 'Religion of the People', p.239.; Kent, Age of Disunity, p.44.; Currie, Methodism Divided, p.71.
2. Bernard Semmel, The Methodist Revolution, London, 1974, pp.136-7, pp.144-6.

of post-war economic depression upon the Methodist financial machine.

In this situation, it appears, pastoral authoritarianism was required simply to ensure the survival of the 'movement'. As Ward argued, the doctrine of the Pastoral Office, which provided scriptural legitimacy to pastoral authority, was finally devised 'to defend an otherwise intolerable situation.'¹

Wesley, as an adamant Establishmentarian, had left sufficient ambiguity in his definition of the office of 'assistant' as being 'to watch over souls submitted to his charge.'² After his death, however, the travelling preachers began to press their claims.³ In 1796, Joseph Benson carefully asserted the pastoral right of the preachers to edify and build up faith, invoking the will of Christ rather than that of the people in his support. This right, he argued, must be maintained, or:

'our congregations will soon be like many of theirs, [17th century Dissenters] either continually quarrelling with their Preachers, or divided and subdivided about the choice of them, while the one care of the Preachers must be, not to profit but to please their hearers, and especially those of them that are rich, on which their maintenance will chiefly depend...'

4

After 1815, however, such views became more profoundly enshrined within the Methodist establishment, and the publication in 1829 of John Beecham's An Essay on the Constitution of Wesleyan

1. Ward, 'Religion of the People'.
2. Kent, op.cit., p.49.; Minutes of the Methodist Conference, i p.23.
3. J.M.Turner, 'From Society to Church', London Quarterly and Holborn Review, April 1963, p.112.
4. J.Benson, The Discipline of the Methodists Defended, London, 1796, pp.13-4.

Methodism, written in answer to the Leeds seceders, began from a similar premise to Benson, and marked the point at which the doctrine of the Pastoral Office became 'official'.¹ Beecham appealed to the New Testament and to John Wesley, and held that Christ, who occupied the whole Pastoral Office himself, had committed the government of His Church to a distinct and separate order of pastors. The Ministry, then, was of divine institution, and was not responsible to the wishes of the people; preachers had a dual role, in Jabez Bunting's words, as 'teachers to instruct and pastors to govern the people.' The doctrine of the Pastoral Office also maintained that Connexionalism was a New Testament principle, and that Conference had the same kind of responsibility for, and oversight of, the Connexion as a whole, as the itinerant preacher exercised at the local level. In the opinion of its advocates, Conference could not be challenged: it was the 'corporate episcopos', the 'pastor pastorum', a divine institution with powers of admitting, ordaining, stationings, and dismissing preachers, administering discipline, and regulating doctrine.²

The detailed formularisation of the doctrine of the Pastoral Office was a necessary corollary to the great sea-change of Methodism from 'society' to 'denomination'. With divine authority legitimizing the powers of the Ministry and Conference, a complex administrative and disciplinary machinery was able to be developed which furthered the process of institutionalization. In its conception and design, Jabez Bunting was the chief architect. By

1. Ward, Religion and Society, pp. 149-52.

2. Kent, op.cit., pp. 52-3.; Currie, op.cit., p. 44.

1837, Conference could not proceed without him, because he had established a series of Connexional Committees - 'a Conference within a Conference' - over which he yielded enormous personal influence. In 1844, ten leading Buntingites held eighty nine Committee seats; six other ministers, the remaining seven. Samuel Dunn objected loudly to the fact that while one thousand one hundred and twenty nine preachers were available for choice, one preacher found himself on no fewer than nine Connexional Committees.¹

To local opponents, however, Conference had none of the scriptural legitimacy that its advocates claimed. They challenged the 'sacrosanct' foundations of the Pastoral Office, and saw Bunting as a great absolutist monster, with a head for each Connexional Committee he instituted and controlled, and a tail that mercilessly lashed the most mild-mannered and well-meaning of critics. Behind the constitutional battles which ensued between reformers and those who loathed and feared democracy as worse than sin, this divergence in attitudes towards the Ministry and Conference was a critical continuum. In the evolution from 'society' to 'denomination' all was not smooth, sweet progression. Something of a chasm, in fact, extended between those who continued to view Methodism in its 'primitive' light as a vehicle of spiritual revitalization, and those whose task it was to manage and control Methodism in its new capacity as a maturing religious institution. As late as 1869, the question could still be asked: 'Can Methodism consolidate herself as a Church and yet sustain her pure

1. Currie, op.cit., pp.33-4.; Early Victorian Methodism, p.306.

spirituality, her aggressive spirit, her enterprising energy..?'¹ Quite clearly, the great disputes and secessions of 1834-35 and 1849-51 were merely flashpoints within Wesleyanism, which would not have occurred had not the powder-keg been well stocked.

ii. Cornwall and Connexionalism.

Cornwall's geographical location was bound to cause administrative problems for any centralised organisation in 18th and 19th century England. In 1751, John Wesley signed an agreement with his brother Charles, declaring an intention to visit the 'fringes' of Cornwall, Ireland, and the north each year.² In 1760, he was regretting the fact that he had not adhered to his plans; on his first visit to Cornwall in three years he found 'consequently all things are out of order.'³ However, as itinerant preachers were stationed to the early Cornish circuits, Wesley still heard news of problems of control. In 1765 he wrote to Thomas Rankin: 'I advise you to remove all such leaders and stewards as do not cordially love the Methodist doctrine and discipline.' In 1788, he wrote to Benjamin Rhodes at Redruth: 'It has been observed for many years that some at Redruth were apt to despise and very willing to govern their preachers.' And the following year to Samuel Bardsley: 'Let the preachers stand firm together and then the people will be regular, but if any of you take their part against the preacher all will be confusion.'⁴

1. J. Willis, The Class and the Congregation of Wesleyan Methodism, London, 1869, pp. 7-8.
2. L. Tyerman, Life and Times of John Wesley, London, 1880 ii p. 130.
3. Letters of John Wesley, ed. Telford, iv p. 104.
4. Quoted in Edwards, 'Cornish Methodism: A Study in Division', M.A. thesis, pp. 38-9.

Tension between the pastoral and local lay dynamics of early Methodist growth was not uncommon throughout the country, but in Cornwall it was almost certainly exacerbated both by the obvious isolation which itinerants must have felt as 'outsiders', and by an increasingly articulated regional sensitivity on the part of the Cornish which fuelled an exaggerated identification of Methodism as 'theirs'. So, on Wesley's death, about fifty leading Cornish laymen met at Redruth to deliberate the future of Methodism. The meeting by itself was not that unusual, but the fact that minutes of the meeting were published and sent to every preacher in the Connexion was a revealing act of their high self-regard. George Smith, a later leading Cornish layman of quite different persuasion, summed up the implications of the action in his denominational history:

'These officials seemed to think that it lay entirely with them to arrange the whole polity of the Body. The preachers at Halifax and elsewhere had only aimed at supplying a new and pressing necessity in the administration of affairs, arising out of the death of Wesley. They never thought of altering existing rules, or interfering with any custom or right. These laymen, however, proposed changes which, whether they were aware of it or not, would have revolutionized Methodism.s'

1

The principal proposals urged the need for far greater lay control of the 'movement', and revealed a strong local distaste for the commanding aspirations of the itinerants. What is more, the signatories were, for the most part, the foremost local laymen, who regarded themselves as nothing but staunch Wesleyans.²

1. Smith, op.cit., ii pp.84-6.
2. A copy of the manifesto is included in J.C.C. Probert, Dr. Boase of Redruth, n.p., 1965, pp.2-4.; Shaw, Methodism in Illogan, p.33.

Over the next decade, the tension between centralism and localism occasionally bubbled to the surface. In 1801, Conference decided to admit stewards to the financial sessions of the District Meetings, but as Richard Treffry senior noted in his diary in February 1802, the Chairman of the District was:

'in a strait, not knowing whether to admit delegates from the people to the District Meeting to be present all the time, or not; by admitting them to all the business, he thinks he shall merit the censure of Conference, and by not admitting them the censure of the people.'

¹ Two years earlier, the Plymouth Dock District Meeting had passed a resolution disapproving the exclusive judgement of the Committee in London as to what was included in the Methodist Magazine, and had condemned Connexional worthy Dr. Thomas Coke's continual voyages across the Atlantic as 'attended with very great expence, and not answering any valuable end.'²

The basic problems which Connexional leaders faced in establishing control in Cornwall, from the practical and psychological effects of the region's 'isolation', were compounded by the rapid expansion of Methodism locally from the early 1780s, which established habits of administration, worship, and devotion often at variance with Wesley's wishes. Later Connexional authorities in fact found it very difficult to establish 'orthodox' administrative and disciplinary arrangements, and as late as 1871, conservative laymen in the Cornish District Meeting passed a resolution requesting Conference to appoint a Committee to sit in Cornwall and

1. Proc. W.H.S., xviii p.31.

2. 'Minutes of the Plymouth Dock District Meeting 1800', M.C.A. MS.

take evidence as a preliminary to finally taking control of Cornish Methodism. Peter Prescott, the superintendent of the St. Agnes circuit at the time, penned his own proposals for reform in which he wrote:

'As Ireland has been styled Enland's difficulty, but is now becoming in an important sense England's example; so will Cornwall, which is at present the difficulty of Methodism, become its example.'

1

The critical role in fostering Connexional orthodoxy and exerting Connexional control, of course, had to be played by the itinerant preachers, but here an unusual policy was pursued by authorities apparently committed to extending their dominion. Until the mid-1840s, J.H. Rigg assures us:

'owing to the remoteness and geographical isolation of Cornwall - making it to the great majority of the ministers something like a foreign principality - the ministerial appointments for Cornwall had, up to that time, been left almost wholly in the hands of Cornishmen, so that the leading ministers - the most famous preachers, the most able and experienced administrators - were very little known in the "Duchy".'

2

Resistance from within the pastorate to being stationed in Cornwall tended to underscore this policy. The substantial costs involved in moving itinerants great distances to new stations led to the planning of preachers to circuits in the same locality for a number of years, especially in the fringes. One itinerant hoped for release after travelling eleven years in Cornwall, but feared 'the

1. Peter Prescott, The Case of Cornish Methodism Considered, London, 1871, p.25.
2. The Methodist Recorder, 10 Dec. 1903, p.15.

gate is closed.' Another wrote to a friend: 'It is said that if a Preacher once get into Cornwall it is difficult to get out again - I intend to try to get out of it.'¹

An antipathy within part of the pastorate to the possibilities of being stationed in Cornwall became deeply-ingrained within the Connexion. As late as 1872, Samuel Romilly Hall, then Chairman of the Cornwall District, wrote: 'The unwillingness of certain brethren to go to Penzance greatly distresses me.'² In part, this was generated by the fear of 'entrapment': that once sent to the fringes, a preacher may never return to 'up-country' England. As one itinerant stated succinctly: 'I have been in Cornwall about Two Years, - and am now desirous of getting nearer the centre of the Kingdom.'³ For some, notably the talented and ambitious, the prospect of a long spell in Cornwall seemed potentially damaging to their long-term career aims. J.H. James, for example, considered himself 'in exile' in Truro in 1845,⁴ while in 1831 Jabez Bunting objected to the proposal of Richard Treffry as forthcoming President on the grounds 'that in order to be near his son, he may be obliged to go to Penzance next year, a point too remote for a President's residence.'⁵

1. 'S. Timms-Benjamin Carvosso, Tuckingmill 19 June 1844', M.C.A. MS. PLP 106.8.4.; 'H. Botterrell-William Shearman, Liskeard 25 Feb. 1841', M.C.A. MS. PLP 10.40.1.
2. Thomas Nightingale, Life of the Rev. Samuel Romilly Hall, London, 1879, p. 157.
3. John Gay Wilson-Maximilian Wilson, St. Just 23 June 1846', M.C.A. MS. PLP 114.2.37.
4. 'J.H. James-George Osborn, Truro 22 Oct. 1845', M.C.A. MS. PLP 61.4.36. Four years later, however, with the Connexion in turmoil, he was thankful for being 'out of the way of it all, - permitted to labour quietly, and happily, and to save souls.' 'J.H. James-George Osborn, Falmouth 17 May 1849', M.C.A. MS. PLP 61.4.37.
5. Early Victorian Methodism, p. 11.

But there was also the often discouraging fact that the work in a number of the Cornish circuits was notoriously enervating; the size of circuits, or of congregations, and the peculiar problems of administration and discipline which they confronted, during the regular periods of revival in particular, sometimes took their toll on the most hardy and dedicated of men. Examples of preachers 'breaking down' in fact are not at all rare.¹

Finally, the existence of a strong regional and cultural identity, and often a communal cohesiveness, within chapel congregations in the west, ensured that while some preachers attained almost sacerdotal status, the Cornish were very discriminating in whom they took to their hearts. Thomas Collins was warned by one of his new colleagues of what to expect when arriving in Camborne in 1848:

'Cornish Methodists, with many excellencies, join some peculiarities. Preachers labouring in this region, superintendents above all, must make straight paths for their feet. Uppish men are an abomination here: and, not seldom, get awkward thumps and communications more frank than welcome.'

2

Thus, for practical financial and administrative reasons, to please both preachers and people, and often simply because Cornwall was 'out of sight, out of mind' to many Connexional leaders, the planning of preachers was directed primarily from the locality rather than the centre until the 1840s. This had the effect, of

1. e.g. see 'John Davis-Jabez Bunting, Penzance 26 Nov. 1836', M.C.A. MS.; 'John Jenkins-William Arthur, Penzance 17 Sep. 1845', M.C.A. MS. PLP.61.21.2.
2. S. Coley, The Life of the Rev. Thomas Collins, 2nd edn., London, 1869, p. 284.

course, of reinforcing an ambivalent attitude to the pastorate. Local men, in general, were often regarded in the highest possible terms, but 'outsiders' had to overcome suspicions, and occasional hostility. When Edward Wilson was sent to Bodmin in 1820, it was rumoured that, because he had been moved a great distance from his previous station, (as well as placed below a junior preacher on the Plan), he must have been guilty of some 'immorality', and sent down out of the way to Cornwall.¹ More seriously, at the height of the Warrenite agitations, in 1836, a superintendent needing to replace an ill colleague delayed writing to Bunting, then President, in the hope that he might win over 'our people into the mind of supporting the man we might obtain.'² It was almost as if the doctrine of the Pastoral Office had never been invented.

Connexional authorities, of course, were desirous of tying the county much closer to Connexional orthodoxy, and of drawing Cornish Methodism into the national vortex of institutionalisation; but the one occasion on which leading Connexional ministers actually appeared in Cornwall in the first half of the 19th century was as members of the annual Foreign Missions Deputations. Methodist missions had been instituted in an unofficial, piecemeal way in the later 18th century, largely through the work of Thomas Coke, but his two plans for establishing foreign missions on an official footing in 1778 and 1783 had been cast aside by Wesley, and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society did not come into being until 1817.³

1. 'Edward Wilson-Jabez Bunting, Bodmin 2 Sep. 1820', M.C.A. MS. PLP 114.2.1.; 'John Hodson-Jabez Bunting, 12 Sep 1820', M.C.A. MS.
2. 'John Davis-Jabez Bunting, Penzance 26 Nov. 1836', M.C.A. MS.
3. John Vickers, Thomas Coke. Apostle of Methodism, London, 1969, p. 67, pp. 151-2.; John Walsh,

At the Conference of 1813, the question of missions had been discussed, and 'it was at last agreed to diminish the number of the Preachers at home, in order that we might be enabled by our frugal savings to maintain a greater number of Missionaries in foreign countries.' In October, the Leeds District Missionary Society was established, and throughout the year several other such societies appeared in different parts of the Connexion.¹

The first meeting in Cornwall took place in the chapel at Redruth on December 7th, 1813, with Francis Truscott, the District Chairman and Redruth Circuit superintendent in the chair, and in early 1815 further meetings were held in a number of towns, and circuit societies formed in Truro and Liskeard.² Nationally the missionary cause accelerated with such speed from 1813 that Bernard Semmel argued a deliberate attempt had been made by Methodist authorities to divert religious enthusiasm from the path of political radicalism and social revolution, by erecting the alternative 'grand purpose' of foreign missions.³ Such a view has been seriously countered both by Ward and - in greater detail - by Stuart Piggin.⁴ A much stronger case has been made for the

the Methodist Church in Great Britain, ed. R. Davies and G. Rupp, London, 1965, i p.300.

1. G.G. Findlay and W.W. Holdsworth, The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, 1921, 1924, i p.40.; Thomas Jackson, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Richard Watson, London, 1834, pp.135-6.
2. 'Francis Truscott-James Allen, Redruth 30 Jan. 1814', M.C.A. MS. PLP 107.8.42. is written on a printed copy of the resolutions of the first meeting in Redruth. For subsequent meetings see W.B. 10 Feb. 1815.; W.B. 24 Feb. 1815.; W.B. 10 Mar. 1815.
3. Semmel, Methodist Revolution, pp.144-6.
4. Ward review in History, lx(1975), p.311.; Stuart Piggin, 'Halevy Revisited: The Origins of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society: An Examination of Semmel's Thesis', The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, ix(Oct. 1980), pp.7-32.

contention that the Methodist Missionary cause was not artificially stimulated by Bunting and Watson, but grew naturally from the same roots which fostered the growth of the L.M.S., the C.M.S., and the Baptist Missionary Society in the 1790s. Methodists shared in an evangelical concern for the 'salvation of the heathen' which had first been awakened in Germany by the Pietist movement in the early 18th century, and which was stimulated in Britain by Cook's Voyages and colonial expansion, and by the recognition of the moral responsibilities of empire, as demonstrated for example by the slave trade agitation.¹

It was as the cause developed, rather than in its inception, that Connexional leaders recognised the essential ulterior purposes to which it might be put. Interest in foreign missions in Cornwall grew immediately, in line with Methodism nationally. At the annual meeting of Methodists in Gwennap Pit in May 1817, an address on the state of foreign missions was delivered, and a collection taken for their support. Rowland Hill and Thomas Jackson on a tour for the missionary cause in 1819 were well pleased with the apparently universal interest which they discovered in the principal towns of the district.² Throughout the 1820s, commitment to the cause expanded, and though it suffered a slight setback in the mid-1830s with the Warrenite agitations, by 1837 Richard Treffry felt able to note 'an increase in hearty missionary feeling' in Penzance, and 'at Hayle the missionary spirit is reviving also.' By 1845, the

1. Findlay and Holdsworth, op.cit., i p.27.; Walsh, 'Methodism at the end of the 18th century', pp.299-301.; Hempton, Methodism and Politics, pp.96-7.
2. W.B. 27 May 1817.; W.B. 27 Aug.1819.

prominent Truro layman, Thomas Garland, expressed his belief at the Missionary Anniversary in the town, that the cause of foreign missions had now passed the transitional stage, and had become an acknowledged duty of the Methodist.¹

By this time, in fact, Cornwall was famed throughout the Connexion for its enthusiasm on behalf of missionary work. Every circuit and village had come to regard the Missionary Anniversary as the grand Methodist festival of the year; the preaching of the Missionary Deputation as the great annual event.² For a number of reasons, foreign missions captured the imagination and claimed the financial support of the Cornish. In the first place, the great growth in interest in the work coincided with the first trickle of emigrants to the United States and Australia, which had become a steady stream by the 1840s. The initial expansion of outlook which had allowed the foreign missions cause to take root in the 1810s, was developed and enlivened as friends and relatives became scattered across the globe. The Missionary Deputation exploited a growing curiosity with the wider world by carrying artefacts from India and China with them; while returning missionaries:

'arrested the attention of the people in an unusual manner with lively descriptions of the superstitions of Africa, and the dark and degraded state of its wretched inhabitants.'

Missionary meetings appealed not only by tapping a genuinely zealous missionary idealism amongst the audience, but by enlight-

1. Treffry, Memoirs of Richard Treffry junior, p.251.; Garland, Memorials, p.408.
2. J.H. Rigg, Wesleyan Methodist Reminiscences : Sixty Years Ago, London, 1904, p.57.; Barratt, "long Life and Peace", pp.99-101.; Pearse, The Ship Where Christ was Captain, p.78.

ening,educating,and entertaining.¹

In the second place,the cause of foreign missions appealed because it seemed to indicate that the spirit of 'primitive' Methodism had not been entirely misplaced by the Connexion,and indeed that Wesley's view of the 'world as a parish' had been revived and reinvoked in the most literal of senses. The Cornish in general were far more ready to contribute to Connexional collections for foreign work of a missionary nature,than they were to merely administrative or seemingly mundane pursuits such as the Educational Fund or the Theological Institution. They magnified their own commitment to revivalism into a world-wide vision of mission. The Bible Christians in Cornwall very quickly established their own Foreign Missionary Society in 1821,which in time became 'the brightest jewel of the Denomination,its noblest ornament,its firmest pillar,and...its most effective instrument.'²

The great popularity of foreign missions in Cornwall convinced Connexional authorities that this enthusiasm for a Connexional cause might be the means of establishing a much more general notion of Connexional responsibility and association amongst local congregations. More importantly,however,the annual Missionary Deputation was seen as one opportunity for Connexional authorities to appear in Cornwall,at a time when festivity and excitement would allow them to be viewed in a favourable light,and when they in turn would be able to review practices and progress within Cornish Methodism,and to advise superintendents wherever required. In this

1. W.B. 25 Feb.1820.; Jackson,Memoirs of Richard Watson,p.292.
2. Thorne,James Thorne of Shebbear,p.167.; Bourne,Bible Christians,p.99.

way, it was hoped, Cornwall could be eased gradually and increasingly into the Connexional fold. John Davis, an itinerant in Penzance in 1835, could write that 'I have long perceived that Mr. Newton is not thought so much of in Cornwall as in other parts of the Kingdom', but Robert Newton made three enormously successful visits to the county on the Missionary Deputation.¹ A member of the Missionary Deputation in 1903 began his visit 'into Bodmin, out of the world', and discovered a terra incognita, whose inhabitants still spoke of those from east of the Tamar as 'foreigners'. But, as he wrote:

'this strangeness of feeling, confessed by many travellers in Cornwall, does not trouble the Missionary Deputation. Nor is he in any sense a foreigner to his Cornish hearers. The common inheritance of the grace of life in Jesus Christ, the mutual experience of the Methodist conversion, the common acceptance of Methodist doctrine and discipline; the uniting bond of brotherhood in Methodist fellowship - these are our passports to their confidence and affection, and to their unstinted hospitality. But we were still more fully accredited to their hearts and homes. We were their representatives on the Mission field.'

2

Missionary Deputations appear to have been selected by Conference with especial care from the first. Jabez Bunting himself visited Cornwall in 1820 and 1836, on the former occasion being joined by Richard Watson, the joint-Missionary Society Secretary. John Carne, an itinerant stationed in Cornwall, wrote to Thomas Jackson of the desirability of sending a man of repute and

1. 'John Davis-Jabez Bunting, Penzance 3 Nov. 1835', M.C.A. MS. PLP 33.1.5.
2. The Methodist Recorder, 10 Dec. 1903, p. 11.

talent, 'the collections of the year depending not a little on the impulse given at the Annual Meeting.'¹ The crowds that gathered to meet the Deputation in Cornwall were rarely mtched in other parts of the country; a sizeable portion of the collections on such occasions coming from non-members attracted by a name. In 1822, Watson returned to Cornwall; in 1823, 1837, and 1841, Robert Newton made the journey. On the second occasion he wrote to his wife: 'I find my visit announced in the Cornish apers, as though I were some mighty personage who honoured the county with his pesence.'²

It was in the late 1830s and early 1840s, however, when a number of indicators point to a firmer commitment on the part of Connexional authorities to tie Cornwall more satisfactorily to the structures of Connexional control and orthodoxy. Amongst these was an even greater attention paid to the composition of the Missionary Deputation. In 1839, the Cornwall District was divided into two sections, and a Missionary Deputation appointed for each. For three successive years, from 1841 to 1843, the President of Conference visited west Cornwall, and in 1844, east Cornwall. In the space of seven years, from 1840 onwards, Cornwall was visited by many of the leading Connexional figures of the time: Robert Newton, James Dixon, John Hannah, John Rattenbury, Dr. Beaumont, William Arthur, Francis West, and Robert Young. In 1850, Robert Newton was requested to visit Cornwall, not only because of his previous

1. 'John Carne-T. Jackson, Penzance 6 Nov. 1833', M.C.A. MS. PLP 22.47.1.
2. T Thomas Jackson, The Life of the Rev. Robert Newton D.D., London, 1855, pp. 174-6.

successes, but also because of the need to counter the effects of the Flysheets controversy in the county.¹

The reason for this intensification of Connexional interest and involvement need to be assessed. The starting point, perhaps, might be to ask what the Connexion thought was wrong with Cornish Methodism. We can begin to answer that question by examining one of its most distinctive features: revivals.

1. 'Joseph Carde—General Secretaries, Mission House, Penzance 23 Dec. 1850', M.C.A. MS. PLP 22.34.1.

CHAPTER 7 : REVIVALS.

i. Revivals and Connexionalism.

Cornwall was unique among English counties - and even outbid Wales, the so-called 'land of revivals' - in the frequency with which it was awash with a revival wave in the 19th century. As one commentator remarked:

'Cornish revivals were things by themselves. I have read of such stirring movements occurring occasionally in different parts elsewhere, but in Cornwall they were frequent. Every year, in one part or another, a revival would spring up, during which believers were refreshed and sinners awakened.'

¹ As late as 1871, an esteemed Connexional minister stationed in Penzance could write of his 'fear' of Cornish revivals and be puzzled by the outbreak of religious excitement which 'to the people at hand... is all natural and welcome.'² Richard Poole summed up a revivalist mission to the county in 1861 with the words:

'There is a very prevalent notion among the people of Cornwall that conversion is not satisfactory or thorough unless connected with considerable PHYSICAL EXERTION and this opinion to a great extent, governs the passions, and exercises of nineteen out of twenty of the penitents.'

3

Revivalism as a natural, native impulse provided the most explicit proof of a popular indigenisation of Methodism, and demonstrated, as W.R. Ward has suggested, that the Cornish had made Methodism into a Volkskirche.⁴ This begins to become clear if we

1. William Haslam, From Death into Life : or, twenty years of my ministry, London, 1894, p.70.
2. Nightingale, Life of Samuel Romilly Hall, .143, pp.147-8.
3. The Revivalist, June 1861, pp.93-5, p.108.
4. Ward, 'Religion of the People', p.246.

examine the divergence between official Wesleyan attitudes towards revivals in the first half of the 19th century, and actual practice within Cornish Wesleyanism.

The early progress of John Wesley's movement, borne forward on a conversionist wave by his emphasis on the doctrines of justification by faith and universal redemption, critically conditioned the Methodist outlook with a conviction of belonging to a steadily broadening scriptural and spiritual influence with a divine commission to encourage and extend the 'good work'. In this wide sense, revival implicitly underscored Methodist *raison d'être*.

But Wesley himself had no clearly articulated conception of 'revival' in the limited, localised sense of a sudden and spontaneous outbreak of religious 'frenzy'; and on the several occasions when such concentrated and intense outbursts of spiritual excitement did accompany his preaching, Wesley was sometimes frankly troubled by the physical and psychic excesses - the shrieks, the tears, the induced trances, etc. - which he witnessed. He tried to explain such outbursts in simple terms as unequivocally the 'work of God' (unless the 'deliberate influence of devils' could be seen to be at work in some decidedly unreligious phenomenon) and, for the most part, left matters there. To the question 'What can be done to revive the work?' raised regularly in the Methodist Conference, came replies which focused on the need for spiritual renewal within existing members, rather than on effecting a programme of prayer and preaching designed to stimulate such local phenomena.¹

1. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, i p.74, p.79, p.82.

It was only after Wesley's death in 1791 that a self-consciously revivalist approach began to be adopted by some of his followers, with attempts by preachers and prayer-leaders to generate local revivals as a means to conversion. The success of William Bramwell, the charismatic preacher at the heart of the Great Yorkshire Revival (1792-6), who held prayer meetings for revival each morning, helped polarise Methodist attitudes to this new form of 'revivalism'. On the one hand, a number of revivalist sects sprang up at the turn of the century from the loosely interwoven Methodist undergrowth, encouraged in their progress by reports of American Camp Meetings in the Methodist Magazine, and the first visit of the American revivalist Lorenzo Dow in 1806. Desiring to re-create what they saw as the spiritual vitality of 'primitive' Methodism, members of these sects adopted a direct approach to inducing and 'praying down' local revivals as the critical means by which new converts would continue to be gathered; aided in their pursuit by the providential belief that periodic 'showers of blessing' would fall, a Heaven-sent gift as it were.¹

To Wesleyan authorities, on the other hand, charged (as they saw it) with consolidating Wesley's movement into a church-like edifice founded in government and order, these revivalists appeared as a serious challenge who sought to renounce the increasing formalisation of Methodist worship and the doctrinal subtleties on which the Connexion rested.² The critical Conference ruling against Camp

1. Ward, op.cit.

2. e.g. the Conference in 1800 noted: 'we fear there has sometimes been irregularity in some of the meetings. And we think that some of the hearers are in danger of mistaking EMOTIONS OF THE AFFECTIONS for experimental and practical godliness', Minutes of the Methodist Conference, ii p.55.

Meetings in 1807 marked the official Wesleyan renunciation of alternative religious forms, and by implication signalled a rejection of the concept of revivalism.¹ Thereafter 'popular' revivalism was increasingly attacked in the early 19th century by Wesleyan authorities who argued variously that it was linked to social discontent and even popular protest, that it damaged Methodist spirituality and upset administration and that it disturbed normal patterns of worship and devotion. Determined not to lose the broad, underlying revivalist ethos which they had inherited from their 18th century origins, yet equally committed to ensuring a smooth passage for Methodism from religious 'movement' to administratively sound, ministerially governed 'denomination', Wesleyan authorities increasingly stressed that the official view of revivals must remain that which their founder had seemed to advocate. So Wesleyans employed the term to denote simply a time of spiritual revitalization of existing members, as George Smith explained:

'The term is applied to a society or community of persons; and, thus employed, recognises the fact of the previous existence of real religion among them, and indicates its rapid increase and extension.'

2

Even in the face of the first annual decline in Wesleyan membership in 1820, this attitude was upheld. The so-called Liverpool Minutes which were adopted by the Conference of that year contained thirty-one proposals for attempting to reverse the

1. Ibid., ii p.404.; Ward, op.cit., p.244.

2. Smith, History of Wesleyan Methodism, ii p.617.

trend, which conform comprehensively to existing Wesleyan practice and doctrine, reiterating the virtues and values of the traditional 'means of grace' rather than implanting a fresh and populist revivalist modus operandi.¹

What is clear in the case of Wesleyan Methodism in Cornwall, however, is that a substantial proportion of members, especially in the west, adopted and maintained what we have distinguished as a sectarian view of revivalism as the prime means of church expansion; and that cycles of 'internal revitalization' within the chapels spilt over into great popular revival waves which swept through the mining villages in particular, with almost ineluctable regularity from the late 18th century to the early 1860s. In the 'Great Revival' of 1814, the transference from a Connexionally orthodox revitalization to popular revivalism was neatly encapsulated in the abandoning of standard Wesleyan hymns in favour of spontaneous folk revival songs.² Cornish Wesleyanism was - and remained into the second half of the 19th century - something very different from orthodox Connexional Wesleyanism.

As Connexional representatives, itinerant preachers faced an obvious dilemma in fashioning their responses to outbreaks which, for all their unorthodoxy, brought hundreds, sometimes thousands of new converts inside the chapel doors. Connexional concern was first shown when the 'Great Revival' swept through west Cornwall in 1814. Stuart Piggin, in taking issue with

1. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, v pp.146-52.

2. Thomas Shaw, 'Lecture Notes on Revivals in Cornish Methodism etc. i. Revivals of religion in Cornish Methodism 1782-1839', R.I.C. MS.

W.R.Ward's interpretation of a disapproving attitude to revivals on Bunting's part, quoted Bunting on Cornwall: 'What a remarkable Revival is that at Redruth ! 500 professed converts in a week !' He admitted that Bunting's view of revivals was ambiguous, but argued that though 'to institutionalize revival might be the best way of abolishing it...it is too cynical to credit Bunting with such a programme.'¹ In 1814, this may well be true, but it is nonetheless the case that the revival in 1814 worried Connexional leaders, who kept a close scrutiny on developments; the more so as critical pamphlets began to appear, which trawled up 18th century arguments against Methodism's 'enthusiasm'.² Joseph Benson in London wrote to the Cornwall District Chairman, Francis Truscott, for information 'of all the most unpleasant things' which had occurred during the outbreak, and Truscott replied in May 1814:

'As "Disorder" is something like a relative Term, and what would be pronounced Disorder in some places might be deemed very good order in others, I will not give what I relate a Name; but having mentioned a few Facts which shall be the most exceptionable I can recollect, I will leave you to judge of them and name them as you please.'

³ Truscott's ensuing report was sympathetic and unsensational, and while in a sense he was complying with Benson's request, in another, as a Cornishman sympathetic to revivalism himself, he was working hard to justify any 'disorder' that may have occurred during

1. Piggin, 'Halevy Revisited', p.20.

2. e.g. see A Sequel, to an Essay on Enthusiasm; or Mr.Truscott's Misrepresentations and Falacies Refuted, By a Layman, Redruth, 1814.; James Cornish, 'Remarkable Effects of Fanaticism on the Inhabitants of several towns in Cornwall', The Medical and Physical Journal, xxxi(1814), pp.373-9.

3. 'Francis Truscott-Joseph Benson, Redruth 10 May 1814', M.C.A. MS. PLP 107.8.43.

the 'outpouring of God's Spirit.'

As soon as Bunting was in a real position to direct official policy - as President of the Conference in 1820 - he demonstrated a clear and eager desire to institutionalize revival. The aim of the Liverpool Minutes, for which he was himself largely responsible, might be gauged from his satisfaction the following year when reflecting on a year of 'Many revivals in the gradual and regular way.'¹ The 'Minutes' became the Manual of Official Wesleyan Revivalism, the Conference in 1821 resolving that they be read each year in all District Meetings, in 1853 adding the regulation that they be read and discussed in Preachers meetings in all circuits once a year, and in 1885 decided that they should be given to each preacher at the start of his first appointment as an itinerant.

And with official attitudes and policy decisions ringing in their ears after 1820, it is not surprising that many itinerants in Cornwall revealed mixed feelings about the revivals which they witnessed. In 1824, Amy George, a nineteen-year old girl, achieved notoriety by hanging her younger brother, ostensibly to enable him to see the glories of Heaven after attending a number of revival meetings in Redruth. Once again, local critics pounced on Methodism and revivalism. James Akerman, the superintendent of the Redruth circuit, informed Bunting of the events and the controversy, and asked for advice on how to proceed in the affair, while the Truro superintendent, Joseph Burgess, also wrote to Bunting and listed a number of 'irregularities' which had occurred in amongst the 'good

1. T.P. Bunting, The Life of Jabez Bunting D.D., 2 vols., London, 1859, 1887, ii p.194.

work':

'A few, I hear, are a little deranged, and indeed considering their distress, their agony in prayer, and bodily exertions, added to their want of rest for nights together, and the consequent inability to attend business, it is no wonder.'

1

Bunting's rationale in opposing popular revivalism in fact altered step by step with changing Connexional preoccupations. At first, and culminating in the Liverpool Minutes, Bunting feared both the possible connection of revivalism with popular radicalism and social discontent, and its fissiparous influences on the Connexion as a whole. By the 1830s, however, and paralleling his deeper immersion in administrative matters, Bunting's attitude was primarily borne of a concern about the possible damage which revivals might inflict upon Connexional and circuit administration. He opposed the request for an additional preacher after a revival at Downham in 1834, for example, on the grounds that 'I would not have us take measures to affect our finances on the strength of a recent revival.' The same year, a revival at Yeadon elicited the remark: 'I wish there was less parade about revivals.

I wish that our Editor would not insert any reports from Superintendents. There should be less said about revivals. You will spend money to win souls, but not to keep them.'²

Whether or not it was Jabez Bunting who perpetrated the

1. 'James Akerman-Jabez Bunting, Redruth 7 April 1824', M.C.A. MS. PLP 1.31.4.; 'James Akerman-J. Burgess senior, Redruth 10 Mar. 1824', M.C.A. MS. PLP 1.31.3.; 'Joseph Burgess-Jabez Bunting, Truro 12 Mar. 1824', M.C.A. MS. PLP 17.42.2.
2. B. Gregory, Sidelights on the Conflicts of Methodism, 1827-52, London, 1898, pp. 139-40, p. 168.

description of the Cornish as the 'mob of Methodism' - a question which was the source of much justifiably heated local debate - there is little doubt that his attitude to the county was summarised in the comment: 'In Cornwall there are great revivals, but in the regular work there is little done.'¹ While nationally the notion of 'internal revitalization' aided and reflected the evolution of the Methodist Church, and, by implication, replaced the ideal of a universal mission with the more realistic task of garnering the children of existing members as the backbone for the next generation of Methodists, in Cornwall, it seemed, the regular influx and vacillation of new members brought in by revivals militated against the formation of a truly stable membership base. Bunting's antagonistic viewpoint was underpinned by a belief that not only did revivals tend to disrupt the pattern of services, to make the planning of preachers more difficult, and adversely to affect the administrative network of the Church - from collections to disciplinary matters - but that, in their febrile and volatile moments they damaged what he regarded as true Methodist spirituality. One writer dubbed much of Cornish Methodism as 'hedgerow' religion, in which 'in making the feelings the test of the spiritual condition, it comes about that conscious spiritual exultation is looked upon as the one manifestation of God's grace.'

All other aspects of religion seemed 'to sink into insignificance before the special favour shown to a person in enabling him to feel saved.'² In a discussion on revivals at the 1837 Conference, Bunting

1. Drew, Life of Samuel Drew, p.491.; Gregory, op.cit., p.343.

2. Told for a Memorial. The Story of Mary Ann, London, 1886, pp.70-1.

spoke out against the cheap popularisation of his religion by undignified revivalism; 'instead of 'Come to Jesus', and ranting tunes', he avowed, 'we should have 'God of all grace and majesty!''¹

We have interpreted a perceptible drive by Connexional authorities in the early 1840s to accomplish greater linkage, in all senses, between the county and the Connexion, and it was partly a heightened antipathy to the emotionalism and apparent excesses of Cornish revivalism which finally impelled such activity. At this point, the Connexion was facing up to the impact of a series of annual visits to Britain (though not Cornwall) by an Irish-American 'professional' revivalist, James Caughey. Caughey's visits, methods, and use of Wesleyan pulpits were discussed at each Conference from 1843 onwards, until he was finally officially outlawed in 1846, with Bunting stating: 'Loss of numbers, or smallness of increase, is not to be cured by making revivals.'² The use of explicit techniques designed to 'work up' revival was seen not only to dilute the theological and spiritual basis of the Methodist process of conversion, but to devalue the ideal of the Pastoral Office, by encouraging a minimalist conception of the Ministry as simply a means to 'save souls'.³ Against the background of a perceived threat to the Connexion from this new form of revivalism, Cornwall - already under an official cloud because of

1. Gregory, op.cit., p.247.

2. Ibid. p.403.; Richard Carwardine, Transatlantic Revivalism. Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865, Westport, 1978, p.103, pp.125-33.

3. see Sidney E. Mead, 'The Rise of the Evangelical Conception of the Ministry in America (1607-1850)', in The Ministry in Historical Perspectives, ed. H.R. Niebuhr and D.D. Williams, New York, 1956, pp.226-9.

its revivals - received fresh Connexional attention and specific decisions of policy.

In 1845, two talented and Connexionally-esteemed ministers were sent to the Truro circuit, and the following year reported on a revival based on Truro which, from their account, was unprecedented in its respectability and order. In their observations, the ministers denied any attempt at 'getting up' the revival, but planning and organisation dominated the proceedings. At an early stage, arrangements were made for withdrawing potentially unstable and overwrought penitents from the midst of the congregation, thereby minimizing the risk of psychological contagion. Solemnity and order, we are told, marked the revival's progress; while 'measures were taken, by the appointment of door-keepers and other officers, to prevent any interruption on the part of the ungodly and profane.' Meetings were concluded by ten o'clock in the evening, and with the exception of the first week of special services, not a single class meeting, leaders meeting, or regular service was suspended or disrupted. The spontaneous, uncontrollable Cornish revival appeared to have been rigorously sanitised.¹

Although direct evidence is lacking, there is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest that the whole affair, from the stationing of the ministers, to their report on the revival in the evangelical Cornish Banner and Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, was carefully stage-managed by Connexional authorities. Their aims were perhaps two-fold. To Methodists at the national level, the revival served to defend the doctrine of the Pastoral Office

1. The Cornish Banner, April 1847, p.303ff.

against Caughey's challenge, by demonstrating that Methodist ministers themselves could oversee a revival which was orderly and disciplined, and obtained through the established 'means of grace', while nonetheless extensive and effective. To Cornish Methodists, simultaneously, the degree of order and organisation in the revival was perhaps meant to provide first-hand experience of the Connexional ideal of spirituality with decorum which up to that point had been lacking in the county. However, in the latter aim at least, Connexional leaders had little success. Revivalist meetings in the early 1860s were once again marked by the disorder, excitement, and uncontrolled emotion, which was so antithetical to Connexional orthodoxy.¹ The continuity of popular revivalism in Cornwall, in the first place, provides evidence of the undoubted failure of the Connexion to exert sufficient controlling influence in the county right down to 1870.

ii. Cornish Wesleyan revivals :

Having identified a dichotomy between Connexional and Cornish attitudes to revivalism, and having asserted the essential powerlessness of Connexional authorities to direct Cornish revivals into orthodox channels in the first half of the 19th century, it is necessary to explain why these revivals occurred, and the functions that they may have performed. From 1782 to 1865, revivals were a common and recurring phenomenon of Cornish life. Beginning as small-scale 'internal revitalizations' in the early 1780s, they developed rapidly into regular periods of widespread spiritual

1. See The Revivalist, 1861-2.

interest,during which hundreds,and sometimes thousands,were brought (often temporarily) into society membership. These large-scale revivals were overwhelmingly a feature of west Cornwall,and had their origins within the Wesleyan chapels, although other sects and denominations often enjoyed revitalized chapel life as a direct consequence.

The first recorded revival occurred in the parish of St.Just, in the extreme west of the county,in 1782,which in turn stimulated similar outbreaks in a number of neighbouring societies. Three years later,a revival of comparable proportion occurred in St.Austell. These earliest revivals,though dramatic and exciting,were largely confined to solitary Methodist societies,but from 1799 onwards a number of revivals burst from the confines of Methodist chapels to become eminently popular and public. Hence while the St.Just revival brought in one hundred and twenty new members in the space of six months,the 1799 revival swept through large tracts of west Cornwall,from village to village,with great speed and effect, extending beyond Methodist control to become self-generating and self-justifying. The 'Great Revival' of 1814 took a similar course,and one estimate of 5000-6000 converts in the space of a few weeks gives scant impression of its overall impact. Subsequent large-scale revivals stirred the west in 1824 and 1832,substantial revivals occurred in the circuits of Hayle and St.Austell (1827),St.Ives (1839),and Truro (1847); while in the early 1860s a widespread and extensive revival period lasting several years affected most parts of west and central Cornwall.¹

1. A.M.,vii(1784) pp.211-3.; M.M.,xxii(1799) pp.410-3.;
M.M.,xxxvii(1814) pp.397-9.; W.M.M.,xlvi(1824) pp.217-20.;
W.M.M.,lv(1832) pp.361-5.

The Methodist explanation of these revivals, at both official and popular levels, was that they were strictly and simply the manifestation of Divine intervention. Thomas Garland saw 1814 as:

'a time when there was spread over a vast district a general spiritual awakening, and when in the absence of any means which were visibly connected with such a result, thousands were compelled, by an apparently irresistible power, to seek the salvation of their souls.'

1

Francis Truscott considered at the same time that 'we were favoured with such an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit as I have never before witnessed', while a fellow itinerant John Riles confirmed:

'This revival differs from several others we have been acquainted with, within the space of thirty years past. No particular incident has occurred, to rouse the mind from its torpid state; nor any thing out of the ordinary way, in either the manner or method of the ministers, in delivering their message.'

In short: 'This glorious work began, and is continued without human instrumentality.'²

Local critics, both clerical and lay, however, proposed different interpretations. The Reverend C. Valentine le Grice, perpetual curate at Penzance, gave a sermon in 1814, in which he argued that revivalism was in fact 'a plan, or a system, set in motion periodically, for a particular purpose, in which the name of the Holy

1. Garland, Memorials, p.13.

2. Hayman, The Methodist Revival in North Devon, p.74.; John Riles, An Account of the Revival of the Work of God in the County of Cornwall; With Advice to Young Converts: to which is added, an Appendix, containing some Remarks on the Rev. C. Val le Grice's Sermon on Revivalism, preached at St. Mary's Chapel, Penzance, Penryn, 1814, pp.7-8.

Ghost is used for a pretence.' Proof of this, for Le Grice, was to be found in the manner in which 'It appears periodically, it travels from place to place, it is expected before its arrival, and arrives precisely at the time expected.'¹ Richard Polwhele concurred that revivals were simply 'worked up' by the itinerant preachers :

'Charity would at first revolt at the suggestion that these revivals, recurring about once in seven years, are mere machines in the hands of mercenary operators to rekindle the fainting flames of Methodism. Such (it is abundantly clear) is the fact.'

2

The insinuation that the revival in 1814 was man-made opened the flood-gates to additional charges. One clergyman claimed that sorcery had been used to produce the effects, whilst others concentrated on the late hours and disorder of the meetings. The general feeling of critics was that the revival was 'all a delusion', worked up by Methodist ministers :

'a delusion of the mind, excited by unreasonable fright and terror, proceeding from a damnatory stile (sic) of preaching, adopted since the present preachers came into the neighbourhood; who have dropt (sic) all Gospel mildness and persuasion, and have given into unwarrantable noise and declamation.'

3

It was claimed that the preachers were assisted and promoted in the revival by 'known agents' who excited the congregations, by

1. C. Val le Grice, "Proofs of the Spirit", or Considerations on Revivalism, Penzance, 1814, p.27, p.22.
2. Polwhele, Rural Rector, p.46.
3. Riles, op.cit., pp.19-20.; A Sequel to an Essay on Enthusiasm, p.10.; Francis Truscott, Methodism Vindicated from the Charge of Enthusiasm; or, the Layman's "Enquiry into the Origin and Cause of the late Revival", duly considered, Redruth, 1814, p.9.

rocking to and fro, clapping their hands, and generally stirring up those present into a frenzy. A Wesleyan local preacher, Samuel Drew, partly supported such a notion when he commented somewhat cryptically:

' I fear...there is an artifice with some preachers and people to light up this contagious fire. I have been behind the curtain, and have seen a little of it; and am filled with disgust in proportion to the discovery.'

1

In brief, early critics made two fundamental lunges at the view that revivals were the work of the Holy Spirit. Theologically, the notion of periodic 'showers of blessing', and more centrally the Methodist doctrine of conversion, came under bitter attack. Instead, while the work of God in such occurrences was vehemently denied, the hand of man was detected in all that occurred. The further charge was made that the intense and fervent services and religious meetings provided an environment which encouraged the temporary derangement or breakdown of those caught up in them, and fostered a mass hysteria which induced spontaneous 'conversion'. The 18th century slogan - 'enthusiasm' - was re-activated and seen to underlie events, defined as 'a power of the mind that overpowers the Judgement, and leads men to mistake the suggestions of fancy, for the inspiration of God.'²

Clearly, both charges had some validity. Revivals undoubtedly were maintained and spread to some extent by the creation of a mood of mass expectancy and psychological dislocation within the

1. Drew, Life of Samuel Drew, pp. 486-7.

2. Cornish, 'Remarkable Effects of Fanaticism', pp. 373-9.

chapels. Many of the converts were those most susceptible to the heightened emotionalism of chapel life. In 1782 and 1785, children of up to fourteen years of age were picked out as particularly prominent converts, while in 1826, some of the converts were as young as ten and twelve.¹

Preachers, too, played often important roles as agents of chapel revitalization, although their aims and attitudes were usually more complex and contradictory than their critics would allow. Broadly speaking, there were three types of preacher who might be involved in some way in the process of revival. In the first place, there were those local preachers and helpers who had sprung up on the fringes of Methodism in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, who were committed to revivalism as a means to conversion, and who used particular means, such as prayer meetings, for the deliberate purpose of 'praying down' a revival. In the second place, were those more orthodox Wesleyans who simply worked, often in an organisational rather than a strictly pastoral sense, to create the right conditions within the societies - usually over a lengthy period - to encourage Divine intervention. In Australia, it has been suggested, most 19th century Wesleyan revivals 'sprang from the work of the circuit minister in warming the congregations to sufficient fervour and expectancy.'² The third type of preacher arose as the psychological processes in revivals were increasingly recognised in

1. A.M., vii(1784) p.267.; Dunn, Life of Adam Clarke, p.19.; C.Appleby, 'Wesleyan Methodism in Hayle-1826', J.C.M.H.A. 7 no.1(1985), p.16.
2. R.B.Walker, 'The Growth and Typology of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in New South Wales 1812-1901', Journal of Religious History, 6(1970-1) p.335.

the early 19th century, and as American 'professional' revivalists began to influence British evangelicalism from the 1830s. The most well-known of these revivalists was Charles Finney, whose fame rose rapidly as a result of a substantial revival at Rochester in 1830-1, and who held that a man:

'may enter on the work of promoting a revival, with as reasonable an expectation of success, as he might on any other work with an expectation of success; with the same expectation as the farmer has of a crop when he sows his grain.'

1

In Cornwall, each of these types of preacher made an appearance in the 19th century, and in part influenced the outbreak and course of revivals. The 'professional' revivalist was least common, and was in fact unknown until 1861, when Richard Poole and then William and Catherine Booth made a substantial impact with their evangelical and ecumenical missions. More interestingly, the 'sectarian' revivalist, very often a local man, maintained a presence within Wesleyan ranks throughout the first half of the 19th century. Charles Haime, for example, possessed much the same sense of mission as William Bramwell, the charismatic preacher at the heart of the Great Yorkshire Revival, and in the four successive circuits in which he travelled in the early 19th century, revivals broke out.² William Carvosso, again a Cornishman (and local preacher) attempted to work up revivals wherever he visited, and achieved considerable success due to his reputation and popularity.

1. C.G. Finney, Lectures on Revivals of Religion, (1835), ed. W.G. McLoughlin, Harvard, 1960, p.33.; William McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism. Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham, New York, 1959.
2. see Hayman, The Methodist Revival in North Devon, pp.63-74.

But, nonetheless, in general it would appear that preachers were by no means as central to the stimulation and control of revivals as was the case, for example, in Wales. Most 19th century Welsh revivals can be seen as in large measure due to the work of particular evangelists: John Elias in 1806-9, and 1831-2, Christmas Evans in 1814-5, John Jones in 1839-42, Evan Roberts in 1904.¹ It was first noted in 1782 in St. Just that the travelling preachers had very little part in the work,² and in no revival in the 19th century would the work of an individual preacher appear to be critical to its propagation. Moreover, even as Connexional ministers increasingly took charge in initiating chapel services and meetings designed to generate orthodox 'internal revitalizations', on a number of occasions when they successfully regenerated chapel life, the 'good work' was swept from their hands by a popular revivalist wave. The prime impulse behind Cornish revivals would seem to have come from the people rather than the pastorate.

In explaining this impulse, it is tempting to draw comparisons with Wales, where at least fifteen revivals occurred between 1762 and 1862, compared with at least seventeen in Cornwall. In both areas, 19th century writers explained the depth of popular religiosity in part 'from the extreme paucity of other objects of interest.' In both, writers still have a tendency to draw upon theories of distinctively 'Celtic' religious traditions which, it is argued, engendered fervent and ecstatic religiosity.³ In

1. Eifion Evans, Revivals: Their Rise, Progress, and Achievements, London, 1969.; Eifion Evans, The Welsh Revival of 1904, London, 1969, p.63ff.
2. A.M., vii (1784) pp.267-8.
3. Eifion Evans, When He is Come. An Account of the 1858-60 Revival in Wales, 2nd edn., London, 1967, p.10.; J.V.Morgan, The Welsh Religious Revival, 1904-5. A Retrospect and Criticism, London, 1909, pp.34-5, pp.45-6.; W.Rees, Memoirs

both, certainly, Anglicanism was historically weak, and nonconformity was able to adopt and adapt indigenous beliefs and practices to acquire a level of popular religious functionality.

But it is difficult to explain the onset and persistence of Cornish revivalism specifically in terms of the 'Celtic' characteristics of their participants. Spontaneous revivals occurred with regularity throughout England in the mid- to late-18th century, and in large part their outbreak in Cornwall at this time merely reflected the manifestation of popular religiosity common to other areas of England. It may well be the case that the persistence of revivalism throughout the first half of the 19th century was connected to the fact that, as the Cornish were sensitive to the gradual erosion of tradition and regional identity from external pressures from the later 18th century, they embraced Methodism as a popular establishment, and - among other things - as a means to preserve traditional culture and perceptions in a changing world. In this sense, while the Connexion as a whole moved steadily towards formality in worship from the early 19th century, Cornish Wesleyans maintained a distinctively spiritual basis to their religion, which they clung to tenaciously as a badge of regionalism in the face of encroaching external forces of all kinds.

But of equal importance must surely have been the weakness of factors, both inside and outside the chapels, which could have inhibited the spread of a genuinely popular phenomenon. In the first place, popular revivalism erupted where Methodism was particularly well established, which meant, in effect, the fishing and

of the late W. Williams of Wern, London, 1846, p. 162.

mining villages of the west.¹ In the new and vastly extended mining villages thrown up by the development of the copper industry, popular revivalism was able to spread because economic development and new settlement made existing parochial boundaries obsolete and local social and political control ineffective; and because the absence of a visible employer class gave the mining parishes a class cohesion and solidarity. Similarly in fishing villages, the insular independence and social cohesion of communities helped the progress of popular revivalism. By contrast, the Bible Christians, a pre-eminently revivalistic offshoot concentrated largely in rural east Cornwall, where social divides were more explicit and traditional social controls still operative, could whip up nothing which even closely resembled the Wesleyan revivals in the West.

Popular revivalism could also survive for so long because Connexional authorities and local middle class members were not in a strong enough position to counter it with any real success until at least the 1840s. On the one hand, as was noted in the previous chapter, the prospect of Connexional control was emasculated by the adopted policy of selecting itinerant preachers for the county in the first half of the 19th century. On the other, as suggested in chapter 5, the influence of middle class 'town' congregations in the west was more than counterbalanced by that of the bulk of the membership in the 'country' chapels in mining and fishing communities. The beginnings of Connexional and middle class doubts about popular revivalism in fact were rooted as far back as 1799

1. see Ward, Religion and Society, p.46.

and its aftermath, and in 1814 they were openly stated in the wake of Anglican criticism. John Riles, while defending the revival in general, nonetheless argued that:

'Many persons pay much attention to dreams, visions, and the illusions of imagination: this practice is dangerous, and too often fatal. Human passion ought to be put under requisition to order, and nothing allowed to pass for religious feeling and the work of God, which will not bear examining, and rigidly comparing with the Bible.'

1

During the 1820s, upset middle class sensibilities and increased Connexional concern began to coincide, and certainly the way in which the revivals which broke out during the decade were handled by the itinerants, and publicly presented, indicated real attempts to re-direct popular revivalism, and to improve the public image of Cornish Methodism. Walter Lawry, for example, described the revival in the St. Austell circuit in 1827 as 'attended with as little alloy as any other, whose progress I have witnessed, or whose history I have read.'²

On the other hand, when Richard Poole arrived in Camborne in April 1861 to embark on a revivalist mission, it was clear that popular revivalism was far from its demise. Before long, he was witnessing what he described as 'curious scenes' in the

1. Riles, Account of the Revival, pp. 22-3.

2. W.M.M., 1 (1827) pp. 470-1. Compare this with a 'popular' description of the revival: 'Three hundred was converted to God; their distress of soul was so great that they could neither sleep nor work, but continued in the chapel night and day till their souls were set at liberty; and oh! what streaming eyes were seen, what shouts of praise to God were heard both from old and young. Such a glorious revival as that my eyes have never seen before nor since.' Told for a Memorial, p. 53.

chapel, reminiscent of earlier revivals in the county. One man who danced up and down the aisle during the service delighted the congregation, 'as he was a steady man; and they wept for joy. An old Cornish Methodist said, "That will stir up the fire, brother."' ¹

Remarking on a subsequent evening prayer meeting, Poole in fact demonstrated considerable perceptiveness of the indigenous mechanisms and deeply-ingrained functionality of Cornish popular revivalism:

'It appeared such disorder, and yet it ended as if the most perfect system had conducted the issue. The people don't believe in Conversions unless the Spirit stamps them by the heavy truths of the Bible like the stamping the tin ore. It is the genius of the people, and it is no use either finding fault with it, nor trying to mend it.'

2

iii. The function of Cornish popular revivalism :

The regularity and persistence of revivals in 19th century Cornwall provides an opportunity to analyse closely the processes at work within them, and to examine how Cornish Methodism functioned as a Volkskirche in practice. How did they occur, and can we pinpoint their essential 'meaning'? Analysis needs to begin within the Methodist societies themselves, for though Cornish revivals fall into a number of categories, and in some instances have a plethora of causal factors, their origins in almost all cases can best be understood in terms of a process of periodic renewal within the Methodist societies. A recent study of church growth ³ has

1. The Revivalist, June 1861, pp. 91-2.

2. Ibid. p. 92.

3. Currie, Gilbert, Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers, pp. 44-5.

postulated a five-phase cycle which explains general fluctuations in church membership, described by the terms: depression, activation, revival, deactivation, and declension. Revival follows a period of activation within the church itself, which is marked by renewed zeal and commitment and by a subsequent rise in expectations of church growth as enthusiasm becomes externalised and recruitment rates climb. An observer remarked in 1826 that a Cornish revival 'usually commences by a greater degree of liveliness among the old members of society.'¹ Such activation was always theoretically possible within Methodist societies because of the nature of their structure and preoccupations. In the class meeting and prayer meeting, but also in special services such as the love feast, the spiritual state of the individual received constant attention. It was, of course, with such activation that the 'Liverpool Minutes' were pre-eminently concerned, as were later 'revival' and special prayer meetings.

All the major Cornish revivals in fact appear to fit a cyclical pattern, with peaks of membership at the time of the revival preceded by usually lengthy periods of steady growth and followed by fairly rapid declension. In the first recorded revival in St. Just, membership started rising significantly at least a year before the revival broke in December 1781. In 1799, five years of gradual consolidation preceded a dramatic year in which membership was doubled in the two west Cornwall circuits, with over 4000 new members brought in. The itinerant preachers at the time stressed the critical role of the several years' steady accumulation of

1. Appleby, 'Wesleyan Methodism in Hayle-1826', p.17.

members in laying the foundation for the revival. A similar cycle can be observed in 1814, when as a culmination to several years of steady growth, revival broke out from what one itinerant called 'a prepared Church'.¹ Activation might be encouraged by a wide range of internal circumstances. The general background to the revivals in 1782 and 1785 was a gradual extension of local Methodist organisation, which included the missioning of new villages, and the building or improving of chapels. The origins of other revivals can be traced variously to the reclaiming of a notorious 'backslider', the working through of a new, zealous generation within the chapel, and the division of a circuit allowing itinerants to focus their attentions more intensively.

Activation might also be due to wider religious circumstances: in particular as a corollary to internal mobilisation to defend Methodism from recurrent Anglican and Establishment challenges. Activation which led to the 1814 revival in particular was rooted, at least in part, in a national Methodist response to a concerted Establishment attack in 1811, from Sidmouth's bill, which would have effectively restricted Methodist itineracy. The substantial petitioning of Parliament that year helped win the Methodists a revised Toleration Act in 1812, and led to burgeoning denominational self-confidence.² In Cornwall, Methodists mobilised to petition Parliament and to protect their religion in the face of the charges of the bishop of Exeter - to his clergy in support of Sidmouth's proposals, and of the

1. W.M.M., lvi (1833) p.617.; Hayman, op.cit., p.74.

2. M. Edwards, After Wesley. The Social and Political Influences of Methodism 1791-1849, 2nd edn., London, 1948, pp.76-82.

archdeacon - 'the Church was in danger' and vigorous measures must be adopted for its preservation.¹ As the threat abated, an evangelical reaction ensued, assisted also by a surge of revitalized zeal as the war against France neared its end. Revival broke out hard on the heels of a meeting at Redruth in December 1813, at which the District (Foreign) Missionary Society was formed. In this climate of heightened religious expectation in spring 1814, as Napoleon the anti-Christ was defeated and sent into exile, the revival reached full flood. An itinerant preacher noted optimistically:

'It is not at all improbable, that the desolating war which has affected Europe for many years past, has been God's harbinger to prepare the way for the promulgation of the gospel.'

2

Once activation had been incubated within the society or societies, revival often began at special services, with an uncommon intensity of spiritual feeling engendering emotional and often physical outbursts. The 1814 revival, for example, began at a love feast in Camborne, where seven people professed conversion.³ The outbreak of revival increasingly followed a set pattern, with the 'old and leading members' of the society whipping up the rest of the congregation by their shouts and exclamations 'during the prayers of the preacher in the chapel.'⁴ With regularity, revivals began at the turn of the year. The advent of the 1799 revival, for

1. J. Burges, Observations on a sermon, preached by the Rev. Mr. Hocker, and on a charge, delivered by Rev. the Archdeacon of Cornwall in Truro church, Monday May 20 1811, Truro, 1811.
2. Riles, Account of the Revival, p. 4.
3. Shaw, History of Cornish Methodism, p. 65.
4. Appleby, 'Wesleyan Methodism in Hayle-1826', p. 17.

example, was traced to seasonal services in December and January; a love feast at Penzance on the circuit quarter day, a midnight watch-night service at Redruth on New Year's Eve, and the Covenant service at Truro the following week, were all scenes of the first indication of excitement and conversion which rapidly became widespread revival.¹ In part, insofar as seasonal work patterns influenced church involvement, the lull in fishing and farming at this time of year may have helped make religious commitment temporarily more attractive. When William Booth much later arrived in St. Ives for his mission in September 1862, 'even professing Christians derided the idea of a revival in the fishing season.'² At the same time within the chapels themselves, the festival of Christmas, and perhaps especially the renewal of the covenant of membership, made this a peculiarly significant period of spiritual resolve for members and of susceptibility for adherents. Increasingly, Wesleyans 'planned' special revival prayer and other meetings for this time of year, while in 1854, Conference suggested that:

'The annual solemnity of Renewing the Covenant may, if duly prepared for and improved, afford a means of great usefulness in quickening the zeal of our people and in bringing in many to decide for a religious life.'

3

So far, of course, the revival process conforms quite neatly to the Wesleyan model of 'internal revitalization', but on a number of occasions - in 1799, 1814, 1824, and 1832, for example - such

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1. M.M., xxii (1799) pp. 410-1.
 2. The Revivalist, May 1862, p. 69.
 3. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, xii p. 474.

internal revitalizations rapidly metamorphosed into popular revivalism, and moved outside both chapels and Wesleyan control and orthodoxy. Two key reasons explain this transition. In the first place, many members, as we have seen, maintained a sectarian view of revivalism as a means to conversion, and also increasingly understood revivalism as a manifestation of a distinctively regional and religious spirituality. Thomas Collins in 1849 discovered that the process of inducing revival in fact came quite easily:

'I have only to abide with God in the closet, receive Him there, and then go among the people and break the alabaster box; they know the odour, and love it.'

1

A local tradition of revivalism was fostered within the chapels, as in Wales, where the 1904 revival was aided by the fact that 'past revivals were constantly kept before the eyes of the common people in published biographies and histories.'² Revivalism in fact became a part of Cornish popular culture in the 19th century, which lived relatively happily alongside the remnants of pre-industrial tradition. In the revival in Mousehole in 1828, for example, customary activities, such as the traditional trip to the island on Midsummer's day and the lighting of bonfires on Midsummer's Eve, were substituted by religious services, themselves endowed with surrogate cultural sentiment. In St. Ives in 1862, the customary 'guise dances' between New and Old Christmas Day were largely overshadowed by revival meetings.³

1. Coley, Life of Thomas Collins, p.288.

2. Evans, The Welsh Revival of 1904, p.46.

3. Carvosso, Efficacy of Faith, p.250-1.; The Revivalist, May 1862, pp.69-70.

In the second place, popular revivalism was dependent on the key role of the Methodist adherents. By the early 19th century, Methodism had obtained a very high nominal affiliation in many mining and fishing villages, not represented in actual membership figures. As was said at the time of the 1799 revival:

'It is really wonderful to reflect that for fifty years, the gospel had a more general spread in the West of Cornwall than in most other parts of England, except in some parts of Yorkshire, yet, in the last six months, nearly an equal number has been added to society, to what had joined for fifty years before.'

1

Membership might be postponed, or not even considered, for a number of reasons: the financial obligations could be severe, especially for a miner on 'tribute', a contract system of labour which gave fluctuating and irregular income; the disciplinary framework of the class and the time required to be spent in meetings could seem unappealing or over-demanding; the notion that conversion involved a conscious feeling of conviction of assurance may have restrained potential members who remained 'unaffected'. Whatever the precise reasons, Methodist religion for the many - the adherents - plainly differed from that of the members, and centred on worship and the social forum of the chapel rather than on the individually disciplinary and spiritually incest-igative atmosphere of the class meeting.

When the society became activated and revitalized, many of these adherents were brought into the flock. One commentator remarked:

1. Dunn, Memoirs of Thomas Tatham, p.146.

'It may well be conjectured that a large number of the converts of revivals consists of well-disposed persons upon whose minds the Spirit of God has long been operating, and who were only waiting the guiding hand of Christian sympathy to become decidedly religious.'

¹ In large numbers of Cornish Methodist biographies, the outbreak of revival is deemed to be the critical event in the spiritual history of the subject.

But Methodism had a rapid turnover of members - one estimate claiming that five out of six who had made a start were in fact lost in time to the permanent organisation - and with the frequency of revivals in Cornwall, recurrent 'conversion' was also far from rare. A minister stationed in Penzance in 1871 wrote that, as a result of great revivals in the past, the town 'swarms with Methodist backsliders'. In part, at times of revival, a popular conception of 'conversion', based on a literal interpretation of Wesley's justification by faith alone, brought many adherents simply affected by the zeal and excitement of a revitalized chapel life into membership for a short time.² For others, revivals could be a source of entertainment, or a break from the routine of everyday life. But many adherents were described as 'borderers', that is:

'Persons of whom it is difficult to say whether they belong to the church or the world... They can attend places of worship, or places of amusement, just as occasion may serve them... And a very large proportion of those who attend on the ministry of the word are of this description.'

³ It is tempting in this respect to understand the metamorphosis

1. Treffry, Memoirs of John Edwards Trezise, p.87.
2. Warner, The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution, p.198.; Nightingale, Life of Samuel Romilly Hall, pp.144-5.; Blencowe, Faithful Pastor, pp.205-6.
3. Treffry, Memoirs of Richard Trewavas senior, pp.62-3.

from internal revitalization to popular revivalism, at least in part, as a response to a particular external, secular situation.

Historians have been concerned for some time with explaining the appearance of revivals in relation to social, economic, and political trends. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, drew a largely unexplained correlation between periods of Methodist expansion and acute socio-economic and political strain in the first half of the 19th century. Wesleyan growth-rates were highest, 'with the one exception of the boom years 1820-4', in 'periods of mounting popular agitation.' The Primitive Methodists, also, 'advanced most rapidly in the period of maximum social discontent and rapid industrialisation between 1815 and 1848.'¹ In a similar vein, a study of the Great Yorkshire Revival of 1792-6, argues that although:

'The real impact of economic dislocation created by the war was perhaps not felt until the revival had developed its early momentum...its appearance intensified feelings of frustration and anxiety among working people in the northern counties...'

which helped the revival to spread.²

But what social function might revival have performed in these periods of socio-economic strain? A recent study of Welsh revivals in the 19th century seems to suggest a two-fold answer.³ On the one hand, C. Ben Turner argued that the secular milieu of strain and dislocation provided a context in which emotional and salvationist

1. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, p.29, p.32.; Primitive Rebels, Manchester, 1971, pp.129-30.
2. John Baxter, 'The Great Yorkshire Revival 1792-6 : A Study of Mass Revival among the Methodists', Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, 7., ed. Michael Hill, p.61.
3. C. Ben Turner, 'Revivals and popular religion in Victorian and Edwardian Wales', University of Wales, Aberystwth, Ph.D. thesis, 1979, p.129, p.136, pp.139-40.

religion could flourish, by providing comfort and support, and a means of adjustment in a period of social and personal crisis. Psychologists have indicated that social dislocation can induce religious conversion which 'often conceals the search for a social group into which one may fit and cease to be an outcast in one's own eyes.'¹ Less clearly, however, Ben Turner also suggested that popular revivals might serve more positive functions, expressing both discontent at the way in which wages in the industrial areas fluctuated wildly, and vague attempts to re-invoke the validity of custom and tradition.

Two prime strands of thinking on the function of popular revivalism have evolved within social historiography, which Ben Turner, to some extent, attempted to combine. On the one hand, E.P. Thompson forwarded an 'oscillation' theory by which it was conceivable that religious revivalism in the period 1790-1830 reflected 'the chiasm of despair' amongst working people, and occurred 'just at the point where 'political' or temporal aspirations met with defeat.'² On the other, Eric Hobsbawm first argued that in the half century after 1790 intense political and religious excitement often coincided, and that at such times 'preachers, prophets, and sectarians might issue what the labourers would regard as calls to action rather than to resignation,'³ More recently, however, he appeared to concur with Thompson when he interpreted the revivalism which superseded Swing riots in several parts

1. J.A.C. Brown, Techniques of Persuasion. From Propaganda to Brainwashing, Harmondsworth, 1963, pp. 229-30.
2. Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, pp. 427-9.
3. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, p. 32ff.

of the country in 1830 as 'an escape from, rather than a mobilisation for social agitation,'¹

How, then, are we to interpret popular revivalism in Cornwall? Undoubtedly, the pace and nature of socio-economic change in west Cornwall in the 1780s and 1790s helped activate the societies prior to the 1799 revival, and in general secular circumstances in part determined the form and extent of popular revivals thereafter. But what kind of milieu helped revival spread, and what functions were popular revivals meant to serve in these circumstances?

The weakness of popular radicalism and Chartism in Cornwall prevents any attempt to explain popular revivalism in terms of a process of 'oscillation', a point Thompson readily conceded.² On the other hand, it is possible that political excitement in general may have played some part in Cornish revivals. The superintendent of the Penzance circuit in the midst of a revival in 1832 saw the influence of cholera and 'political commotions' generated by the issue of Parliamentary reform, 'all operating with the great moral machinery, in hastening the universal reign of grace.'³ The most significant 'political' influence probably came from war, peace, and the threat of invasion. The revival in 1782, for example, coincided with the formation of a corps of Volunteers in the face of threatened French invasion.⁴ In general, political developments which tended to draw communities together, and foster universal concern or preoccupation, provided important backcloths for

1. E.J.Hobsbawm and G.Rude, Captain Swing, London, 1969, p.291.

2. Thompson, op.cit., p.920.

3. W.M.M., lv(1832) p.365.

4. Treffry, Memoirs of John Edwards Trezise, pp.41-4.

revival, while socially divisive and contentious issues tended to make revival less likely.

One external determinant which clearly did play the role of unifying communities was cholera. In Cornwall, the cholera epidemic which reached Sunderland in late 1831, arrived late, and was not as severe as in many other areas. But a revival which had begun in the Penzance circuit in 1831 maintained its impetus throughout 1832 because of the impact of cholera. In August 1831, a Wesleyan minister had written in his diary: 'The cholera is drawing near. Four persons have been snatched away at Hayle...and the alarm is felt... Professors are driven to self-examination and prayer, and sinners tremble at their danger.'¹ Cholera brought a new aspect to a revival which had previously been largely a process of internal revitalization: it now catered for whole communities caught up with an all-suffusing and unifying preoccupation. Similarly, when revival returned on a smaller scale in 1849:

'One great momentous concern seemed to pervade the mass of the people. One intense agonising inquiry was heard in every direction, 'What must I do to be saved?' Domestic engagements and worldly business seemed suspended until the great question of salvation was settled.'

2

Cholera brought an urgency to personal ponderings upon the fundamentals of human existence, and the coincidence of a Christian model of explanation for the cause of the epidemic - especially in 1832, in the absence of a credible scientific alternative³ - with a

1. Blencowe, Faithful Pastor, p.208.

2. Coley, Life of Thomas Collins, p.302.

3. A. Briggs, 'Cholera and Society in the 19th century', Past and Present, 19(April 1961), p.91.

possible course of action which would bring at least spiritual relief had dramatic impact on a fear-filled population. Moreover, the chapel provided a central forum for villagers in sudden need of explicit forms and structures of communal solidarity.

On the other hand, economic depression, which might also have unified mining or fishing communities, for example, did not by itself provide a productive milieu for popular revivalism. In this respect, the case of Cornwall would appear to support a number of recent views of Methodist church growth in England in general.¹ In Cornwall, it is clear, financial obligations perpetually deterred potential members; and when prices were high, or unemployment rife, membership was more likely to be deferred, or even abandoned. The circuit report of the St. Austell Primitive Methodists in the depressed year of 1846 mentioned about twenty members who had left during the year 'thru thier inability to contribut thier class money.'² At times of depression, there were more immediate concerns than religious commitment. Hence the 1799 revival came after a good harvest in 1798; the 1814 revival after wheat prices had fallen significantly from the heights of 1812 and 1813. The 1847 revival spread very little beyond the town society of Truro, as one minister explained, because of considerable distress in the countryside following a poor harvest and high prices. Indeed, he concluded:

'we hope this providential chastisement of our guilty land will soon be withdrawn, and that God

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1. Walsh, 'Elie Halevy', pp. 10-1.;
Currie, Gilbert, Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers, p. 105.
 2. 'St. Austell Primitive Methodist Circuit Reports and Schedules 1830-66', C.R.O. MS. MR/A/124/1-71.

will again grant us fruitfull seasons and general prosperity - and we hope temporal blessings will be accompanied by an effusion of the Holy Spirit, and an extensive revival of pure and undefiled religion.'

1

One possible reason why depression did not lead to revival was that a traditional form of direct action in times of high prices remained operative throughout the first half of the 19th century. Partly because the retention of the 'tribute' system allowed the Cornish miner to maintain an economic mentality which focused on prices rather than wages, right down to 1847, miners continued to react to high market prices and grain shortages with traditional forms of protest - the food riot, the fixing of market prices, the prevention of the 'exportation' of grain. At times of depression, in other words, mining communities turned to riot rather than religion.

But the persistence of this effective form of customary direct action might shed some light on popular revivalism. The most common milieu in which popular revivalism flourished was one of complex social and economic change and dislocation, when revivals might well have represented popular responses in the traditional mould of public demonstration, to socio-economic pressures no longer reducible to traditional economic reasoning. Such a milieu underpinned the first major revival in the mining heartland in 1799. Throughout the 1790s, copper mining in the region had begun to recover from a severe depression in the 1780s, and by 1800 the

1. 'William P. Burgess-Benjamin Carvosso, Camborne 25 Mar. 1847', M.C.A. MS. PLP 17.44.5.

price of copper - or 'standard' - had doubled since 1785, old mines had re-opened and a number of new operations were under way. The revival of 1799 would appear to have broken out at a time of economic upturn. But, in fact, the basic climate in the area was one of overwhelming anxiety and uncertainty. Early in 1799, Birmingham manufacturers introduced a motion in the House of Commons in a bid to control the price of copper by regulating the duty on imported ore. A price of £100 per ton was suggested, above which ore might be imported free of duty. In Cornwall, with the standard at £121 per ton, this presented a serious threat, the more so as an enquiry into the state of the copper mines for the six months to January/February 1799 revealed most of them to be essentially speculative ventures, dependent on discovering profitable lodes, and a steadily rising 'standard'. In March 1799 the Redruth neighbourhood was said to be in a state of great alarm as a result of the motion; if passed, it was felt, only four mines locally would survive a year. Three to four thousand miners would be out of employment. Throughout April, a parliamentary committee took evidence on the state of the copper mines and copper trade; and against this background, the Methodist revival which had broken out in the societies at the turn of the year, was taken up by the mining communities in the spring.¹

Other internal revitalizations also became popular revivals at times when new and primarily 'external' forces were plaguing

1. Barton, Copper Mining, p.39-44.; Jenkin, Cornish Miner, p.140.; Report from the Committee to Enquire into the State of the Copper Mines and Copper Trade of this Kingdom, Parliamentary Papers, 1799.; Jenkin, News from Cornwall, p.68.

working miners with financial doubts and fears of unemployment. The 1824 revival, for example, took off in the midst of an exceptional (and short-lived) speculative boom in mining; the 1846/7 revival around Truro in a climate of local uneasiness over Peel's free trade budgets which threatened a flood of cheap tin ore imports.¹

It is difficult to interpret the role that popular revivalism might have played in these circumstances, and indeed any analysis of reports of revivals indicates that the revivalist impulse was multi-layered rather than unitary, and encompassed a wide range of perceptions and religious 'aims'. Undoubtedly there were the socially dislocated who sought refuge in the communal excitement and salvationist comforts of revitalized chapel life, just as there were members who reached their spiritual goal of 'entire sanctification', or simply renewed commitments at such times.

But it does appear to have been the case, between 1799 and 1839, and again in the early-1860s, that though revivalism might not have had the immediacy of aim of a food riot, it could help bind a community together in response to economic forces beyond their control. What stimulated an increasingly articulated spirit of regional identity, after all, was the consciousness that 'external' economic forces and structures were eroding Cornish tradition. Revivalism in this sense was a preservative reflex, which signalled a protest at the encroaching and alien modernisation of economic trends and practices. Popular revivals generally continued for

1. Rowe, Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution, p.132ff.

days and sometimes weeks, disrupted work, and upset commerce. In 1814 in Redruth, 'for some time all business in the town was suspended, even little was done in the market-days, but the chapels were crowded day and night.' In Ponsanooth in 1823-4, 'for eight weeks successively they never broke up their meetings by day, and seldom by night.'¹

In these situations, revivalism was a genuinely 'popular' and 'Cornish' protest against economic change. Nor could it be condemned as mere escapism. In 1824, the magistrates threatened to shut the chapel at Redruth if the excitement continued. Richard Polwhele took issue at the time with Southey's claim that Methodism had subdued the spirit of the lower classes, and feared that revivalism was merely a prelude to insurrections from the mines, led by Methodist preachers, which would 'strike terror into Cornwall' within a few years.² But above all, popular revivalism in the mining and fishing villages was a community response to many kinds of unifying preoccupation. The Methodist chapel, with a high nominal affiliation, was very often the central social forum of the village, and became a communal refuge and a symbol of communal solidarity. Such unification resulted from many different circumstances: from news of victory in war, to the outbreak of cholera; from a poor fishing season, to the threat of unemployment in the mines. In all these instances, popular revivalism flourished, and functioned both to bind communities together, and to demonstrate

1. Copy of an Interesting Letter from Mr. William Henshaw, Methodist Preacher, Plymouth Dock to Mr. William Bramwell, Methodist Preacher, Birstall 10 March 1814, London, 1814, pp. 2-3.; Treffry, Memoirs of Richard Treffry junior, p. 21.
2. 'Joseph Burgess-Jabez Bunting, Truro 12 Mar. 1824', M.C.A. MS. PLP 17.42.2.; Polwhele, Rural Rector, iii p. 14.

their continued exclusivity to 'outsiders'.

CHAPTER 8 : THE CHAPEL AND ADMINISTRATION.

Popular revivalism, then, provided the most obvious manifestation of an indigenisation of Wesleyan Methodism in west Cornwall, and inevitably Connexional authorities faced daunting local opposition in any attempts to redirect revivals into more orthodox channels. The arrival of Robert Young and J.H. James in Truro in the mid-1840s was in fact central to an eventual Connexional offensive on Cornish 'idiosyncracies'; their efforts to curb the apparent excesses of traditional revivalism being only part of a wider strategy to bring Cornish Methodism more into line with the Connexion as a whole. The conclusion that had been reached by this time amongst Connexional authorities was that, at heart, Cornish Methodist 'problems' issued from the inadequacy of pastoral oversight, that could only be corrected by local administrative and financial reform, which would allow the region to pay for more preachers. By these means, it was calculated, the primary loyalty of many members to the chapel,¹ which served both religious and secular communal functions, not only at times of revival, might be matched at last by an adequate sense of attachment and responsibility to Connexional needs and priorities.

From the first, the Methodist Conference had been faced with the intricate problem of bonding together the societies, and subsequently chapels, under its charge into a Connexional network. In 1765, Conference had resolved to send a representative through the country to examine existing chapel deeds, and to appoint

1. e.g. see Currie, Methodism Divided, pp. 44-5.

new,Connexionally acceptable trustees wherever necessary. In 1788,a new Model Deed was proposed,and it was resolved that all chapels built in future must immediately be settled on the 'Conference plan'.¹ By the Deed of Declaration in 1784 it was to be specified in every chapel deed that Conference had been the power to appoint preachers and exercise discipline within the chapel. The Plan of Pacification in 1795 confirmed the powers of Conference,after considerable opposition from trustees.

But the legal and institutional framework of Connexionalism, by itself,could make few initial inroads into a basic psychological and social attachment to the chapel. There was always the tendency,in the 18th century in particular, for local congregations to detach themselves from the wider frame,because it served no useful function,or even intruded on specific forms and needs. In 1765,for example,a number of the members in Mevagissey left the society to form an Independent church.² Far more importantly,however,because the great majority of Cornish chapels were built 'by the self-denying efforts and liberality of the poor rather than by the encouragement and munificence of persons belonging to the wealthier classes',³ they became and remained peculiarly potent and enduring symbols of affection and loyalty.

The notion that the chapel belonged to the community rather than the Connexion was made plain in the continuing battle over chapel deeds in the first half of the 19th century. John Slater,in

1. Smith,History of Wesleyan Methodism, i p.321,p.554,p.565.
2. Select Remains of the Rev. Francis Truscott,ed. Richard Treffry,Helston,1833,pp.57-8.
3. Bourne,The King's Son,p.49.

noting his impressions as an itinerant in the Truro circuit in 1812,wrote:

'The people in general,are very kind. I see no fault in the Cornish people,but,an inordinate love of power. This is a striking feature of their character - manifested in many instances to the hurt of God's cause,the pain of a Preacher's mind - and to the disparagement of their own character. Hence rises the desire,among the people,of having the chapels in their own hands,that they may more effectually domineer over those who ought to be at rule in the Church.'

1

One of the most serious early disputes between the locality and the Connexion took place when the trustees refused to settle a new chapel at Ladock,in the Truro circuit,on the Conference plan in 1814. The circuit superintendent,John Riles,who attempted to solve the problem,was 'not a very popular Man in this county',because he was 'too fond of governing absolutely.' The difficulty for the Connexion,as another itinerant noted at the time,was that:

'several of the Local Preachers have declared that they will supply the Chapel in Question,if the travelling preachers will not.'²

Thereafter,the problem of the settlement of chapels remained a serious bone of contention between trustees, (backed by lay leaders and congregations) and the itinerant preachers. Richard Treffry noted that 'much discussion concerning the settlement of chapels' took place at the Helston circuit Quarterly Meeting in July 1824;³ the following year,the Truro Quarterly Meeting resolved:

1. 'John Slater-J.Simpson, Truro 25 Nov.1812', M.C.A. MS. PLP 98.3.32.
2. 'Francis Truscott-Joseph Allen, Redruth 30 Jan. 1814', M.C.A. MS.
3. Treffry,Memoirs of Richard Treffry junior,pp.21-2.

'that this Meeting recommends that the friends at Silverwell do immediately Settle their Chapel on the regular Methodist Plan, and that the Local Preachers be requested to Abstain from Preaching in that Chapel untill it is settled.'

1

In 1826, those responsible for building a new chapel at Portreath, in the Redruth circuit, informed the circuit superintendent that a clause must be inserted in the deed similar to that already in the Bridge chapel deed, giving the trustees the right to invite the preachers of their choice when a majority of them thought proper.² In December 1842, Josephus Ferns wrote to Jabez Bunting from Truro: 'I find no less than six Trust Deeds void by their non-enrollment in Chancery; - and I have reason to believe that great defects exist in every circuit in the County.' In October 1845, John H. James summarised:

'chapels settled in all imaginable and unimaginable ways; deeds drawn up by auctioneers and other non-professional persons. Indeed, the people seem to have had their own way in almost everything.'

3

One simple problem for the Wesleyan pastorate which was exacerbated by this desire for autonomy in controlling chapel affairs, was the habit of local trustees of inviting 'unofficial' preachers into their chapels, particularly in the 1840s, when roving revivalists and teetotal advocates began to tour the county. Their

1. 'Truro Wesleyan Circuit Stewards Account Book 1816-45', C.R.O. MS. MR/T/18.
2. 'Redruth Wesleyan Local Preachers Minute Book 1821-79', C.R.O. MS. MR/R(5)/10, 6 July 1826.
3. 'Josephus Ferns-Jabez Bunting, Truro 17 Dec. 1842', M.C.A. MS. PLP 40.33.11.; 'J.H. James-George Osborn, Truro 22 Oct. 1845', M.C.A. MS. PLP 61.4.36.

admittance into the local chapels directly challenged the doctrine of the Pastoral Office, while their espousal of teetotalism and revivalism represented a contrasting commitment to 'primitive' piety above denominational formalism. But in a more general sense, the desire for control among trustees was paralleled by a sense of attachment to 'their' chapel on the part of the membership; which in turn fostered a particularly affectionate regard for local preachers and leaders, who were more readily associated with the life of the chapel than the itinerant preachers from 'outside'. One itinerant in 1842 remarked to a local chapel leader that the work of God was progressing well, to be met with the riposte: 'I hope you do not think that you have done it.'¹

Serious efforts were made to resolve this problem by reducing the size of circuits, so that itinerants might visit the country places more frequently. In the early development of the circuit, the itinerants had been expected to work a 'round', enabling them to visit all the societies under their charge, but in fact they quickly settled into staying longer and longer in their 'station' town, to the increasing neglect of the country societies. This was particularly the case after 1815, when missioning in general was largely discarded.² In some circuits, however, eventual re-organisation did allow the itinerants to spend more time visiting the more distant parts of their circuits, which both improved discipline and devotional orthodoxy. The huge Liskeard circuit, for example, was eventually divided in

1. quoted in Rule, 'The Labouring Mner in Cornwall', D.Phil. thesis, p.271, n.

2. Ward, 'Religion of the People', p.251-2.

Table 21 : The Liskeard Wesleyan Circuit, Before and After Division.
(Sources : MR/Lisk/55.; MR/Lisk/3.; MR/Lisk/36-40 : all C.R.O. MSS.).

	<u>1822.</u>		<u>1842.</u>	
Members.	867.		725.	
Preaching Places.	50.		22.	
Travelling Preachers.	3.		2.	
Proportion of services taken by travelling preachers :	% of Places.	% of mem- bers affected.	% of Places.	% of mem- bers affected.
0.	56.	30%.	0.	0.
1 - 10.	18.	16·1%.	13·6.	4·8%.
11 - 20.	6.	3·8%.	59·1.	43·7%.
21 - 30.	12.	23·4%.	13·6.	16·5%.
31 - 40.	2.	3·2%.	0.	0.
41 - 50.	2.	13·0%.	4·5.	11·4%.
51 - 60.	2.	3·9%.	4·5	9·2%.
90.	2.	6·5%.	4·5.	14·2%.

1840, and from circuit plans we can gauge the improvements in pastoral oversight which ensued.¹

By reducing the size of the circuit, the itinerants were still able to remain stationed in the head town of Liskeard, but now found it possible to introduce mid-week services in the country places, without jeopardising their responsibilities and quota of services in the key towns of the circuit. Such administrative reorganisation was carried out throughout east Cornwall in general.

The originally immense St. Austell circuit, for example, was gradually whittled down to manageable proportions with the formation of circuits based on Launceston (1794), Camelford (1803), Bodmin (1804), Liskeard (1809), and Saltash (1840). Similarly, in the north-east of the county, the Launceston circuit was gradually contracted, and at the end of the line the Northhill circuit was created:

'to diminish the long journies of the ministers; to enable the ministers to devote more time to their house to house visitation; to enable Launceston to secure one minister to be always in the town... and to equalize the work and support of two ministers between Town and country.'

2

The problem in the west of the county, however, was rather different. It was not the size of circuits which exacerbated chapel loyalty, but the heavy concentration of societies with high membership levels in a small area which made pastoral oversight so difficult. Western circuits were in fact fashioned into manageable

1. See Table 21.

2. 'Launceston Wesleyan Circuit Schedules, 1869-79', C.R.O. MS. MR/L/24.

size far more quickly than in the east, but the huge societies of the wet central mining region in particular were still, paradoxically, outside true ministerial control. The basic problem here, in fact, was the absence of sufficient local finances to pay for adequate pastoral supervision. Attempts were made to continue the process of circuit subdivision - the Tuckingmill circuit was formed in 1839 and the Perranwell circuit in 1841 - but because neither was able to sustain financially their travelling preachers, both were re-emerged in their parent circuits in 1847. As late as 1864, a similar proposal to create a new circuit from portions of the Truro and St. Agnes circuits was deemed to be financially impracticable.¹ The inadequacy of pastoral oversight simply ensured that great powers devolved onto, and remained with, the class leaders and local preachers. W.R. Ward has written of Cornish local preachers: 'The double hold of converting power and pastoral leadership gave them an ascendancy which did not bend easily to preacher's pressure.'²

The pastoral hold of local leaders was matched in administrative matters. In 1871, Samuel Romilly Hall wrote from Penzance: 'Ticket-giving money never comes into sight, and is seldom mentioned. The leaders appear to prefer to attend to finances themselves.'³ The ambivalent attitude of many travelling preachers to revivals in the west lay in part in a recognition of their relative powerlessness; for at times of revival, more new members were brought into the societies than they could effectively

1. 'Cornwall District Meeting Minutes, May 1864', M.C.A. MS.

2. Ward, *op.cit.*, p.245.

3. Nightingale, *Life of Samuel Romilly Hall*, pp.145-6.

oversee, while the forced reliance on class leaders and local preachers in pastoral supervision only rendered the task of imposing ministerial authority more difficult.

Inadequate pastoral supervision helped an indigenous 'primitive' piety to maintain an existence within the 'country' societies, which of itself concerned the itinerants, especially during revivals. But, during the first half of the 19th century, Connexional preoccupations in general became increasingly administrative rather than spiritual or devotional. Here too, however, a disjunction occurred between Connexional needs and Cornish practice, and in fact it was the eventual diagnosis that the whole Connexional apparatus in the west of the county was on the verge of administrative collapse, as well as suspect in its spirituality, that finally led to concerted efforts to 'reform' Cornish Methodism in the 1840s.

The root cause of the disjunction was financial. As Methodism in general institutionalised, its leaders were increasingly tied up with financial concerns; while the bureaucratisation and formalisation of the Methodist 'denomination' made ever-growing demands on the pockets and purses of the membership. In Cornwall, these trends created a growing rift with the Connexion for two simple reasons. In the first place, it does appear to have been the case that a relatively high proportion of the Wesleyan membership in the west was genuinely too poor to meet Connexional requisitions. In 1798, George Dermott, as principal agent in the district for collections for a new chapel in Nottingham, after the original one

had been taken over by the New Connexion, wrote a note of warning to Daniel Tatham in Nottingham:

'Do not my dear friends raise your expectations too high, as tho' Cornwall abounded in gold - our societies here are large but there are not many rich people in the county in proportion to the number of inhabitants: fewer I think than in any parts I have before time known - our collection will not be large compared to the numbers upon the minutes.'

1

In the second place, however, there was also an indigenous resistance to contributing to those Connexional 'causes', such as the Kingswood collection, or the Educational Fund, which underpinned the evolving formalism of the Methodist denomination. Foreign missions, as we have seen, became an eminently popular cause, but as John Riles remarked on the annual collections for more mundane, administrative tasks in 1814, (in the midst of revival): 'These Coll.s are disgraceful to the Circuit: However all has been done that could be done.'² A fellow itinerant commented on the Cornish: "Though with all their religion they cannot think of paying so much for heaven as Methodists do generally.'³

The interplay of both these local factors explains why chapel debts, for example, remained virtually impossible to clear in the county, resulting in a number of specific recommendations being made in 1846 by the Connexional Committee of the Chapel Fund.⁴ By

1. 'George Dermott-Daniel Tatham, Redruth 31 Oct. 1798', M.C.A. MS. PLP 33.51.8.
2. 'Truro Wesleyan Circuit Collection Book, 1814-35', C.R.O. MS. MR/T/16.
3. J.C.M.H.A. vol.1 no.8. p.175.
4. The Cornish Banner, Aug. 1846, pp.63-4.

1866, debts still totalled 24,000 in the Devonport district, covering east Cornwall, with only 23 chapels out of 178 actually free of debt. In the Cornwall district, covering the west, debts amounted to over 47,000 in 1870.¹ In part, the durability of this debt was due to the relative poverty of the local membership, accentuated by the rapid decline in copper mining fortunes from the 1840s, which followed immediately upon a surge in membership - and a substantial chapel-building programme - in the west during the 1830s. But perhaps, it also bore witness to the preservation among local societies of 'traditional' spiritual above 'Connexional' administrative priorities. In 1819, Conference had recommended that chapels with deficient incomes should introduce anniversary sermons and collections; and later Sunday School anniversaries, public tea meetings, bazaars and lectures all performed important fund-raising functions. In the course of time, such 'events' became formalised as part of the chapel calendar, and developed into popular festivals which in important respects altered the tone and ethos of chapel life and worship. In Cornwall, such developments did occur, but sometimes at a slow pace. While the town societies quickly established anniversary services, and introduced pew rents for example, many of the country societies resisted what was viewed as a drift into formal denominationalism. At the Devonport District Meetings in 1860 and 1862, for example, the establishment of chapel anniversaries was again recommended as a means to help reduce chapel debts, but by 1862, only 79 out of 186 chapels in the region

1. 'Devonport District Meeting Minutes, 1839-70', M.C.A. MS.;
'Cornwall District Meeting Minutes, 1839-70', M.C.A. MS.

had actually initiated such services.¹

The problems created at a local level by the need to comply with an ever-growing multiplicity of Connexional causes actually significantly increased tensions between the county and the Connexion. In part, the basic poverty of the region simply meant that as Connexional demands increased, 'the poor (and in many Circuits the bulk of the people are very poor) are too often driven from God's house by the frequency of collections.'² But as the demands of funds and collections proliferated, an antipathy towards contributing to causes which apparently served few local needs also became more overt. The Cornwall District Meeting Minutes for May 1846 recorded:

'That this Meeting is sorry to learn that, in many Circuits in this District, considerably less than the amount of subscriptions promised to the Educational Fund has been remitted to the General Treasurer... This meeting also feels called upon to express the extreme pain and humiliation with which it has received the intelligence that, in one or two circuits, several individuals have refused to pay their promised contributions to the General Fund, but have applied them to local purposes.'

3

But the real conflict between Cornwall and the Connexion developed when the latter began to introduce quotas, requiring circuits to contribute to Connexional needs in proportion to the number of members on their books. In 1819, the Children's Fund was established for the upkeep of preacher's children, and paid for on these lines. In 1839, a contribution of 6d. per member per year was

1. 'Devonport District Meeting Minutes, 1839-70', M.C.A. MS.

2. Ibid. May 1868.

3. 'Cornwall District Meeting Minutes, May 1846', M.C.A. MS.

introduced to pay for the New Auxiliary Fund, which the Cornwall District never came close to fulfilling. In part, these shortfalls helped convince Connexional authorities of the need to investigate the workings of Cornish Methodism. But it was as a result of a confluence of Connexional desire and local initiative that greater Connexional exertions in the county were made in the 1840s, beginning when William Dale, a leading Truro layman, wrote a long letter to Jabez Bunting in 1839. Amongst other things, Dale argued that the proposed 6d. contribution for the New Auxiliary Fund was 'impracticable in Cornwall with our large and poor Societies', while in the case of the Children's Fund, 'this plan of charging according to the number of members falls very hard upon Cornwall.'¹

The background to Dale's letter was a growing pressure for reform at the local level from an essentially middle class caucus within the town societies, primarily in Truro and Penzance, alongside the rise of a small group of influential Buntingite laymen, including George Smith, Thomas Garland, Joseph Carne, and Dale himself, who increasingly sought to act as spokesmen for Cornish Methodism at the Connexional level. One member, Joseph Carne, for example, was described at this time 'as the most influential man in west Cornwall', while in the same congregation at Penzance 'there were not wanting other families of superior character, if not pretensions.' The Truro congregation was similarly 'a quiet and genteel one', including those of 'considerable refinement and culture.'² In part, the local

1. Early Victorian Methodism, pp. 225-9.

2. The Methodist Recorder, 3 Dec. 1903.; Shaw, History of Cornish Methodism, p. 100.

'movement' for change demonstrated the growing class and cultural divides within local Methodism, and represented the increasingly articulated desire within the town congregations for worship and a chapel life in general which addressed the head before the heart. Thomas Garland noted with respect to the anticipated 'stationing' for the Redruth circuit in 1842: 'We expect to have Mr. Shoar. I have taken a new house for him in the Green Lane - a somewhat dashy concern - and anticipate some grumbling from the 'country friends'; but K. and G. are resolved to give Methodism a genteel air.'¹ The demand increased for 'attractive men to fill our pulpits' in place of the traditional 'native produce.'² In part, too, the pressure for reform reflected an increased consciousness among the local middle class of a national rather than a regional identity, and an intense desire to demonstrate their own credentials, both as middle class citizens and Methodists, on the national stage, something which required the considerable remoulding of indigenous forms of Methodism into a more recognisably and respectable Connexional shape.

The essence of Dale's argument was that the parlous financial state of Cornish Methodism in general did not just affect the county's ability to contribute to Connexional causes, but more importantly was the root cause of disciplinary and spiritual unorthodoxies at the local level. Because insufficient revenue had been gathered from the societies to support circuit funds, west Cornwall had for many years suffered from its inability to pay for

1. Garland, Memorials, p.312.

2. Ibid. p.308, p.326.

adequate numbers of itinerant preachers. Consequently pastoral oversight and Connexional discipline had been weak from the first, while - by implication - indigenous Methodism had been allowed full sway:

'The time is now favourable for introducing the proper financial system and increasing the pastoral labour, and both these are essential to the preservation of the souls gathered into the church and the future well-being of the Societies in this District.'

1

The 'proper financial system', which had been established in the 18th century to pay for the travelling preachers, was for individual members to contribute 1d. a week, and 1s. per quarter, wherever possible.² The system seems never to have been entirely successful anywhere, and the Conference made regular exhortations to members reminding them of its purpose and efficacy. It is impossible to know how well it was ever applied in Cornwall in detail, but an example from St. Just in the 1790s indicates that in one class each member was paying an average of 1/3d. for the quarter, very close to the required sum, but that in the remaining ten classes, average contributions ranged between just 7d. and 11d. per quarter. A study of the Bodmin society account book from 1805 onwards shows that:

'initially the members were paying Class Money of 1d. per week, and quarterage at 2/- per quarter. This is about 3d. per week. In sample quarters from 1821 and 1828 the class money (which was now entered as one sum from each class) averaged between 1.5d. and 2.5d. per member per week.'

3

1. Early Victorian Methodism, pp. 225-9.
2. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, i p. 100.
3. C.J. Podmore, Bodmin Methodist Society 1769-1828, Bodmin, 1980, p. 6.

The poverty of many members in west Cornwall seems to have made inevitable the early breakdown of the whole system of individual payments. In January 1802, Richard Treffry senior noted the need to attend to the 'old established custom of 1d. per week.'¹ Circuit officials, needing to exact a steady income from the societies in their charge, increasingly turned instead to what became known locally as the 'average' system. According to this system, the contributions which each society made towards the upkeep of the circuit were calculated on the basis of an 'average' payment which could be expected from each member in the society.² The system had obvious benefits. It allowed circuit officials to expect a dependable circuit income, while sharing the financial load more realistically in terms of the social composition of local membership. 'Country' societies, for example, might well be expected to contribute around 1/- per member per quarter, while in the 'town' societies the sum exceeded 2/-.

The disadvantages, as pointed out by Dale and later critics, centred on the fact that the actual sum which a society contributed was calculated by multiplying its 'average' by the number of members on its books. Individual payments were replaced by a fixed sum which the society, collectively, had to raise each quarter. The first problem was that society stewards, reflecting

1. Proc. W.H.S., xviii p.30.

2. e.g. see Shaw, History of Cornish Methodism, p.106.n.; 'Bodmin Wesleyan Circuit Stewards Account Book 1815-50', C.R.O. MR/B/4, where such a system was introduced in 1839.

local concerns, aimed to get their own 'average' fixed as low as possible, and as Peter Prescott later wrote: 'A circuit becomes

thus, to a great extent, an assemblage of independent societies, having separate interests, rather than a Methodist circuit with a family interest.'¹ The overall effect of the bargaining over society contributions was that, 'things are perpetually tending downwards.' The less the circuit raised, the fewer itinerant preachers it could afford; the smaller the number of preachers, the less adequate the pastoral oversight; and so on.²

The second major problem was the inflexibility of the system, for once agreed, the sum which each society was expected to contribute to circuit funds was rarely altered, even at times of revival when societal memberships were often dramatically augmented.

The simple effect of the system was that, in west Cornwall in particular, the number of itinerant preachers stationed in the region did not rise in proportion to the growth in membership, both in normal periods and at times of revival. Richard Treffry junior noted in 1834 that one of the key defects of Cornish Methodism was that 'while the number of members is increased seven-fold there are only three times the number of preachers.'³ The proportion of members to ministers in the Cornwall District in general rose from around 511 in 1799 to 656 in 1834; but throughout most of west Cornwall, the situation was much worse, particularly in the Redruth, Gwennap, St. Agnes, Camborne, St. Just, Truro, and Hayle circuits.

1. Prescott, The Case of Cornish Methodism Considered, p.8.

2. Ibid. p.8.

3. quoted in Shaw, op.cit., p.106.

Table 22 : Proportion of Members per Itinerant Preacher, by Circuit.

Circuit.	1770.	1780.	1790.	1801.	1810.	1820.	1830.	1840.	1850.	1860.	1870.	
Cornwall West.	427.	336.										
Penzance.			435.	346.	646.	843.	683.	547.	372.	380.		
Marazion.								332.	432.	412.		
St. Ives.		348.					678.	400.	425.	462.		
St. Just.						1110.	861.	486.	683.			
Hayle.					480.	743.	1053.	400.	620.	464.		
Camborne.						725.	853.	885.	633.	779.		
Redruth.		613.	643.	468.	691.	613.	866.	695.	558.	579.		
St. Agnes.						929.	605.	634.	565.	729.		
Gwennap.						840.	1090.	728.	835.	878.		
Tuckingmill.						793.						
Helston.					318.	440.	583.	493.	584.	700.	513.	
Falmouth.						330.	340.	502.	590.	322.	360.	
Truro.					580.	780.	658.	641.	970.	628.	656.	
Cornwall East.	201.	159.										
St. Mawes.						250.	317.	341.	163.	255.		
St. Austell.			254.	308.	278.	290.	746.	535.	473.	430.	276.	
St. Columb.								317.	371.	215.	201.	
Bodmin.						281.	255.	460.	373.	428.	383.	339.
Camelford.						178.	304.	324.	105.	195.	129.	152.
Kilkehampton.								257.	215.	266.	181.	
Holsworthy.						390.	265.	246.	268.	280.	229.	
Launceston.						225.	380.	285.	480.	545.	403.	239.
Liskeard.						234.	297.	369.	582.	462.	320.	337.
Saltash / Callington.									320.	258.	250.	
Great Britain.						299.	333.	343.	391.	343.	285.	

(Sources: Minutes of the Methodist Conference; Peirce, Ecclesiastical Principles, p.309.).

Dale's essential argument was that 'without additional ministers, discipline must be neglected, and our beloved Methodism appears crippled and powerless.'¹ But underlying his pleas to the Connexion to step in and reform local finances was a broader dissatisfaction within the 'town' congregations at paying disproportionately for the upkeep of a ministry which increasingly did not suit their needs. Educated, middle class congregations by the 1840s were tired of home-grown talent and revivalists; so that Dale's request for 'several superintendents possessing special qualifications for the work...ministers of talent, zeal, and prudence'², was in essence a double-edged sword. Distinguished Connexional ministers, it was clear, were likely to be both sound administrators and sophisticated preachers.

The desire for reform amongst local laymen coincided with an increased Connexional determination to focus on the 'problems' of Cornish Methodism, which was in part stimulated, no doubt, by the election of a Cornishman, Theophilus Lessey, to the Presidency of Conference in 1839. That year, in fact, Samuel Dunn, then in the Camborne circuit, had been taken aside by Thomas Jackson and Jabez Bunting at Truro, and recalled being told with all seriousness: 'We shall look to you for the working of Methodism in Cornwall. And when I said, nay, John Hobson is the Chairman, they answered: yes, but we shall look to you!'³ Dale's request in 1842 that 'the President or Secretary of the Conference...be deputed yearly to attend the

1. Early Victorian Methodism, pp.273-6.

2. Ibid. pp.225-9.

3. Samuel Dunn, Recollections of Thomas Jackson and his Acts, London, 1873, pp.18-9.

Cornwall District Meeting' to become 'better acquainted with the peculiarities and necessities of Cornish circuits'¹, had effectively been initiated by Connexional leaders the previous year by sending the President of Conference to west Cornwall on the Missionary Deputation. After three successive annual visits, the Conference of 1844, under Dr. Bunting, determined to appoint ministers 'to make provision for the special needs of Cornwall', influenced also by George Smith, 'who had himself gone to London on purpose to lay the case of Cornwall before the most influential ministers of the Connexion.'² In 1842, John Hall, as superintendent of the Truro circuit, had canvassed Bunting for an efficient colleague, reminding him of 'the important central position of Truro in the county.'³ In 1845, two distinguished ministers, Robert Young and John H. James, were stationed there with the specific remit to reform circuit administration.

Young and James were selected with especial care. Both were exactly the kind of eminent and talented minister which local town congregations were calling for, each in turn going on to become President of Conference. At the same time, however, each had considerable understanding and experience of the needs of the 'country' societies. James, in fact, had been appointed to the Camelford circuit immediately following the bitter and decimating secession to the Association in the mid-1830s, and had done much to calm denominational antagonisms and to recreate the Wesleyan cause. Young was a great believer in revivals, albeit of the

1. Early Victorian Methodism, pp.273-6.

2. The Methodist Recorder, 3 Dec. 1903, p.19.

3. Early Victorian Methodism, p.272-3.

orthodox Connexional type, and had just published Showers of Blessing in 1844, which was a collection of Sketches of Revivals of Religion in the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion.¹ Together they spent six years in Cornwall, in both Truro and Penzance, during which time organised and committed efforts were made to redirect indigenous Methodism into orthodox Connexionalism.

Reforming the local financial system became their first priority, convinced that:

'the connexion between the financial and spiritual prosperity of any church is more intimate than many persons imagine; especially where the system of finance is founded upon the principle of the New Testament, and calculated to give full play to the Christian affections, or otherwise.

2

At the first circuit quarterly meeting in September, it was resolved to return to the 'primitive' plan of individual weekly and quarterly payments, which, it was argued, both increased revenue and improved popular attitudes towards the support of the pastorate. By October, James could write that 'the members are all (with hardly an exception) adopting the system of weekly payments.' At the same time, however, he made plain that much remained to be changed:

'Verily this is a queer region, and Methodist preachers in past years have much to answer for. The laxity of discipline is astonishing...I shall have a rare collection of Cornish Methodist curiosities in a little while.'

Five months later, however, his optimism could not have been higher: 'We are going on well...Our financial measures have been

1. Robert Young, Showers of Blessing; or Sketches of Revivals of Religion, in the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion: with Observations thereon, London, 1844.
2. The Cornish Banner, April 1847, p.303.

crowned with complete success; and the people are delighted with genuine Methodism.'¹

The reorganisation of circuit finances allowed the ministers to petition Conference for an additional itinerant preacher to be sent, and on his arrival in September 1846, a system of pastoral visitation for the Truro society was put into operation, and various Bible classes formed among the children and young people of the congregation. A Conference Committee noted the following year that, 'since Methodism arose the habits of society are greatly altered', and these innovations marked the realisation that, in the face of the waning influence of the class meeting, alternative means of pastoral care and direction had to be provided.²

So financial reform appeared to lead to immediately improved pastoral oversight in the Truro circuit, just as its advocates had suggested. But Young (as District Chairman) and James were also concerned to improve Connexional affairs throughout the District as a whole. James Grose, in Redruth, gave evidence of the need for reform there, in a letter in July 1846, written on the crest of a local revival wave:

'Our circuit needs some great financial reformation. With an increase of 130 in numbers, we are still falling off considerably in income... We have been told that so long as we have our money we need not concern ourselves about it. So much for Cornish Methodism.'

3

1. 'J.H. James-George Osborn, Truro, 22 Oct. 1845', M.C.A. MS. PLP 61.4.36.; 'J.H. James-William Arthur, Truro, 16 Mar. 1846', M.C.A. MS. PLP 61.4.13.
2. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, x pp. 546-9.
3. 'James Grose-J. Smedley, Redruth, 2 July 1846', M.C.A. MS.

At the District Meeting in May, it had been recognised that administrative reform was essential in some parts; while the decrease in membership during the year was in part explained by 'the unfavourable operation of the average system of payments, leading in many instances to the suppression or erasure of the names of several of the poorer members.'¹

The key to reforming Methodism throughout the District as a whole was to station men of similar calibre and commitment to Young and James in the other circuits. In July 1846, James Grose wrote to John Smedley, in St. Ives:

'Our Chairman says that he shall have great difficulty in finding suitable men for the county. He wants superintendents who will enter into his plans, that is, into Methodism, and he has to provide for St. Agnes, Gwennap, Perranwell, Tuckingmill, Camborne, Penzance, and St. Just.'

2

A number of experienced and reliable superintendents were in fact found for the following year, including William Burgess at Camborne, John Hetherington at Tuckingmill, and Thomas Turner at Gwennap. Not all of them settled into their required tasks. Thomas Hardy stayed just one year at St. Just before moving to the more orderly Falmouth circuit, where he explained: 'Our people at St. Just would not be Methodists - this is the reason why I left them, nor do I at all regret so doing.'³ Others made more notable contributions, Thomas Collins, for example, riding the line between discipline and spirituality with great ability during his three

1. 'Cornwall District Meeting Minutes, May 1846', M.C.A. MS.
2. 'James Grose-J. Smedley, Redruth, 2 July 1846', M.C.A. MS.
3. 'Thomas Hardy-John Rattenbury, Falmouth, 7 July 1846', M.C.A. MS. PLP 49.30.7.

years in Camborne.¹

At the District Meeting held in May 1847, the ministers recorded their general optimism with the state of Cornish Methodism, while the following year, the outlook was apparently still brighter. A resolution was passed stating 'that Methodism in Cornwall was never in a sounder state; that our discipline is more generally observed than it ever was; and that the attachment of the Societies to our beloved Methodism was never stronger than at present.' The following year, the resolution was duplicated.²

The coincidence of an increased Connexional concern with the rising influence of a number of local laymen, and the middle class in general, generated a sustained attack on indigenous Methodism during the 1840s. Measures ranged from a resolution to increase the sale of Wesleyan publications in the district to attempts to tighten discipline and assert pastoral authority; from the introduction of anniversary services to help pay off chapel debts, to the use of house to house visitation and catechumen classes to soften the blow of the decline of the class meeting. Broader social and economic change helped developments too, as the closure of mines forced emigration, and as communities fragmented and increasingly succumbed to external pressures. Popular revivalism waned through the 1840s and 1850s; while the drift into a more orthodox Connexional denominationalism was represented by the rapid rise in the number of Sunday schools in the county. In 1818, just 4.4% of the population was enrolled in Sunday schools of every kind and

1. Coley, Life of Thomas Collins, p. 284ff.

2. 'Cornwall District Meeting Minutes, May 1847, 1848, 1849', M.C.A. MS.

denomination, which placed Cornwall twentieth on the list of English counties in terms of its proportion of Sunday scholars. In 1833, Cornwall had risen to thirteenth place, but by 1851 to fourth equal, largely as a result of the sudden expansion in Wesleyan Sunday schools.¹

On the other hand, in purely practical terms, the administrative reforms carried out by Young and James were not sustained by succeeding ministers in the 1850s. At the time of Young's departure, a young preacher was overheard to say 'that it was a pity that Mr. Young should leave Cornwall, for when he was gone, things would fall into the old ruts again.' By 1853, an average system was again in operation in the Truro circuit, with quarterage payments ranging from over 2/- per week in Truro to under 9d. a week at Kerley. Peter Prescott could still write in 1871 that what Cornish Methodism needed above all else was to have the penny-a-week system properly applied, for 'the Methodist system of finance has never been duly carried out.'²

In part, this relapse reflected the Connexional abandonment of a coordinated strategy for Cornwall in the face of new priorities developing from the Flysheets issue in the late 1840s. In part, it simply demonstrated the impossibility at this stage of overcoming the obstacles to Connexionalism imposed by the poverty of many Cornish members, and the remaining isolation and remoteness of the county. But indigenous Methodism also continued to fight a

1. Laqueur, Religion and Respectability, p.49.
2. Prescott, The Case of Cornish Methodism Considered, pp.7-8.; 'Truro Wesleyan Circuit Schedule Book 1852-63', C.R.O. MR/T/3.; Gregory, Sidelights, p.411.

rearguard action against the Connexion and against social and economic change in general. In the 1840s, teetotalism was widely adopted as a means to counter both the doctrine of the Pastoral Office and the increasing slide into formalism in worship; while in the years after 1849, there were very significant secessions to the cause of Wesleyan Reform in some parts of the county. In the early 1860s, an extensive and dramatic period of revival affected most parts of west and central Cornwall. Altogether, though local Methodism became increasingly 'orthodox' from the 1840s onwards, indigenous Methodism retained many of its forms and functions in the country. As the Reverend H.T. Hooper explained in 1908:

'In the town...the minister represents the Connexion and takes over the chapel as his own...In the village the chapel belongs to the people...and the people take over the minister as a newcomer to be attached to them.'

1

1. quoted in Currie, Methodism Divided, p.31.

CHAPTER 9 : METHODISM AS POPULAR RELIGION.

i. The Transforming Power of the Cross?

Having established that Methodist growth in Cornwall was at least in part socially determined, it is necessary, in conclusion, to reverse the analysis and ask how Methodism affected Cornish society. What social functions did Methodism perform during the period of industrialisation in Cornwall? Our regional survey of Methodist development informed us of the diverse variety of contexts in which Methodism grew, from moorland to coastal plain, from mining village to farmstead, and clearly in a work of this nature, it is not possible to look in detail at the interplay of religious ideology and social change in each. As it was in west Cornwall that Methodism was strongest, had most impact, and took most distinctive form, examining the social role of 'indigenous Methodism' in those parts will be the essential aim of this chapter.

To some contemporaries, and many later writers, Methodism was viewed as centrally, and unquestionably, the moral regenerator of Cornish society in the early 19th century. Cornish itinerant preacher Richard Treffry represented a strong body of Methodist opinion when he insisted that:

'Few classes of our peasant population supply so striking a comment on the efficacy of Christianity, as is to be found in the mining districts of Cornwall. A century ago none were more debased. Ferocious in manners, obtuse in intellect, intemperate in habit, alternately servile and riotous, their more serious employments, when disengaged from the mines, were smuggling and wrecking; while their amusements partook of the same savage

and brutal character.'

Providentially, Wesleyan Methodism appeared, with the result that:

'Rescued from a state of moral degradation, which at present is not easy to conceive, we have now a peasantry rarely equalled, and probably nowhere surpassed, in frugality, order, intelligence, and general conscientiousness.'

1

Non-Methodists tended to confirm these impressions. A manager of a mine in Gwennap, in evidence to the Select Committee on Accidents in Mines in 1835, credited Methodism with the improvement in the moral habits of the miners; while in 1861, a banker enthused:

'The effects of Cornish Methodism in making the drunkard sober, the idle industrious, the profligate moral, and in inducing men to provide decently and comfortably for their families, and to give a suitable education to their children, can be attested by thousands of witnesses.'

2

Drawing upon this model of moral transformation, an influential branch of social historiography has argued that nowhere were the effects of Methodism more decisive, at a popular level, than in confronting and dissolving traditional recreation and popular culture. Contemporary support for such a view is not lacking: in reforming the behaviour of the people, it was argued, 'never has Methodism obtained more signal triumphs than in Cornwall':

'It has taught them to renounce the sins and recreations of smuggling, sabbath-breaking, cock-fighting, bull-baiting, hurling, and wrestling; and has converted them into a Sunday-keeping, chapel-going, hymn-singing, prayer-offering,

1. Treffry, Memoirs of John Edwards Trezise, pp. 10-2.
2. Warner, The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution, p. 175.; Jenkin, Cornish Miner, pp. 283-4.; Shaw, History of Cornish Methodism, p. 113.

intelligent,moral,and religious people.'

1

In mobilising such views,Cornwall fits into a pattern of social development in mining and manufacturing districts in early industrialisation frequently presented by social historians,in which the 'older, half-pagan popular culture, with its fairs, its sports, its drink, and its picaresque hedonwasm' is steadily eroded by Methodists who both campaigned against the evils of customary behaviour,and offered an alternative chapel-based culture of respectability and sobriety.² John Rule,in pursuing such an interpretation in his study of the labouring miner in Cornwall,detected a two-pronged attack on popular recreation from capitalising industry and from evangelicalism; with Methodism first conflicting - 'often deliberately' - with many aspects of village life and behaviour,and later (by the mid-19th century) organising counter-attractions,such as railway excursions and tea-treats.³

The basis for such an interpretation is often found to lie in Wesley's theology,and in particular in his announced aim of 'freeing the individual',(and most specifically rehabilitating the character of the labouring poor),by propagating a schema of individual spiritual development designed ultimately to regenerate society as a whole.⁴ The schema began with a conversion experience

1. Treffry,Memoirs of Richard Trewavas,Senior,p.20.; Dunn,Memoirs of Joseph Allen,p.1.
2. Thompson,Making of the English Working Class,p.918.; Robert Colls,The Collier's Rant. Song and Culture in the Industrial Village, London,1977,p.58,p.73,pp.100-1.
3. Rule,'Labouring Miner in Cornwall', D.Phil. thesis,pp.72-8,pp.303-12.; Hugh Cunningham,Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c.1780-c.1880, London,1980,p.40.
4. Warner,op.cit.,p.57,pp.167-73,p.221ff.

which generally marked the beginning of a 'new life', not just in spiritual, but in social terms. It was said of the early Bible Christians, for example:

'that the completeness of the change which passed over them at their awakening and conversion obliterated their early lives. The pursuits of their carnal days were now so distasteful to them that the mention of them was tacitly avoided.'

1

A vital precondition to conversion was a heightened consciousness of personal depravity, and as many early attendants at Methodist preaching had 'no conception' of living in sin, it became natural for them, and for the preachers, to focus on their normal behaviour and to consider it, or selected parts of it, as inherently sinful.² In this sense, conversion precipitated the renunciation of day-to-day behaviour, and the acquisition of new norms to govern life.

Conversion was only the starting point for a Methodist's spiritual development, however. In order to reach the ultimate goal of holiness, the converted member was expected to adopt a lifestyle which would both assist personal progress towards 'entire sanctification', and to demonstrate a continued separation from the evils inherent in secular society. The structures of the class and band meetings encouraged and supervised this progress, while John Wesley's Rules for Societies, and occasional charges - A Word to the Drunkard, A Word to a Smuggler - provided more detailed guides to behaviour.

1. Thorne, James Thorne of Shebbear, p.12.
2. Treffry, Memoirs of Richard Trewavas, Senior, p.56.

As Methodism formalised from the late 18th century, it is often portrayed as producing novel means designed to evangelise more broadly, and to engage society more directly. The revival in west Cornwall in 1799, for example, was sometimes seen as the beginning of this process, when conversion became a mass rather than a personal phenomenon, and where 'the change that was wrought in the co hearts was demonstrated by the purity of their lives, they were sober, industrious and strictly honest.'¹ Subsequently, the county gazeteer in 1817 pinpointed the formation of Sunday schools and the circulation of Bibles as particularly responsible for ameliorating 'uncouth and offensive habits from the lower classes in the mining district.'²

Taken together, the individualistic and the broadly evangelistic approaches of the Methodists are deemed by some historians to have been primarily or at least significantly responsible for shattering traditional popular culture and implanting a more restrained, self-disciplined, and ordered habit of mind and behaviour congruent with the demands of industrial society. Methodism functioned as a critical support to industrialisation, which challenged normative behaviour and helped generate new mental and moral imperatives. A heightened perception of the need to use time wisely and without waste, and to live earnest, ordered, and frugal lives, provided both labourers and entrepreneurs with the basic mental tools required for success in the modern world. Samuel Drew's experience of a steady improvement in

1. T.R.Harris, Methodism and the Cornish Miner, n.p., 1960, pp.8-9.

2. Ibid. pp.10-1.

his business affairs after his conversion in this sense fits into a typical pattern of self-fulfillment recorded in early Methodist biography.¹

The general argument so far delineated is well-supported evidentially, and apparently logical in its assumptions, but there are epistemological weaknesses in relying too heavily on orthodox Wesleyan ideology to explain the impact of Methodism at a popular level. In the first place, it remains unclear for how many or for how long, the process of conversion and the subsequent pursuit of holiness could transform the lives of individuals in the manner suggested. Most evidence of conversion leading to a 'new life', after all, comes from Methodist biographies, published very often in the denominational magazines or by the denominational presses, and apart from the possible atypicality of such experience, we must obviously handle cautiously material which served didactic purposes, and provided idealised versions of spiritual development. Accounts of conversion in fact followed a routinised form, and it is possible that at a relatively early date the actual process of conversion was also formalised. Conversion occurred because it was expected, and:

'it is therefore conceivable that a Methodist in the 1790s could write of his conversion experience in language as dramatic as his co-religionists in the 1740s, and yet, psychologically, have passed through a far less traumatic experience.'

2

For children brought up within the denomination, conversion

1. Drew, Life of Samuel Drew, .103, p.339.

2. Piggin, 'Religion and the Industrial Revolution', pp.25-8.

could become simply a symbolic rite of passage, which denoted the transition into adulthood; while in general 'experimental' religion was steadily undermined by processes involved in the institutionalisation of the denomination, as well as by the influence on members of wider social and cultural trends in early 19th century England. In Cornwall, conversion probably remained central to Methodist experience much later than in many other parts, but popular conceptions of conversion in the 19th century tended to focus on the sensation of 'feeling saved' as the critical element in the process, rather than on the spiritual and social implications of the event.¹ Subsequent secular success, if it occurred, might be explicable not in terms of virtuous living, but - as a converted tributer uttered on receipt of a windfall payment - as a mysterious demonstration of providential intervention.² Moreover, as was suggested in the examination of popular revivalism, recurrent 'conversion' was far from rare, and the Methodist 'backslider' was a widespread and common phenomenon.

Furthermore, although conversion survived in some form, whether routinised or popularised, to the end of our period, the pursuit of holiness, and the structures and precepts on which it rested, fared less well. W.R. Ward has argued that Wesley's schema of spiritual development was becoming 'a bore' by the early 19th century, at a popular level especially, and while sectarians thereafter focused almost exclusively on conversion, Wesleyans also increasingly neglected what for Wesley had been the most essential part of the

1. Haslam, From Life into Death, p.105.; Nightingale, Life of Samuel Romilly Hall, p.149.

2. Tyack, The Miner of Perranzabuloe, p.55.

spiritual journey.¹ Band meetings seem rarely to have survived into the 19th century, while Conference exhortations which grew in frequency from around the 1780s, attest to the difficulties experienced in applying Wesley's Rules. As early as 1785, it was feared that societies 'had made too great advances towards conformity to the world.'²

Class meetings probably persisted in general to around the middle of the 19th century before decaying rapidly, although one recent article has suggested that the decline began as early as between 1800 and 1830.³ In Cornwall, the fact that at the time of the 1799 revival, there were occasionally more than one hundred members registered in a single class, and that at normal times, average class membership was higher than was Connexionally approved, suggested that a potentially restricted spiritual functionality existed from an early date.⁴ The decline in general, however, demonstrated how, during the early 19th century, the demands of membership were steadily relaxed 'from those of a particular pattern of religious experience and behaviour to those

1. Ward, 'Religion of the People', pp.239-40.; H.D.Rack, 'Wesleyanism and "the world" in the later 19th century', Proc. W.H.S., xlii(1979) pp.35-54.
2. quoted in Peirce, Ecclesiastical Principles, p.37.
3. Obelkevich, Religion and Rural Society, .192.; Currie, Methodism Divided, pp.125-31.; H.D.Rack, 'The Decline of the Class-Meeting, and the Problem of Church-Membership in 19th century Wesleyanism', Proc. W.H.S., xxxix(1973) pp.17-20. From a study of about 100 class books, it has been estimated that, up to the end of the 18th century, about 65% of members regularly met in class, which fell slowly to around 50% by 1850, and 20% by 1900, 'Action, Reaction and Interaction', Report of a Conference on Methodist History, Westhill College, 1983, Bognor Regis, n.d., p.12.
4. 'Circuit Stewards Account Book, West Cornwall 1774-1796', C.R.O. MS. MR/T/17.

of a more conventional and generalized church life.'¹

Overall, it is probably impossible to gauge accurately the extent to which Wesley's ideal of a personal spiritual quest was ever effectively embraced by the Methodist membership at any given time, but the persistence and regularity with which Methodists were charged with hypocrisy indicates the probably regular gap between Methodist ideal and reality.² Social and perhaps family pressures, and the tendency to succumb to the 'frailties' of human nature, must occasionally have affected all but the most holy; while the 'public image' of Methodism as presented in the biographies of Methodist worthies was at times simply at odds with actuality. Mary Thorne, for example, was both daughter of William O'Bryan, the founder, and wife of Samuel Thorne, a member of the foremost Bible Christian family from its origins; but her private, unpublished diary presents a harrowing account of a marriage quite contrary to the Methodist ideal, which became a 'galling and humiliating...yoke' due largely to her husband's failures in business and as a father.³

By 1860, the decision of William Allin to 'live by rule' upon conversion led to his neighbours identifying him as an eccentric with singular Christian views.⁴

Perhaps a more important qualification to the presented model of Methodism's social impact, is the fact that, though difficult to

1. Rack, 'The Decline of the Class-Meeting', p.20.

2. e.g. see D.Clark, 'Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village', Newcastle University M.A. thesis, 1978, p.120.

3. 'Diary of Mary Thorne', Thomas Shaw transcript of MS., 19 May 1855.

4. Thomas Stephenson, A Memoir of Mr. William Allin, late of Kilkhampston, London, 1871, p.36.

quantify, a large proportion of attendants at Methodist chapels were always 'adherents' rather than members. As suggested earlier, Methodist religion for the mass of the hearers was clearly different to that of the members, perhaps fulfilling associational and 'primary religious' needs, without inspiring the notion that a 'new life' had to be adopted. Miner Paul Burall in the 1770s attended Methodist meetings but did not join the society 'for fear I went astray, for fear I should bring a bad Name on the good Coase.'¹ Charles Thomas, born in 1794, and brought up as a Methodist 'had a dislike of Class-meetings and this, coupled with the shame of being called a Methodist by his young companions, became a great hindrance to him.'² Attendance at chapels often varied according to secular circumstances, and for many 'borderers' the chapel was one of several competing attractions. Adherents fell between the polarities of chapel and pub, and more overtly than some at least of the membership, who in reality must have shared their traits, cannot be categorized as either 'rough' or 'respectable'.³ More directly than the members, the adherents brought secular concerns and affairs into the chapel, and took religion out into the community; the lines between 'alternative cultures' tended to be blurred, the links between them very real.

It is clear, then, that attempts to arrive at the 'essential'

1. Cornwall to America in 1783. From the Journal of Paul Burall (1755-1826), ed. K.M. Burall, London, 1932, p.5.
2. George Smith, The Christian Warrior Crowned: A Sermon Preached in Wesley Chapel, Camborne, on Sunday, March 8th 1868, on the Death of Mr. Charles Thomas. To Which is Added a Short Memoir of his Life, London, 1868, p.28.
3. E.T. Davies, Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales, Cardiff, 1965, p.49.; Colls, Collier's Rant, p.18.

social teaching of Methodism by extrapolation from Wesleyan theology are likely to provide distorted impressions of the actual social impact of Methodism.¹ Other considerations tend to qualify the theories presented at the outset still further. Until the 1820s, Methodism remained essentially outside the political Establishment, and was often still seen as socially deviant at the parish level.² Regular Establishment charges were made which questioned the loyalty and purposes of Methodists. The Reverend Richard Polwhele in Cornwall, linked religious and political unrest in a sermon at the county assizes in 1801, arguing that itinerant preachers and political radicals were 'secretly corresponding throughout the country and concerting plans of sedition on the most extensive scale.' Two years earlier, he had considered local Methodists 'all ripe for rebellion', and asserted that they had played a role in the recent riots in Camborne.³ Until the 1820s, at least, many of the Methodist eulogies of their 'movement' were penned against a background of Establishment hostility. They sought not just to defend their religion but to justify it; while at the same time emphasizing their detachment from radical political movements. The most straightforward way in which that

1. Robert Moore, 'Methodism and Class Conflict', Sociological Analysis. A discussion journal of research and ideas, Sheffield, 1 no.2(1971), p.77.
2. Alan D. Gilbert, 'Methodism, Dissent and Political Stability in Early Industrial England', Journal of Religious History, 10 no,4(1979) p.383.
3. R.Polwhele, A Sermon Preached at the Assizes held for the County of Cornwall, at Bodmin, on Tuesday 4th August, 1801, Falmouth, 1801, pp.18-9.; R.Polwhele, A Letter to the Rev. Robert Hawker D.D. Occasioned by his late expedition into Cornwall, London, 1799, p.83.; Polwhele, Anecdotes of Methodism.; Lavington, Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists, p.cxcvi.

could be achieved was by emphasizing Methodism's moral and social beneficence. Furthermore, as suggested earlier, the impulses behind revivalism and Sunday schools in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were too complex to be subsumed within a theory of expanded evangelicalism 'from above'.

But the most important qualification to the model of Methodism as an agent of social modernisation, in the case of Cornwall, is that despite fundamental changes which took place within the local economy, in mining, fishing, and farming, and notwithstanding the steady erosion of some forms of tradition and popular culture which did occur in the first half of the 19th century, a remarkable degree of continuity in socio-cultural custom and behaviour in fact pertained. Miners in particular maintained pre-industrial housing and working arrangements, which allowed for the retention of a strong sense of 'independence' even within capitalist economic structures. The persistence of the food riot down to 1847, and the wide range of popular cultural practices and beliefs which survived through to 1870, were pointed to by contemporaries and by later writers as distinctive and influential regional socio-cultural phenomena. Custom, in general, was retained longest where Methodism was strongest, so that far from acting as a force for change, it might be argued, Methodism's prime social role on a popular level in early industrialisation was one of preservation.

ii. The Social Function of 'Indigenous Methodism'.

Perhaps a more fruitful approach to the study of the popular impact of Methodism is to begin 'from below', and to attempt to

develop models at a local level which incorporate popular religious experience and belief. We identified at an earlier point the importance of a local 'religious need' in assisting the spread of Methodism in west Cornwall in the 18th century. That need can be understood to have evolved from a combination of social and spiritual imperatives, but initially it was the spiritual perspective which was uppermost, and which Wesley and his early helpers most readily engaged. Methodism began by appealing to two distinct groups of people: those who might be described as practising Christians, and those largely outside the orbit of institutionalised religion, who perhaps observed the rites of passage and occasionally attended the parish church for one or other of its calendrical festivals. In part, Methodism embraced a Christianized audience, and appealed by virtue of its apparently superior doctrinal and ethical constructs. But Methodism also meshed with a non-institutionalised religious sub-culture, and was dependent for its spread at a popular level upon a syncretism of indigenous folk belief and popular perceptions of Methodist theology.

But what do we mean by 'folk belief', and how can the historian begin to address and explain it? Since the distinction was made between 'dogmatic' and 'practical' religion in the late 19th century,¹ a number of sociologists and anthropologists have indeed suggested several ways forward. Their basic outlook has been largely conditioned, to over-simplify, by their view of religion per

1. F.M. Muller, Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion, London, 1878.

se: whether, in essence, they follow Durkheim's definition of religion as 'a unified system of beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them', and explain religion in terms of social functionality and expression;¹ , or whether they emphasize the fundamental instinctive and intuitive need of the individual for some form of 'experience of the Holy', which springs at least in part from non-social roots and which is often not met by conventional, institutionalised religious forms and practices.² An exclusivist, substantive definition of religion might well deny the existence of popular religion simply because it conforms to no interests or articulated doctrines, and because it has no formulated organisation or aims. An inclusive, causal approach, on the other hand, might refer to any form or gesture which invokes or implies an immaterial, spiritual, or supernatural plane to human existence, however personalised or essentially trivial it may be.

The evidence from history is that the Christian Church in England has never held exclusive rights to the spiritual world. From the first, the Church fitted awkwardly on top of pre-existing pagan sites, and inevitably an interaction of belief systems rather than an elimination of one by the other took place. On the one hand, the Church embraced and gradually redirected many existing festivals and rituals; while on the other, mutated forms of Church ritual or practice were removed from the Church itself and invested

1. E. Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, quoted in Susan Budd, Sociologists and Religion, London, 1973, .6.

2. J. Wach, quoted in Ibid. p.6.

with fresh meaning in a non-Christian context.¹

But how can historians approach and understand popular religiosity? It might be recognised that an intuitive human need exists for some form of 'other-worldly' experience or explanatory system, and that non-social roots to specific 'popular religions' may have existed, but for purely empirical reasons a historian must begin to approach popular belief as a heterogeneous, but conjunct phenomenon, which manifests itself in social form. Inevitably in studying religion of any kind, we have to concentrate on what is apparent, rather than what is not. The danger, however, is that we focus on the functions and rituals of popular religion to the extent of excluding the idea of an underlying 'feeling'; that we see the outward expression of religion without understanding the inner meaning, motivation, or purpose.²

Ignoring this pitfall has led some sociologists and historians to draw an apparent distinction between Christian and folk religion. The latter, it would seem, was at heart practical and functional. Luckmann, for example, argued that popular belief served strictly worldly functions and was based on personal autonomy and subjective self-realisation.³ Similarly, a sociological study of 'privatized religions' has argued that they are formulated to combat 'ultimate problems', many of which are in no way 'other-worldly'.⁴ In the same way, some historical views of medieval magic

1. Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, p.35.

2. Davis, 'Some Tasks and Themes in the Study of Popular Religion', pp.309-14,

3. T.Luckmann, The Invisible Religion, London, 1967.

4. R.Machalek and M.Michael, '"Invisible" Religions : Some Preliminary Evidence', Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 15(1976) pp.311-4.

in England see it in essentially functional terms, as a bundle of methods and practices, spells and potions, designed to tap supernatural powers to solve concrete earthly problems, like disease and hunger.

Clearly, popular religion in medieval England served vital social and personal functions, which in large part explain its survival in the post-Reformation world. But it should not be approached as merely a diverse and often irrational collection of practices and customs with essentially limited, earthly functions. Underlying popular religion was a set of beliefs and a moral framework, however assumed and incoherent, which were in origin pagan, Christian, and an amalgamation of the two, which in many senses made popular religion as comprehensive as institutionalised religion. Put simply, it offered other-worldly explanations for human existence and human and natural developments, which depended upon a concept of the 'unseen' and a form of faith; it provided systems of ritual, festival, and ceremony to accompany and objectify belief; it prescribed a moral framework which governed human behaviour.

In Cornwall, where, as we have seen, for historical and structural reasons the Anglican Church remained something of an alien implant, particularly in the west, popular beliefs probably survived as a rich and multi-textured element in popular mentality and culture in the 18th century. Though not held exclusively by any particular occupational group, miners and fishermen had evolved specific practices and beliefs as a result of the peculiar dangers and closeness to nature which their labour entailed. Up to

about 1830, for example, the fishermen of Newlyn and Mousehole (both Methodist strongholds), were said to have left part of their catch on the beach to 'Bucka', an evil spirit, and forbade whistling and speaking of hares in the boats. Miners believed that various spirits inhabited the mines, especially the 'knackers', and felt it unlucky to make the form of a cross on the sides of the mine, or to whistle underground.¹ Again, while not restricted geographically, most beliefs and practices later collected by folklorists were gathered in the west. William Bottrell, the most celebrated of Cornish folklorists, found that in the last quarter of the 19th century the preservation of old customs, legends, and traditions was strongest amongst the cottagers in the hills to the north of Penzance, and in the western-most parishes of Morvah, Zennor, and Towednack.²

Some of these beliefs had no connection with Christianity. Well into the 19th century, it was commonly believed, it would seem, that the world was literally alive with spirits, fairies, 'spriggans', and 'piskies'; while observances regarding the sun and moon, involving charms and 'protections' were noted by Bottrell to be still practised.³ Witchcraft is frequently alluded to in Methodist and other sources throughout the period, and, it was said, was still widely believed in as late as 1891. A study of the

1. William Bottrell, Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall, 2nd ser., Penzance, 1871, p.246.; M.A.Courtney, 'Cornish Folklore', Folklore Journal 5(1887) p.190, p.196, p.193.; Folklore 1(1890) p.280.
2. Bottrell, op.cit., p.207.; William Bottrell, Stories and Folk-Lore of West Cornwall, Penzance, 1880, p.43.
3. Bottrell, Traditions and Hearthside Stories, 2nd ser. p.245.; Stories and Folk-Lore, 3rd ser. pp.187-8.

folklore of the Cornish village in 1855 suggested that witches, conjurors, and charmers were still widespread; while in 1953, a contributor to Folklore insisted that a rat charmer and a blood charmer were still active in a small town in west Cornwall.¹

A far larger body of beliefs and practices either fed off Christianity, or became attached to the Church. Holy wells, for example, which represented a continuity in spiritual purpose from pre-Christian times, through Celtic Christianity to Anglicanism, were used in a functional popular religious sense for cures, divination, and wishing, as well as for Christian baptism.² Charms were frequently concluded 'in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost', while the 109th Psalm was believed to have powers as a 'Cursing Psalm.'³ Within the fabric of the Church, bench ends of pews were sometimes decorated with superstitious emblems - a mermaid at Zennor, and sea-monsters at Morwenstow - while Richard Polwhele recalled visiting the church at St. Columb in his capacity as rural dean, and 'saw, very deeply impressed, the marks of a horse-shoe, which had been nailed against the church-door, to ward off mischief from witches or from evil spirits.'⁴

Most of these examples have been drawn from folkloric sources

1. Folklore, 2(1891) p.248.; N&Q 1st ser. xi(1855); Folklore, 64(1953) pp.304-5.
2. J.Meyrick, Holy Wells. A Pilgrim's Guide to the Holy Wells of Cornwall and their Saints, Falmouth, 1982.; Bottrell, Traditions and Hearthside Stories, 2nd ser. p.240.; Folklore, 6(1895) p.282.; Folklore Journal, 5(1887) pp.90-2.
3. Bottrell, op.cit., pp.244-5, p.229.
4. G.S.Tyack, Lore and Legend of the English Church, London, 1899, pp.105-6.; S. Baring-Gould, The Vicar of Morwenstow A Life of Robert Stephen Hawker, London, 1876, p.58.; Polwhele, Traditions and Recollections, p.610.n.

from the late 19th century, by which time most practices and rituals which had been maintained were essentially 'survivals', but it does seem clear that in the 18th century, and in parts well into the 19th, forms and fragments of age-old belief pervaded the minds of the people, partly as inherited explanatory tools, partly as cultural bonds which helped maintain tradition and communal identity. Polwhele avowed in the 1790s that 'the superstitions of Cornwall are, even at this moment, propitious... Supernatural beings... still float in the minds of the Cornish.' Sixty years later, another Anglican, William Haslam, agreed that 'the Cornish people... lived in a spiritual atmosphere', and that 'even the cold and hardened amongst them were ready to hear about the mysteries of the unseen world.'¹

Traditionally, some of the clergy had sought to build bridges between the Church and its charges by attempting to enter the spiritual world of their parishioners, and by adopting a role congruent with popular needs and expectations. In other cases, local-born curates already inhabited it. Obelkevich has argued that in rural south Lindsey in the mid-19th century, the clergy were occasionally understood to play a pagan role 'as exorcist and wielder of power over the pagan world of spirits.'² In Cornwall, too, in the late 19th century it was suggested that 'clergymen in Cornwall are still supposed to be able to drive out evil spirits.'³

1. Polwhele, Old English Gentleman, pp. 5-6.; Haslam, From Death into Life, p. 88, p. 98.
2. Obelkevich, Religion and Rural Society, pp. 274-5.
3. M.A. Courtney, 'Cornish Folklore', Folklore, 5(1887) p. 27.

The reality, however, was probably that during the 18th century, as class, culture, and education (and an antipathy towards 'experimental' religion) increasingly separated the clergyman from his flock, this role was generally abandoned. In the early 1820s, Polwhele reflected on the steady decline in superstition over the past fifty years, and intimated that: 'In the last age some of the rusticated clergy used to favour the popular superstition, by pretending to the power of laying ghosts, etc. etc.'¹ In the mid-18th century, the Rev. Wood of Ladock was renowned for his powers as an exorcist and ghost-layer, the Rev. Polkinghorne of St. Ives was deemed to be the most powerful exorcist and 'spirit-queller' west of Hayle, while Parson Jago of Wendron was said to have had a private demon always in attendance, and acquired a reputation as the last local clergyman to exercise supernatural powers. But from his vantage point in the 1820s, Polwhele could only conclude that 'there was a familiarity between the parson and the clerk and the people which our feeling of decorum would now revolt at.'²

The exceptional clergyman, in fact, continued to attempt to enter the spiritual world of his parishioners in the 19th century, but in so doing became famed as more than a little eccentric. Robert Stephen Hawker, the vicar of Morwenstow in the mid-19th century accepted the invitation of his parishioners to take on the 'pagan' role of quelling the influence of a local witch. This, along with his reputed power to 'ill-wish', was considered to

1. Polwhele, Traditions and Recollections, p.605.
2. Bottrell, Stories and Folklore, 3rd ser. p.1, p.27.; Folklore Journal, 5(1887) pp.23-6.; Brown, 'Methodism and the Church of England in Cornwall', Ph.D. thesis, p.45.; Polwhele, Traditions and Recollections, p.605.

have been primarily responsible for winning back the support of some of his flock.¹ William Haslam, in the 1850s, found attendance at his own church to rise markedly once he had demonstrated an approval of local spirituality by undergoing a 'conversion' experience.² Polwhele himself was in a dilemma, restrained by his pretensions to culture and education, and yet intuitively interested in the popular beliefs of his parishioners, and indeed desperate to believe in the spirit world in general 'Could it be established.' A fellow clergyman in 1817 showed appreciation of the implications of the increasing divide between Church and popular spirituality when he wrote of superstition: 'when in vulgar minds it is entirely done away, religion will languish if not expire.'³

John Wesley and his helpers hence moved into a highly charged spiritual atmosphere in west Cornwall in the mid-18th century, and for several reasons, Methodism was able to integrate itself with popular indigenous religious beliefs and habits. Unlike the Quakers, who were described as 'no better than unbelieving pagans' in the late 18th century because they 'haven't the grace...to know anything about such creatures as spriggans, piskies, knackers...and other small folks, good or bad, that haunt our carns, moors, and mines',⁴ the Methodist emphasis on spiritual experience found an immediately responsive audience. The Methodists in fact were able to bridge the gap between formal and popular religion, without the constraints imposed upon most Anglican clergymen, with the result

1. Baring-Gould, op.cit., pp.153-63, p.188.

2. Haslam, op.cit., pp.114-6.

3. Polwhele, op.cit., pp.450-1.; Old English Gentleman, p.28.n.; Rule, 'Labouring Miner in Cornwall', D.Phil. thesis, p.250.

4. Bottrell, Traditions and Hearthside Stories, 2nd ser. p.203.

that,as one old woman later remarked: 'I do say for christenings, marryings,and berrins we must go to church, but for praichin' and anything for the next world give me the chapel.'¹ The lack of animosity which one writer noted in her village between the Methodists and the rector in the mid-19th century,was explicable in terms of a local acceptance of this division of function. The parson,

'was generally beloved by all;went in and out among the people,advised or comforted,helped or reproved, as the case might be; preached a sermon to them on Sunday; baptized, married and buried them; and there it seemed his duty to his parishioners ended.'

2

The congruity between a heightened awareness of an all-consuming spiritual reality which Methodist preaching encouraged,and popular perceptions of supernatural forces and order,is well chronicled and does not require detailed rehearsal here. Wesley himself,though not 'superstitious', was determined to counter rationalistic and Deistic interpretations of religion,and took great interest in unusual phenomema which seemed to indicate profound religious experience,and the workings of the Spirit. He catalogued examples of psychic and supernatural manifestations in his Journal,and remained aware that the spiritual world and possible forms of experience could not easily be confined within traditional doctrinal and theological bounds of explanation.³ His critics,however,focused on his apparently deliberate manipulation

1. Jenkin,Cornwall and its People,p.197.
2. E.Bonham,A Corner of Old Cornwall,London,1896,p.11.
3. R.A.Knox,Enthusiasm. A Chapter in the History of Religion,Oxford,1950,pp.519-20.

of popular perceptions, arguing, for example, that his Journals included claims to instantaneous cures and the miraculous gift to exorcise devils.¹

Certainly in Cornwall, an inevitable confusion between 'legitimate' and 'unorthodox' spiritual experience was probably widespread in the initial spread of Methodism. Thomasin Lawry, the mother of William O'Bryan and an early Methodist convert, had acquired a spiritual awareness at the age of four as a result of her house being 'haunted' by strange noises, which, as O'Bryan's biographer later avowed, 'confirmed to the little girl the evidence of a future state and the existence of a world of spirits.'² Early Bible Christian biographies, especially, contain a rich vein of supernatural tales, and it was said of the sect in general that they were greatly affected by dreams, mysterious voices, signs and tokens. John Davey, a Bible Christian local preacher in the 1820s, dealt in charms, and offered cures to the villagers; his wife, also a member, was familiar with several witches.³

In a number of important respects, the spiritual and moral world which the Methodist preachers often delineated tied in with popular conceptions of the way in which the universe was ordered. Emphasis on the immediacy of spiritual experience and the omnipotence of divine Providence meshed easily with a popular fear and respect of the apparently all-embracing mysteries of nature and the elements, which sprang from a prepossessing awareness of the dangers

1. Lavington, Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists, pp.190-3.

2. Thorne, William O'Bryan, p.18.

3. Baring-Gould, op.cit., p.170-1.; Told for a Memorial, p.47, pp.49-50, p.96.

inherent in mining and fishing, and from the overpowering impact of the rugged, but impressive landscape. It was said of the early Bible Christian preachers that 'they had the original thought of those who owed more to Nature than to books'; and while in the popular mind 'all nature seemed to be united...in sympathizing with human credulity; in predicting or averting; in relieving or in aggravating misfortune', the Methodist preachers faced few problems in opening up the popular imagination to considering the spiritual perspective.¹

A readiness to explain even the minutiae of human existence and natural events in terms of divine intervention again fitted well with a popular explanatory system; while a belief in the efficacy of supplicatory prayer as a means to exert personal influence on divine processes led to an identification of the Methodist preacher in the popular mind with the village conjuror or charmer. The spread of Bible Christianity in north Cornwall was accompanied by frequent portrayals of the preachers as witches, conjurors, or 'the devil's crew', while preachers acquired popular sobriquets such as 'Hootaway', 'Roarwell', and 'Plague-chaser.'² Methodist preachers were frequently charged with making claims to inspiration, and with asserting special rights and powers to predict, interpret, and direct the workings of the Holy Spirit. At a popular level, Billy Bray prayed with every confidence to God to provide the timber for the roof of the chapel he was building, just

1. R. Pyke, The Early Bible Christians, London, 1941, pp. 12-3.; Polwhele, Traditions and Recollections, pp. 605-10.
2. Thorne, James Thorne of Shebbear, pp. 51-2, p. 54, p. 55.; Shaw, Bible Christians, p. 78.n.

as he later prayed in St.Ives for fish to be sent for the fishermen.

It was not so much the belief in the legitimacy of prayer which marked out Bray from more 'orthodox' Christians, but his absolute assurance of its likely success in every instance. Prayers to cure a lame woman in 1832 were believed to have had similarly miraculous effects; while the drawing up of an astrological table on the back of the hand-written minutes of an early Bible Christian Quarterly Meeting indicated the non-Christian roots of some of this confidence.¹

While Methodist doctrine thus converged with many of the explanations and techniques of popular religion, it was probably in its moral outlook and ethical system that Methodism welded most directly with popular belief. In its emphasis on conversion and Providence, Methodism defined the moral world in outright terms as a dichotomy between good and evil, and in so doing, it coalesced with popular moral assumptions about fortune and judgement and 'fairness' which had evolved from a synthesis of Christian belief and common experience. The idea of a 'moral economy', for example, which E.P.Thompson has ascribed to popular mentality in the 18th century, is evidence of a clearly-defined view of a moral construct to human existence - and of individual transgression - which Methodism could hope to manipulate.²

The devil in particular was alive and kicking in the popular

1. Bourne, The King's Son, p.53, pp.63-4.; Treffry, Memoirs of Richard Treffry Junior, p.103.; Quarterly Meeting at Tideford, September 1820, in 'Letters of William O'Bryan', C.R.O. MS. MR/DDX/241.
2. E.P.Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the 18th century', Past and Present, 1(1971).

mind before the arrival of the Methodists, and had in fact been taken from a purely Christian context to become a familiar person in village culture. William Haslam noted in the 1850s that 'in dreams and visions in Cornwall the Lord Jesus very often appears, and the devil also; these are real persons to the Cornish mind, and their power is respectively acknowledged.' The devil seemed to represent, as Obelkevich suggested, 'not only external evil but also ordinary human weakness', and his presence in popular culture and belief signified the existence of a well-defined moral framework to guide and sanction behaviour at the village level.¹

Not surprisingly, the devil looms large in early Methodist biography, and he is invariably presented in the familiar guise of traditional culture, rather than as a theological abstraction. Billy Bray ended a meeting with the words: 'Let us pray a minute before we go, or else the devil will be scratching me on the way.' The saintly William Carvosso 'had a hard struggle with Satan' during the course of his conversion, which took the form of a personal encounter with a familiar figure.² It was said of a Bible Christian prayer leader that 'you could hear him hunting the Devil of nights a hundred yards or more off from the cottage where he was leading prayer'; while Bible Christian meetings were often thought to involve the ritual of 'hunting the devil out', which demanded the preacher whipping up his audience to a frenzy before providing them all with sticks, and blowing out the lights:

1. Haslam, From Death into Life, p.95.; Obelkevich, Religion and Rural Society, p.277.
2. Bourne, The King's Son, p.29.; Carvosso, Efficacy of Faith, pp.34-6.

'A general melee ensues. Every one who hits, thinks he is dealing the devil his death blow, and every one who receives a blow, believes it is a butt from the devil's horns.'

Even Samuel Drew, a self-educated local preacher with a penchant for writing metaphysical works, insisted that a confrontation with a dark creature the size of a dog, with a shaggy coat and 'huge fiery eyes', while he was out poaching as a young man, was a providential means 'of withdrawing me from the company of those who were leading me to ruin.'¹

The similarity between the clear-cut, judgemental moral codes of Methodism and popular religion in fact helps explain the vigour with which some Methodist members campaigned against some forms of popular culture in the 19th century. The introduction of the conversion experience into the matrix of popular belief reinforced the dichotomy between good and evil which pre-existed in some form in the convert's mind, and drew out the familiar devil figure to such prominence that the convert, through fear, renounced the 'evils' in his or her own life in order to live a 'new life.' There was very little that was 'orthodox' about such behaviour, however. It was 'from below', where popular and Methodist belief meshed most thoroughly, that popular culture and recreation was most vigorously attacked in the 19th century; in Bible Christian, rather than Wesleyan biographies, that converts felt compelled to hunt out 'evil' in this way.²

1. Baring-Gould, op.cit., p.176, p.175; and see 'Diary of Mary Thorne', Thomas Shaw transcript of MS. 23 June 1867.; Drew, Life of Samuel Drew, pp.37-9.; The Remains of the late Tobias Martin of Breage in Cornwall, Mine Agent. With a Memoir of the Author, 2nd edn., Helston, 1856, p.162.
2. e.g. S.L. Thorne, The Converted Wrestler: or, the Life of Abraham Bastard, London, 1871, p.12, p.17, pp.22-4.; Christophers, Foolish Dick, pp.94-6.

In simple terms, the meshing of Methodist belief and moral strictures with pre-existing popular beliefs of various kinds allowed Methodism to make rapid headway in the villages and farmsteads of west Cornwall from the 1740s. The approximation of Methodist spirituality and morality to an underlying, indigenous Weltanschauung helped it to overcome the opposition accorded to 'external' influences in general, and to become an established part of west Cornish communities. The most significant legacy of this original symbiosis was probably the unique spirituality for which Cornish Methodism became renowned, and the central role accorded to conversion and revival in the life of local chapels throughout the first half of the 19th century.

But though the coalescence of systems of belief and morality allowed Methodism access into many communities from the 1740s, it does not satisfactorily explain why Methodism was turned to by the inhabitants of those communities, or indeed provide, by itself, much guidance in assessing the social role that Methodism played during industrialisation. In order to achieve these objectives, we need to ask what Methodism itself contributed to the people of west Cornwall.

The compelling attraction of Methodist religion was that it offered philosophical and ethical support to a rising demand for greater personal autonomy in society, while simultaneously satisfying an equally strong desire for communal association. Ultimately, throughout England as a whole, communal and individualistic priorities collided, and appeared contradictory, but in Cornwall, for

reasons which will be explained, they remained successfully aligned during the first half of the 19th century. The schema of Wesleyan spiritual development, which focused on the individual with greater rigour than any other contemporary institutionalised religion, we have examined to some extent. Methodism also provided a series of opportunities for individual expression and self-fulfilment in its multiplicity of lay offices, particularly those of local preacher and class leader. But it was probably as a communal religion that Methodism first began to appeal at a popular level. Wesley introduced specific forms of worship and means of grace – the love feast, the class and band meeting, the watchnight service, the regular chapel service with its sermon and hymns – which all depended for their success on creating an immediate and intense feeling of communal and spiritual fellowship, while at the same time allowing individual participation and involvement in expressing faith, experience, and emotion.¹ The combination of social and spiritual, of communal and individualistic, of traditional and modern elements which fused in the early Methodist chapels, seemed to bring religion to life, to make Christianity relevant.

In some senses, the cottage meetings and chapel services provided the structure and the stage to perpetuate popular belief. Both Methodism and popular religion might be considered to have served practical functions, while also providing explanatory and ethical frameworks for human existence. The success of Methodism among the miners and fishermen of west Cornwall has indeed been

1. Sydney Dimond, The Psychology of the Methodist Revival, Oxford, 1926, p.119, p.121, p.211.

interpreted in terms of its supposed role as a 'theodicy of suffering'; that is to say, for those in occupations of especial danger, Methodism provided the essential comfort of an explanatory model of the workings of an apparently wilful universe.¹

But if this was all that Methodism offered, there would have been little to choose between it and popular religion. In fact, Methodism provided something new. What distinguished Methodism from popular religion, as a structured and formulated religion, was that it was purposive; that it existed not merely to explain and interpret the world, but to change it.² Unlike popular religion, Methodism was seen to be a mobilising agent which could directly represent, and perhaps even protect, the social and spiritual interests of individuals and communities.

The rapid growth of Methodism in west Cornwall began in the early 1780s, and in part the Methodist chapels in the last two decades of the 18th century served to provide an often temporary form of comfort and security for migrants and the displaced. But from the 1799 revival onwards, it became clear that Methodism was also being utilised by the fishing and mining communities in particular for more positive social purposes. The background to this development was a perception of an erosion of tradition which was occurring in the face of economic change and growing 'external' pressures. The rapid growth in population and the development of structures of capitalist investment and control of the mines; the

1. Rule, 'Labouring Miner in Cornwall', D.Phil. thesis, pp.240-60.; Hugh McLeod, Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789-1970, Oxford, 1981, p.39.; Hammonds, Town Labourer, p.262, p.265.
2. see Currie, Gilbert, Horsley, Churches and Churchgoers, p.1.

growing influence on the mining economy of 'outsiders', whether Swansea smelters or Birmingham manufacturers; the novel fear of unemployment, and threats to custom from a rising commercial class in the towns; the dislocation in the fishing trade caused by the Napoleonic Wars, all tended to draw together the mining and fishing communities with an underlying purpose to preserve tradition and 'independence'. The essential purpose of Methodism, now established within many communities, was to assist mining and fishing families in their struggle to survive.

It is well to remember, at this point, the refined and developed form which the notion of 'community' had obtained in the fishing and mining areas of west Cornwall by the 18th century. Fishing villages, as compact, socially homogenous communities, looked outwards to the sea for their survival and meaning, and remained relatively exclusive to outside social groups and influences.

Miners, too, though often strung out across the moorlands in small hamlets and homesteads, were united by the traditional concept of existing as a 'race apart'. But underpinning communality in both cases was a critical and vigorously articulated notion of individualistic 'independence', which was understood to have enabled the groups as a whole to retain their exclusivity. Underpinning this individualistic independence was the homestead, which acquired significant loyalties and cultural meaning as the critical foundation of the whole system of life.

The sanctity of the household came to be objectified in a range of popular beliefs and customs. It was later written of

parts of England in general that

'the primitive homestead... was the seat of superstitious beliefs and practices which, if not codified into a religion, at all events occupied the place of a primitive system of morality.'

¹ As the root of a traditional life-style that encompassed family and community, the homestead - and particularly the hearth - became invested with a wide range of spiritual virtues and symbolic meaning. The hearth was not only a social forum, but the altar of the house-spirit. The threshold was protected against witchcraft by the placing of a jug of horse-shoe nails under the door.

Methodism, in its origins, was literally a 'household' religion. The holding of class meetings and preaching in the cottage reinforced folk belief in the sanctity of the household. Methodist theology and morality chimed well with a popular commitment to household morality, the role of the family, and the continuity of custom.² In an essential way, Methodism succeeded because it got to the spiritual roots of local communities, and based its own purpose on upholding traditional values. But it also provided a significant additional spiritual chain, which linked individual hearths to the wider occupational or village community in an explicit, purposive way for the first time. The continuance of the class meetings in the cottages maintained the spiritual functionality of the homestead, while the chapel served to integrate individual priorities and spiritual energies into the wider framework of the community.³ For the first time, in fact, the

1. G.L.Gomme, Folklore relics of early village life, London, 1883, pp. 70-1, p. 78, p. 96.
2. Valenze, Prophetic Sons and Daughters, pp. 32-3.
3. c.f. A.D. Rees, Life in a Welsh Country-side, Cardiff, 1950, p. 100.

'community' came to be represented in spiritual as well as psychological or cultural terms.

Thus, against a background of socio-economic change which threatened to destroy tradition, Methodism provided spiritual legitimation for both homestead and community¹ and became the means through which the social and other interests of the community were expressed. In essence, Methodism came to perform three interlinked functions: as social and spiritual support for the community; as solvent of growing class division within the community; and as buttress against 'external' influences, whether local or national. Robert Moore has noted in the case of Northumberland mining villages that the language used by the Methodists to describe the chapel was the language of family and community,² and in Cornwall, the chapel became the pre-eminent social forum of many mining and fishing villages. In many instances, though only a core of villagers were actually members, the majority of the community attended worship in 'their' chapel. In 1843, the Bible Christian Conference remarked that those who sang best were often 'the unconverted part of the congregation',³ and clearly chapel attendance fulfilled deep-seated social and 'primary religious' needs for large numbers.

The chapel gradually evolved its own 'popular culture', which

1. e.g. Despite the increased need to live a peripatetic existence, following the fortunes of local mines, miners retained the view of a cottage of their own as 'that grand desideratum' (quoted in Rule, 'Labouring Miner in Cornwall', D.Phil. thesis, p.97.).
2. Robert Moore, 'The Political Effects of Village Methodism', A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain. 6., ed Michael Hill, London, 1973, p.174.
3. Shaw, Bible Christians, p.87.

bore witness to the symbiosis of institutionalised religion and popular belief which had originally allowed it its influence. Local folklore and legends surrounding John Wesley abounded; while Methodist 'holy sites' competed with surviving holy wells and other popular religious venues. Gwennap Pit became a shrine for local Methodists, while 'Wesley Rock' in Gulval (from which Wesley had preached) became a 'favourite place for marriages.' Other rocks and sites were similarly commemorated, all 'dear to the heart of every Methodist.' At Holywell Bay, Methodists gathered regularly at what was thought to be an ancient holy well; while during the Mevagissey Feast, the custom of the Methodist Sunday schools processing to the sea to sing hymns was a direct revival of the days 'when they would bring the image of St. Peter down from the church to bless the waters and their increase.'¹ In all these ways, Methodism was incorporated into a pre-existing mental and cultural matrix, which, paradoxically, increased the magnitude of its own local influence.

In many ways, both practical and symbolic, Methodism served to buttress mining communities in particular against 'external' influences. Miners re-emphasized their traditional notion of 'independence' to mine owners by adopting the chapel as an alternative focus of loyalties to the workplace, which provided them with a religious code to counter the gradual infiltration of capitalistic priorities. Attempts by owners to erode the customary

1. Shaw, S. Petroc and John Wesley, p.11, p.12, p.26.; Baring-Gould, The Vicar of Morwenstow, p.45.; J.H.Rigg, Wesleyan Methodist Reminiscences. Sixty Years Ago, London, 1904, p.46.; Maker, Cob and Moorstone, p.64, pp.66-7.; J.C.M.H.A., vol.7 no.1(1985) pp.9-12.

practice of not working on Sundays, for example, were effectively challenged by miners throughout the first half of the 19th century on religious grounds.¹ Moreover, Wesleyan economic ethics tied in with traditional mining mentality in two ways. In the first, the Methodist encouragement to seek material independence and approval of economic enterprise provided an ideological continuity to traditional notions of 'independence'. In the second, a version of the popular theory of a 'moral economy' allowed for very little Methodist condemnation of the traditional food rioting which continued throughout the first half of the 19th century.

But indigenous Methodism also offered specific strategies and methods to allow the mining and fishing villages to combat the threat from social and economic change. Popular revivalism, occurring at times of peculiar tension, not only bound together a community in a more explicitly spiritual sense, but also perhaps represented a form of communal protest. Justification for action stemmed partly from the assurance granted with conversion, and partly from a traditional popular belief that 'in things that no law ruled', misfortune befell the individual who broke communal custom.² Perhaps, subconsciously, revivalism served partly as a propitiary rite designed to impel divine intervention to remove those phenomena or trends which threatened the community.

More practically, it represented a form of theatre or direct action, which disrupted mundane, secular priorities in the assertion of the superior claims of an all-encompassing spiritual reality.

1. W.B. 30 April 1967.; Cunningham, Leisure in the Industrial Revolution, p.72.

2. Told for a Memorial, p.50.

On the other hand, the frequent remarks of observers which alluded to the frugality, self-discipline, and intelligence of miners, attested to a clear-cut commitment within mining communities to adapt behaviour, where necessary, in line with changing circumstances. But in this process, we should not simply assume that conversion has 'morally transformed' the individual. It is true that the Wesleyan pastorate made attacks on specific forms of popular culture, but it is likely that the pursuit of 'respectability' was often perceived as a 'choice of role rather than a universal normative mode'; as a practical ploy, rather than an ideological commitment.¹ Adaptations that were made in life-style tended very often to be selective, voluntary, and with defined and practical aims. In essence, the elevation of the virtues of thrift, frugality, and hard work, and the adoption of teetotalism, could all be identified as defensive mechanisms, designed to allow the maintenance of a traditional life-style in the face of ever-encroaching economic change.² The desire to be able to provide for oneself and one's family was traditional, rather than revolutionary;³ while concentrating on education allowed miners to keep pace with wider social change, while retaining their independent outlook.

1. Appleby, 'Wesleyan Methodism in Hayle-1826', p.16.; P. Bailey, '"Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?" Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability', Journal of Social History, 12(1979) pp.342-3.
2. e.g. see F.M.L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', Economic History Review, 2nd ser., 39 no.2.(1981) p.189.; G. Stedman Jones, 'Class Expression versus Social Control? A Critique of Recent trends in the social history of 'leisure'', History Workshop, issue 4, Autumn 1977, pp.169-70.
3. Robert Gray, The Aristocracy of Labour in 19th century Britain, c.1850-1950, London, 1981, pp.37-8.

This apparent embracing of 'Victorian virtues' for simply functional ends helps explain the paradox of west Cornwall noted in 1891, where on the one hand Wesleyan Methodism was said to have led to great moral improvement, yet on the other, 'in some aspects at least the 'population' seems to have remained unaffected by modern changes.'¹

Indigenous Methodism maintained its vitality and purpose in fishing and mining communities until the 1830s, when a number of pressures began to operate which forced its fragmentation in some parts, and lessened its influence in others, during the 1840s. The strength of Methodism had in fact always depended not just on its appropriateness to local needs and mentalities, but also on the unevenness of opposition and obstructions to its spread. By the 1840s, obstacles were increasing. Inevitably, relations with the Connexion became increasingly fraught as on the one hand, the Connexion questioned the apparently homespun spirituality and morality on which much indigenous Methodism was based, while on the other, the communities resisted Connexional exertions simply because they represented 'external' influence. We have already emphasized the distance between 'orthodox' and 'indigenous' Methodist discipline and spirituality, and the problems facing the Connexion in drawing local Methodism into conventional channels. In 1864, a Tract for Cornish Methodists still maintained the view that Methodism in Cornwall belonged to the people rather than the Connexion, and worked differently - and more successfully - than in other parts as a result.² But from the 1840s, the Connexional drive

1. L.L.Price, ' West Barbary ' or Notes on the System of Work and Wages in the Cornish Mines', Burt, Cornish Mining, pp.121-2.

2. A Tract for Cornish Methodists, London, 1864.

was on, and gradually the local defences were pierced.

The revival of the local Anglican cause, initiated by Bishop Philpotts in the 1830s, also harmed indigenous Methodism. A large church building scheme in the late 1830s led to thirty three new parishes being created, in the mining heartland in particular, which challenged the monopolistic role of local Methodism as trustees of community interests. Vast improvements were made in terms of clerical residence; while some clergymen, notably Robert Aitken and William Haslam, adapted themselves to popular spirituality and began to advocate revivals. Taken together, the pressures from more aggressively pursued orthodox religions, both Connexional Wesleyanism and Anglicanism, helped reduce the popular religious element in Cornish Methodism.¹

Important, too, was economic change. By the 1840s, the notion of 'community' was becoming difficult to sustain, due partly to the rate of local population growth, and because a growing specialisation within the mining industry was widening gaps between individuals; but also, paradoxically, because emigration and migration to other mining areas was beginning to fragment the idea of a 'closed' community. Values and influences began to seep in from outside the communities, as this fragmentation continued. John Probert, in examining the phenomenon of Methodist decline from the early 1840s, focused on architectural change in chapels from neo-

1. Shaw, Pastoral Crook, p.9-10.; Haslam, From Death into Life, p.20, p.22, p.46, p.60, p.65.; Treffry, Memoirs of Richard Treffry Junior, p.152.; A.B.Donaldson, The Bishopric of Truro 1877-1902, London, 1902.; Wesleyan Methodism : Is it a Church or a Sect? Plain Words for Cornish Wesleyans, Plymouth, 1877.

classical to Gothic Revival, and argued 'that Methodism was the product of the neo-Classical age and with the emergence of a new age it became less in tune with society.'¹ What appears to have been the critical social development in Methodism's decline was the inevitable 'opening up' of villages to a wider society - often against their will - which ensured that indigenous Methodism, as a buttress to 'community', lost its vital spiritual purpose.

But Methodism probably played a part in its own decline. Obelkevich has argued that Methodism contained both 'modern' and 'traditional' elements in rural Lincolnshire;² and in outlining strategies which local Methodists adopted to combat 'external' forces, it was earlier suggested that both the 'traditional' means of popular revivalism, and the 'progressive' means of education and moral discipline were applied. Ultimately, the life-style offered by hard work, education and sobriety (if successful) might become something distinct from one of traditional independence, marked by a greater emphasis on personal autonomy and self-fulfilment, and less on being 'tied to the soil'. The inevitable infiltration of wider social change, liberal and utilitarian philosophies, and the domestic products of industrialisation, all helped encourage outlooks based less on 'community' and more on the individual detached from the community. As congregations began to sense growing class divisions within their ranks, so a clearer distinction between the ideals of 'independence' and 'individualism' emerged, with the middle class embracing the now-fashionable cause of temperance, and the working

1. J.C.M.H.A., vol.5 no.3, pp.117-8.

2. Obelkevich, Religion and Rural Society, p.203.

classes choosing teetotalism.¹

Bernard Semmel has argued that Methodism acted as a bridge between the traditional and modern worlds, gradually promoting liberal, progressive ideals of individualism, within structures which allowed for a sense of continuity and tradition.² A sociological model of the way in which 'folk' religions are affected by the arrival of institutionalised 'universal' religions, also suggests that the central feature of the process is the replacement of the community by the individual as the heart of that religion.

'Whereas the individual in folk religion was a member of the over-arching community, through which he lived and in whose "sanctity" he participated, in all universal religion we encounter the individual who has become conscious of himself and presents distinctive problems,'

3

Initially, it might be argued, Methodism appealed in Cornwall because it appeared to mesh with traditional views of independence within a broader communal imperative. Over time, however, and in league with other social and intellectual changes, Methodism had the effect of increasingly detaching the individual from the community and asserting a more autonomous individuality.

From the 1840s, as the increasing fragmentation of fishing and mining communities blurred and eventually removed the spiritual function which indigenous Methodism had originally served, the inter-

1. T.R.Tholfsen, Working Class Radicalism in mid-Victorian England, London, 1976, pp.67-72, p.229.; B.Harrison, Drink and the Victorians. The Temperance Question in England 1815-72, London, 1971, p.109, p.149.
2. Semmel, Methodist Revolution, p.8.
3. G.Mensching, 'Folk and Universal Religion', Religion, Culture and Society, ed. Louis Schneider, Wiley New York, 1964, pp.254-9.

twining of social and spiritual needs which had propelled people to the chapel diminished, to the detriment of spirituality. The emergence of temperance and teetotalism, for example, can be seen to represent the beginning of a secularisation of the conversion experience, rather than, as John Rule suggests, a ' 'religious' force amplifying and extending...well-established Methodist sanctions.'¹

In line with developments at a national level, local Methodism increasingly lost its spiritual intensity and developed more and more as a social phenomenon at a popular level.² Immensely popular chapel-based activities such as Sunday School Anniversaries and tea-treats proliferated, and from the 1870s onwards, the triumph of a new mental and spiritual outlook showed in the manner in which 'curious tales and legends' from Cornish Methodist history began to be hunted down and published with the same relish (and in the same format) as folklorists simultaneously searched for their 'survivals'. Biographies of early Methodists began to appear as quaint tales from the past, rather than as didactic models for the present, as the titles themselves reflect: The Converted Wrestler; or the Life of Abraham Bastard (1877); The King's Son; or a Memoir of Billy Bray (already through thirty eight editions by 1906); Foolish Dick : the Pilgrim Preacher (1873). A distinct genre of Cornish Methodist folk tales emerged, associated with Henry Dawson

1. Harrison, op.cit., p.31.; J.Rule, 'Methodism, Popular Beliefs and Village Culture in Cornwall, 1800-50', Popular Culture and Custom in 19th century England, ed. R.D.Storch, London, 1982, pp.49-52.
2. see Rack, 'Wesleyanism and "the World"', pp.48-50.; Clark, 'Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village'', M.A. thesis, pp.120-49; 'Diary of Mary Thorne', Thomas Shaw transcript of MS. 23 June 1867, 29 July 1865.; R.Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, Harmondsworth, 1981, pp.112-6.

Lawry, and in particular Mark Guy Pearse.¹

The final collapse of mining in west Cornwall in the mid-1860s in fact brought down the curtain on the age, not only of industrial Cornwall, but of 'indigenous' Methodism too. Although Cornish Methodism in general retained a distinctive spiritual vitality, it no longer served as a fundamental socio-spiritual buttress to 'independence' and 'community' in the west. In the late 19th century, in fact, Cornwall entered a new phase in its history, a phase characterised by increasing nostalgia for the past. As Mark Guy Pearse reminisced, on an age floating out of reality and into mythology:

'That grand old Cornwall. How I love it, with its old notions, its legends, its ghosts, its witches, separated as it is from the rest of England... preserving all the old-time traditions, in all their pristine vigour and freshness.'

2

1. see Mark Guy Pearse, Daniel Quorm and his Religious Notions, London, 1874.
2. G. Unwin and J. Telford, Mark Guy Pearse Preacher, Author, Artist, London, 1930, p. 133.

CONCLUSION.

Initial Methodist growth, at the parish level, was to a considerable extent determined by the interplay of three sets of conditioning factors : the degree to which inhibiting 'environmental' pressures (whether social, economic, religious or political) operated; the strength of commitment of local Methodist evangelism; and the sense in which a real or latent religious 'need' existed. Subsequent Methodist expansion and development remained dependent on a favourable combination of these underlying factors, but perhaps can best be understood by reference to an interaction between Connexion, chapel, and community, which produced very different results (in terms of Methodist forms, strength and functions) in different locations. In Cornwall, especially in the populous west, initial Methodist growth was rapid because of the historical and structural weaknesses of Anglicanism and the relative absence of social controls based on parochial 'dependency systems'; because John Wesley considered the mining population in particular to be one of his key evangelistic targets; and because industrialisation (with its concomitant social and economic strains), occurred early. Subsequent Methodist development was in some senses 'distinctive' because the particular interplay of these underlying factors ensured a peculiar strength and vitality to the local Methodist cause.

However, that 'distinctiveness' was also resultant upon a specific balance between Connexional, communal, and chapel forces, which allowed a local, popular spirit and ethos to permeate and fundamentally influence the form and function of Cornish Methodism throughout our period. On the one hand, the social homogeneity of fishing and mining communities, the increasing perception that 'external' economic pressures for change were at work, and the complex, symbiotic relationship between indigenous popular beliefs and imperatives, and popular interpretations of Methodist doctrine and

ethics, allowed Methodism to function as a socio-spiritual buttress to a traditional way of life which emphasized both 'independence' and communal identity. On the other, the pastoral and administrative difficulties created by the 'isolation' of the region, the poverty of many local members, the controlling influence of local leaders, and the relatively weak alliance that was forged between pastoral authorities and the middle classes in the 'town' chapels, ensured that efforts to subdue indigenous forms of spiritual experience and to implant a Connexional orthodoxy (in all senses) in the region made little headway before at least the 1840s. Taken together, these factors explain the development and persistence of a form of Methodism which was genuinely a popular religion.

Wesleyan Methodism in Cornwall in the first half of the 19th century was distinctive, but nonetheless sufficiently related to Methodism at the national level to allow a number of points to be made which relate to Methodist historiography in general. In the first place, peculiar circumstances help explain the difficulties which the Connexion faced in taking control of the 'movement' in Cornwall after Wesley's death, but nonetheless the case of Cornwall does add weight to the view that Connexionalism was often more apparent than real in England throughout the first half of the 19th century. Conflicts over chapel trusts, pastoral authority, local and Connexional finance, revivalism and teetotalism, just as much as the more overt controversies and secessions which rent the Connexion, all point to a continuing gap between local and central priorities in the evolving denomination. In the second place, the outbreak and continuance of popular revivalism within Cornish Wesleyanism demonstrated a genuine popularisation of Methodism, which welled from local rather than pastoral sources, and which again pointed up the divergence between 'orthodox' and local spiritual experience.

But most centrally, the case of Cornish Methodism suggests, in accordance with the work of Deborah Valenze, W.R. Ward, Robert Moore, and others, that Methodism had the potential to function as a religion of the people in particular socio-economic circumstances in early industrial England. As with Valenze's study of sectarian Methodism, Wesleyan Methodism in many mining and fishing villages of west Cornwall acted as a preservative reflex, tying communities together with a heightened spiritual purpose and 'meaning' in the face of economic change. As with Moore's study of pit villages in Durham, the Wesleyan chapel in these communities in west Cornwall came to serve social and mundane communal functions too. Taken together, the social and spiritual functions which Methodism served allowed it to exist throughout the first half of the 19th century as a profoundly influential popular religion.

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