

Methodist Union in Whitby: A study of the impact of organizational, social and cultural factors on Methodist Union in Whitby and District, 1918 -1953

Christopher Kirkness Metcalfe (2011)

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**Methodist Union in Whitby: A study of the impact of  
organizational, social and cultural factors on  
Methodist Union in Whitby and District, 1918 –  
1953**

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **Abstract**

Arguably, Methodist Union in 1932 was the most significant event in twentieth-century Methodist history. It brought together in one Methodist Church, the former Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist denominations. It was led from the apex of each denomination by their Conferences and promised a renewal of evangelism, a better use of personnel and property and the setting of an ecumenical example to other Churches. However, it was at the level of individual circuits and Societies that these benefits were hoped to be felt. Although there is literature concerning Union encompassing a broad, national perspective and which discusses its overall outcomes, there has been little scholarly research into the detail of what happened at the local level. The focus of the study is a particular geographical area which, in 1932, was the territory of the Whitby Wesleyan and Whitby Primitive Methodist Circuits. It investigates the process of Union from 1918 until 1953, within the local geographical, economic and historical context. The sources of evidence are predominantly of a documentary nature, but a further strand of evidence is provided by oral history interviews. The study considers organizational factors and their relevance in the light of some concepts drawn from organization theory.

The thesis argues that although Union presented many common issues across the Methodist denominations, including the increasing influence of secularization on society as a whole, it can only be properly understood by also taking local factors into account. The significance of the local culture is highlighted with its roots in seafaring and farming, together with the influence of tourism and the seasonal cycle of visitors. The influence of social class, related to the 'social geography' of Whitby, was also a significant factor. The organizational structures and practices of Methodism, although effective for maintaining the denominations in periods of relative stability, were not well adapted to deal with the changes involved in Union and circuit amalgamation and former loyalties, especially to individual chapels, could hinder developments in new areas of population. In conclusion, suggestions are made as to how the research could be developed further.

## **Foreword**

This study had a long gestation period stretching back to student days in the 1960s. A finals paper was entitled 'Church History since 1830' and one of the questions was, 'Account for the divisions among Methodist Christians in this period and the attempts to overcome them'. At that time it seemed that relatively little had been written of an academic nature about the Methodist Union of 1932, probably because so many people still remembered and had been involved in it. Despite the intervening years it remains the case that little scholarly research has been undertaken with a focus on Union, especially detailed studies of Union at local level.

My interest also stemmed from the experiences of childhood when various impressions were gained from what people said and from visiting chapels which still exhibited characteristics of their former Methodist denominations. My grandfather, the Rev Ernest Metcalfe, had been the Primitive Methodist superintendent minister in Whitby from 1928 until 1933, (the period covering Union) and returned as superintendent from 1942 until 1944, when the former Primitive Methodist and Wesleyan Methodist Circuits were moving towards amalgamation. I was only five when he died but my curiosity had been aroused. I subsequently decided that when the opportunity arose I would conduct academic research to test the perceptions that I had gained against the evidence in order to try and find out what actually happened and what this meant for those involved. Given family involvement, I have been careful to minimize bias by relying only upon extant sources of evidence, critical analysis and reflexivity to ensure that the fullest picture was obtained.

From my professional work I had an interest in the theory of organizations. Although aware of the developing field of Congregational Studies and the part played in this by Organizational Studies I felt that little use had been made of the associated body of theory in research with a historical perspective. The study, therefore, provided an opportunity to test out this approach through research in an actual setting. Organizational perspectives, however, form only one strand of the thesis, which is a primarily a historical study that draws at some points on organization theory rather than an

organizational study that draws upon historical evidence. The specialist terminology of organizational theory was therefore only used when this was felt necessary.

If the research had been conducted even ten years earlier it could have drawn to a greater extent upon oral history interviews and thus would have been a different type of study. However, it was decided that although the remaining number of people with memories of Union and its immediate aftermath was very small, their contribution would nevertheless be of qualitative value. For this reason the study is one that relies predominantly on documentary sources and the methodology is essentially historical. Although this is a history set within a locality, it is not only a 'local history' because it is concerned with the broader historical context and is related to bodies of theory - ecclesiological, organizational and sociological. The research has a strong element of narrative analysis, reconstructed from the evidence. It is concerned, in places, with fine detail as it can be the nuances of what was recorded, or omitted, that can be most illuminative. The study is thus concerned with creating new knowledge and insights from primary source material together with the identification of some broader themes which relate the process of Union and circuit amalgamation to its geographical and temporal settings.

## **Archive Abbreviations**

The following abbreviations are used in footnotes relating to archive sources. Further information about archives can be found in Chapter 2 and in the archive section of the bibliography. Where sources are not cited frequently they are given in full.

NYCR            North Yorkshire County Record Office, Northallerton.  
WCR            Whitby Circuit Records, The Manse Sleights, Nr. Whitby (at time of research – these to be transferred to NYCR).

## **Folio abbreviations**

### Quarterly Meeting Minutes

PQM            Primitive Methodist  
CQM            Church Street Circuit (September 1932 to September 1944)  
WQM            Wesleyan Methodist  
BQM            Brunswick Circuit (September 1932 to September 1944)  
QMW            Whitby Methodist Circuit (from September 1944)

### General Purposes Committee

BGP            Brunswick Circuit (until September 1944)  
GPW            Whitby Methodist Circuit (from September 1944)

### Preaching Plans

WCP            Wesleyan Methodist Circuit preaching plans  
BCP            Brunswick Circuit preaching plans (from September 1932)  
PCP            Primitive Methodist Circuit preaching plans  
CCP            Church Street Circuit preaching plans (from September 1932)  
CPW            Whitby Circuit preaching plans (from September 1944)

### Local Preachers' Meetings

WPM            Wesleyan Local Preachers' meetings (until September 1932)  
BPM            Brunswick Local Preachers' meetings (until September 1944)  
PMW            Whitby Local Preachers' meetings (from September 1944)

### Church Names

In the folios Briggswath and Sleights (one church) may be referred to as either 'Briggswath' or 'Sleights', Fylingthorpe as 'Thorpe' and Robin Hood's Bay as 'Bay'(See Appendix 1, Map of Whitby and district).

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

This study is an investigation into the Methodist Union of 1932 in a specific local context. The setting is the Whitby district, on the North East coast, in what, during the period that is the focus of the study, was the North Riding of Yorkshire.<sup>1</sup> It is concerned with the extent to which Methodist Union and its aftermath were influenced by organizational, social and cultural factors, especially those relating to the locality. The study arose from a questioning of differences of perception as to how Union had been received and responded to at local level in contrast with national presentations and expectations. This chapter sets out the purposes, general context and boundaries of the study, its relationship with previous work in the field and introduces the theoretical framework within which it is conducted. It also explains how it contributes to research into Methodism in the twentieth-century. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of what is to follow.

### **The contribution of the study to twentieth century Church history**

An early impetus for conducting original research into this aspect of twentieth century Methodism came from reading David Clark's ethnographic study set in the fishing village of Staithes, ten miles from Whitby.<sup>2</sup> The fieldwork for that study was conducted in the years 1975 – 1976 and the focus was on 'folk religion' and on what Clark described as 'the underlife of religion in Staithes'. He discovered that:

In Staithes the terms 'Primitive' and 'Wesleyan' are still considered legitimate and over forty years after Methodist Union, chapels are referred to by their pre-1932 names.<sup>3</sup>

Although essentially a sociological study Clark's book contains material about Methodist chapels and chapel life and he described Methodist organization as 'a bureaucratised, church-like, multi-national organization'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From 1974 it became an area within the County of North Yorkshire.

<sup>2</sup> D. Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 82.

In terms of focus and methodology Clark's study is different in nature from the present historical study which relies principally, but not exclusively, on documentary sources. However it does share the conviction that it is only through detailed research of religious life in specific settings that the building blocks can be obtained for wider national studies.<sup>5</sup> Although this study does not explore 'the underlife of religion' in the same way as that undertaken by Clark, it aims to investigate the finer detail of the process of Union, in a specific setting, in a manner that has not been attempted to the same extent in wider studies of Union. A distinguishing feature of the research, therefore, and one that contributes to its originality, is that it is concerned with investigating the process of Methodist Union predominantly 'from below' rather than 'from above'. In particular, it investigates how Union was received, interpreted and responded to at the level of a specific geographical area, the territory of a Wesleyan Methodist Circuit and a Primitive Methodist Circuit.<sup>6</sup>

A second feature of its originality is that this study places a particular emphasis on the nature of Methodism as an organization (or series of related organizations) and on the role that organizational factors played in the process of Union. As Roosen and Newman have pointed out, 'denominations are both religious and institutional in nature', a 'combination of both the theological and the organizational'.<sup>7</sup> This study therefore investigates Methodist Union as an organizational as well as a religious process and aims to help to develop additional historiographical tools that can be employed in other contexts and by other researchers. Although the formal event of Union took place in 1932, with the Uniting Conference held on 20<sup>th</sup> September, it was not just an event in that year but part of an extended process of planning and enacting involving many pressures and influences. As this study will

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<sup>5</sup> M. Wellings, 'Methodism in the UK and Ireland' in C. Yrigoyen Jr, (ed), *T and T Clark Companion to Methodism*, New York, London: T and T Clark International, 2010, 'immersion in local materials is a vital part of the historian's task', p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> A circuit is the local administrative unit of Methodism, made up of a number of Societies and under the pastoral charge of a Superintendent Minister.

<sup>7</sup> D. A. Roozen and J. R. Neiman, (eds), 'Introduction', in *Church, Identity and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times*, Michigan/Cambridge, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2005, p. 4.

show, it could, with some justification, be described as 'the long Methodist Union'. Some of these were factors that were common across the Methodist denominations, others were the influence of factors at local level. As a study of a particular historical 'case', circumscribed within physical and temporal boundaries, it is not claimed that findings can be generalized to other contexts, rather that the questions raised and the concepts employed may suggest additional lines of enquiry to others working in the field.

A third contribution, therefore, is that the study investigates Methodist Union in the context of a number of specific local factors, most notably those of geography, topography and a local economy based partly on agriculture, partly on fishing and seafaring and, increasingly, as a holiday and leisure destination. There were also local Methodist denominational 'foundation myths'<sup>8</sup> and factors arising from shared experiences and traditions. It will be argued that although the Whitby area exhibited many factors that were common to Methodism as a whole it is only possible to fully understand the process of Methodist Union by investigating it at the local level which was where Union was intended to make the most impact. This was at the level of individual circuits, Societies<sup>9</sup> and other sub-groupings such as local preachers or organizations for women and young people. The study will show that as well as doctrinal and ecclesiological factors there were also issues of social differentiation which cut across both Whitby denominations and affected the relationship between them.<sup>10</sup>

Although the study is concerned with Methodist Union in a particular area it is more than a local denominational history reconstructing the narrative at local level, being also concerned with 'those wider issues which supply both

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<sup>8</sup> A foundation myth relates to the foundation of a nation or movement and which provides a pattern for self-understanding and behaviour. The word 'myth' applies to this function and is not making a judgement on historicity or otherwise.

<sup>9</sup> 'Society' was the term adopted by John Wesley to refer to each local congregation. Societies were sub-divided into Classes led by a Class Leader.

<sup>10</sup> Although Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism shared much in common in relation to church organization there were also significant differences between them, for instance on the exercise of authority. They were thus distinct and can be referred to as denominations.

context and meaning'.<sup>11</sup> It is set within the broader social, economic, educational and religious contexts that shaped the thinking of the period, and with the complex inter-relationships between them. The study has as its focus religious organizations facing a changed situation within a wider society that was itself changing. No attempt is made to discuss everything that happened during the period or to focus on particular personalities, other than where relevant to the purposes of the study. It is organized, in a flexible manner, around narrative and thematic modes of presentation and analysis. There is the narrative analysis of Methodist Union but this is interwoven with analysis of other relevant themes. Unlike most local histories of circuits or individual churches, which were often produced to celebrate anniversaries and centenaries, the approach adopted is critical, analytical and reflexive.

### **The origins of the study 1: an under-researched area**

Twentieth-century Methodism has not yet gained the same level of attention from historians as the formative 'heroic period' of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Indeed, Hempton argues that despite being 'the most important Protestant religious development since the Reformation... Methodism itself remains remarkably under researched'.<sup>12</sup> This is particularly the case in relation to its more recent history as can be confirmed by a visit to the Methodism section of any academic library. Here the shelves are likely to contain most volumes about the Wesleys, especially John, and the formative years of the movement, some more general volumes about Methodist history, but relatively little detail about the twentieth-century, especially after 1932. This is less true of articles in publications such as the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* but even here the emphasis has tended to be on the earlier years. This is despite the significance of the period leading up to Union in 1932, the protracted process of Union itself and its consequences which resonate to the present day.

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<sup>11</sup> E. Royle, 'Writing the Local History of Methodism', in P. Forsaith and M. Wellings, (eds), *Methodism and History: Essays in Honour of John Vickers*, Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 2010, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> D. Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2005, p. 2.



To put this in perspective, however, there are relatively few works on twentieth-century English/British church history as a whole, notable exceptions being those by Hastings and Robbins.<sup>13</sup> The seeming lack of coverage could be for a number of reasons. The first could be a preference for investigating periods of growth and expansion rather than of numerical decline. The second may lie in a feeling that the events of the mid-twentieth century are still too recent to be analysed in perspective and merge into matters more appropriately the concern of the social scientist than the ecclesiastical historian. As Tiller has pointed out, 'confidentiality and objectivity can be pressing issues'.<sup>14</sup> A third factor may be that more recent documentary material has not yet been catalogued or deposited in archives, as was the case with some used as a basis for this study. It could also be argued that in a more secular culture the religious history of the twentieth-century is felt to be less relevant or could be subsumed within a secular historical framework.<sup>15</sup>

The world of even two or three generations ago was very different from the world of the twenty-first century and relative proximity in time does not mean that this particular period lacks the 'otherness', the making of the familiar strange that is of particular interest to many historians.<sup>16</sup> However, where there is discussion of Methodist Union in the literature it tends to be of a 'broad-brush' nature concentrating upon the wider situation with relatively few references to research done at local level (e.g. Davey, Davies, Currie, Kent, Turner, Brake, Tabraham).<sup>17</sup> Batty covers the twentieth-century in a

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<sup>13</sup> A. Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1900 – 1925*, London: Fount Paperback, 1987; K. Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Churches 1900 – 2000*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> K. Tiller, *Local History: An Introduction*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn), Thrupp: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 2002, p.234.

<sup>15</sup> But see M. Burleigh, *Moral Combat: A History of World War 2*, London: Harper Press, 2010, for the role of moral sentiment and reasoning in political decision making.

<sup>16</sup> R. Williams, *Why Study the Past: The Quest for the Historical Church*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005, p. 5 – 'a good historical perspective makes the familiar strange'.

<sup>17</sup> C. Davey, *The Methodist Story*, London: Epworth Press, 1955; R. E. Davies, *Methodism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Press, 1963; Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenism*, London: Faber and Faber, 1968; J. Kent, *The Age of Disunity*, London: Epworth Press, 1966; J. M. Turner, 'Methodism in England 1900 – 1932', in R.

work on Methodism in Scotland from 1750 - 2000 but gives little detail on Union.<sup>18</sup> Articles in journals have also tended to be of a more general nature examples being Bowmer, Drewery, Wakefield, and Hartley.<sup>19</sup> Wellings points out that the lack of coverage of more recent years means that 'opportunities for primary research on Methodist institutions, individuals and activities are considerable'.<sup>20</sup>

There are very few academic studies that are concerned either with Methodist Union or with organizational issues relating to Union at local level. David Easton conducted research into the reunion of Methodism in Cornwall during the period 1860 – 1960 and is thus broader in scope geographically and temporally than the present study.<sup>21</sup> Easton considered the competing natures of authority within the Methodist denominations and explored the tensions with resurgent Anglicanism in the nineteenth-century, developing a conflict model which he argued shaped the process of Methodist Union. B.S. Turner considered the decline of Methodism in relation to commitment and organization, making comparisons between Leeds and California.<sup>22</sup> Turner's study was concerned with analysis of individual religious commitment and church organization based upon sociological models and although containing references to Methodist Union does not make it a key element. A small-scale study was conducted by H.C. Haysom with a particular focus on Methodist

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Davies, A.R. George and G. Rupp, (eds), *The History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 3, London: Epworth Press, 1983 pp 309 – 361; J. M. Turner, *Methodism in England 1932 – 1998*, London: Epworth Press, 1998; G.T. Brake, *Policy and Politics in British Methodism 1932 -1982*, London: Edsall, 1984; B. W. Tabraham, *The Making of Modern Methodism*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn), London: Epworth, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> M. Batty, *Scotland's Methodists 1750 – 2000*, Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> J. Bowmer, 'Methodist Union', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Vol. XLIII, September 1982, pp. 101 – 110; B. Drewery, 'Methodist Union: Some Theological Issues', in *Epworth Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1982, pp. 32 – 39; G.S. Wakefield, 'Methodist Union: Youthful Memories, Adult Assessment and Future Hope', in *Epworth Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1982, pp. 26 – 31; J.C. Hartley, 'Methodist Union in Theory and Practice', in *Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire Branch) Journal*, Vol. 42, 1983, pp. 2 – 5.

<sup>20</sup> Wellings, op cit, p. 87.

<sup>21</sup> P.D. Easton, 'Gathered into One': The reunion of British Methodism, 1860 -1960, with particular reference to Cornwall, Lampeter: University of Wales. 2007. Unpublished PhD thesis.

<sup>22</sup> B.S.Turner, *The Decline of Methodism: An analysis of Religious Commitment and Organization*, University of Leeds. 1970. Unpublished PhD Thesis.

Union in the London Borough of Waltham Forest.<sup>23</sup> This covers the period up to 1992 and concludes that in Waltham Forest the aims of Union had not really been achieved. It shares with the present study a focus on a locality but is less detailed in approach, covering a much longer period. The present research, therefore, makes a significant original contribution to what is known about Union through an investigation of a specific local context, including the period between Union in 1932 and the amalgamation of circuits in 1944.

The growth of interest in oral history and ‘the remembered past’,<sup>24</sup> suggest an increasing focus on periods which have not yet entirely slipped below the horizon of human memory. The memories of individuals tend to be of the local unless, of course, they were personally involved in events at a national level and even here they do not necessarily have a complete overview. For instance, the memories of the last remaining soldiers of the First World War were of the trenches that they were in, not of the grand strategy of the politicians or generals.<sup>25</sup> Although the use of oral history poses particular challenges of interpretation, it nevertheless has a significant contribution to make even when, as is the case with this study, the main sources of data are documentary.<sup>26</sup>

### **Doctrinal and ecclesiological issues**

The issues faced by the three uniting Churches at Union can be traced back to the origins of Methodism and to John Wesley himself. Hempton wrote of ‘Wesley’s ambiguous ecclesiological legacy’<sup>27</sup> and Rack argued that:

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<sup>23</sup> H.C. Haysom, *Methodist Union in 1932: Were its aims achieved, altered, thwarted?* A project of A 403 ‘Arts and Sciences in Britain since the Thirties’, Open University, 1992.

<sup>24</sup> P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Third Edn., 2000, p. 11; Also, Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> A. Thomson, ‘Anzak Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia’, in A. Green and K. Troupe, (eds), *The Houses of History: A critical reader in twentieth-century history and theory*, Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1999, pp. 239 – 252.

<sup>26</sup> See J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, methods and new directions*, (4<sup>th</sup> edn), London: Pearson Longman, 2006, pp. 318 – 338.

<sup>27</sup> Hempton, *op cit*, p. 105.

the divisions in Methodism represented the splitting apart of the two sides of Wesley's legacy, indeed of two sides of his personality.<sup>28</sup>

On the one hand John Wesley was a High Churchman with a concern for order and the proper exercise of ecclesiastical authority but on the other a pragmatist who was prepared to bend or break the rules in the pursuit of evangelism and the spreading of scriptural holiness. These tensions were reflected in the structures and procedures that he left behind although it must be borne in mind that he saw himself as setting up a Religious Society and not an alternative Church. It can be argued that to a great extent the subsequent divisions in Methodism had their origins in these tensions, especially in relation to the doctrines of the Church, Sacraments and Ministry. However, there were also tensions arising from those who retained a close affinity with the Church of England, its doctrines and practices, and those who were closer to Dissent. According to Currie, this meant that the United Committee, which started meeting in January 1918:

could never decide whether it was resolving the controversies of the past or looking, under divine guidance, to the new age.<sup>29</sup>

The work of this committee is discussed in relation to the local response to the Tentative Scheme for Union and its revisions in Chapter 5.

Literature undertaking a considered analysis of Methodist Union and its aftermath did not start to appear until about thirty years after the formal event took place in 1932. In 1963 Davies argued that:

There was little or no theological difference between the Churches, though the Wesleyans tended to lay greater stress on the sacraments and the doctrine of the Church, and had a 'higher' conception of the ministry, while the United and Primitive Methodists were more closely akin to historic nonconformity.<sup>30</sup>

While it was true that in relation to the centrality of the Scriptures, Evangelical Doctrine and a desire to spread Scriptural Holiness there was

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<sup>28</sup> H. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, (3<sup>rd</sup> edn), London: Epworth Press, 2002, p. 552.

<sup>29</sup> Currie, *op cit*, p. 254.

<sup>30</sup> Davies, *op cit*, p. 187.

general accord, the differences over the doctrines of the Church, Sacraments and Ministry were deeply held and therefore of considerable significance. On the Wesleyan side a particular emphasis had been placed on the notion of the 'consecrated authority' of the 'Pastoral Office' held by ordained ministers and their leading role in church government. In the non-Wesleyan denominations a greater degree of lay participation was expected. There were also differences over the place of John Wesley's teachings in Methodism and the authority that should be accorded to his *Notes on the New Testament* and the *44 Sermons*.

The ways in which these tensions were addressed are evident in the careful wording of *Doctrinal Standards of the Methodist Church*. This was expressed in such a way as to be acceptable to a broad span of Methodist opinion.<sup>31</sup> References were made to the place of the Methodist Church within the Holy Catholic Church together with an affirmation of loyalty to the Protestant Reformation. The *Notes on the New Testament* and the *44 Sermons* were to be seen not as a test of orthodoxy but interpreted more loosely as 'standards of preaching and belief' and it was stated that there was 'no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to the Lord's people'. The basis for ordination was 'representative selection' and a matter of Church Order, and 'not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office of Ministers'. It remained possible for lay people to be able to administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the Primitive and United Methodist Churches but the conditions under which it was allowable became more circumscribed. The importance of the laity was signified by having a lay Vice-President of Conference and that of the ministry by retaining a Pastoral (ministerial) as well as a Representative Session at the Methodist Conference.

Nevertheless a Doctrinal Statement, however carefully worded, was not enough to be able to achieve a quick or smooth 'organic union'. It was simpler to rationalize the central departments of the three uniting Churches and to begin to bring together ministerial training, education and

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<sup>31</sup> The Doctrinal Standards of the Methodist Church, Defined in the Deed of Union, 1932, in H. Carter, *The Methodist Heritage*, London: The Epworth Press, 1951, pp. 236 – 237.

denominational newspapers than it was to have similar effects at the level of the circuits. However, there is general scholarly agreement that the hopes expressed by the leadership for a release of energy and better use of resources for evangelism in the face of declining membership were not realized. Kent wrote that 'little serious effort' was made to build a form of Methodism suitable for the age.<sup>32</sup> Both Kent and Turner referred to the fact that in relation to Methodism at local level the Union lacked the 'teeth' necessary to promote change, especially in relation to overlap and over-capacity of provision.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Currie argued that:

Rationalization remained the most important, yet the most delicate question. The Committee deliberately drew back from it.<sup>34</sup>

It was recognised that 'non-interference with circuits' was a price that had to be paid in order to gain sufficient support for Union.<sup>35</sup> Vidler, writing more broadly on ecumenism, pointed to the significance of the 'non-theological factors' that keep churches apart and of how it is:

dogged local attachments to traditional buildings and customs and sociological groupings which ordinary church members do not wish to see disturbed.<sup>36</sup>

This observation is borne out both in the secondary literature concerning Union and emerged as a significant factor in the present study of the Whitby area. These matters will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, especially in relation to a proposal for Methodist premises to serve the needs of a new council estate.

### **The wider context: the contribution of other studies**

Reference has already been made to Clark's ethnographic study of folk religion in Staithes and although not concerned with Methodist Union two other major studies have particular relevance. Green conducted a case study

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<sup>32</sup> Kent, *op cit*, p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Kent, *op cit*, p. 16; Turner, *op cit*, p. 341.

<sup>34</sup> Currie, *op cit*, p. 287-288

<sup>35</sup> Turner, *op cit*, p 340.

<sup>36</sup> A. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, p. 267.

with its focus on Halifax, Keighley and Denholm, three towns in the industrial West Riding of Yorkshire.<sup>37</sup> This was concerned with the decline of religion between the years 1870 and 1920. As with the present study it has geographical and chronological boundaries but is broader in scope, including the other denominations found in the area. Green described his approach as:

An essentially institutional history: a description and analysis of the ends, activities and fate of religious institutions.<sup>38</sup>

He argued that during this period the churches became less focussed on their sacred purposes and that they 'extended the boundaries of their organisations to bring people in'.<sup>39</sup> At the same time they became more responsive, inclusive, organizationally complex and ordered, as well as more efficient and businesslike as 'producers and distributors of religious goods'.<sup>40</sup> The result of the extension of their portfolios of activities, often coupled with unrealistic expectations, led to mounting debts and buildings that were rarely, if ever, filled to capacity. A consequence was that 'some time in the 1920s the local religious classes lost heart'.<sup>41</sup> The issues of finance and the extension of the activities of the churches beyond their religious functions are of particular relevance for the present study and will be discussed in later chapters.

A case study was undertaken by Moore between 1966 and 1970 in Esh Winning, Cornsay, Waterhouses and Quebec Hamsteels, four mining villages in the Deerness Valley in County Durham.<sup>42</sup> Moore described this as an intensive field study of a small population in a limited area. The approach was sociological and had the objective of exploring 'the meanings of religion and sociological and economic relations for the society'. For this he required

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<sup>37</sup> S.J.D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial West Yorkshire 1870 – 1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.21.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 387.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 384.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 380.

<sup>42</sup> R. Moore, *Pit-Men, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974.

'interactional and highly situational data'.<sup>43</sup> As a sociological study Moore's research drew upon interviews and participant observation as well as manuscripts, printed sources and newspapers. It has a similarity with the present research in that mining and fishing were dangerous occupations, both associated with close community life, although the scope of the present study extends beyond the fishing community. Moore's research differed from the present study in that, like Clark in Staithes, Moore was able to conduct fieldwork in the communities as they were at the time and could employ participant observation as a means of collecting evidence. It was also possible to use interviews to a much greater extent for the same reason.

As with Green, Moore argued that the churches had widened the range of their activities beyond the specifically religious. He contended that the average Methodist was relatively unconcerned with matters of theology and that:

The unintended consequences of the dominance of communal values has been to make the chapels *wholly* communal bodies, with communal benefit taking precedence over every consideration.<sup>44</sup>

This resulted in the chapels becoming unable to respond to changes in social, economic and religious circumstances. Moore also argued that although Methodism provided individual motivation for people to become involved in social and political activity its emphasis was on changing individuals rather than transforming society as a whole. He contended that Methodism was more a way of life than of doctrines or organization, embodying a code of ethics that was often implicit and unstated.<sup>45</sup>

Together with the present study both Green and Moore provide evidence to support Hempton's contention that religious growth and decline are 'symbiotically linked to other social, economic, and political entities'.<sup>46</sup> They are also based on the premise that local studies can make a major

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 230.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p 228.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 228.

<sup>46</sup> Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, p. 29.



contribution to broader historical understanding. From the perspective of the present research both of these studies provide valuable contextual material. This is especially the case in relation to the way in which the churches had extended their functions from evangelism and spiritual nurture to becoming providers of social, educational, cultural and community activities. Some of the tensions arising from this development will be explored in the study, in particular, the consequences of the increasing competition from secular alternatives, especially evident in an area developing holiday and leisure facilities.

It was noted previously that Green and Moore share some of the methodology of the present study, most notably the use of documentary research. Moore shares the use of interviews, employed more extensively, but with participant observation as a central feature. As with Clark's ethnographic study of Staithes, Green and Moore both provide material that is relevant to the broader context. They therefore have some relevance as models of investigation for the present study. However, each case study has to be designed to meet the specific circumstances in which it is set. For this reason a model of investigation needs to be developed to take account of the opportunities and constraints presented by the particular circumstances of the study.

### **The wider context: secularization**

The present study also took place within the context of the wider process referred to as 'secularization'. Wilson defined secularization as:

a set of propositions, often loosely stated, which amount to a body of theory concerning processes of social change that occur over an unspecified period of historical time.<sup>47</sup>

Platten wrote that it was a product of the Enlightenment which led people:

'to differentiate between sacred and secular; reason became separated from faith'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> B. Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 148.

As an overarching theory secularization has come to be contested on the grounds that it cannot be proved that religious decline is an irreversible process in history.<sup>49</sup> Hempton argued that secularization is a more gradual and complicated process than is sometimes supposed in which religion interacts with other social frameworks.<sup>50</sup> MacCulloch pointed out that in the 1970s and early 1980s it was thought that the process of secularization was going to set patterns across the world but that this is now challenged and that different societies such as the USA have not responded in the same way to those in Europe.<sup>51</sup> However, in broad terms secularization is taken to mean the process during which, over time, religious beliefs, religious institutions and religious observance and practices lose their social significance. Platten preferred to define it as 'the alienation of religion from everyday life'.<sup>52</sup> Green noted that secularization was particularly associated with the transition from agricultural and traditional societies to industrialized societies, the establishment of the factory system and the application of rational planning techniques in the search for more efficient means of production.<sup>53</sup> Such imagery, derived from industrial production, will be discussed further in the study, especially in relation to mechanistic and bureaucratic models of church organization and the use of such terms as 'efficiency' in relation to the aspirations expressed for Methodist Union.

McLeod distinguished two main streams of religious scepticism flowing from the Victorian era, the first with its roots in popular radicalism and the second from scientific and literary thinking.<sup>54</sup> However, it would be wrong to view secularization as a process that inevitably leads people from less to more

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<sup>48</sup> S. Platten, *Rebuilding Jerusalem: The Church's Hold on Hearts and Minds*, London: SPCK, 2007, p. 87.

<sup>49</sup> C.G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization 1800 – 2000*, London: Routledge, pp. 28 – 29.

<sup>50</sup> Hempton, D, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and popular religion c. 1750 – 1900*, London: Routledge, 1996 p. 67/8

<sup>51</sup> MacCulloch, *op cit*, p. 985.

<sup>52</sup> Platten, *op cit*, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup> S.J.D. Green, *Religion in the age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870 – 1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 6/7.

<sup>54</sup> H. McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850 – 1914*, London: Macmillian Press, p. 49.

rational or empirical forms of thinking and making sense of the world. Although it resulted in a loosening of ties with formal, institutionalized religion it did not (and has not) eliminated alternative interpretations, including superstition and astrology. Green described how religious beliefs have tended to relocate themselves into new organizations or within personal life.<sup>55</sup> This is supported by Moore who argued that a contributory factor in the decline of formal religious observance in the Deerness Valley was that specialized non-religious agencies were taking over functions such as entertainment and adult education from the churches, resulting in a consequent weakening of commitment.<sup>56</sup>

In his study of Staithes Clark demonstrated how folk religion was able to coexist alongside formal religious observance 'in a relationship of considerable complexity'.<sup>57</sup> Also, as McLeod pointed out, many people retained an attachment to religious rites of passage, festivals such as Harvest and Christmas and lives based broadly on Christian ethics without adherence to matters of doctrine or regular church attendance.<sup>58</sup> This is of particular significance for the present study because the chapels drew upon a penumbra of good will and support, especially important for fund-raising and through the attendance of local children in the Sunday Schools, even when their parents were not necessarily regular churchgoers.

The period that forms the main focus of the study was heavily influenced by the effects of the First World War. H.V Morton, in his foreword to 'The Pageant of the Century' (covering pictorially the years 1900 to 1933), described how the war had shaken the foundations of the world as they had known it and that:

We thought that the War had only to be won and that we shall  
return again, victorious and singing, into the ease and comfort

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<sup>55</sup> Green, *op cit*, p.p. 10/11

<sup>56</sup> R. Moore, *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1974, p. 215

<sup>57</sup> Clark, *op cit*, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> H. McLeod, 'Being a Christian in the early twentieth century', in H. McLeod, (ed), *Cambridge History of World Christianity c. 1914 -2000*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.22.

of the nineteenth-century – for such, in reality, were the first years of the twentieth. We have learnt wisdom.<sup>59</sup>

Snape argued that although the early years of the war were characterized by an increase in religious observance, this subsided during the war and that the war itself was a secularizing influence upon European societies generally.<sup>60</sup> Elborough wrote that:

New personal moralities and technologies, some of them hothoused during the war, now evolved at a remarkable pace.<sup>61</sup>

Secularization was also a growing influence in the post-First World War years through the spread of modern forms of media, in particular, the radio and the cinema.<sup>62</sup> Newspapers were becoming more widely read and spreading information and ideas previously seen mainly by a more restricted readership. Also, between 1919 and 1937 almost 30 percent of the British population were re-housed, with many families moved from sub-standard properties to suburban estates.<sup>63</sup> This broke up many formerly close-knit communities and traditional patterns of religious observance. A local example of re-housing and its effects will be discussed in later chapters.

As a holiday resort Whitby was particularly influenced by the secularizing tendencies associated with leisure activities. In addition to the development of leisure facilities in the town in the 1920s and 1930s there was the growing influence of the health and beauty movement and an increasing interest in outdoor activities.<sup>64</sup> This encouraged people to spend their leisure time, which for many workers was only on a Sunday, engaging in such activities as rambling, cycling and camping for which the Whitby area was particularly suitable and promoted as such by railway company marketing material.<sup>65</sup> However, the National Sunday League condemned the growing popularity of

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<sup>59</sup> H.V. Morton, *The Pageant of the Century*, London: Odams Press, 1934, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> M. Snape, 'The Great War' in H. McLeod (ed), *Cambridge History of World Christianity c. 1914 – 2000*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 144.

<sup>61</sup> T. Elborough, *Wish You Were Here: England on Sea*, London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 2010, p. 105

<sup>62</sup> R. Pearse, *1930s Britain*, Oxford: Shire Publications, 2010, pp. 60/61.

<sup>63</sup> J. Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History*, London: Harper Press, 2010, pp. 272-273.

<sup>64</sup> K. Ferry, *The British Seaside Holiday*, Oxford: Shire Publications, 2009, p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> J.A. Rennie, *Posters of the Yorkshire Coast*, Hull: Ferens Art Gallery, 1980.

Sunday railway excursion as 'excursion tickets to hell'.<sup>66</sup> The rise of private motoring also gave people greater freedom in their use of leisure time and opened up areas that had previously been inaccessible.

The complex process of secularization and its influence throughout society was therefore an important factor both in creating the conditions that led to Methodist Union and also in terms of the particular local pressures influencing Union and circuit amalgamation at the local level. Themes introduced here will be developed further in the study with particular reference to how the process of secularization influenced the churches in the Whitby area.

## **The origins of the study 2: the perspective of Organizational Studies**

A second reason for undertaking the study stems from an interest in organizations and how they function. The modern study of organizations and the development of theories about organizations stemmed partly from the field of sociology, especially the work of Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. It also arose, in part, from the context of business and management studies which came to prominence with the rise of business schools within universities, predominantly after the Second World War when management was coming to be seen as a professional activity in its own right. More specifically, for religious organizations, it draws upon sociological theories developed by writers such as David Martin and Bryan Wilson with their typological analysis of religious groups in terms of the models of sects, denominations and churches.<sup>67</sup> More recently it has been taken up and developed as an element within the relatively new and eclectic field of Congregational Studies drawing upon the work of such people as Harris, Cameron and Galindo.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ferry, *op cit*, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> D. Martin, *A Sociology of Religion*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1967; B. Wilson, *Contemporary Transformations of Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

<sup>68</sup> M. Guest, K. Tusting, L. Woodhead, (eds), *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004; H. Cameron, P. Richter, D. Davies, F. Ward, *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook*, London: SCM Press, 2005; M. Harris,

The thesis argues that Organizational Studies provides conceptual tools for asking questions about all kinds of organization including those in the past. The objective is to gain greater understanding of how organizations functioned through the identification of patterns and the application of theoretical concepts. Organization theory is concerned with such factors as models of organizations (e.g. 'tightly coupled' as opposed to 'loosely coupled' organizations), organizations as systems and sub-systems, organizational change, life cycles of organizations, leadership and the exercise of power and authority, communication and organizational culture. It is recognised that all such theories present an oversimplified and overlapping series of perspectives and in an academic context are intended to be employed heuristically rather than normatively, as tools for analysis as opposed to a means of seeking solutions to current practical problems. This counters the argument sometimes made that 'business techniques' are being applied inappropriately to organizations that do not see themselves primarily as businesses, even though in some respects churches do function as voluntary sector 'businesses'.<sup>69</sup> As Cameron noted:

The idea of studying organization can be equated with 'management' and thus associated with the negative and reductionist connotations of 'managerialism'.<sup>70</sup>

However, a parallel may be drawn with those who have adopted a predominantly social or sociological perspective (e.g. Obelkevich, and Currie)<sup>71</sup> to demonstrate that such approaches are not employed in a reductionist manner, but to use as particular sets of conceptual 'lenses'

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*Organizing God's Work: Challenges for Churches and Synagogues*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998; H. Cameron, 'Perspectives from the Study of Religious Organisations', in *Organisation Theory and the non-profit form*, London: Centre for Civil Society, 2001, pp. 52 – 61; I. Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Discovering Church Dynamics*, Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2004.

<sup>69</sup> S. Pattison, *The Faith of Managers: When Management Becomes a Religion*, London: Cassell, 1997.

<sup>70</sup> H. Cameron, 'Organizational studies', In H. Cameron et al, (eds), *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook*, London: SCM, 2005, p. 15.

<sup>71</sup> J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825 – 1925*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976; Currie, *op cit*.

through which to gain fresh perspectives, generate new ideas and encourage interdisciplinary dialogue.<sup>72</sup>

It might be argued that the discipline of Organization Studies is concerned principally with the investigation of current organizations and not something that should be drawn upon for historiographical tools to analyse organizations as they were in the past. While this is certainly true of some of the methodology employed (e.g. surveys or observation in real time) this does not mean that the same questions cannot be asked of organizations, or models applied, just that the methodology will, in some respects, be different, for instance, a greater use of documentary material. The same applies equally to the application of economic theory in economic history, sociology in social history or feminist theory in gender history, where such perspectives are adopted by historians.

It could also be contended that organization theory is not an appropriate theoretical perspective for use by historians, especially ecclesiastical historians, based on an epistemological view that history is a discrete discipline with its own methodology and body of theory. This is countered with the argument, firstly, that historians have always shown a concern for how organizations function and, secondly, that history is a dynamic and evolving discipline. Jordonova argues that 'history is an inherently eclectic discipline' and that:

there can be no firm boundaries around 'history' – there are no watertight definitions for any humanities or social science discipline, and the boundaries have definitely become more permeable in recent years.<sup>73</sup>

She contends that while retaining a continuing allegiance to the discipline of history this can nevertheless be 'combined with openness to other perspectives'. The development of 'historical sociology' is such an

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<sup>72</sup> C. Marathunga, P. Lant & G. Mellick, 'Imagining an Interdisciplinary doctoral pedagogy', in *Teaching in Higher Education*, Vol. 11, No. 5, 2006, p. 369.

<sup>73</sup> L. Jordonova, *History in Practice*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn), London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006, pp. 170-171, 80.

example.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, Wellings argues that 'the historiographical field is wide, and ever expanding'.<sup>75</sup>

There is also ample evidence to support the view that churches, although distinctive in particular ways (as are schools, hospitals, prisons or businesses), are essentially organizations and can be studied as such. As Green has pointed out 'religious organisation is about organisation as well as about religion'.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, a casual reading of many books on Methodism reveals how often the word 'organization' is used in relation to the formative period of the movement and its development into a settled and structured family of churches, examples being 'an organization for creating and developing Christian holiness'<sup>77</sup> and 'a highly-organised church, of bureaucratic control'.<sup>78</sup> As Abraham and Kirby pointed out, 'Methodists were very intentional about their structures and practices'.<sup>79</sup> The very expression, 'organic union' which was used by Hugh Price Hughes in 1891 of the bringing together of the separate branches of Methodism<sup>80</sup> is a metaphor drawn from the biological sciences which gave rise to General Systems Theory of organizations.<sup>81</sup>

### **The focus of the study**

The focus of this study is on the period leading up to Methodist Union in 1932, the local consequences of Union resulting eventually in circuit amalgamation in 1944, and the formative years of the Whitby Methodist Circuit up until the early 1950s. Tosh has pointed out:

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<sup>74</sup> A. Green and K.Troupe, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in twentieth century history*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996, pp. 110- 120.

<sup>75</sup> Wellings, *op cit*, p. 73.

<sup>76</sup> S.D.G. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organization and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire*, 1996, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 34.

<sup>77</sup> H.D Rack, *The Future of John Wesley's Methodism*, Lutterworth: Lutterworth Press, 1965, p. 17.

<sup>78</sup> M. Edwards, *Methodism in England: A Study of Methodism in its Social and Political Aspects during the period 1850 – 1932*, London: The Epworth Press, 1943, p. 152.

<sup>79</sup> W.J. Abraham and J.E. Kirkby, (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, Introduction p. vii.

<sup>80</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p. 152.

<sup>81</sup> J.Hatch, *Organization Theory: Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 34.



Historical writing is characterised by a wide range of literary forms. The three basic techniques of description, narrative and analysis can be combined in many different ways, and every project poses afresh the problem of how they should be deployed.<sup>82</sup>

In this study the form includes a descriptive and narrative aspect, in that it analyses, from contemporary records and interviews, the process of how Union was received and implemented in the Whitby area.<sup>83</sup> It also employs a thematic approach in that it develops a number of themes that are relevant to understanding both the wider and the local context of Union and its aftermath. These include the secular influences of an expanding leisure industry and the effects of population movement as a result of re-housing.

The principal contextual focus for the research cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader context and the prevailing influences in religion and society at the time. These include specifically Methodist factors such as events at national ('Connexional') and District levels and wider social and cultural factors affecting Methodism at national and local levels, especially preceding and during the immediate period of study. For instance, Munson points to the broader movement in society for organization and co-operation of which Methodist Union was a part, hastened by the experience of the First World War and membership of such organizations as the League of Nations which encouraged a sense of internationalism but also included the rise the totalitarian regimes of fascism and communism.<sup>84</sup>

A particular feature of the study is that it provides a perspective on a growing leisure economy on the life of the Methodist churches, itself a product of economic and social changes, which brought both perceived benefits and threats for the Methodists in its wake. The study also investigates the consequences of the re-housing of significant numbers of people in the town of Whitby from areas of sub-standard accommodation, in the midst of which

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<sup>82</sup> Tosh, *op cit*, p. 147.

<sup>83</sup> Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, 'A narrative is an ordered account created out of disordered material and experience', p. 106.

<sup>84</sup> J. Munson, *The Nonconformists: In Search of a Lost Culture*, London: SPCK, 1991, p. 158; Edwards, *op cit*, p. 104; M. Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict in Methodism, Peace and war in the Twentieth Century*, London: Epworth, 2008, p. 78.

were two of the four urban Methodist churches, to a new council housing estate on the edge of the town. This was part of the response, at local level, to a series of Acts of Parliament following the First World War which encouraged the replacement of sub-standard housing.<sup>85</sup> The research identifies particular factors relating to local social and cultural divisions which cut across more specifically denominational boundaries and affected relationships between the two Whitby denominations. It will be argued that a locally focussed study cannot be conducted in isolation from broader trends, events and influences just as no wider study can ignore or gloss over the complexity of the local situation. As Tosh has argued, 'context must be respected at every point'.<sup>86</sup>

The overall objective of the research, therefore, is to investigate the processes and the consequences in a local setting of the bringing together of the two formerly separate denominations of Wesleyan Methodism and Primitive Methodism to form what became, as a consequence of Methodist Union in 1932, the Whitby Methodist Circuit in 1944. The third branch of the Methodist Church involved in the 1932 Union, the United Methodists, was no longer represented in the area at the time of Union in 1932, having ceased to exist as a separate denomination in Whitby in 1885. Commenting on the process of Union overall Robbins claimed:

No one involved in these discussions could be unaware of how difficult circuit consolidation would be. It was the local church which had association and meaning.<sup>87</sup>

Likewise Turner has pointed out that 'Methodists tend to be local rather than cosmopolitan',<sup>88</sup> also emphasising the need to understand the local ecology of Methodism as well as the broader context. In relation to Union itself Hartley observed that:

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<sup>85</sup> R. Hattersley, *Borrowed Time: The Story of Britain Between the Wars*, London: Abacus, 2007, pp. 208 – 210.

<sup>86</sup> Tosh, *op cit*, p. 11.

<sup>87</sup> Robbins, *op cit*, p. 222.

<sup>88</sup> Turner, 1998, *op cit*, p. 10.

It is not so much the working out of top plans that provides the greatest obstacle, but implementing the plans among the ordinary people.<sup>89</sup>

These 'ordinary people' are those with the voices least likely to be heard in studies of major initiatives as the principal sources of evidence have been left by those holding official positions. It must also be borne in mind that during the period of the study the ordained ministers were all men, most local preachers were men, and men occupied the most senior Society and circuit offices, this despite the central part played by women in church life. The voices of women, who tended to outnumber the men in the congregations, are therefore less likely to be heard, as are those of adherents and more casual worshippers. It is by finely observing and interrogating the detail of the records, both what they contain and what may be missing, that discrepancies come to light between what the official records contain and what might have been the views of those not represented. Sometimes, 'hidden traces in the records' and 'unwitting evidence' such as alterations to minutes of meetings give clues to these divergences and differences where no other evidence might exist.<sup>90</sup>

### **The choice of the Whitby area**

The Whitby area was chosen because it was (and to some extent still is) isolated geographically and culturally. This led to a certain independent-mindedness and a strong sense of local identity (see [Appendix 1](#) for map of Whitby and district and [Appendix 2](#) for town map of Whitby). Whitby shares some of the same characteristics as identified by Clark in Staithes, although Whitby is much larger. Clark identified a physical and cultural divide in Staithes, between the old fishing village and the new part of the village at the top of the bank. In Whitby a comparable divide could be found between the 'old town', predominantly on the east side of the river, the 'East Side', and the new town on the west, the 'West Side'. This had particular significance for the development of Methodism and on social and cultural factors that

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<sup>89</sup> Hartley, *op cit*, p. 5.

<sup>90</sup> Tosh, *op cit*, pp. 105 – 106.

influenced the process of Union and circuit amalgamation. Valenze also studied a fishing community on the Yorkshire coast, in this case Filey. In a study of female preaching and 'cottage religion' in a Yorkshire fishing village she highlighted the isolation of such communities claiming that:

Filey fisherfolk, unlike their more compromising neighbours at Whitby and Flamborough were more set apart.<sup>91</sup>

She argued that 'cottage religion', a mix of official religion, Methodism, and superstition was an integrating element in village life and formed a transitional stage between the old pre-industrialised world and the encroaching modern one. A similar conclusion was reached by Obelkevich in his case study of South Lindsey.<sup>92</sup> While not claiming for Whitby in the twentieth-century the same isolation as of Filey in the nineteenth, an element of the present study is that it identifies similar tensions between geographically located traditional values and practices and the rapid social changes taking places in the years between the two world wars and beyond, especially as a result of exposure to the growing leisure industry and mass media. It examines how the local Methodists faced and responded to these tensions.

The setting for this research was not therefore chosen for its 'typicality'. Indeed, one of the arguments of this thesis is that 'typicality' is an illusion and that it would be difficult to define the criteria for such a judgement. However, this does not mean that there may not be some similarities with other areas, especially with those having characteristics in common. The setting was chosen because, given the current state of scholarship, it provided an opportunity to investigate, in depth, how the two largest Methodist denominations involved in the Methodist Union of 1932, each with strong local as well as national traditions and identities, responded to the centrally driven initiative of Union.

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<sup>91</sup> D.M.Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 273.

<sup>92</sup> Obelkevich, *op cit*, p. 322

This research pays particular attention to the twelve year period of 'parallel circuits' between 1932 and the amalgamation of the previously separate circuits in 1944, especially those factors that held them apart and those that eventually brought the two organizations together. As will be highlighted, there were considerable differentials of power, numerical strength and wealth between the two denominations. The study considers to what extent Union at local level was a coming together of equals or an absorption of the weaker by the stronger, and how this was worked out in practice. A particular question is the extent to which the distinctively Methodist 'Connexional' form of church organization and its local structures and leadership, responded to an essentially 'top-down' national initiative, the implications of which were not necessarily welcomed or desired by some of the local membership. In this respect the research will contribute to the evidence base of those who are considering the broader question of Methodist Union and its consequences.

### **Social and cultural factors.**

Social and cultural factors are closely related to those of structure and organization and, in particular, to Methodism as a 'sub-culture' (or related sub-cultures) within wider society.<sup>93</sup> As Obelkevich had noted, Methodism constituted a community within a wider community and one which was essentially conservative in nature.<sup>94</sup> For instance, during the period of the research this could be seen in the desire to retain the 'traditional Sunday', on which secular entertainment was kept to a minimum and a more conservative attitude to the consumption of alcohol, gambling and dancing than many in the population at large.

Dawson defines the culture of organizations as 'shared values and beliefs which create distinctive patterns of feeling within organisations'.<sup>95</sup> However, when considering organizations which superficially, appear to have much in common, as had the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists, a particular

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<sup>93</sup> D. Bebbington, 'Methodism and Culture', in W.J. Abraham and J. Kirby, (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 712 – 729, for discussion of culture of Methodism and relationship with wider society.

<sup>94</sup> Obelkevich, *op cit*, p. 104.

<sup>95</sup> S. Dawson, *Analysing Organizations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996, p. 142.

challenge is posed for the researcher. Schein points to the 'deeper assumptions' that are 'the real drivers of how culture works at an operational level'.<sup>96</sup> It was these 'deeper assumptions', a feature of Clark's 'underlife of religion', that often lay beneath the reactions to Methodist Union and to the amalgamation of the circuits, as well as to social, moral and cultural issue of the day.

### **'The long Methodist Union'**

The principal focus is on the years from the end of the First World War in 1918 and, in particular, from when votes were taken by Quarterly Meetings and Trustees' Meetings on a Scheme for Methodist Union, until 1953, the Coronation Year, by which time the new Whitby Circuit had become established. This was also the time that the adult membership numbers and Sunday School attendance in Whitby reached a peak. It was judged that the period from the early nineteen-fifties onwards, characterized by gradual numerical decline, would form a major study in itself. Also, if this latter period had been made the focus of the research it would have been able to draw to a greater extent on oral evidence and from the point of view of methodology would differ in research design from the present study.

### **The wider ecumenical setting**

There is some evidence throughout the study of contacts between the Methodists and Churches of other denominations, most notably through the Free Church Council but less so with the local Anglicans and Roman Catholics. This is not a major strand of the research and will be touched upon only where relevant. During the period in question the attention of the Methodist churches was largely focussed on internal matters and the ecumenical movement was still in its infancy, although gaining pace in the years following on from the ecumenical Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 and the First World War. Methodist Union itself was an outworking of this movement and was identified with it. However, ecumenism was only

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<sup>96</sup> E.H. Schein, *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999, p. 44.

having a limited impact at local level, involving mainly the Free Churches, and the serious discussions about union between Methodists and Anglicans were still some years in the future. For much of the period of the study the former Primitive and Wesleyan Methodist denominations were still coming to terms with how to relate to and work with each other, although there is evidence of informal contacts between Christians of all denominations, such as supporting each other's fund raising events and even liaising with each other to avoid clashes of dates for their bazaars and 'efforts'.

### **The structure of the study**

The structure of the study has been designed to support the argument of the thesis. Of necessity, this depends on the exploration of some material, particularly the minutes of meetings, in considerable detail and further 'signposting' is provided where this was felt to be helpful.

Chapter 2 analyses and evaluates the main sources of evidence that have contributed to the research. It considers the nature of the sources, their availability and factors affecting validity and reliability, including the critical comparison of sources. Attention is drawn to literature relating to historical sources, historiography and methodology. The chapter also includes further discussion of the nature of organizational studies and introduces concepts of particular relevance to the study.

Chapter 3 analyses the geography, topography and economy of the area covered by the study with particular reference to those features that are distinctive and that helped to shape the development of Methodism. It also provides a discussion of the local religious context of which Methodism was a part.

Chapter 4 covers the origins, expansion and characteristics of Methodism in Whitby and the surrounding area, with particular reference to those factors that helped to shape the culture and identity of 'Whitby Methodism', as it affected both the Wesleyan Methodists and the Primitive Methodists. Whitby shared much in common with the rest of the Methodist movement but the

thesis will argue that local factors also made a significant contribution which, in turn, influenced the process of Union itself.

In Chapter 5 the focus of the study is on the years immediately preceding Methodist Union in 1932. The nature of the two Whitby circuits at the time is discussed, together with votes, taken by both circuits, on proposals for a Scheme of Union between the Wesleyan, the Primitive and the United Methodists. Comparisons are made between the local and the national outcomes of the votes and what this suggests about feelings locally. It is not within the scope or purpose of this study to recount in detail the complex history of Methodist Union but, where necessary, events at Connexional and District level will be referred to and discussed.

Chapter 6 is concerned with investigating how the vision, aspirations and aims of Union, as articulated by the national Methodist leadership, were communicated, received and responded to at the local level. During the period between 1932 and 1944 both circuits continued to operate as separate organizations and the study investigates the extent to which they communicated with each other, the means by which they communicated and the extent to which they co-operated together as Methodists. The chapter is divided into two parts. Part A is concerned with Union and the broader context within which both circuits were operating and Part B with the responses of the two Methodist circuits to local and national influences.

In Chapter 7 the focus is specifically on the process leading to circuit amalgamation in September 1944. It investigates the nature of contacts between the two circuits throughout the nineteen-thirties paying particular attention to the final stages during the war years. Consideration is given to the leadership provided and the pressures that were being exerted for and against circuit amalgamation.

Chapter 8 considers the early consequences of amalgamation, together with the setting up of structures, procedures and pastoral oversight of the nascent Whitby Circuit. Consideration is given to the extent to which circuit amalgamation involved a change in the character of Methodism in the area



and if there were benefits in terms of the life and work of the churches, especially in relation to outreach and mission.

In conclusion, in Chapter 9, the main findings of the research are discussed and assessed, considering the extent to which additional light has been thrown on the process of Methodist Union in a local setting. Broader consideration is given to the ability of the organizational structures of Methodism of that period to initiate and to provide leadership in order to manage this major transition.

## **Chapter 2 Sources and Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the sources of evidence upon which the study is based and to outline the theoretical framework that is drawn upon for analysis. An examination is provided of key themes and issues that will be developed in greater detail throughout the study. It explains and justifies the decisions taken concerning the parameters of the study and its structure and discusses and evaluates the sources of evidence, documentary and oral. Information is given about the conduct and analysis of the oral history interviews and their place in relation to other evidence including issues of validity and reliability. An account is provided of the theoretical framework of organization theory which is a particular feature of the study.

### **The parameters and structure of the study**

A key objective of the study was to gain fresh knowledge of and insight into the process of Methodist Union within a local context. This places both geographical and temporal boundaries around the study. As outlined in Chapter 1, the geographical boundary is the area covered by the former Whitby Wesleyan and Whitby Primitive Methodist circuits<sup>1</sup> and following circuit amalgamation in 1944, the Whitby Methodist Circuit. However, in order to understand the process of Union within this area it is necessary to widen the focus and, where relevant, to take account of factors at both Connexional and at District levels. In this respect the analogy of a zoom lens is appropriate. By its very nature, the Methodist system of 'Connexionalism' involved a relationship between the various levels of the organization.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> As a consequence of Methodist Union in 1932 the former Wesleyan Circuit was renamed the Whitby Brunswick Circuit and the former Primitive Methodist Circuit was renamed the Whitby Church Street Circuit.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'Connexion' refers in the first instance to the relationship between John Wesley, the 'Societies' that he founded and his preachers. It signified a pattern of mutual dependency which came to characterise the Methodist denominations. The relative balance of power between ordained ministers and lay people was a distinguishing feature of the different branches of Methodism. See Munson, *op cit*, p. 3.

'stationing' of probationary ministers and ordained ministers 'in Full Connexion' by the Methodist conferences and their itinerancy was a significant feature of Methodist polity. It differed from both the episcopal system in which authority was vested more clearly in individuals and the congregational system in which authority was vested in the local congregation and its leadership.

As has been noted, the process leading up to Methodist Union can be traced across many years. Indeed, an official celebratory book about Union, published in 1936, traces its origin to 1866.<sup>3</sup> However, for the purposes of this study the focus is on the period when there is most evidence at local level and so concentrates on the years following on from the Great War (1914 – 1918) up until 1953, when the new circuit structures had had time to emerge, but before the ensuing period of numerical decline and chapel closures. The difficulty of defining periods of historical time, either long or short, has been debated by historians and for the present study a pragmatic decision was taken to use the framework provided by the local process of Union.<sup>4</sup> The study also shows some correspondence with the framework adopted by Robbins in his work on the Churches in the twentieth-century and who adopts periods from 1919 to 1932 and from 1933 to 1953, the year of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth the Second. 1953 also marked the twenty-first anniversary of united Methodism.<sup>5</sup>

### **Sources of evidence for the study**

The main source of evidence for the study is comprised of primary archival and manuscript material (primary being taken to mean material that was produced at the time as part of the normal workings of the circuits and churches involved). It also includes other material written at the time which conveys views and attitudes held during the period of the study and which help to locate it within a broader context. By the nature of its Connexional

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<sup>3</sup> R.N. Wycherley, *The Pageantry of Methodist Union*, (1<sup>st</sup> edn), London: The Epworth Press, 1936, p. 198.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, see P.J. Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007, 'humans generate interpretations of the shape of history', p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Robbins, *op cit*.

structure and decision-making processes Methodism generated a considerable body of records. This is helpful to the historian, but a challenge is presented in that the records are not all stored in the same place, with some having been lost. As an example of the latter some of the Whitby records were stored in Briggswath and Sleights chapel in which serious flooding took place in November 2000.<sup>6</sup> These were destroyed and as they were not catalogued it is uncertain what they contained. However, it is thought that they included a significant body of material from the former Primitive Methodist/Church Street Circuit and this is supported by the fact that there are fewer surviving records of this circuit than for the former Wesleyan Circuit. As has been aptly pointed out, 'records live and die on church premises'.<sup>7</sup> The main locations of the circuit and chapel records and an indication of what they contain are as follows:

1. The North Yorkshire County Archive at the Record Office in Northallerton which holds records of Quarterly Meetings, Leaders' and Trustees' meetings from some Societies. There are also circuit preaching plans (Wesleyan, Primitive and amalgamated circuits), circuit schedules containing statistical information, Sunday School records, accounts, some letters and other paperwork;
2. Circuit Records stored in the Manse in Sleights by the superintendent minister. This material had not yet been catalogued and is comprised mainly of records of Leaders' Meetings, Trustees' Meetings, Circuit Youth Committee and Sunday School teachers' meetings and ledgers, financial records, pulpit announcements and the minutes of Local Preachers' Meetings, in the latter case a continuous record of those of the Wesleyan, the Brunswick and the Whitby Circuit meetings from 1920 until 1985. In the Primitive Methodist/Church Street Circuit the preachers' meetings were held as part of Quarterly

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<sup>6</sup> *Briggswath and Sleights Methodist Church Building: Celebrating a Centenary of Worship and Praise 1905 – 2005*, Briggswath and Sleights Church, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> P.R. Day, 'The Importance of book-keeping', *Methodist Recorder*, Issue 7847, May 15<sup>th</sup> 2008, p. 16.

Meetings. Other material includes information about church members on active service in the Second World War;

3. Records of some of the York and District Synod meetings are located in the Methodist Archive at the John Rylands University Library, Manchester University. The Borthwick Institute, York University, also contains some District records, as well as records of closures of some chapels. Other material is located in the archive of the Wesley Historical Society at Oxford Brookes University.

To some extent working with the primary records can be compared with reconstructing a mosaic in which some complete sections remain but where significant sections have been lost and only fragments can be located. As Tuplin has observed:

In every organization there are irresistible reasons why official records are liable to be incomplete and incorrect.<sup>8</sup>

It is particularly important to interrogate the provenance and bias of such records asking who produced them, in what context and for what intended audiences. As Tosh has pointed out, it is necessary for the historical researcher to read 'between the lines' in order to 'draw out the hidden assumptions and beliefs the author was hardly aware of showing'.<sup>9</sup> The nature and quality of the records of meetings varied considerably depending on the skill and inclinations of the record keeper with some providing details of the discussion that had taken place while others simply reported outcomes.

Unlike much modern minute keeping and chairing of meetings, matters were frequently not followed through or reported back in the minutes of the meetings of both Whitby circuits so it can be unclear what, if any, action had been taken. Likewise the recording of statistics was not always consistent, with differing figures reported at Quarterly Meetings from those shown in the Circuit Schedules passed on to District level. For most of the period covered

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<sup>8</sup> W.A. Tuplin, *North Eastern Steam*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, (4<sup>th</sup> edn), Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2006, p. 88.

by the study the minutes were handwritten and in some cases are not entirely legible. However, changes made in the wording of the minutes as originally recorded can give clues as to underlying issues. This was a period when minutes were read at the commencement of the meetings rather than issued in written form so the modifications in wording would not be apparent to members of the meeting who only heard the verbal report.

Secondary sources of evidence were important in providing contextual information, for instance in relation to the geographical, economic and historical setting for the study. These included works on the history, polity, ecclesiology and organization of Methodism, the geography, topography and economic history of the area and general local histories of Whitby and the surrounding region. A PhD thesis by Greaves about the history of Methodism in Yorkshire between 1740 and 1851 includes a section on the early development of Methodism in Whitby.<sup>10</sup> However, the distinction between 'secondary' and 'primary' sources is not always clear cut. As Jordanova pointed out:

There are many instances where materials shift between being a primary and a secondary source.<sup>11</sup>

Local examples of this include booklets produced to celebrate anniversaries and special events which are secondary sources in that they provide information about the chapels and the circuits but also tend to be 'confessional' and celebratory in tone, which gives primary evidence of how the authors wished to present their churches at the time. The same is true of the circuit magazines and material supplied to the local paper, the *Whitby Gazette*, with its wider readership, and was therefore analysed in that light.

On a broader scale there are also works which can be regarded as both secondary and primary in nature. These include celebratory works produced to mark centenaries, for instance those by Kendall, Ritson and Patterson

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<sup>10</sup> B. Greaves, *Methodism in Yorkshire, 1740 – 1850*, (unpublished PhD Thesis), University of Liverpool, 1969.

<sup>11</sup> L. Jordanova, *op cit*, p 39 -39. See also K. Jenkins, *Re-thinking history*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 57 – 61 for discussion of the problematic nature of the definition of primary and secondary sources.

published around the time of the centenary of the founding of Primitive Methodism.<sup>12</sup> In 1932 Barber produced a 'pageant' as a 'souvenir' of the Primitive Methodist Church, dedicated 'to our founders, builders and saints' and in 1936 Wycherley compiled a 'pageant' in order to celebrate the Methodist Union of 1932.<sup>13</sup> The use of the words 'romance' and 'pageant' in the titles are indicative of the approach adopted. These are useful primary sources for how the Methodist leadership was presenting Union to people in the circuits. A particularly interesting early work that falls within this category was written by the Reverend Henry Woodcock in 1889 and describes the formative years of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds. This is a region that shares some of the same coastal characteristics as the Whitby area and contains descriptions of personalities, open air evangelism and even some persecution. Writing of the fishing town of Bridlington he stated:

Great revivals took place here from time to time, some of which linger as bright scenes in the writer's memory. At five o' clock a.m., in the depth of winter, for many weeks together, old and young met to pray for the conversion of souls.<sup>14</sup>

In order to gain an insight into what leading Methodists were thinking during the period of the study, especially concerning the Methodist ecclesiology of the period and about Union, a number of books written at the time were used, including works by Brash, Bett, Harrison *et al*, Edwards, and Lidgett and Reed.<sup>15</sup> As an example of such views Harrison *et al* expressed concerns about:

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<sup>12</sup> H.B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of Primitive Methodism*, London: Edwin Dalton, 1907 (2 volumes); J. Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism*, London: Edwin Dalton, 1909; W.M. Patterson, *Northern Primitive Methodism: A Record of the Rise and Progress of the Circuits in the Old Sunderland Circuit*, London: E. Dalton, 1909.

<sup>13</sup> B. A. Barber, *A Methodist Pageant*, London: Holborne Publishing House, 1932, quotations taken from frontispiece ; R.N Wycherley, *The Pageantry of Methodist Union*, London: Epworth, 1936.

<sup>14</sup> H. Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry: being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds*, London: John Toulson, Primitive Methodist Book Depot, 1889, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> W.B. Brash, *Methodism*, London: Methuen, 1930, Second Edition; H. Bett, *The Spirit of Methodism*, London: Epworth, 1937; A.W. Harrison, B.A. Barber, G.G. Hornby, and E.T Davies, *The Methodist Church: Its origins, divisions and reunion*, London: Methodist

Deep-rooted sentiments and old prejudices and the natural feeling that 'I love my own garden best'.<sup>16</sup>

Hopes were expressed that the new hymn book (The Methodist Hymn Book of 1933)<sup>17</sup> 'will soon bind us together', but that 'all three Churches tend to become more like middle class communities' and therefore not reaching 'the mass of the real poor of England'. It was argued that there were 'new town areas, where our witness is needed' and that 'we can only occupy these places if we are prepared to close unnecessary buildings elsewhere'.<sup>18</sup> These observations emerged as particularly pertinent in relation to the present research.

The local newspaper, the *Whitby Gazette*, was a primary source for Methodist events and celebrations in the town and surrounding district, with a microfiche archive in the Whitby Public Library covering the period of the study. However, this is not fully catalogued which necessitated extensive researching. The reports of Methodist events such as centenaries and bazaars usually contain considerable detail, including what was said by speakers and the responses of the audiences. The reports capture something of the atmosphere of the occasions as well as details of what took place. It is often possible to compare the newspaper reports with the minutes of Quarterly Meetings that included discussion of the events.

A useful source for the early period of Methodism in Whitby was a history written by Lionel Charlton in 1779 and which provided a perspective on the religious institutions of the town during the period when John Wesley was still a regular visitor to the area.<sup>19</sup> An additional source of contextual information was provided by two local authors who wrote about Whitby during periods

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Publishing House, 1932; M. Edwards, *Methodism and England: A Study in its Social and Political Aspects during the Period 1850 – 1932*, London: Epworth, 1943; J.S. Lidgett, and B.H. Reed, *Methodism in the Modern World*, London: Epworth, 1929.

<sup>16</sup> Harrison et al, *op cit*, p. 225.

<sup>17</sup> Methodist Church, *The Methodist Hymn Book*, London: Methodist Conference Office, 1933.

<sup>18</sup> Harrison et al, *op cit*, pp. 224 – 228.

<sup>19</sup> L. Charlton, *The History of Whitby and its Abbey*, York: A. Ward, 1779.



relevant to the study. Although their works are fictional they describe the town and its social and religious divisions from first-hand experience of living there. The first, Mary Linskill (1841 – 1891) spent her early years living in Blackburn Yard, off Church Street, on the east side of the town. In her novel, *The Haven Under the Hill* (in which Whitby is named 'Hild's Haven') she describes living conditions and religious attitudes in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>20</sup> The second author, Storm Jameson (Margaret Storm Chapman, 1891 – 1986) includes in her novel *The Road from the Monument* (in which Whitby is named 'Danesacre') some descriptions of living conditions in the town during the period of the study and also contains comments on Primitive Methodist attitudes and reputation.<sup>21</sup>

### **Oral history interviews**

As the research was originally conceived it was hoped that oral history interviews would form a significant strand of the data although this turned out not to be possible. This was because the number of people with memories of the period was relatively few, partly as a result of death, and partly because people had moved away, often to be closer to families who lived elsewhere. In the event it was possible to interview five people who had clear memories of the period, the oldest being born in 1920 and having childhood memories of some of the events surrounding Methodist Union in 1932 and others with memories of the period following Union. Of the five, three were female and two male. All now live in villages outside Whitby but three had previously lived in Whitby itself. The sample was therefore small but the interviewees were able to provide qualitative information about matters that are not recorded in the minutes and to give descriptions of chapel life, personalities and social conditions at the time (See [Appendix 3](#) for further details of interviewees).

Clive Field pointed out in 1976 how far distant the Methodism of two generations ago had already become and that:

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<sup>20</sup> M. Linskill, *The Haven Under the Hill*, (5<sup>th</sup> edn), Whitby: Horne and Son, 1900.

<sup>21</sup> S. Jameson, *The Road from the Monument*, London: Macmillan, 1962.

Manuscript and printed documents alone are not sufficiently comprehensive to bridge a gulf of this magnitude, and the resources of memory must be immediately tapped if we are ever going to obtain total access to this vanishing age.<sup>22</sup>

However, Cubitt cautions that 'memories...are not mental copies of things previously witnessed' and are reworked in the context of present structures of thought and assumptions.<sup>23</sup> They also include emotional reactions and personal biases. The interviews, therefore, provided an additional strand of evidence to complement the documentary sources but the sample is too small to be considered a major source of data in its own right.

The interviews were conducted within an ethical framework of informed consent and confidentiality, following the procedures of Oxford Brookes University.<sup>24</sup> Interviewees were provided with full information about the research and the purposes to which it would be put, they were informed that they could withdraw at any time and that anonymity would be safeguarded. Possible informants were identified with the aid of the current Methodist minister in the Whitby Circuit and then personal approaches made by the researcher explaining the purposes and scope of the research. This was done both verbally and in writing to ensure that questions could be asked and any concerns dealt with. The interviewees were people who had been committed to Methodism over many years and so did not represent the more casual members or adherents. All had held Society or circuit offices, but after the period of the study. The schedule of questions was designed to include specific factual questions but predominantly utilising open-ended questions with the objective of allowing informants to respond in their own way and identify what, for them, were the key issues. This was in order to 'minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data'.<sup>25</sup> A core of questions which was asked of all informants to establish basic factual information and sufficient flexibility was built in to the process to allow

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<sup>22</sup> C. Field, 'A Sociological Profile of English Methodism', 1900 – 1932', *Oral History Society Journal*, Vol. 4, No.1, 1976, p. 87.

<sup>23</sup> G. Cubitt, *History and Memory*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007, p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> The ethical safeguards for the interviews were approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, June 2008, UREC No. 080337.

<sup>25</sup> M.Q. Patton,, *Qualitative Evaluation Methods*, London: Sage Publications, 1980, p. 211.

questions and supplementary questions related to the particular situation and experiences of each informant (See Appendix 4 for core interview questions). Although it was known by interviewees that the researcher, in the past, had family connections with the area this was kept, as far as it could be, out of the interviews in an attempt to minimise the effects of 'personal reactivity' on responses. As Hammersley and Atkinson note:

The aim...is to minimize, as far as is possible, the influence of the researcher on what is said, and thus facilitate the open expression of the informant's perspective on the world.<sup>26</sup>

Each interview lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes and in all instances agreement was obtained for audio recording to be used which allowed full written transcripts to be made. This allowed the capture of detail that could be lost when only partial and selective transcription is possible. Brief notes were also taken to record contextual factors surrounding the interviews. The analysis of the transcripts involved a system of colour coding which allowed key themes and issues to be identified and which could be cross-referenced with themes and issues from other sources.

### **Critical comparison of sources, validity and reliability**

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the research it is necessary to compare and to contrast the different sources of evidence. This is a technique that is sometimes known as 'triangulation' (a surveying or navigation metaphor) although it is criticised by Richardson and St.Pierre for its two-dimensionality, proposing 'crystallisation' as being a more appropriate multi-dimensional alternative:

What we see depends on our angle of repose – not triangulation but rather crystallisation.<sup>27</sup>

Whatever metaphor is applied, the objective is to test and interrogate the different sources of evidence and types of evidence against each other and

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<sup>26</sup> M. Hammersley, and P. Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1983, p. 110.

<sup>27</sup> L. Richardson, and E.A. St.Pierre, 'Writing: A Method of Enquiry', in N.K. Denzin, and Y.S. Lincoln, (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (3<sup>rd</sup> edn), London: Sage, 2005, p. 963.

to view them from different perspectives, paying particular attention to any 'negative cases' that go against patterns that appear to be establishing themselves.<sup>28</sup> It needs to be kept in mind that as well as distortion of memory the responses may be affected by the personal bias of the informants, which must be taken into account in the analysis.

In the case of the present study comparison of sources has involved comparing documents generated by both the Wesleyan/Brunswick circuit and the Primitive/Church Street circuit to see how the respective circuits record the same events. Thus it was possible to compare the two sets of Quarterly Meeting minutes in the period preceding Union and during the twelve years of 'circuits in parallel'. This is especially the case from Chapter 5 onwards. Tosh cautions that 'few forms of writing arise solely from a desire to convey the unvarnished truth' and even documents which purport to be straightforward recordings of what took place may display bias or prejudice, either consciously or unconsciously.<sup>29</sup> In some instances the oral history interviews provided an additional perspective including people's feelings about them, something unlikely to be written down or perhaps even expressed openly at the time.

As far as possible, therefore, there has been an attempt to establish validity in the sense that the methodology and techniques are sensitive to possible sources of bias, either acknowledged or unintended. Likewise, in relation to reliability, that a different researcher looking at the same evidence would come to similar conclusions. The researcher will make explicit where there are limitations based on such factors as missing or inadequate data. As a historical study there has also been a concern to relate the study to the wider body of literature, especially that which throws light on the period, including the process of Methodist Union and the broader historical context within which it was set.

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<sup>28</sup> C. Robson, *Real World Research*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn), Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, p. 175.

<sup>29</sup> Tosh, *op cit*, p. 99.

## **Availability of sources, their selection, inclusion or omission**

The principal factors governing the inclusion and omission of sources used in this study were determined by the scope and focus of the study, including its geographical and chronological boundaries, and the availability of sources. As was noted earlier, the surviving material is of a fragmentary nature, confirming Moore's observation that 'historical data survive in a random manner'.<sup>30</sup> Thompson pointed out that the ways in which source material become preserved and transmitted to the archive 'can be a very hit and miss process' and that 'an archive is useless unless and until it is organized and classified'.<sup>31</sup> Also, the archives contain only a small fragment of what was written down and much of the most important information that a historian would wish to know was not recorded. It is from these fragmentary 'traces of the past'<sup>32</sup> that the historian has to select the source material that is most relevant to address the key research questions. As Carr observed:

The historian is necessarily selective. The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which is very hard to eradicate.<sup>33</sup>

Each of the above factors had a bearing on the availability of sources, the selection of sources and the gaps in the available evidence. An important example of missing evidence concerned the Whitby Primitive Methodist/Church Street Circuit. Even accounting for the relative sizes of the two circuits the majority of folios in the North Yorkshire County Record Office relate to the Wesleyan/Brunswick Circuit. An imbalance also exists in relation to Society records and much of what survives from the Primitive Methodist/Church Street Circuit is concerned with property and financial matters. The only records that were located from the former Primitive Methodist Church Street Church, the main church of the circuit, were a minute book of trustees' meetings covering the years 1950 – 1972 and balance sheets from 1968. A similar imbalance was found in the records that

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<sup>30</sup> Moore, *op cit*, p. 232.

<sup>31</sup> W. Thompson, *Postmodernism and History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 31.

<sup>32</sup> K. Jenkins, *Re-thinking history*, London: Routledge Classics, 2003, p. 59.

<sup>33</sup> E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1961, p. 6.

had not yet been catalogued or placed in an archive. It was previously noted that the most likely reason for the shortage of records from the Primitive Methodist Circuit may have been the result of flood damage. The Primitive Methodist records that remain also tend to be less detailed than those of the Wesleyans (e.g. of local preachers' meetings) which may have reflected a difference in culture based on educational backgrounds. It is also possible, but less likely, that as the Brunswick Circuit framework of systems and procedures became the core framework for the new Whitby Circuit in 1944 there was less incentive to preserve the Church Street Circuit Records.<sup>34</sup>

However, the quantity of surviving items from each circuit does not give an indication of their relative importance for the study. Much that is preserved relates to the nineteenth-century. The Wesley Chapel of 1788 is particularly well represented in the surviving material, probably because of its historical link with John Wesley. The archives also contain sources that cover the period following on from that of the study and are therefore not directly relevant. In addition there are many documents concerned with legal and financial matters that are not central to the main purpose of the research. The Quarterly Meeting minutes, of particular importance for the study, are preserved from both circuits. These cover the years 1918 to 1953 and minutes from before 1918 were also used to provide contextual material. Some copies of *The Dawn*, the Wesleyan/Brunswick Circuit magazine, survive but mostly from before 1928. The *Notes* on the Primitive Methodist/Church Street preaching plan served a similar function in providing a notice and information sheet and most plans covering the years of the study have been preserved. The minutes of meetings require critical scrutiny not only for what they were intended to convey but also in relation to their 'unwitting testimony', the unintentional evidence that is contained within them and which provide clues to things that are helpful to the historian.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Discussed in detail in Chapter 8

<sup>35</sup> A. Marwick, *The Nature of History*, (3<sup>rd</sup> edn) London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1989, p. 216.

There are gaps in the evidence relating to the private and personal opinions that were held about Union and the subsequent developments in the circuits. The formal documents only provide a limited perspective and rarely contain the views, opinions and reflections of individuals. Such opinions were no doubt expressed but the minutes of meetings generally only contain summary statements of discussions or record the results of a vote. The conclusions of the study would have been strengthened if it had been possible to locate personal letters, memoirs, notes or diaries written at the time. Copies of sermons or devotional writing would also have helped to provide evidence of theological emphases not usually evident in minutes of business meetings. Despite extensive researching in the North Yorkshire County Record Office, the records held by the Whitby Circuit and the collection of the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society nothing of relevance was found.<sup>36</sup> For this reason the oral history interviews were of considerable value, despite the small and unrepresentative sample.

The argument of the study could also have been strengthened through the use of more specific and quantifiable information about the social and occupational backgrounds of the church members, adherents and those who attended more casually, including those on holiday in the area. However, the surviving evidence of those who were members (e.g. membership lists) is of a fragmentary nature. Information about church officials does not necessarily provide a representative sample of the membership or of congregations as a whole. Where names are given there are usually no addresses or details of occupation. For the same reason it would have been difficult to make valid comparisons over time of how congregations may have changed in terms of their social composition. There is also no direct evidence concerning adherents and those who attended such events as harvest festivals and anniversaries or who supported fund-raising events. It is likely that most of these people lived in the neighbourhoods of the churches but some may have come from other locations, possibly out of preferences for a particular

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<sup>36</sup> The Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society, located at Whitby Museum, is responsible for a library and archives relating to the history of Whitby and the surrounding area.

style of worship, family connections or having attended the Sunday Schools as children. In addition there would have been those who were likely to have attended bazaars and entertainments at more than one church. As the study will show, the churches were centres of a rich social and cultural life that extended well beyond their own memberships.

It is not possible to know a great deal about the visitors who swelled some of the congregations during the holiday season. They were regarded as important not only for what they contributed to the worship but also in terms of the financial benefits that they brought through the collections or by attending events organized by the churches. However, it is reasonable to assume that visitors would have chosen to attend those places of worship that were most similar to their home churches. It emerged in the study that there was some competition between the churches for the visitors and elementary marketing techniques were employed to attract them to their own places of worship. An additional challenge is faced in finding information about female members and adherents. Many would not have been in full-time employment although it is likely that some would have worked in hotels, guest houses or catering during the summer season.<sup>37</sup> It would have been helpful to quantify the number of people from the churches who worked in the holiday and leisure industries, especially in order to be able to make comparisons between the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists. For a study that had a specific focus on the sociology of church membership and adherence it would be possible to undertake more detailed research through matching membership information, where it exists, with census returns and with any surviving employment records of local businesses. Such a study might be widened into an investigation across the full range of denominations which would help to locate the Methodists within the spectrum of church membership and adherence as a whole.

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<sup>37</sup> In 1932, out of a total town population of about 11,500 people 55 males and 198 females were employed in hotel and catering work and 683 people in distributive trades. By 1939 the numbers were 124 males, 501 females, and 764 people respectively. This does not include people taking visitors into their own homes. See J.W. House, 'Whitby as a Resort' in G.H.J. Daysh, (ed), *A Survey of Whitby*, Windsor: The Shakespeare Head Press, 1958, p. 186.



A source of information not included in the study concerned the views and reactions to Methodist Union of people who had no strong religious connections. One of the main arguments put forward for Union was that it would release energy and resources for evangelism and outreach. The formal national events of Union in 1932 were covered in the national news media and also reported in some detail in the *Whitby Gazette*.<sup>38</sup> It would be of value to know if local people noticed any difference in how the two Methodist circuits functioned as a result of Union and whether the local communities were affected in any way. However, it was not possible to locate relevant documentary evidence. One approach would have been to include a question in the oral history interviews but the interviewees were only children at the time of Union and not in a position to provide any degree of detail. The sample was very small and any views would have been derived from others and may have been misunderstood. Indirect evidence from membership numbers and Sunday School attendance suggests that the response was not significant, although this is unable to give an explanation of why it should be so. This is a constraint when the research is conducted at a distance in time from the period which forms the focus of the study.

As previously discussed, a source of primary information included books and articles written around the time at which Union took place. They were used to gain a perspective on the views of leading Methodist thinkers such as Henry Bett, Maldwyn Edwards, Richard Pyke and W. Bardsey Brash. It is not known how widely such works were read by the Whitby Methodists or whether reading them would have influenced the views that they held. However, reference to some of these works gives an indication of the overall climate in which Union was taking place, contributes to the variety of perspectives on Union and its aftermath and helps to place the local study within the context of the national debate.

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<sup>38</sup> 'United Methodism: Goal of Fifty Years Attained', *Whitby Gazette*, 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1932, p.8.

## **Organization Studies: its contribution to a theoretical framework**

A distinctive feature of the study is the focus on organizational factors and the perspective that organization theory is able to provide. It is important to bear in mind that matters of organization and culture are closely linked to theological and ecclesiological understandings and therefore cannot be studied in isolation from them. As Cameron pointed out, a distinctive feature of religious organizations demonstrates that 'they maintain a tight connection between principles (beliefs/values) and practice.' She continued:

Their structures reflect their understanding of authority, which is often based upon more than rationality. This means that the historic polities that inform denominations, congregations and orders demonstrate a tight link between structure and beliefs.<sup>39</sup>

Although these matters will be developed in greater detail later in the study it is necessary to provide an outline of what is understood by 'organization theory' as this term can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Some examples of the means by which organization theory can be used to analyse religious organizations will be provided with particular reference to the issues underlying the present study.

There is nothing new about the study of organizations and this has long been a concern of historians, for instance of empires, states, armed forces and institutions. However, the particular body of theory relevant to the present study is largely a creation of the last one hundred and fifty years. Starbuck defines organisation theory as 'a collection of general propositions about organizations' and traces the origins of contemporary organization theory to the social and technological changes that took place as a result of industrialisation and the consequent economic and social changes from the

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<sup>39</sup> H.Cameron, 'A perspective from the study of religious organisations', in H.K. Anheir, (ed), *Organisational theory and the non-profit form: Proceedings of a seminar at the LSE Centre for Civil Society*, London: The Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2001, p. 59.

mid nineteenth-century onwards.<sup>40</sup> Morgan points out that organizations are seldom established as ends in themselves and that the derivation of the word 'organization' has its origins in the Greek word 'organon', meaning a tool or instrument.<sup>41</sup> Thus organizations are formed in order to achieve goals and perform tasks. The challenge can be to define the goals or tasks, especially in relation to ecclesiastical organisations which vary in emphasis and where outcomes may be unclear, diffuse and difficult to evaluate. It can also be misleading to consider that an organization can have a unified view of what it should be achieving and this study provides examples of such dissonance within Methodism.

The application of organization theory is particularly relevant in a study of Methodism as matters of organization are frequently referred to in relation to the Methodist movement and its constituent parts. For instance, Malcolm Gladwell argued that the success of the Methodist movement was not especially as a result of John Wesley's charisma as a preacher (he rated George Whitfield higher) or his being a great theologian but that 'his genius was organizational.' As a basis for this he cited the founding of societies, subdivided into classes ('class' here referring to a division, derived from the Latin *classis*) which, because of the standards that they set 'stood for something'. He contended that John Wesley had realised:

'that if you wanted to bring about a fundamental change in peoples' belief and behaviour, a change would only persist and serve as an example to others, you needed to create a community around them, where the new beliefs could be practiced, expressed and nurtured'.<sup>42</sup>

Henry Rack pointed out that the original requirement was to create an organizational structure 'for mission and holiness'<sup>43</sup> and throughout the

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<sup>40</sup> W.H. Starbuck, 'The Origins of Organization Theory', in H.Tsoukas, and C. Knudsen, (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Organization Theory: Meta-theoretical Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 143.

<sup>41</sup> G. Morgan, *Images of Organization*, London: Sage Publications, 1986, p. 23.

<sup>42</sup> M. Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How little things can make a big difference*, London: Abacus, 2000, pp. 172 -173.

<sup>43</sup> H.D. Rack, *The Future of John Wesley's Methodism*, p. 36.

literature there are references to Methodist organization both in the formative era of the movement and beyond. For instance, the Reverend William Younger wrote of John Wesley's 'organized methods for the government of the Church and the salvation of humanity'<sup>44</sup> and Harrison *et al* argued that 'Methodism is one of the most efficient organisations that society has ever known'.<sup>45</sup> However, organizations that had been successful in achieving their objectives during one stage of their development, for instance during their pioneering and formative stages, may not be equally successful as they mature. Their objectives may change, or become diffuse, the nature and expectations of their membership may change and the environment in which they are set may change. Organization theory can be used to analyse organizations at different stages of their development, examples being Plant's model of 'five phases of growth and crisis'<sup>46</sup> and Galindo's 'dynamics of congregational lifespan'.<sup>47</sup> Although doctrinal factors were involved in Methodist Union they were part of a process of organizational change within a changing social, economic and religious environment.

Organization theory, in its modern sense, had its origins in industrialisation and the competitive commercial environment in which industry looked to achieve its objectives as cheaply and efficiently as possible. Frederick W. Taylor,<sup>48</sup> an American who was working at the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, is sometimes credited as 'the father of Scientific Management'.<sup>49</sup> Max Weber contributed to organizational thinking through his description of bureaucracy.<sup>50</sup> From this time onwards there have been various changes in approach, for instance, the 'human relations movement' which was a reaction against the mechanistic, 'cogs in a wheel', approach of 'scientific management' and which stressed the importance of social factors

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Wycherly, *op cit*, p. 256.

<sup>45</sup> Harrison *et al*, *op cit*, p. 23

<sup>46</sup> R.W Plant, *Managing Change and Making it Stick*, London: Fontana, 1987, p 91.

<sup>47</sup> I. Galindo, *op cit*, p. 58 ff.

<sup>48</sup> F.W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, New York: Harper, 1911.

<sup>49</sup> C. Handy, *Understanding Organizations*, (4<sup>th</sup> edn), London: Penguin Books, 1999, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, London: Oxford University Press, 1947.

and informal factors in the working environment.<sup>51</sup> More recently there has been an interest in organizational culture which is concerned with 'underlying assumptions, which are typically unconscious but which determine how group members perceive, think and feel'.<sup>52</sup>

Organizational culture encompasses things that are public and open about an organization and also, crucially, the 'informal organization', Clark's 'underlife', which represents things that are not visible and which lie 'below the surface'. Plant employed the metaphor of 'the organization iceberg'<sup>53</sup> to represent these aspects and Grey points to the 'disjuncture between the formal and the informal organization'.<sup>54</sup> In relation to this study these concepts are particularly helpful in understanding the tensions inherent in bringing separate Methodist denominations together and where the public presentation of Union did not necessarily correspond with what was being felt or was happening at the level of circuits or individual churches. This will be shown in the contrast between statements made by leaders at national level and the reactions in the local context.

Another approach has been to analyse organizations as systems, which combines thinking by biologists and engineers as a means of gaining an understanding of the relationship between an organization and its environment and between the constituent sub-systems within organizations.<sup>55</sup> Organizations are deemed to be concerned with a 'transformation process' and have 'inputs' and 'outputs'.<sup>56</sup> This is usually referred to as 'open systems theory' in which organizations may be more or less closed to the environment in which they are set. In ecclesiastical terms

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<sup>51</sup> L.J. Mullins, *Management and Organisational Behaviour*, London: Pitman Publishing, 1989, Second Edition, p. 38.

<sup>52</sup> E.H.Schein, 'Coming to a New Awareness of Organizational Culture', in *Sloan Management Review*, Winter 1984, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Plant, 1987, *op cit*, p 128

<sup>54</sup> C.Grey, *A very short, fairly interesting and reasonably cheap book about studying organizations*, London: Sage, 2005, p. 29.

<sup>55</sup> P.B. Checkland, 'The origins and nature of 'hard' systems thinking', in M. Lockett and R. Spear, (eds), *Organizations as Systems*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1980, p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> M.J. Hatch, *Organization Theory: Modern Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 38.

an example might be the difference between a strict sect or a closed religious order and a national church such as the Church of England in which boundaries between church and society are more permeable. In its formative phase, Methodism with its 'classes' and entry by 'class tickets' was more 'closed' than its later stages, when class discipline declined. Sociologists such as Bryan Wilson have developed similar concepts in order to identify 'church – sect typologies' in which classification depends, in part, on the degree of openness to society at large and to other religious organisations.<sup>57</sup> B.S. Turner noted that the 'typological classification of Methodism has been particularly problematic' because of the different traditions within it and changes over time.<sup>58</sup> Factors that will be considered in the present study are the relationship between the Methodist churches and the changing social and economic environment and between the various sub-systems of their organizations, for instance their Quarterly Meetings and their Local Preachers' Meetings.

The thesis argues, therefore, that organization theory can provide an additional and helpful interpretive perspective for the analysis of the process of Methodist Union at both national and local levels. It offers models, conceptual frameworks and metaphors that can be drawn upon when analysing, interrogating and interpreting the evidence. As Morgan noted:

the use of metaphor implies a way of thinking and a way of seeing that pervade how we understand our world generally.<sup>59</sup>

This study is concerned with analysing the ways in which the distinctive Methodist ways of thinking and seeing impacted upon the process of Union with a focus on a local example. As with the use of economic or sociological models in the interpretation of historical phenomena it is no more than a 'lens' or 'filter', providing a particular focus, and does not preclude other

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<sup>57</sup> B. Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982.

<sup>58</sup> B.S. Turner, *The Decline of Methodism: an analysis of religious commitment and organisation*, (unpublished PhD Thesis), Department of Social Studies, University of Leeds, 1970.

<sup>59</sup> Morgan, *op cit*, p. 12.

perspectives. Indeed, organization theory is itself eclectic in nature, drawing upon other disciplines in order to provide insights.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide an introduction to the nature of the sources of evidence and their analysis, including limitations and challenges. It has also introduced relevant concepts and ideas from the field of Organizational Studies. There is a close relationship between ecclesiological, social and cultural factors which will be developed further when necessary. However, it is emphasised that this is a first and foremost a historical study that draws upon the perspective of some theories of organization rather than an organizational study that draws on a case from history. The organizational focus is not exclusive, and other sources of theory are used as relevant.

## **Chapter 3 'Between the Heather and the Northern Sea'<sup>1</sup> - the Setting for the Study**

In Whitby one finds one of the most strikingly situated places in England.<sup>2</sup>

### **Introduction**

A central argument of this study is that, in order to understand of the process of Methodist Union, it is necessary to know something of the local setting. This is because the circumstances contributing to the process of Union were a combination of local and broader denominational factors. This chapter will therefore examine the geography and topography of the area, its economy and the occupational and social structure of the town of Whitby and its hinterland. Consideration will also be given to the ecclesiastical history of the area and the circumstances that preceded and influenced the period in which the study is set. A separate chapter, Chapter 4, will be concerned with Methodist origins and development.

### **Geography and topography of the Whitby area**

One of the most basic determinants of 'localism' is the nature of the locality itself and this was particularly true of Methodism in the Whitby area. As Royle has pointed out, 'local geographical awareness and insights' are 'often neglected by the professional outsider'.<sup>3</sup> The town of Whitby is situated at the mouth of the River Esk and is surrounded in all landward directions by 772 square miles of moorland.<sup>4</sup> As Fletcher described it in 1908:

On one side lies the grey North Sea; on the other stretch miles and miles of lonely moorland.<sup>5</sup>

After passing through Whitby in a southerly direction the valley of the Esk turns to the south- west and is joined at Grosmont (c.6 miles from Whitby)

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<sup>1</sup> The title of a novel by Whitby Author, Mary Linskill.

<sup>2</sup> J.S Fletcher, *The Enchanting North*, London: Eveleigh Nash, 1908, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> E. Royle, 'Writing the Local History of Methodism' in P. Forsaith and M. Wellings, (eds), *Methodism and History: Essays in honour of John Vickers*, Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 2010, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> R. Barker, 'Whitby', in R.A. Butlin, (ed), *Historical Atlas of North Yorkshire*, Otley: Westbury Publishing, 2003, p. 211.

<sup>5</sup> Fletcher, *op cit*, p. 118.



by the Murk Esk which forms a tributary valley leading up to the moorland village of Goathland (c. 9.5 miles) situated about 500 feet above sea level. At Grosmont the Esk valley turns in a generally westward direction towards the village of Castleton (c. 16 miles). The spread of both Wesleyan Methodism and Primitive Methodism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was reflected in the location of chapels in or on the moorland fringes of the Esk Valley. To the north-east of Whitby lies the small fishing village of Sandsend (c. 2.5 miles) and a mile inland of this the village of Lythe (c. 3.5 Miles). To the southeast of Whitby are Hawsker (c.3 miles), Fylingthorpe (c. 6.5 miles) and the fishing village of Robin Hood's Bay (c .6.5) miles. (See Appendix 1, Map of Area)

For much of its history the town of Whitby and its hinterland were relatively isolated in all landward directions although, as a seaport, it had access from the sea. However in stormy weather the narrow and shallow harbour bar was difficult to cross, especially in the days of sailing ships when shipwrecks along the coast were common.<sup>6</sup> Inland from Whitby the moorland roads (more accurately described as packhorse tracks) were poor, especially in the winter.<sup>7</sup> Writing in 1779, Lionel Charlton described the situation thus:

Till the year 1750, all roads about Whitby lay in a state of nature, rough, rugged and uneven: it was a dangerous place for a man on horseback to come into the town in the winter season of the year, but more so for any laden carriage then to approach the place.<sup>8</sup>

Whitby did not gain a coach service until 1788 and then only operating on two days a week from York.<sup>9</sup>

The opening up of this isolated area to inland transport began with the construction of the Whitby and Pickering Railway, initially horse-operated,

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<sup>6</sup> A. Godfrey and P.J. Lassey, *Shipwrecks of the Yorkshire Coast*, Clapham: Dalesman Books, 1974, Chapters 2 'Whitby' and 3 'Robin Hood's Bay'.

<sup>7</sup> M.P. Ventress, *A Little about Littlebeck: A Biographical Glimpse of the Past*, Littlebeck: Monica Ventress, 2009, p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> Charlton, *op cit*, p.338.

<sup>9</sup> M. Barker, *Yorkshire: The North Riding*, London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1977, p. 28.

which opened in 1836,<sup>10</sup> the principal purpose of which was to give access to Whitby and the surrounding area for trade and to provide a link with the market town of Pickering, twenty-one miles from Whitby. This was the beginning of the development of a network of railways which eventually connected the Whitby area with Malton and York (1847), Stockton (1865) and Saltburn (1883). A further and final line was constructed along the coast south-eastwards through Hawsker and Robin Hood's Bay to Scarborough (1885).<sup>11</sup> In addition to providing transport for goods, including fish, and thus stimulating the fishing industry, the railways also made possible the development of the area as a destination for holiday-makers. This became a significant factor from the mid-nineteenth-century onwards, establishing itself as an important feature in the economy and character of the area which had significant implications for the growth and development of Methodism.

During the period of this study, all the railway lines were still in use, with line closures not beginning until 1958. The roads, especially in the Esk Valley, were poor but travel by bus was becoming more popular during the inter-war years with some local services starting in the mid-1920s and a more extensive timetable of longer-distance routes developing in the 1930s.<sup>12</sup> Although on the increase, especially after the First World War, private motoring was still relatively uncommon and its growth was curtailed by the Second World War. These developments were not welcomed by all, including some Methodists, largely because they felt that it would open up rural areas to secularizing influences and possibly lead to a loss of members from Societies which were already small.<sup>13</sup> However, the fact that the area had so long been relatively isolated remained a significant influence on the

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<sup>10</sup> G.W.J. Potter, *A History of the Whitby and Pickering Railway*, (1906/1969), Wakefield: S.R. Publishers Ltd., Republished from the second edition.

<sup>11</sup> K. Hoole, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, Vol. 1V, The North East*, Newton Abbot & London: David & Charles, 1965, Chapter 1V, The North Riding of Yorkshire.

<sup>12</sup> P. Battersby, *Discovering Heather Motor Services Ltd, Robin Hood's Bay*, Middlesbrough: United Enthusiast's Club, 2005, p. 17; J. Banks, *United*, Glossop: Venture Publications, 1999, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> R. Pyke, 'Methodism Today and Tomorrow', in J.S Lidgett & B.H Reed, (eds), *Methodism in the Modern World*, London: The Epworth Press, 1929, p. 276.

local culture and this was one of the factors that affected the local character of Methodism and its development.

### **Economic history of the area**

Rosalin Barker stated that 'Whitby's economic hinterland made it an unpromising location for a town'<sup>14</sup> and the surrounding area was devoted principally to hill sheep farming. In the middle ages the monastic foundation of Whitby Abbey was an important feature of the economic and social life of the area, as were monasteries generally.<sup>15</sup> First mentioned as a port in 1301 Whitby had the only harbour between the Tees and Humber and was often needed as a port of refuge in storms.<sup>16</sup> It had grown in significance in the seventeenth-century, especially as a result of the mining and processing of alum in the area. By the middle of the eighteenth-century, Whitby played an important role in shipping coal from the coalfields of Northumberland and Durham to London, as well as the import of timber from Norway.<sup>17</sup> During this period the population of the town was around 10,000 of whom about 1,000 were usually at sea.<sup>18</sup>

Whitby also became a centre for shipbuilding and in the peak years in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as many as twelve ships, especially 'coal cats' (collier brigs), were to be found on the stocks at the same time.<sup>19</sup> Charlton wrote:

Whitby has long been noted for building good ships for the merchant service and coal trade, but never was in so much fame on that account as at present.<sup>20</sup>

There were also ancillary maritime industries such as rope-making and the making of canvas for sails, there being four canvas factories in the town. Towards the end of the nineteenth-century the shipbuilding industry declined

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<sup>14</sup> R. Barker, *Historical Atlas of North Yorkshire*, p.211.

<sup>15</sup> F.B. Singleton & S.R. Rawnsley, *A History of Yorkshire*, Chichester: Phillimore and Co. Ltd, 1986, p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> A. Russell, 'The Liberty of Whitby Strand', in W. Page, (ed), *The Victoria History of the County of Yorkshire: North Riding*, Vol. 2, London: St. Catherine's Press, 1923, p. 511.

<sup>17</sup> A. White, *A History of Whitby*, Chichester: Phillimore, 1993, pp. 76, 212.

<sup>18</sup> P. Shaw Jeffrey, *Whitby Lore and Legend*, Whitby: Horne and Son Ltd., 1952, p. 138.

<sup>19</sup> Whitby built ships were chosen by James Cook (1728-1779) for his voyages of discovery.

<sup>20</sup> Charlton, *op cit*, p. 358.

as a result of the growing demand for larger steam driven iron vessels, which could not pass through the town's drawbridge. Despite this, Whitby continued to have a considerable number of vessels registered and managed from the port. For the year 1909 it was recorded that 67 vessels were registered there, having a total carrying capacity of 288,262 tons.<sup>21</sup> This meant that considerable wealth came into the town which had an effect on its economy and social structure. It also led to employment of local men from the town and area as seamen on Whitby registered vessels. In terms of the development of Methodism, some of the income from shipping helped to fund the building and maintenance of the churches. It also led to a tradition of seafaring, especially in Whitby and Robin Hood's Bay which was still a significant factor during the period of the study.<sup>22</sup>

Whitby was also a fishing port and this had a significant effect on the local culture of Methodism. Fishing contributed to the economy of the abbey, mentioned in an inventory in 1394, and in 1817 there was a large fishing fleet selling fish in markets as far away as London.<sup>23</sup> For a time whaling was also carried out. In 1816 the Whitby Marine Bible Association was founded and Roald Kvendal argued that it flourished because it generated a sense of corporate responsibility among seafarers and also because Whitby was a stronghold of Wesleyanism.<sup>24</sup> As a result of herring fishing, the port was used extensively as a base by Cornish fishermen from the mid-1870s until the mid-1890s, finally finishing in 1906. Many of the Cornishmen belonged to the Bible Christians and developed a special relationship with the town's Primitive Methodists, strengthening it during their visits. Scottish fishermen also visited the port during the same period but were fewer in number. Thus both the Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodists had strong links with seafaring and fishing which lasted well into the twentieth-century. However, by the 1930s the industry had declined in the face of competition from larger

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<sup>21</sup> R. T. Gaskin, *The Old Seaport of Whitby: Being Chapters from the Life of its Bygone People*, Whitby: Forth & Son, 1909, p. 449.

<sup>22</sup> Interview 1, 12/03/09. Interviewee 1 spoke of the men who were seamen and master mariners in Robin Hood's Bay.

<sup>23</sup> J. Tindale, *Fishing out of Whitby*, Clapham: Dalesman Books, 1987, pp. 9, 14.

<sup>24</sup> R. Kvendal, *Seamen's Missions: Their Origins and Early Growth*, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1986, p 146. There were also branches at Hull and Aberdeen.

ports such as Hull and during the Second World War was limited to local fishing. There was a brief revival of herring fishing after the war, the stocks having increased as a result of cessation of fishing, and Scottish and Dutch boats visited during the summer months but thereafter it decreased before ceasing altogether.<sup>25</sup>

Two other important industries in the area during the period of the expansion of Methodism were mining for alum, together with its processing, and mining of jet. Charlton wrote that:

Our staple commodity is alum, an article wherewith we furnish the greater part of Europe, and which at present made in no other part of Britain, except in the neighbourhood of Whitby.<sup>26</sup>

The extraction of alum, which was used for fixing colours in the dyeing industry, survived until the early 1870s, when alternative dying processes became available, with the alum-driven boom leaving its mark on the landscape in the form of old workings along the cliffs in both directions from the town.

The mining of jet, a hard black substance for use in making jewellery, has a long history in the area. It became popular in the Victorian era especially as a result of the deaths of Wellington in 1852 and of Prince Albert in 1861 when it was popular as mourning jewellery. In the early 1870s some 1500 men and boys were employed in the industry but jet fell out of fashion after the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and so the mining and working of jet declined.<sup>27</sup> This was the result of changing fashions in the Edwardian era, imports from Spain and cheaper moulded substitutes.<sup>28</sup> Another industry of some importance which flourished for a limited period in the area was iron-stone mining. Iron ore was mined in the vicinity of Grosmont and an ironworks was established there in 1862 with two blast-furnaces, a third being added in by

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<sup>25</sup> D.G. Sythes, *100 Years of Fishing - through Whitby lenses*, Whitby: Whitby Museum, 2006 pp. 4, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Charlton, *op cit*, p. 359.

<sup>27</sup> A. Whitworth, *The A to Z of Whitby History*, Whitby: Culva House Publications, 2006, pp. 129-30.

<sup>28</sup> H.P Kendall, *The Story of Whitby Jet*, Whitby: Whitby Museum, 1936, (reprinted 1988), p. 27.

1875.<sup>29</sup> Competition from the larger ironworks established on the banks of the River Tees resulted in the closure of the Grosmont works in 1891. A Wesleyan Methodist chapel was established at Grosmont in 1867 to cater for the expanding population involved in iron-making. A further Wesleyan chapel was opened at Esk Valley to serve the mining community there.

Writing from the perspective of the 1770s Charlton concluded his history of Whitby by observing that:

so long as a spirit of industry and temperance prevails among us, our trade will flourish, and we shall be an opulent, and happy people; but if we ever suffer ourselves to be enervated, and become a prey to idleness, luxury and intemperance, our riches will vanish, and our trade will leave us, and we shall insensibly dwindle into obscurity.<sup>30</sup>

He was writing at the height of Whitby's eighteenth-century prosperity and he could not foresee the economic and social changes that would result from industrialization, improvements in land transport and competition from elsewhere. When it came, the decline of Whitby as a port could not be attributed to any lack of industry or intemperance on the part of its people. During the period covered by this study most of the above industries had declined or disappeared altogether. From the close of the First World War onwards the heavier industries of shipbuilding and mining were in serious decline and there was little commercial harbour trade left. Lund pointed out that:

The Depression years of the thirties were especially bad for shipping and many owners had to lay up their ships.<sup>31</sup>

This led to a shortage of work in the area, other than seasonal work, and young people who went to college or left to find work generally did not return. Malcolm Barker commented that since the closure of the major shipyard in the early twentieth century, 'the town has always had more workers than

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<sup>29</sup> P. Benham, *An Illustrated History of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway*, Hershaw: Ian Allen Publishing, 2008, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> Charlton, *op cit*, p. 362.

<sup>31</sup> A. Lund, *Home Port: An Outline of Shipping Activities in Whitby from Monastic Times to the Present*, York: Maxiprint, 1980, p. 28.

jobs'.<sup>32</sup> However, from the perspective of this study the earlier employment pattern of the area is important, partly because its economic legacy affected the life of the Methodist churches and also because of its influence in shaping local culture and attitudes, in particular in fostering a sense of tradition and independence. As Interviewee 3 put it:

Everything at Whitby is Whitby! It's always had its own ideas and is very parochial with the fishing people at the bottom of the town.<sup>33</sup>

Most of the area was, however, rural. It was made up of a combination of pasture, much of it poor, and moorland.<sup>34</sup> The majority of the chapels were located in farming villages and settlements, some in quite isolated locations. This led to another distinct strand of local Methodist culture and one which will be discussed in more detail later in the study.

### **The holiday and leisure industry**

The holiday and leisure industry was of considerable significance for the Methodists because it affected employment patterns, the economy of the circuits and the annual cycle of church activities with 'the Season' running from June to September. The natural beauty of the coast and moors had led to its attraction as a destination for holidays and leisure. The origins of the holiday trade pre-date the arrival of the railways but the major stimulus for growth in the holiday trade came through the involvement of George Hudson (1800-71), the so-called 'Railway King', who established the Whitby Building Company in connection with through running of trains to the town in 1847. The objective was to develop the West Cliff fields with terraces of lodging houses and the West Cliff Hotel overlooking the sea to the north and the harbour and the abbey to the east.<sup>35</sup> After Hudson became bankrupt in 1848 the Whitby Building Company passed out of his control.<sup>36</sup> However, the

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<sup>32</sup> M. Barker, *Essence of Whitby*, Ilkley: Great Northern Books, 2006 p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> Interview 3, 27/03/09.

<sup>34</sup> F.B. Singleton and S. Rawnsley, *A History of Yorkshire*, Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd. 1986, Map 11, Yorkshire Agriculture, opposite p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> D. Joy, *Whitby and Pickering Railway*, Clapham: Dalesman Books, 1971, Second Edition, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> A.J. Peacock, & D. Joy, *George Hudson of York*, Clapham: Dalesman Books, 1971, pp. 65 - 66.

railways continued to stimulate the holiday industry which developed into a major factor in the economy of the town. In language typical of the period an LNER publication of 1930 described the area thus:

Whitby will always be a popular place because Nature has endowed it with three unchangeable attributes – a quaint sea-front, an enchanting river, and the always magnificent moors close at hand.<sup>37</sup>

During the period of the study the pattern of holiday-making was in a process of change. Whitby had originally developed as a resort with an appeal to ‘the quiet middle and upper middle class families’. These visitors would generally stay for more than one week, including over weekends, with the possibility of church attendance. During the 1920s, and especially, in the 1930s this pattern started to change with a wider social mix of visitors and a rising proportion of industrial and factory workers taking shorter holidays.<sup>38</sup> Also, during the inter-war period and particularly in the 1930s, there was the rapid growth of the day-tripper, especially at weekends. A similar seasonal pattern of church life has been noted elsewhere and was described by Peter Fletcher in his account of his upbringing as a Wesleyan Methodist in an East Anglian seaside resort in the early years of the twentieth-century. He stated that from September until the middle of May nearly all the places of amusement closed down:

Consequently all the townsfolk, saints and sinners alike, had to rely on their own resources for any diversions they wanted. Naturally, the churches and chapels were the organizing and co-ordinating centres for most of the corporate activities designed to meet this need and so they performed a valuable social function.<sup>39</sup>

The changing pattern holidaymaking and tourism, together with its effects on Methodist life during the period surrounding Union will be further explored in Chapter 6.

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<sup>30</sup> London and North Eastern Railway, *The Holiday Handbook*, (3<sup>rd</sup> edn), LNER, 1930, p. 14b.

<sup>38</sup> J.W. House, ‘Whitby as a Resort’, in G.H.J. Daysh, (ed), *A Survey of Whitby and the Surrounding Area*, Windsor: The Shakespeare Head Press, 1958, pp. 157, 165.

<sup>39</sup> P. Fletcher, *The Long Sunday*, London: Faber and Faber, 1958, p. 58.



## **The occupational and social structure of Whitby and its hinterland**

In order to understand Whitby Methodism during the period of the study, it is necessary to consider the occupational and social structure of the area as this had an influence on the life and culture of the churches. In many respects these reflected the economic development of the town and its hinterland as previously described. In broad terms the rural area around Whitby was mainly concerned with farming and its support services, together with some tourism. Whitby itself and the coastal villages of Robin Hood's Bay and Sandsend were predominantly 'seaward facing' and concerned with fishing and seafaring and, increasingly, with servicing the holiday trade. The fishing and farming communities did not necessarily get on with each other. In an account of his childhood in 'Bramblewick Bay' (Robin Hood's Bay) the author Leo Walmsley wrote of how the boys from the fishing village would fight with those from the nearby farming village of 'Thorpe' (Fylingthorpe):

There was a standing quarrel between the boys of Bramblewick and the boys of Thorpe. Nearly all the boys in Bramblewick were the sons of either fishermen or sailors. Those of Thorpe were mostly farmer's sons. They did not wear jerseys, but corduroys which stank, and they wore clogs in winter. We called them Thorpe cloggers, and they called us Bay bumpers.<sup>40</sup>

Walmsley was writing about life at the beginning of the twentieth-century but, as will be shown, something of the mutual suspicion between the two communities still existed at the time of the study and affected the relationship between the chapels in Robin Hood's Bay and Fylingthorpe, despite their both being Wesleyan Methodist.

The urban area of Whitby also exhibited its own 'social geography' and could be broadly divided into five main residential areas, each of which had significance for the development and life of Methodism. These were the 'old town', predominantly on the east side of the river, Georgian Whitby, the West Cliff resort area and Fishburn Park (known locally as 'The Railway' with its

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<sup>40</sup> L. Walmsley, *Sound of the Sea*, London: Collins, 1959, 1995, Republished, Otley:Smith Settle Ltd., 1995, pp. 13 -14.

inhabitants referred to as 'living on The Railway').<sup>41</sup> From the early 1930s there was a growing council estate on the east side of the river, first known as 'Gallows Close' and later as 'Helredale'. During this period there was also some new private housing, mostly built as ribbon development with some infilling along the main roads leading from the west side of the town (See Appendix 2 for Town Map of Whitby).

The larger part of the 'old town' is located on the east side of the river below the cliffs on which stand the abbey ruins and St. Mary's Church.<sup>42</sup> The main thoroughfare is Church Street (formerly 'Kirkgate') which leads to the Church Stairs (often referred to as 'The 199 Steps') up to St. Mary's Church and the abbey ruins.<sup>43</sup> Connecting at about the mid-point of Church Street is Bridge Street providing access to the bridge which connects the east and west sides of the town.<sup>44</sup> The dwellings in this area were clustered close together along 'yards' or 'ghauts' some leading up towards the cliff and some from street level down to the riverside.<sup>45</sup> It has been noted:

The Yards are intrinsically unique. They developed out of their necessity for houses in which to live and work as the population grew.<sup>46</sup>

By the 1920s and 1930s many of these dwellings were in a very poor condition and were being pulled down. Writing of this period Storm Jameson described them as:

dilapidated houses, centuries old, built crazily across the face of the cliff, between harbour and ruined abbey. One by one they were being torn out, like rotten teeth, and dear

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<sup>41</sup>M. Barker, *Essence of Whitby*, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> The town of Whitby is located on a promontory in such a way that the River Esk flows into the sea from a southerly direction, thus the two sides of the river are referred to as the East Side and the West Side. The east and west piers point in a northerly direction and Whitby is one of the few places where in high summer the sun can be seen both rising and setting across the sea.

<sup>43</sup> H.P. Kendall, *The Streets of Whitby and their Associations'*, (revised edn), Whitby: Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society, 1976, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Church Street can be divided into 'upper Church Street', running from Bridge Street northwards to the Church Steps and 'lower Church Street' which runs southwards from Bridge Street.

<sup>45</sup> The term 'ghaut' is derived from a Viking word meaning a road.

<sup>46</sup> *The Whitby Report*, Kingston Polytechnic: School of Three-Dimensional Design, 1974, p. 42.

knows (*sic*) that no health authority could do otherwise. Yet for centuries the toughest human beings conceivable had been born and had lived in these places.<sup>47</sup>

Interviewee 2 (b.1920), a Wesleyan, brought up in Church Street, recalled:

They were poor, very, very poor. The kids had ragged trousers and all the rest of it...They lived in, I won't say hovels, but there were some tenements, you know, wooden hovels, tenements, they were all divided with wood, you see.<sup>48</sup>

She described visiting her elderly grandmother who did not have a bedroom, just a 'bed place...like a shelf in the wall wide enough to lie on'. In 1937 a Ministry of Health Inquiry reported that 'a number of premises...were simply beyond hope' and of the council's concern over 'the necessity of providing proper housing facilities'.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the East Side, a smaller part of the 'old town' could be found on the west side of the harbour. It included Baxtergate, Haggergate, Flowergate and an area known as 'the Crag'. The Crag was described by Whitworth as 'one of the rookeries of Whitby' with crowded dwellings similar to those on the east.<sup>50</sup> As on the East Side, the dwellings here were inhabited mainly by those who earned their livings from the sea or occupations in support of maritime trade. These people were described by Harland thus:

They are old Whitby, native Whitby, born of the bitterness of the sea on their lips and hardened to life and death by the sea.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the somewhat florid language employed, the expression 'old Whitby' is of sociological significance because it described a self-designated identity of a social group in the midst of whom were situated two Methodist chapels, the Wesley Chapel (later 'Wesley Hall') and the Primitive Methodist Church Street Chapel.

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<sup>47</sup> Jameson, *op cit*, p. 8.

<sup>48</sup> Interview 2, 17/09/09.

<sup>49</sup> 'East Side Housing – the Council's Proposals for Compulsory Purchase. Ministry of Health Enquiry', *Whitby Gazette*, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1937, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Whitworth, *The A to Z of Whitby History*, p. 82.

<sup>51</sup> O. Harland, *Yorkshire North Riding*, London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1951, p. 68.

The area described as Georgian Whitby was the first significant area of growth after 'old Whitby' and is located on the west side of the river. The development of this area was stimulated by wealth generated in the shipping trade and includes St. Hilda's Terrace, on the hillside overlooking the town, followed by houses in Bagdale. The Georgian houses generally had gardens to the front and accommodation for coaches and horses to the rear. Commercial and further residential premises were developed to serve the needs of this part of the town, with houses of a similar style being built in the Victorian era. It was close to this area that the Wesleyan Brunswick Church was built.<sup>52</sup>

The inhabitants of 'old Whitby' viewed this part of the town as completely different from their own both in economic and social terms. In her novel, *The Haven Under the Hill*, Mary Linskill, herself an 'Eastsider' brought up in Blackburn Yard, off Church Street, captured this perception:

the dwellers on St.Hilda's Mount were not as the dwellers in other parts of the place. A kind of mystic effluence seemed to emanate from those old Georgian houses on the hill-top. They had an atmosphere of their own. ..To live on St. Hilda's Mount was a kind of 'hall-mark', and secured you a consideration in the town and neighbourhood of an especial kind.<sup>53</sup>

She stated that 'outsiders' had since built new villas, probably referring to those in Bagdale, but that St. Hilda's Mount was the location that was most aspired to. From the perspective of 'old Whitby', she wrote:

'Across the water' meant everything to the dwellers on the east side of the town.<sup>54</sup>

Elizabeth Gaskell spent the summer of 1859 in Whitby collecting information for her novel *Sylvia's Lovers* in which she used the pseudonym 'Monkshaven' for Whitby. She likewise noted the difference between the social status of people living on opposite sides of the river.<sup>55</sup> It should be

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<sup>52</sup> The name Brunswick was adopted by some Wesleyan churches to demonstrate that although classed as dissenters they were loyal to the Hanoverian dynasty.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Linskill, *op cit*, p. 153.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Sylvia's Lovers*, 1863, Published in London: Penguin Classics, 1996, p. 7.

born in mind however that parts of 'old Whitby' were on the west bank of the Esk but were subject to the same social attitudes. As an example Storm Jameson described some well-off parents who disapproved of their son's friendship with another boy:

'We don't dislike him', his mother said. 'Your father and I feel that you could have a better friend than a boy out of Cliff Street. That's all'.<sup>56</sup>

Cliff Street runs parallel with the river on the west bank and is some way above it, connected by yards to the Crag and harbourside.

However, despite the fact that other areas were later developed on the west side of the river, most notably the West Cliff and Fishburn Park, the river continued to be seen as a symbol of social division. 'Crossing the bridge' or 'crossing the water' were frequently used by Eastsiders as metaphors for upward social aspiration and mobility, not always regarded as a good thing. As Malcolm Barker observed:

Westsiders were reckoned as off-comed 'uns, or perhaps Whitby folk who had chosen to establish themselves among the foreigners.<sup>57</sup>

Knowledge of this 'social geography' is important for understanding the Methodist history of the town and the factors that influenced the relationship between the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist circuits and between individual chapels of both denominations. As will be shown 'social geography' helped to shape the attitudes that contributed to Union and circuit amalgamation.

The next major phase of development of Whitby and district was as a destination for summer visitors. Robert Gaskin commented on this development, stating that the attractions of Whitby:

demand the provision of accommodation for the summer visitor, and to meet this demand much enterprise has been exhibited.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Jameson, *op cit*, p. 56.

<sup>57</sup> M. Barker, *op cit*, p. 15.

<sup>58</sup> Gaskin, *op cit*, p. 450.

The main residential location for the accommodation of the visitors was the West Cliff area. Its central feature was the Royal Crescent, overlooking the North Sea, although this was never completed as a result of the failure of George Hudson's business empire. Large blocks of lodging houses were erected, along with the Royal Hotel, which was opened in 1849. For the entertainment of visitors the 'Whitby Saloon' and theatre were provided and during the 1920s such facilities as tennis courts and a bowling green, with golf and boating added, as well as a seawall promenade accessed by footpaths.<sup>59</sup> A cliff lift, giving easy access to the beach from the West Cliff, was sunk in 1930.<sup>60</sup> An extensive area of land near the town centre was donated by the Wesleyan Methodist benefactor, County Alderman Robert Elliot Pannett, J.P. (1834 – 1920) and opened in 1928 as the Pannett Park and Art Gallery, with a museum added in 1931.<sup>61</sup>

A major attraction of Whitby was its harbour-side and amusement arcades opened on the West Pier in the early 1930s.<sup>62</sup> There was a band-stand on the Scotch Head and there were cafes, public houses and gift shops to serve the needs of the visitors. In 1898 the large Metropole Hotel had been opened which became a venue for dances and social activities. There was further development along the West Cliff, partly residential and partly smaller hotels, eventually including a Methodist holiday home. Residents often supplemented their incomes by 'taking in visitors' during the summer. House noted that:

The holiday industry proved profitable and the rate of investment in new buildings was commendably high.<sup>63</sup>

The leisure economy brought economic benefits for the Methodist churches in town and district in terms of larger congregations and enhanced collections, but also presented threats to them in providing alternative activities on Sundays. This will be explored in Chapter 6.

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<sup>59</sup> As describes in an LNER booklet, *Yorkshire Coast and Moors*, c. 1930.

<sup>60</sup> House, *op cit*, p.154.

<sup>61</sup> A. Dennier, *A Lasting Legacy: The Story of Whitby's Pannet Park*. Whitby: Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> House, *op cit*, p. 154.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*, p. 154.

The Fishburn Park area ('the Railway') was developed in the mid-nineteenth-century around the same time as the West Cliff estate. It lies on the west side of the upper harbour, with Esk Terrace facing south across the railway yards and the river towards the Whitehall shipyard. The area was named after Thomas Fishburn, a shipbuilder who, from the middle of the eighteenth-century, owned a shipyard and a stone quay in the vicinity. Apart from the larger terrace houses overlooking the harbour most of the houses are smaller, much of it in the style of the industrial towns and villages of Cleveland and Teesside.<sup>64</sup> Thus the character of the area was somewhat different from other parts of the town and it was self-contained and served by its own shops and public house, despite being only a relatively short walk from the town centre (See Appendix 5 for street plan of Fishburn Park).

The inhabitants of Fishburn Park were engaged in a wide range of occupations, with some master mariners occupying the larger houses (Esk Terrace was known locally as 'Captain's Row') and a variety of lower income trades-people and clerks occupying the other houses. Some houses also acted as lodgings for visitors in the summer.<sup>65</sup> Among the residents were railway workers as it was close to the engine shed, goods yard and passenger station. From the perspective of this study, Fishburn Park is important because, from 1866, it was the location of one of the two Primitive Methodist chapels in the town and was one of the two Methodist places of worship on the west side of the river. A more detailed account of the development of the Methodist circuits will be provided in Chapter 4.

From 1932 a council housing estate was developed at Gallows Close, situated on the east side of the river about a mile from the centre of the town. As it expanded and, perhaps because of its macabre association, it was later named 'the Helredale Council Estate' (See Appendix 2, Town Map, D/6). Its inhabitants were soon spoken of locally as living 'oop 'elredale', a reference to its raised location beyond and above the old town. The building of the Helredale estate was the local response to the legislation following on from

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<sup>64</sup> M.R.G Conzen, 'The Growth and Character of Whitby', in G.H.J. Daysh, (ed), *A Survey of Whitby and Surrounding Area*, Windsor: The Shakespeare Head Press, 1958, p. 74.

<sup>65</sup> White, *op cit*, p. 177.

World War 1 to replace housing that was deemed to be 'unfit for human habitation'. Writing as a Methodist in 1929, Richard Pyke stated that 'overcrowding menaces morality, damages health, and weakens the moral fibre'.<sup>66</sup> Following the First World War pressure had been exerted by the churches nationally, especially the Church of England, involving leading figures such as William Temple and Charles Gore. Roy Hattersley wrote that 'in the city parishes the Church were turning militant' and in 1930 the government required every local authority to draw up plans for clearing sub-standard housing and to re-house the inhabitants in better conditions.<sup>67</sup> Conzen noted these changes in the Whitby area and that the new housing was not due to an increase in population but to the growth of 'buildings designed as single family dwellings'.<sup>68</sup> The fact that the housing was provided for people already living locally is borne out by the statistics that between 1931 and 1939 the Urban District population only rose by 11 people and the Rural District decreased by 158.<sup>69</sup> Most of the inhabitants of the Helredale estate were moved from the cramped dwellings that clustered along both sides of Church Street and the narrow yards and ghauts leading off from it.

The nature of the houses built at Helredale was indicated in the *Whitby Gazette* in October 1932 where it was stated that at a meeting of the Whitby Urban District Council:

it was decided to build thirty-four workmen's dwellings on the Council's housing estate at Gallows Close.<sup>70</sup>

The development of the estate continued throughout the period of this study and beyond. It provided a better standard of housing for its inhabitants but it broke up and changed the nature of the close community that had clustered between the Abbey cliffs and the harbour-side. Interviewee 2 remembered:

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<sup>66</sup> Pyke, *op cit*, p. 277.

<sup>67</sup> Hattersley, *op cit*, pp. 205, 210.

<sup>68</sup> Conzen, *op cit*, pp. 74 – 75.

<sup>69</sup> J.W. House, J.W., 'The Population of the Whitby Area: Recent Growth, Trends and Prospects', in Dayshe, G.H.J., (ed), *A Survey of Whitby and the Surrounding Area*, Windsor: The Shakespeare Head Press, 1958, p. 97.

<sup>70</sup> *Whitby Gazette*, 7th October, 1932, p. 1.



It was all done very fairly, but it was upsetting because there had been generations lived there, you know.<sup>71</sup>

The people who moved to the estate were largely 'old Whitby' in terms of background and culture but they left behind many of the influences that had created this culture. Their occupations remained the same but there was also considerable unemployment, especially in the 1930s.

Both urban and rural population remained fairly stable throughout the period of the study with an urban population of around 11,500 and the rural population only slightly higher. The most heavily populated area was Whitby East (Abbey and Helredale Ward) rising from 4,119 in 1931 to 4,360 in 1951. The Town (Central and West) declined from 1,998 to 1,790, and Fishburn Park from 1,880 to 1,756. The village of Ruswarp was included in the urban figures and the Ruswarp, West Cliff Ward rising from 2,683 in 1931 to 3,786 in 1951, reflecting new building along the West Cliff.<sup>72</sup> In the summer season the number of people in the town rose considerably, mainly accommodated in the West Cliff area. Although these figures give some indication of the relative sizes of the neighbourhoods served by the Methodist churches not all Methodists attended their nearest chapel, as membership lists show.

The period 1918 to 1953 was one of considerable economic and social change. The older industries had declined, or disappeared altogether, and there was an increasing emphasis on tourism both as a holiday destination and for day-excursions. With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 there was further disruption as people left on war service and military personnel were moved into the area. These matters will be explored in relation to the Methodist churches in Chapters 6 and 7.

### **The local religious context**

The purpose of this section is to provide a general ecclesiastical context for the study by giving some information about where Methodism fitted in with

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<sup>71</sup> Interview 2, 17/03/09.

<sup>72</sup> J.W.House, 'The Population of the Whitby Area: Recent Growth, Trends and Prospects', in G.H.J. Daysh, (ed), *A Survey of Whitby and Surrounding Area*, Windsor: The Shakespeare head Press, 1958, pp. 91 – 104.

the other religious denominations. It is only possible to provide a relatively brief summary which will focus on those aspects most relevant to the study.

Whitby is rich in religious history and is most well-known for the Synod of Streanaeshalsch in 664 AD, for the double monastery led by St. Hilda and for the legend of the Saxon poet, Caedmon.<sup>73</sup> The Saxon monastery was destroyed in Viking raids and a Benedictine monastery was built on almost the same site. This was dissolved at the Reformation in 1539.<sup>74</sup> The Parish Church of St. Mary had been built near to the abbey in around 1100 to serve the needs of the town. Despite enlargements this had, by the eighteenth-century, become too small for the population and Charlton attributed to this a neglect of public worship.<sup>75</sup> This may be a reason why Methodism was able to gain a strong foothold in the town. In 1778 a proprietary church, St. Ninian's, was opened on the west side of the river and was later influenced by the Oxford Movement, becoming 'high church' and continuing to represent the Anglo-Catholic tradition throughout the twentieth-century.

However the main period of Anglican church building was the nineteenth-century to cater for the growth of the town. The church of St. John the Evangelist, on the West Side, was consecrated in 1850 and St. Michael's, on the East Side in 1856.<sup>76</sup> The West Cliff area was without a church until 1868 when the 'Iron Church' was constructed, to be replaced in 1885 by St. Hilda's Church which was designed with wide aisles to accommodate visitors.<sup>77</sup> A Mission for Seamen was opened in 1876 which had sleeping accommodation, rooms for social activities and a chapel. It was intended particularly to serve the needs of visiting fishermen (and women, who gutted the fish), especially in the herring season. The final Anglican establishment in Whitby was the foundation, in 1915, of a house of nuns of the Order of the Holy Paraclete at Sneaton Castle, on the western outskirts of the town. A

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<sup>73</sup> Bede, *History of the English Church and People*, 731, (revised edn), London: Penguin Books, 1968,

<sup>74</sup> H. P. Kendall, *History of Whitby Abbey*, Whitby: Horne and Son Ltd. 1932, p. 89.

<sup>75</sup> Charlton, *op cit*, p. 354.

<sup>76</sup> Russell, *op cit*, p. 513.

<sup>77</sup> White, *op cit*, p. 55.

school was set up and other houses of the order established at home and overseas.<sup>78</sup>

The town of Whitby, with a population of around 12,000, was therefore served by six Anglican places of worship during the period of the study and every style of churchmanship was represented. In Anglican circles Whitby was seen to be a place which exercised a considerable degree of independence in the Diocese of York, especially during the period when Canon George Austen (1839 – 1933) was Rector from 1875 – 1925.<sup>79</sup> Malcolm Barker wrote that:

The Archbishop of York (then Canterbury), William Temple, said of Austen that 'Whitby was his Kingdom'.

His attitude to other churches is illustrated by an incident when Salvation Army General William Bramwell Booth was asked to lead prayers in the town at a public meeting and Canon Austen stood up and proclaimed, 'I alone pray in Whitby'.<sup>80</sup> This sense of the Anglican churches in Whitby being set apart from the other denominations was evident during the period of the study.<sup>81</sup> It was only in the latter stages that there was evidence of cooperation beginning to develop. In country parishes with Methodist chapels in them the situation was similar and often depended on the relationship between the vicar and Methodist minister. However, with the normal period of stationing for Methodist ministers being three years, there was little time for personal relationships to be formed and develop. During the period of the study the ecumenical movement was not well developed as far as Anglicans were concerned, although during the Second World War there was evidence of increasing contact.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> R. Barker, *The Whitby Sisters: A Chronicle of the Order of the Holy Paraclete 1915 – 2000*, Whitby: Order of the Holy Paraclete, 2001.

<sup>79</sup> After being appointed as Chancellor of York Minster he expected to be addressed as 'Chancellor Austen'.

<sup>80</sup> M. Barker, *Essence of Whitby*, p. 42.

<sup>81</sup> Interviewee 4 recalled an Anglican clergyman refusing to give her communion in hospital 'because I was a Methodist I was beyond the pale'. (06/04/09)

<sup>82</sup> Field, *op cit*, 'Relations with the Church of England had become exceptionally strained during this period', p. 86.

Roman Catholicism was not crushed in country areas by the Reformation and Catholic priests were able to enter by the coastal creeks and villages which were also used for smuggling.<sup>83</sup> A notable Roman Catholic priest of that era was Father Nicholas Postgate who was arrested in 1668 and subsequently hanged in York. However, in Whitby itself Catholicism was not strong. A chapel was opened in 1805, to be replaced by the much larger St.Hilda's Church in 1867.<sup>84</sup> There was also a school on the East Side with its own chapel in which mass was said.<sup>85</sup> The Roman Catholics do not feature in this study as they functioned independently from the other churches at this time.

There was a strong Dissenting tradition in Whitby. The Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers) was established in the town following a visit by George Fox (1624 – 1691) in about 1654.<sup>86</sup> They made a considerable contribution to the development of the town as shipbuilders, ship owners and in banking.<sup>87</sup> There were also Independent congregations in the town although Charlton stated that 'they were never considerable enough to form a congregation at Whitby before the year 1695.'<sup>88</sup> In George Young's history of Whitby, published in 1817, they are referred to as the 'old Presbyterian' congregation but he stated that there was also a 'new Presbyterian' congregation adding, 'the two congregations, however, are not the same denomination'.<sup>89</sup> The 'old Presbyterian' congregation eventually became a Unitarian one.<sup>90</sup> In 1770 an Independent congregation was established as a result of a dispute among the Methodists and one of the two leaders, James Brownfield, a Methodist assistant, was involved in setting up a new church.<sup>91</sup> Although Charlton was an Anglican he approved of the Independents and

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<sup>83</sup> M. P. Ventress, *A Little about Littlebeck: A Biographical Glimpse of the Past*, Littlebeck: Monica Ventress, 2009, p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Russell, *op cit*, p. 513.

<sup>85</sup> Whitworth, *op cit*, p. 62.

<sup>86</sup> Charlton, *op cit* p. 349.

<sup>87</sup> R. Barker, *Whitby North Yorkshire: An Extraordinary Town*, Pickering: Blackthorne Press, 2007, p. 94.

<sup>88</sup> Charlton, *op cit*, p. 350.

<sup>89</sup> G. Young, *History of Whitby and its Abbey*, Whitby: Clark and Medd, 1817, Vol. 2, p. 619.

<sup>90</sup> The Unitarians rejected the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and saw God as one. These views were widely held among old English Presbyterian congregations.

<sup>91</sup> Charlton, *op cit*, p. 351.

Methodists because they performed services in a 'decent and orderly manner' and encouraged orderly and industrious behaviour. A notable and, to some extent notorious, Whitby Unitarian minister was the Rev Haydn Williams who from 1888 to 1910 was regarded as a strong, if tempestuous, supporter of the poor and downtrodden. He was a contrast to his contemporary, Canon George Austen, and frequently in dispute with him, denouncing him publicly as 'a thief and a plunderer'. Williams regarded Whitby as 'cliquily caddish' with servile tradesmen and unjust magistrates.<sup>92</sup>

During the period of the study there was a degree of cooperation between the Methodists and the nonconformist denominations, through a Free Church Council, over such matters as seasonal evangelism, temperance and Sabbath observance. There was less contact with the Anglicans and the 'church/chapel' divide remained considerable. The Methodist churches formed one part of a rich local denominational ecology and one in which there was some competition for members and supporters in an area with, between the years 1931 and 1951, a combined urban and rural population of no more than 21,000 people

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide an overview and analysis of the context in which the process of Methodist Union took place. The town and the surrounding countryside had developed a strong local culture based upon its geographical location, topography, occupational and economic factors and religious traditions. Within this local culture, characterized by a degree of isolation and independence, existed distinct occupational subcultures based on farming, seafaring, fishing and other local industries together with an expanding leisure industry. There also existed such groups as shopkeepers and trades-people, solicitors, bank employees, railway workers and school teachers. The area attracted retired people, including ministers of religion, who had chosen to settle in the town and surrounding villages. Of particular significance in Whitby were the cultural and social divisions associated with the East Side and the West Side, together with the

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<sup>92</sup> M. Barker, *Essence of Whitby*, p. 120.

changes that were taking place as a result of new housing, especially on the Helredale council estate. In the chapter that follows, the Methodist history of the area will be discussed to show its influence on the process of Union.

## Chapter 4 Methodism in Whitby

### Introduction

Chapter 3 provided the geographical, economic and general religious context for the study, emphasising those features of relevance to the development and character of 'Whitby Methodism'. The purpose of this chapter is to give an outline of the origins and development of Methodism in the Whitby area. This is important for understanding the relationships between the Wesleyan Methodists and the Primitive Methodists as both looked to their origins not only in relation to their broader denominational history but also in terms of their local history and traditions. This was highlighted by the fact that the Primitive Methodists celebrated their local centenary in 1921 and in 1938 there were the celebrations of Methodism's bicentenary, which included a strong local element. The local history of Methodism, including its inter-relationship with the local 'social geography', was an important element in the culture of both the Wesleyan Methodists and the Primitive Methodists and therefore is a factor to take into account when considering how they approached Union and circuit amalgamation.

### The Methodist Movement

It is not the purpose of this study to cover in any detail the origins of the Methodist movement in eighteenth-century Britain which is a complex and somewhat contested area.<sup>1</sup> Methodism was itself a part of a wider evangelical movement in the eighteenth-century and has been the subject of attention elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> In 1868 James Miall wrote that the term 'Methodist' was not a new one, for it had been already applied to other Nonconformists

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<sup>1</sup> H.D Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, (3<sup>rd</sup> edn), London: Epworth Press, 2002, pp. 171 – 180; J.D.C. Clark, 'The Eighteenth Century Context: Changes in the Received Model of the Eighteenth Century' in W.J. Abraham and J.E. Kirby, *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 3 – 29. See also R.P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism*, Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989, Chapter 3, The Search for the 'real' John Wesley, pp. 46 – 62.

<sup>2</sup> R.Davies, G.Rupp,( eds), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, London: Volume 1, 1962; W.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman and G. Ayres, (eds), *A New History of Methodism*,(2<sup>nd</sup> edn), London: Hodder and Stoughton, Vol.1, 1910; J.M. Turner, *Wesleyan Methodism*, Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2005; B.W.Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn), London: Epworth, 2010,

as 'an epithet of satire and scorn, although it has since become one of respect and honour'.<sup>3</sup> John and Charles Wesleys' over-simplified public account of the origins of Methodism can be found in the minutes of the Conference held in Manchester on August 20<sup>th</sup> 1765:

Q. What was the rise of Methodism, so called?

A. In 1729, my Brother and I read the Bible: for Inward and Outward Holiness is therein: followed after it and incited others to do. In 1737 we saw 'This Holiness comes by Faith'. In 1738 we saw 'We must be justified before we are sanctified'. But still Holiness was our Point, Inward and Outward Holiness. God then thrust us out, utterly against our Will, to raise an Holy People.<sup>4</sup>

In organizational terms John and Charles Wesley's 'Methodist' contribution to the evangelical movement was characterised by open-air preaching combined with the formation of disciplined 'Societies', themselves divided into 'Classes' or 'Bands' for spiritual and devotional nurture as well as for pastoral oversight and discipline.<sup>5</sup> Andrew Goodhead argued that it was the Class, which offered 'a small, highly effective, experiential group meeting' that "was the crown of the first Methodists' experiential lives'.<sup>6</sup> It was these organizational features that distinguished the Wesley's Methodism from 'methodism' in its wider sense.<sup>7</sup> The development of 'Circuits' provided a system of territorial coverage.<sup>8</sup> The theological position was Arminian, in that human free will was not believed to be incompatible with God's sovereignty, in contrast with those who followed Calvinistic doctrines.<sup>9</sup> Their original intention was that this was to be a movement within the Church of England

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<sup>3</sup> J.G. Miall, *Congregationalism in Yorkshire: A Chapter of Modern Church History*, London: John Snow and Co., 1868, p. 135.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes etc. Manchester, August 20<sup>th</sup> 1765, p 9, Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society, Box Ra-Si.

<sup>5</sup> R. Waller, *John Wesley: A Personal Portrait*, London: SPCK, 2003, pp. 53-55.

<sup>6</sup> A. Goodhead, *A Crown and a Cross, The Rise, Development, and Decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in Eighteenth-Century England*, Eugene, Oregon, WIPF & Stock, 2010, pp. 296, 287.

<sup>7</sup> See R. P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism*, Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989, Chapter 1, 'What's in a Name?'

<sup>8</sup> J.Jago and E.Royle, *The Eighteenth-Century Church in Yorkshire: Archbishop Drummond's primary visitation of 1764*, University of York: Borthwick Paper, No. 95, 1999, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Heitzenrater, *op cit*, pp. 22 – 25.



but, when John Wesley ordained two men as presbyters in 1784 for service in America, separation was inevitable, becoming complete after his death in 1791.<sup>10</sup>

### **Methodist origins and early growth in Whitby**

It is possible that Methodism reached Whitby by way of the 'coastal highway' of the North Sea as this was the principal means of travel to and from the port before the coming of the railways and the improvement of roads. Charlton described its coming thus:

The Methodists first rose up among us at Whitby about the year 1750, and kept gradually increasing till the year 1764, when they erected an octagonal meeting house in Henrietta Street, where they ever since continue to assemble, and where Mr William Ripley is the regular teacher appointed by Mr Wesley, who annually visits Whitby as also do many other itinerant preachers, who betimes somewhat ease the burden that is laid on Mr. Ripley's shoulders, and most assuredly perform a meritorious work, if they reform the morals of such as are wicked and profligate.<sup>11</sup>

There were therefore Methodists meeting in Whitby at least ten years before the first visit of John Wesley in 1761.<sup>12</sup> Charlton was not correct in stating that Wesley visited every year, but he made twelve visits between 1761 and 1790. Indeed, Wesley himself referred to reading Charlton's *History of Whitby* in 1779 in which he states that he found 'many curious things'.<sup>13</sup>

Writing in 1907 the Rev John Seller stated that the earliest meeting room of the Society was at the top of Capleman's Yard which ran off Church Street. However, in terms of numerical growth, 'for ten years but little progress was made'.<sup>14</sup> Then in 1760 a twenty- one year old journeyman stonemason from Stokesley, William Ripley, came to the town. William Ripley was born in 1739

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<sup>10</sup> Davies, 1963, *op cit*, p. 129, 129.

<sup>11</sup> Charlton, *op cit*, p. 351.

<sup>12</sup> Russell, *op cit*, records that there was 'small body of Methodists' meeting in Robin Hood's Bay in 1747, p.535.

<sup>13</sup> W.R. Ward and R.P Heitzenrater, (eds), 'Journals and Diaries', VI ,(1776 – 1786), in W.R.Ward and R.P Heitzenrater, (eds),*The Works of John Wesley*,(Vol. 23), Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, p. 137. (Hereafter cited as *Journal*)

<sup>14</sup> J. W. Seller, 'Whitby and its Methodism', in *The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, London: The Methodist Publishing House, 1907, p. 455.

and had been converted at about the age of sixteen. George Vasey noted that:

He was very strict in his observance of religious duties and began to be called a Methodist.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of his religious convictions he 'suffered persecution' and was told 'to leave these proceedings or leave his work'. Hearing that there was employment in Whitby he came to the town and found that there were 'twelve in Society'. He was asked to take a lead and thenceforth 'their number increased considerably'.<sup>16</sup> A plot of land was purchased at the seaward end of Henrietta Street in 1762 for the building of a chapel which could accommodate several hundred people. This building was octagonal in shape with a pointed roof surmounted with a ball.<sup>17</sup> George Vasey wrote:

from this time Methodism began to be powerfully felt as an instrument which God used for the conversion of sinners.

John Wesley made the first of twelve visits to the town on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1761 and preached on the Abbey Plain.<sup>18</sup> He noted in his Journal that he preached on the hill at the top of the one hundred and ninety-nine steps and that, 'the congregation was exceeding large, and ninety-nine in an hundred were attentive'.<sup>19</sup>

Over the course of his visits John Wesley appears to have developed some regard for the people of Whitby, this becoming part of local Methodist folklore. On July 13<sup>th</sup> 1766 he wrote of a vast multitude that was deeply attentive and of how 'a great number attended at five in the morning'.<sup>20</sup> On June 17<sup>th</sup> 1770 he wrote of how he met the bands which made up nearly two thirds of the society and commented, 'their openness was quite surprising'.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> G. Vasey, *Wesleyan Methodism in the Whitby Circuit*, Whitby: Horne and Son, 1861, quotations from pp. 5, 6, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Young, *op cit*, p. 750.

<sup>17</sup> Sellar, *op cit*, p. 456.

<sup>18</sup> Wesley made specific mention of eleven visits in his journal but Vasey gives details of a visit in June 1768 which Wesley covered under a general comment about visiting most of the societies in Yorkshire.

<sup>19</sup> *Journal*, Vol. 21, (1755-1765), p. 331.

<sup>20</sup> *Journal*, Vol. 22, (1765-1775), p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> *Journal*, Vol. 22, (1765-1775), p.235.

He contrasted 'the plain people of Whitby' with 'the elegant congregation at Scarborough'<sup>22</sup> and of his final visit in 1790 he wrote:

In all England I have not seen a more affectionate people than those at Whitby.<sup>23</sup>

When Wesley was visiting the area he generally also preached at the seafaring and fishing village of Robin Hood's Bay before moving on to Scarborough, a typical comment being:

At one I preached in the little square at Robin Hood's Bay and rode on to Scarborough.<sup>24</sup>

Preaching in places where there were sailors was a good way of ensuring the message spread widely.

However, matters did not always proceed smoothly in the Whitby Society. Vesey wrote how, in June 1768, William Ripley had recorded that:

Mr. Wesley, when visiting us in summer stood amazed, and knew not what was the matter with us, that Whitby people whom he so highly esteemed, should seem so flat and dead.<sup>25</sup>

Upon further investigation the cause of this malaise was attributed to people having given up meeting together in small bands. In 1770 there were further and possibly related difficulties when James Brownfield, one of Wesley's assistants, formed an Independent congregation and built a chapel in Silver Street on the west side of the river.<sup>26</sup> In his Journal entry of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1770 Wesley gave his own account of the matter; that Methodists 'went to church' and 'held perfection' and he urged the Society 'to leave him to God and say nothing about him, good or bad'.<sup>27</sup> It appeared that a significant minority of the Methodists left with Brownfield and the membership was reduced from 220 to 160.<sup>28</sup> James Miall gave two other examples of Methodists who, in the same way as Brownfield, formed Independent congregations largely because

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<sup>22</sup> *Journal*, Vol. 24, (1787-1791), p. 93.

<sup>23</sup> *Journal*, Vol. 25, (1787 -1791), p.181.

<sup>24</sup> *Journal*, Vol. 22, (1765-1775), p. 49.

<sup>25</sup> Vasey, *op cit*, pp. 9-10. This visit is not specifically mentioned by Wesley in his journal.

<sup>26</sup> Young, *op cit*, p. 621.

<sup>27</sup> *Journal*, Vol. 22, (1765 -1775), p. 234.

<sup>28</sup> Seller, *op cit*, pp 456-457

they felt closer to Dissent than to the Established Church. Of Brownfield's secession he gave 'doubting the scripturalness of some tenets', as the reason for moving into independency.<sup>29</sup>

William Ripley died in December 1784 at the relatively young age of forty-five. Writing one hundred and twenty-three years after Ripley's death Seller summed up his view of the contribution of Ripley to Whitby Methodism:

The work which this devoted saint did for God and Methodism in Whitby and the neighbourhood will live through all time.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, Ripley was seen as one of the founding fathers of Whitby Wesleyan Methodism.

The cliff face on which the octagonal chapel had been built was unstable and on Christmas Eve 1787 it collapsed and 'eventually disappeared in the waves'.<sup>31</sup> A new chapel containing 678 seats was constructed in Church Street not far from 'the church-stair foot'<sup>32</sup> and was opened, still unfinished, by John Wesley in 1788. By 1813 it was felt that this 'new chapel' was becoming too small to accommodate 'the flourishing state of the society'.<sup>33</sup> However, this was not the only factor. Vasey wrote that in 1774, 'several respectable families [were] attending the means of grace' and that not only was the chapel too small but that 'the most respectable part of the people wished to move to the west end of the town'.<sup>34</sup> This reflected the general upward social shift in the population, including Methodists, from east to the west of the river as the town became more prosperous, leaving a legacy which was still felt at the time of Union and beyond.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> J. G. Miall, *Congregationalism in Yorkshire: A Modern Church History*, London: John Snow and Co., 1868, p. 139.

<sup>30</sup> Seller, *op cit*, p. 458.

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey, *op cit*, p. 115.

<sup>32</sup> Young, *op cit*, p. 621. The expression 'church stairs' was a local alternative to 'the 199 steps' that led up to St. Mary's church.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 621.

<sup>34</sup> Vasey, *op cit*, pp. 17, 27.

<sup>35</sup> Waller, *op cit*, writes of the Methodist tendency to move 'from a working class environment towards a middle-class culture of thrift, probity, respectability and prosperity' p. 54.

On 14<sup>th</sup> May 1814 the new chapel was opened at a location between Skate Lane (later Brunswick Street) and Baxtergate, This provided accommodation for eight hundred in rented pews and two hundred free seats, a capacity sufficient for the regular congregation, circuit events and summer visitors. A Wesleyan day school and Sunday School were established which in 1870 had four hundred and fifty-five scholars and eighty-six teachers. A new church was built on this site in 1891 at a cost of £5,698, raised by public subscription. A major benefactor was Alderman Robert Elliott Pannett, a prominent member of the church. In 1892 the Brunswick Room was opened which, in addition to housing the Sunday School, was intended for wider philanthropic uses. In terms of accommodation and facilities the Brunswick Church and Room were significantly better than those of any of the other Methodist churches in the area.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Seller wrote of the Brunswick Room that it was 'one of the most beautiful schoolrooms in the Connexion'.<sup>37</sup> It is worthy of note that in 1892 a visiting minister, when congratulating the 'friends at Whitby' on the erection of their 'magnificent church' stated that he was 'glad to hear they were going to call it a CHURCH (*sic*) – it was more than a chapel'.<sup>38</sup> When Robert Pannett died in 1920 he left two adjoining cottages to the church to provide room for the building of an organ in the Brunswick Room and £1500 for the construction of the organ itself. He also left £200 in trust for the Brunswick Sunday School library.<sup>39</sup>

The 1788 'Wesley Chapel' remained in use following the move of the main focus of the Wesleyan Methodists from the east to the west side of the river.<sup>40</sup> However, it was built below unstable cliffs and over time became considered unsafe for regular use. In 1901 a new building, Wesley Hall, was erected at the foot of the steps to the old church. The choice of the title 'Hall' was significant in that not only did it distinguish it from the Wesley Chapel but

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<sup>36</sup> The Brunswick Room had a floor of solid oak parquetry, Danzig oak wall panels and ornamental tiling.

<sup>37</sup> Seller, *op cit*, p. 401.

<sup>38</sup> J. Davison, Whitby in the Nineteenth Century, *Streonshalch*, No. 33, Nov 1997, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Whitby Museum, Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society Library, *Will of Robert Elliott Pannett*, Dated 25<sup>th</sup> October 1917

<sup>40</sup> Seller, *op cit*, p 459. After being known consecutively as the Methodist Chapel and Church Street Chapel it was named Wesley Chapel at a trustees meeting in 1834.

is also gave an indication of its nature and function. Although only having seating for 200 it reflected the influence of the Wesleyan 'Forward Movement' from the 1880s onwards, which was concerned with reaching the urban poor, 'Central Halls' were built in major cities.<sup>41</sup> Interviewee 1 recalled:

Wesley Hall always seemed to be more like a mission church, you know, like one of the London missions, that type of worship.<sup>42</sup>

It was located in what had become the poor part of Whitby and functioned as a mission outpost of Brunswick Church with services and the social activities designed to appeal to the people living in that part of the town. Wesley Hall was quite different in character and social composition from Brunswick, which was the situation during the period which is the focus of this study.

In 1821, seven years after the opening of the Brunswick Church, the Primitive Methodists established themselves on the East Side in Whitby, suggesting there were those there who were not being reached by the Wesleyans. The consequences of this will be discussed in the section on Primitive Methodism. (See [Appendix 6](#) for pictures of Whitby town churches)

### **The Whitby Wesleyan Circuit**

The development of the Whitby Wesleyan Circuit was a complex process and need only be dealt with in outline here. When the Whitby Society was formed it was incorporated in the Yarm Circuit and in 1783 Whitby was made a circuit in its own right. In 1791 Whitby became head of a District including Yarm, Thirsk and Barnard Castle.<sup>43</sup> The Whitby Circuit spread along the coast in both directions and outwards into the remote dales and moorland areas around the town. These were mainly scattered farming communities which looked to Whitby as the centre of the hinterland for their produce. In the years 1807-8, the number of members was recorded as 790. Of its

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<sup>41</sup> C. Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism, Conscience of a New Nonconformity*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999, especially Ch.7, 'New Forward Movement, 1891-95'.

<sup>42</sup> Interview 1, 12/03/09.

<sup>43</sup> Whitby retained a District title in the York and Whitby District until a reorganization of Districts in 1956.

members 332 were in the town of Whitby itself.<sup>44</sup> At this time the circuit covered such distant towns as Guisborough and Stokesley in the Cleveland area.

In 1812 Guisborough became the head of a circuit and this reduced the Whitby circuit membership from 1189 members to 608 members. However, by 1825 the numbers had again risen above one thousand.<sup>45</sup> A 'Lord's Day Plan' for 1829 shows services at Church Street, Baxtergate (later known as Brunswick) and the Poorhouse.<sup>46</sup> Outside Whitby itself the plan shows seventeen places where services were held, including small hamlets such as Houlsyke, Ugthorpe and Peak (later renamed Ravenscar). The highest number of members in the circuit was reached in 1835 when there were 1,214 members, of whom 610 were in Whitby and 151 in Robin Hood's Bay.<sup>47</sup> In 1862 the circuit was again divided with Danby, in Eskdale, becoming the centre of a new 'dales circuit'. In numerical terms this gave 767 members to the Whitby Circuit and 267 to the Danby Circuit.<sup>48</sup> As a result of this reorganization the number of chapels in the Whitby Circuit was reduced to ten.<sup>49</sup>

The creation of the Danby Circuit was the last major reorganization of the Whitby Wesleyan Methodist Circuit before Methodist Union. A Circuit Plan for February to April 1885 shows fifteen preaching places and a total circuit membership of 714. Of these 294 were at Brunswick, 106 at Wesley and 111 at Grosmont. The smallest membership was at Newholm and Goldsborough, each with four, East Barnby with seven and Sandsend with eight.<sup>50</sup> In the period before Union other preaching places in small hamlets such as Kettleless, Mickleby and Iburndale appeared and disappeared on the plans.

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<sup>44</sup> Seller, *op cit*, p. 460.

<sup>45</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Appointments of the Wesleyan Methodist Preachers in Whitby from 1769 – 1851.

<sup>46</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Wesleyan Methodist Preachers in the Whitby Circuit, May to October, 1829.

<sup>47</sup> Seller, *op cit*, p. 460.

<sup>48</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Appointments of Wesleyan Methodist Preachers in Whitby from 1769 – 1885, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/1/3, Wesleyan Methodist Whitby Circuit Plan, February – April 1885

The circuit membership numbers as shown on the preaching plans fell from 736 in 1885 to 564 in 1900. By the time of Methodist Union in 1932 services were shown at Brunswick, Wesley Hall, the Institute (formerly the Workhouse), Robin Hood's Bay, Fylingthorpe, Hawsker, Newholm, Briggswath and Sleights, Grosmont, Esk Valley, Littlebeck, Sandsend and Lythe. The full membership was by then 561.

In summary, the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion was well established in the Whitby area and its historical importance was reflected in the fact that its name was included in the 'Whitby and Darlington District'.<sup>51</sup> It was a circuit of considerable variety, encompassing chapels in fishing villages and remote farming communities as well as the town centre Brunswick Church and the Wesley Hall on the East Side. It was a circuit in which there were two ministers stationed in Whitby with a supernumerary minister or a Lay Pastor stationed at Robin Hood's Bay.

### **The United Methodist Free Church**

One of the distinguishing features of Methodist Union in Whitby was that it only involved the Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodists as there was no United Methodist presence in the area. There had been a United Methodist Free Church in Whitby but this did not survive into the twentieth-century and therefore was not involved in the amalgamation of 1907 which had formed the United Methodist Churches.<sup>52</sup> As a denomination they favoured a more democratic approach than that found among the Wesleyans and 'were very suspicious of anything tending to enhance the "status" of ministers'.<sup>53</sup> In this respect they had more in common with the Primitive Methodists than the Wesleyan Methodists.

The chapel had been built towards the end of the eighteenth-century off Flowergate, in the west side of the town, by George Miller, a seaman, using his prize money. This church was variously described as Wesleyan

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<sup>51</sup> Vasey, *op cit*, p. 29. The Whitby and Darlington District was created in 1835.

<sup>52</sup> The uniting denominations in 1907 were the United Methodist Free Church, the Methodist New Connexion and the Bible Christians.

<sup>53</sup> O. A. Beckerlegge, *The United Methodist Free Churches: A Study in Freedom*, The Epworth Press, 1957, p. 105.



Methodist Association, then Wesleyan Reform, then Wesley Free Church and finally as a United Methodist Free Church. However, on the front page of the chapel account book of September 1884 a note was made stating, 'Begun as a Wesleyan Chapel Oct.4<sup>th</sup> 1885'.<sup>54</sup> At the top of the October page were written the words, 'Flowergate Chapel taken over by Wesleyans 4<sup>th</sup> October 1885'. It was at about this time that the grant to pay for a minister was withdrawn. Across the top of the account book page for July 1888 the heading was changed from 'United Methodist Free Church' to 'Flowergate Wesleyan Mission Chapel Accounts'. The weekly offerings themselves show that giving to the church fell considerably between 1890 when it was about £28 for the year, and 1892 when they had fallen to about £14 for the year.<sup>55</sup> A Wesleyan Circuit plan for October to January 1891-92 shows services at the Flowergate Mission at 10.30 am and 6.30 pm each Sunday.<sup>56</sup> In 1892 there was concern that the Flowergate Mission was drawing people away from Wesley Chapel in Church Street and, despite some opposition, the building was put up for sale.<sup>57</sup>

A number of interesting questions are raised in relation to this church. It was an isolated church and not part of a circuit. The only surviving records are the account book and the weekly offering book. The comment about being 'taken over by the Wesleyans' may be a simple statement of fact but it may also convey a sense of disapproval. In terms of location, the chapel was only about a two minute walk from the Wesleyan Brunswick Church, so it might be assumed that this would be most convenient for the remaining members of the congregation. However, given the denominational emphasis on freedom, the new and lavish Brunswick Church and its formal worship might have felt uncomfortable for them. The fact that Flowergate had been designated a Mission could also suggest that the members would have felt more at home at the Wesley Chapel, which by this time, had taken on the character of a mission. It is also not clear why they became a part of the

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<sup>54</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 2/17/1, United Methodist Chapel Account Book, September 1884.

<sup>55</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 2/17/2, Weekly Offering Stewards Book, 1889.

<sup>56</sup> Order of Public Religious Services 1891-92. In *Littlebeck Methodist Chapel 1890 -1990*, facing p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> J. Davison, 'Whitby in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century', *Streonshalch*, No. 73, November, 1997 p. 14.

Wesleyan circuit rather than joining the Primitive Methodists who shared a closer ecclesiological outlook with them, although it could simply have been based on proximity of churches.

At the time of Methodist Union there was therefore no United Methodist church or circuit to take part in the Union locally. The evidence from the offerings accounts suggests that they were relatively few in number and it is possible that some may have transferred their allegiance to the Primitive Methodists or to one of the other nonconformist churches in the town. Given that thirty years had elapse between the closure of Flowergate and Methodist Union, any influence that former members might have had cannot be detected in the records.

### **The Primitive Methodists**

Primitive Methodism was a movement established in the early years of the nineteenth-century that wanted to recapture what was perceived to be the zeal of the original or 'primitive' Methodist movement.<sup>58</sup> Julia Werner stated that:

Like Wesley, the laymen who founded the Primitive Methodist Connexion meant simply to revitalize religion from within the ecclesiastical structure, not to establish a separate denomination.<sup>59</sup>

However the means by which they were doing this met opposition from Methodists who wished:

to preserve the place in the social order which they had so painfully won, and wished the social order in which they had found that place to be preserved at all costs.

Nevertheless, 'there were some in whom the old rebellious spirit smouldered and could be roused to flame'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The formal date for the beginning of the denomination is usually 1810/1811, although popularly it was often regarded as 1807 when the first Camp Meeting was held.

<sup>59</sup> J. S. Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p. 135.

<sup>60</sup> Davies *op cit*, pp. 134, 135.

The foundation of the movement centred on religious gatherings known as 'Camp Meetings', an idea with its origins in the frontier field preaching of North America, influenced by the flamboyant American Methodist preacher Lorenzo Dow (c.1778–1834). These meetings, with a strong emphasis on prayer, encouraged the full involvement of the people and democratic participation as opposed to tight control by preachers.<sup>61</sup> The methods adopted were 'thoroughly revivalistic'.<sup>62</sup> Joseph Ritson argued that:

it was the Camp Meeting which gave the distinctive character as well as the permanence to the religious movement out of which it sprang. Over a wide area it made the revival known and invested it with an element of romance which hitherto had been lacking.

Ritson went on to claim that 'to find the origin of Primitive Methodism we must go to the moorland' and the first English Camp Meeting took place on a rugged outcrop in Staffordshire called Mow Cop on Whit Sunday, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1807.<sup>63</sup> The leaders of the movement were Hugh Bourne (1772 – 1852) and William Clowes (1780 – 1851), both of whom were Methodists. However, in the age following on from the French Revolution in 1789 there was among the leaders of Methodism considerable nervousness about such seemingly uncontrolled 'democratic' and possibly radical gatherings and that they would be misconstrued by the authorities and lead to reprisals affecting the whole movement. As a result Hugh Bourne was expelled from Wesleyan Methodism in 1808 by the Burslem Quarterly Meeting and William Clowes in 1810.

It was William Clowes who brought Primitive Methodism to the north east of England making Hull his centre and from there setting out on his missions to the north.<sup>64</sup> As a result of his efforts:

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<sup>61</sup> G. Milburn, *Primitive Methodism*, Epworth Press, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> H.B. Kendall, 'The primitive Methodist Church and the Independent Methodist Churches', in W.J.Townsend, H.B. Workman and George Ayers, *A New History of Methodism*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909, p. 561.

<sup>63</sup> J. Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism*, London: Epworth, 1909, pp. 11, 12.

<sup>64</sup> At the time of writing there still exists in Hull a small Primitive Methodist circuit of chapels that did not take part in the 1932 Union.

the Hull Circuit... extended from Carlisle in Cumberland to Spurn in Holderness, an extent of more than two hundred miles'.<sup>65</sup>

Much of this area subsequently became a part of the enormous Sunderland District. Kendall described how, as Clowes travelled from Scarborough to Whitby, the fishermen of Robin Hood's Bay

'got wit' that a 'Ranter preacher' was amongst them and Clowes was fain to preach in three houses opening into another.<sup>66</sup>

This assembly, he said, was 'packed with people'.

In its early stages Primitive Methodism tended to attract those who were not being reached by other denominations including, by this time, the Wesleyan Methodists.<sup>67</sup> J.M. Turner pointed out that 'Primitive Methodism appealed often to a somewhat lower stratum of the population'.<sup>68</sup> Kenneth Lysons also noted that:

In its first fifty years, and for some time afterwards, Primitive Methodism was the nonconformist body that had the greater attraction for the poorer and working classes.<sup>69</sup>

These included farm workers, miners and, on the coast, fishing communities, people who were generally regarded as at the bottom of the social scale or were regarded as 'cultural outsiders'.<sup>70</sup> Lysons pointed to its appeal to those engaged in work which was dangerous and with a high mortality, certainly the case with fishing.<sup>71</sup> Each of these occupations had a degree of what Turner described as 'social homogeneity' but they were set within a rapidly

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<sup>65</sup> Ritson, *op cit*, p. 114.

<sup>66</sup> H.B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, London: Edwin Dalton, 1907, Vol. 2, p. 108.

<sup>67</sup> K.D.M. Snell and P.S.Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 136.

<sup>68</sup> J.M Turner, 'From Connexion to Denomination – Two Case Studies: Wesleyanism 1791 – 1850 and primitive Methodism 1807 – 1932', in J.M. Turner, ed, *Conflict and Reconciliation; Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England 1740 – 1982*, London: Epworth Press, 1985, p 58: See also Snell and Ell, *op cit*, p.139, 141.

<sup>69</sup> K. Lysons, *Primitive Methodism: Primitive Methodism from Macro and Micro Perspectives*, Buxton: Church in the Market Place, 2001, p. 28.

<sup>70</sup> Hempton, *op cit*, p. 31.

<sup>71</sup> Lysons, *op cit*, p. 29.

changing economic and social environment. Deborah Valenze argued that within this context a function of Primitive Methodism was to re-create 'the world of cottage industry, familiarity and household unity'.<sup>72</sup> However, by the time of Methodist Union many of these characteristics had been considerably weakened and, as the study will show, there were some Wesleyan Methodists who had more in common with Primitive Methodists in terms of social origins and style of worship than they had with other Wesleyans.

In his book on northern Primitive Methodism, Patterson gave an account of the first visit of William Clowes to Whitby on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1821, including the comment that 'it is bleak in wintry weather, and that was the season Clowes began his campaign'. He stated that 'some of the baser sort endeavoured to create a disturbance', a not uncommon happening when Ranter preachers came to town, but he was protected by the good offices of the Chief Constable who Clowes had met in York. On Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> February 1821 he formed a Society in the town and Patterson stated that 'the work broke forth like a mountain torrent' and that 'since the commencement of 1821 an organised primitive Church has existed in Whitby'.<sup>73</sup>

The first Primitive Methodist place of worship was an unused school building in Church Street and in 1835 a Sunday School was established. By 1841 numbers had grown to three hundred and the chapel was rebuilt and expanded to accommodate them and Patterson commented that:

in what was recently called a dismal and dilapidated place many souls 'started for the Kingdom', and a large number of young people were influenced for good in the Sunday School.<sup>74</sup>

This was the period when herring fishing was building up and fish curing houses had been erected in 1833.<sup>75</sup> The visiting Cornish fishermen who followed the herring shoals around the coast would have included members of the Bible Christian movement. The Bible Christians were formed in the village of Shebbear in North Devon in 1815 for similar reasons as the

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<sup>72</sup> Valenze, *op cit*, p. 176.

<sup>73</sup> Patterson, *op cit*, p. 33, 34.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34.

<sup>75</sup> Tindale, *op cit*, p. 79.

Primitive Methodists had emerged in the Midlands and the North. They shared many of the same characteristics as the Primitive Methodists including a desire to return to evangelical roots, fervent open-air preaching and the use of men and women preachers. In 1803 the Wesleyan Conference had 'turned its face' against using women preachers, despite John Wesley's willingness to use them.<sup>76</sup> When visiting Whitby, the Cornish fisherman attended the Primitive Methodist chapel and John Tindale wrote of how, after failing to catch fish for a number of days, the Cornishmen:

decided to hold a prayer meeting in the Old Primitive Methodist Chapel in Church Street to pray for fish. It is a remarkable fact that when next the boats went fishing they secured abnormal catches.<sup>77</sup>

A person who had attended the service spoke of his amazement as he saw the heavily laden boats entering the harbour. Tindale also recounted how a number of the Cornishmen took a Sunday afternoon service in one of the village chapels and that they were:

vehement in their audible ejaculations of Hallelujah, Praise the Lord and such like punctuations during prayers.<sup>78</sup>

However, after some poor catches towards the end of the nineteenth-century, the visits of the Cornishmen to Whitby diminished. The link between the fishing community and Primitive Methodism was a feature of the early years of its development. Kendall had noted that:

Religion, in the form of Primitive Methodism, suits the fishermen well, and the fisherman at his best has done Primitive Methodism infinite credit.<sup>79</sup>

By the time of Methodist Union the links with fishing had weakened, partly as a result of the decline of the fishing industry, but also as part of the loss of fisher folk from the congregations as a result of more secular lifestyles. Nevertheless, from an emotional point of view, Whitby Primitive Methodism retained a strong sense of this aspect of its heritage. A good example was

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<sup>76</sup> Milburn, *op cit*, p. 14.

<sup>77</sup> Tindale, *op cit*, p. 82.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 82.

<sup>79</sup> Kendall, *op cit*, p. 107.

the annual 'Harvest of the Sea' services when the Church Street chapel was decorated with fishing nets, crab and lobster pots, model cobbles and keel boats, anchors and with a ship's wheel and navigation lights in the pulpit.<sup>80</sup>

With the development of the Fishburn Park district in the mid-nineteenth – century there was scope for opening a new chapel. Fishburn Park was at some distance and 'across the river' from the Primitive Methodist chapel in Church Street. The *Whitby Times* of 11<sup>th</sup> May 1866 stated:

For some time past the want of a place of worship in this newly made and thickly populated neighbourhood, has been felt and talked about. The Primitive Methodists, liberally aided by Mr. S Horner, have succeeded in raising a neat and commodious edifice, which will be opened for services Sunday next...<sup>81</sup>

The chapel had seating for 320 people and cost a little over £800.<sup>82</sup> At the opening of the chapel it was stated by the chairman:

Some persons might regret that the Primitive Methodists should have built it, but as pure a Gospel would be preached in it as in any place of worship in the town.<sup>83</sup>

It is not clear who these 'some persons' were but the reference to the preaching of 'as pure a Gospel' as at any other place of worship suggests it is aimed at other Christians, possibly the Wesleyans with their Brunswick Church only a short walk away. Until 1910, when a Primitive Methodist chapel was opened there, Fishburn Park Chapel also served the village of Ruswarp which could be reached in about thirty minutes by a direct footpath across the fields. (See Appendix 2 town map, D 4/5)

A new Primitive Methodist chapel was opened in 1903 in Church Street to replace what then became referred to as 'the old chapel'. Patterson commented:

When the old members left it in July 1903, for handsome and up-to-date premises in Church Street (erected at a cost of

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<sup>80</sup> See Tindale, *op cit*, p. 83 for photograph of chapel interior decorated for the Harvest of the Sea services.

<sup>81</sup> *Whitby Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> May, 1866.

<sup>82</sup> *Whitby Gazette*, 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1865.

<sup>83</sup> *Whitby Gazette*, 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1866.

£4,056), hallowed memories and associations would fill their minds.<sup>84</sup>

A description of the chapel in the *Whitby Gazette* of 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1902, stated that the new chapel consisted of a spacious entrance hall with two staircases leading to the gallery and that the ground floor seated about 200 people with a further 200 seated in the gallery.<sup>85</sup> In internal design it resembled the Wesleyan Brunswick church of 1891, but on a considerably smaller scale. However, the style of building was much plainer than the 'builders' gothic' of Brunswick and had less lavish accommodation. Writing in 1909 of both the Church Street and Fishburn Park chapels, Patterson commented:

The responsibilities of both places are not light, but the members – particularly the women – work with courage and sacrifice.<sup>86</sup>

The significance of the role of women in the spiritual, social, economic and cultural life of the chapels and circuits will be expanded upon later.

### **The Whitby Primitive Methodist Circuit**

Whitby was made a circuit in the Connexional year 1823–1824. Shortly afterwards it was united with Guisborough to form 'The Whitby and Guisborough Union Circuit'.<sup>87</sup> The Lord's Day Plan covering the months December 1824 to February 1825 shows 26 preaching places covering an area extending from Guisborough in the north to Robin Hood's bay in the south, a distance of about thirty miles.<sup>88</sup> Twenty preachers are shown, together with five exhorters and two prayer leaders. There were also week night meetings at each location. This circuit was then divided and a Whitby Circuit preaching plan for April to July 1844 shows a much smaller circuit with nine preaching places including Staithes and Robin Hood's Bay.<sup>89</sup> In Whitby the first of the three services of the day was shown as 'open air', camp meetings were planned and there was a programme of week night

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<sup>84</sup> Patterson, *op cit*, p. 34.

<sup>85</sup> *Whitby Gazette*, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1902.

<sup>86</sup> Patterson, *op cit*, p. 35.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35.

<sup>88</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Primitive Methodist Preacher's Plan of the Whitby and Guisborough Union Circuit, 1824 – 25.

<sup>89</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Primitive Methodist Preachers' Plan, Whitby Circuit, 1844.



meetings. In 1824 the Primitive Methodist Conference had divided the Connexion into four Districts – Tunstall, Nottingham, Hull and Sunderland, the latter containing the new Whitby Circuit. Later, further Districts were created and, in 1885, Whitby became a part of the Darlington and Stockton District.<sup>90</sup>

A particular feature of Primitive Methodism was that it provided opportunities for a wide range of people to take on the responsibilities of chapel and circuit and this included the use of women preachers. In 1818 one in every five preachers in the connexion was a woman.<sup>91</sup> One of these women preachers in the Whitby Circuit became something of a celebrity. This was Mary Porteous (c.1783–1861) who originally had been a Wesleyan but as a result of hearing the preaching of Primitive Methodists, felt that she herself was called to preach. Barber described her as:

A woman of parts, she had qualities of brain and heart that made her quite an exceptional preacher.<sup>92</sup>

She first became a local preacher and then an itinerant arriving in the Whitby Circuit in 1826. Patterson wrote that:

Crowds attended the ministry of Mrs. Porteous; and her ability as a preacher, her constant fellowship with God, and her passion for souls contributed largely to the financial and spiritual improvement of the circuit.<sup>93</sup>

By 1905 the circuit consisted of six chapels. These were Church Street, Whitby (100 members), Fishburn Park, Whitby (53 members), Danby End (4 members), Houlsyke (7 members), Goathland (17 members) and Castleton (18 members), giving a circuit membership of 199 in total. In terms of preachers there were twenty listed, one of whom was a woman, Sister Annie.

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<sup>90</sup> The Sunderland Circuit was divided into three Districts – Sunderland and Newcastle (17, 268 members), Darlington and Stockton (11,012 members) and Carlisle and Whitehaven (3,491 members). The numbers are as reported to the 1908 Conference and given by Patterson, *op cit*, p. 382.

<sup>91</sup> Werner, *op cit*, p. 142

<sup>92</sup> Barber, *op cit* p. 108.

<sup>93</sup> Patterson, *op cit*, p. 35.

In addition there were two prayer leaders and nineteen 'Auxiliaries'.<sup>94</sup> This was the term used for visiting preachers, including four ordained ministers from as far afield as Manchester, Chester-le-Street, Darlington and Hull. In 1905 there were two ordained ministers stationed in the circuit, the superintendent being Edward W. Challenger (1871 – 1959), who again returned as superintendent from 1937 – 1942, retiring there as an active supernumerary minister. He thus played a significant part at the time of circuit amalgamation in 1944 and beyond.

A plan for 1913-14 shows that number of chapels had increased by one, to seven, with the opening of Ruswarp chapel in August 1910.<sup>95</sup> This met the needs of those living in Ruswarp which is reflected in the fact that the membership at Fishburn Park had fallen to forty. The total circuit membership had declined to 187. This was before mobilisation for the First World War could have had an effect on circuit numbers. Seventeen preachers were listed including a 'Sister Kate, Chester'. There were seven prayer leaders of whom three were women and thirty 'Auxiliaries' of whom two were women.

The preaching plan shows a full range of activities including class meetings and a Christian Endeavour group for young people. A number of lectures and musical activities were also planned, as well as the normal round of bazaars and chapel anniversaries. It is not possible to know how many adherents and 'hearers' attended on a regular basis but as a rough guide Brash suggested a ratio of about three adherents for every member.<sup>96</sup> This would not necessarily include summer visitors or the much wider community support for bazaars, chapel and Sunday School events.

This then, was the position immediately prior to the disruption caused by the First World War. Storm Jameson mentions 'Danesacre' (Whitby) Primitive Methodism in one of her novels. In it a character describes his upbringing

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<sup>94</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Primitive Methodist Church, Whitby Circuit Plan, July – September, 1905.

<sup>95</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Primitive Methodist Church Whitby Circuit Plan, October 1913 to January 1914.

<sup>96</sup> W.B. Brash, *Methodism*, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1930, p. 178.

and comments that his parents were Primitive Methodists. Asked if this is a sect he replies 'By God it is. They were strict, my God they were strict!'<sup>97</sup> Although this may reflect the views of some, it does not correspond to any great extent with the evidence that emerged in the study of chapel life and culture in the twentieth-century.

### **The strength of Methodism in Whitby in the mid-nineteenth century**

The Religious Census of 1851, which gathered the seating capacity and attendance on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March of that year, gives an indication of the relative strength of Methodism in Whitby in the mid-nineteenth-century. The total attendance, across three possible services, for the Wesleyans was 2188, the Primitive Methodists 1515, and the Wesleyan Methodist Association 350, giving a total Methodist attendance of 4053.<sup>98</sup> This compared with a total Anglican attendance of 2374, making the Wesleyan attendance alone almost comparable with theirs.<sup>99</sup> The total attendance of the Independent congregations was 1445 and that of the Roman Catholics was 400. This is in accord with Wolffe's contention that 'the overwhelming reality in Yorkshire religion was that ascendancy of Methodism'.<sup>100</sup> However, a degree of caution is necessary because of the effect of attendance at more than one service and it is possible that there were Wesleyans who still attended Anglican worship in the morning and Methodist worship later in the day.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, the census return provided strong evidence of the numerical strength of Methodism in the town churches of Whitby at this time.

### **A vicar's perspective on Methodism**

An interesting perspective on the state of Methodism in the Whitby district during the second half of the nineteenth-century was provided by Canon J.C.

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<sup>97</sup> Storm Jameson, *The Road to the Monument*, London: Macmillan, 1962, p. 133.

<sup>98</sup> Calculated from 'Religious Observance on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1851 in Whitby', in Greaves, *op cit*, p. 161.

<sup>99</sup> This in contrast to counties such as Oxfordshire where the overall sittings for the Anglicans were 67.2% and 32% for Dissenting churches generally. See K. Tiller, (ed), *Church and Chapel in Oxfordshire 1851*, The Oxfordshire Record Society, Vol. 55, p. xxvi.

<sup>100</sup> J. Wolffe, *The Religious Census of 1851 in Yorkshire*, University of York: Borthwick Paper, No. 108, 2005, p.5.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, p.23.

Atkinson. Canon Atkinson was, for forty years, the Vicar of Danby in Eskdale who wrote about many aspects of local life. When he took up his incumbency in 1847 he was told by his patron that:

If it had not been for them [the Methodists] and their influence, religion would have practically died out in these Dales.<sup>102</sup>

This, in part, was attributed to the 'slovenly, perfunctory service once a Sunday' in Anglican places of worship.<sup>103</sup> He referred to the 'admirable organisation' of the Wesleyans and stated that they were still a 'strong and influential body'. He felt that although this would continue, they were 'barely holding their own at present', a state of affairs which he attributed to a loss of 'warmth and energy' which had been replaced in part 'by more secular feelings and objects'.

Neither did Atkinson believe that the Primitive Methodists, who constituted a strong element in the religious life of the parish, make up for what was missing. He attributed the problem to the 'advancing tide of information, knowledge, and especially enquiry' and that in these circumstances the local preacher system would not supply the teachers that were needed. He concluded that:

Men of light and leading do not grow up like mushrooms in remote places like these, and will be slow of growth even where the culture can be and is attended to.<sup>104</sup>

This was because he did not feel that they had the education to counter many of the new ideas that were affecting religion, mentioning specifically Bishop Colenso and his work on the Pentateuch.<sup>105</sup> Canon Atkinson stated that his own approach had been to touch on these matters in his sermons as well as addressing the ideas of those he described as 'free-thinking writers or speakers'.<sup>106</sup> What he was not aware of when making these observations was the massive disruption to society and thought that would result from the

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<sup>102</sup> J.C. Atkinson, *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish*, Leeds: MTD Rigg (Publications), republished 1987, p. 15.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>105</sup> John William Colenso (1814-83), Bishop of Natal, questioned the traditional Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

<sup>106</sup> Atkinson, *op cit*, p. 17.

First World War. It was in the immediate post-war period that progress to Methodist Union took place and in Chapter 5 these developments will be examined in the Whitby area.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has dealt in outline with the origins and characteristics of the two local constituent denominations of Methodist Union. It has noted the contributions of some of the leading personalities of this formative period who, in addition to John Wesley himself, include William Ripley, Mary Porteus and the Wesleyan Methodist benefactor, Alderman Robert Elliott Pannett. In addition, each chapel had its own personalities, history and traditions and some of this material will be drawn upon as part of the study. Methodist culture, together with its various sub-cultures, was the result a complex mixture of elements which exerted considerable influence on the process of Union and circuit amalgamation.

## Chapter 5 Moving Towards Union: 1918 to 1932

### Introduction

The previous chapters have introduced the geographical, economic, social and religious context for the period that forms the main focus of the study. It has been argued that these factors are important in order to understand the process of Methodist Union at the local level. The purpose of this chapter is to characterize Whitby Methodism in the years after the First World War and to analyse progress towards Methodist Union. In this respect the local responses, in 1922 and 1924, to a proposed Scheme for Union, provide a basis for discussion about local views and attitudes. Consideration is given to possible reasons for their responses to the proposed Scheme and also to the priorities of the Churches during this period.

### The Wesleyan Methodist Circuit: the early post-war years

Whitby shared in the huge loss of life among the armed forces in First World War.<sup>1</sup> The Wesleyan Circuit war memorial for 1914–1919 contains the names of thirty-five men in the armed forces and in the merchant navy and one woman, a nurse. Ernest Willis wrote:

The impact of the First World War on Brunswick was shattering. Many men served in the armed forces, some never returned, and those who did return had been through such demoralising experiences that some did not return to church attendance.<sup>2</sup>

As a part of the war effort the Brunswick Room had been opened every evening for the use of soldiers stationed in the area.<sup>3</sup> However, the minutes of Quarterly Meetings show that circuit life had continued its normal routines throughout the war. At the Wesleyan Quarterly Meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1918 it was recorded that the finances were 'most satisfactory' and that there were 458 full members and 32 juniors from the twelve churches of the circuit. However, it was reported at this meeting that there was concern about the

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<sup>1</sup> Whitby itself was shelled from the sea on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1914 with some loss of life. *Whitby Gazette*, 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> E. C. Willis, *Whitby Brunswick Methodist Church: Centenary Year 1991 – 1992*, Ripon: E.C. Willis, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

possible withdrawal of a minister. The meeting acknowledged the comparatively small numerical size of the circuit, but a special case was made for retention:

Though the membership of the circuit is comparatively small, yet there are serious difficulties associated with its working both in regard to its geographical arrangements and the lack of workers, particularly Local Preachers and Class Leaders and in the last twenty-seven years almost the whole Trust property in the circuit has been renovated.<sup>4</sup>

The reduction in membership was discussed at the Quarterly Meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1919.<sup>5</sup> It was noted that in 1915 there had been 541 members, in 1916 there had been 481 and in 1917 there were 457. An additional issue, raised in 1921, was support for village chapels and for those people 'who were bravely doing their bit to keep the little cause going'.<sup>6</sup>

It is likely that the fall in membership was caused by wartime conditions and by 1923 the membership had risen to 489 full members, with 13 on trial and 42 junior members. As far as the relationship with the Primitive Methodist Circuit was concerned it was noted that in response to the Wesleyan Conference the circuit already met the requirement for the interchange of pulpits and that it should be left to the respective superintendent ministers to arrange such further exchanges 'as may be found possible'.<sup>7</sup> The improving situation was noted in January 1925 by the Wesleyan superintendent minister, the Rev. William J. Maund:

Certainly we are slowly recovering from the years of war strain and the consensus of opinion is that Christmas 1924 has been the happiest for many years.<sup>8</sup>

By 1926 the number of members had reached 519, this rise reflecting the growing membership nationally at this time.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/4, WQM, 19/06/18.

<sup>5</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/4, WQM, 18/06/19.

<sup>6</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/5, WQM, 21/09/21.

<sup>7</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/5, WQM, 19/09/23.

<sup>8</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/26, *The Dawn*, Vol.17, No.1, January 1925, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> R. Currie, A. Gilbert, L. Horsley, *Churches and Church Goers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, p. 143.

## **The Primitive Methodist Circuit: the early post-war years**

For the Primitive Methodist Circuit, the records of Quarterly Meetings show the circuit membership remaining at 190 throughout the war years and by 1922 this had risen to 203. Of these 172 (84%) were in the three 'home churches'<sup>10</sup> of Church Street (94 members), Fishburn Park (43) and Ruswarp (35) with the remaining 31 members spread between the isolated villages of Goathland (5), Castleton (18), Danby End (4), Houlsyke (4).<sup>11</sup> The latter three were at a distance of between fourteen to sixteen miles from Whitby, double the distance of the furthest Wesleyan chapel from the town. This created difficulties for pastoral oversight and at the Quarterly Meeting on December 10<sup>th</sup> 1918 it was resolved to write to the minister of the Guisborough Primitive Methodist Circuit 'to enquire if there is any possibility of that circuit taking responsibility for the three societies'.<sup>12</sup> However, nothing came of this and the future of these chapels was not decided until near the time of Methodist Union.

Finances were a recurrent problem and in 1920 the plan *Notes*<sup>13</sup> referred to 'high expenditure' and the need for 'our friends to keep doing their best'.<sup>14</sup> In 1921 the circuit debt was £1790, with Church Street Chapel having a debt of £515 and Ruswarp £200.<sup>15</sup> However the 'Great Centenary Bazaar', held on November 21<sup>st</sup> 1921,<sup>16</sup> raised £426 'owing to the unwearied efforts of our people, who were determined it should be a success'.<sup>17</sup> By 1922 the circuit debt had been reduced to £1269. The comment was made that 'the Circuit was generally prosperous', with evidence of 'considerable spiritual vigour' at

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<sup>10</sup> 'Home churches' was a term used by the Whitby Primitive Methodists themselves to refer collectively the Church Street, Fishburn Park and Ruswarp chapels.

<sup>11</sup> In contrast, 54% of the Wesleyan membership was in Whitby and 46% in the villages.

<sup>12</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, PQM, 10/12/18.

<sup>13</sup> The Notes, included on the Circuit Preaching Plan, acted as the newsletter and a means by which the minister communicated with those reading the Plan. The degree of detail, the content and style varied according to who was the minister.

<sup>14</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 4/2/65, PCP, Oct – Dec 1920.

<sup>15</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 4/2/67, PCP, Apr – June 1921.

<sup>16</sup> As part of fund-raising to commemorate the visits of William Clowes on 11th and 18th February, 1821 in order to liquidate the debt on the circuit's churches. *Whitby Gazette*, 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1921, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/70, PCP, Jan – March 1921.



Church Street, Fishburn Park, Ruswarp and Castleton' and there were 'unfailing indications that our churches are maintaining their spiritual flow'.<sup>18</sup>

Overall, the evidence suggests that from 1918 onwards both the Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodist Circuits were recovering from the effects of the war and, by the mid-1920s, were gaining in membership and in confidence. As will be seen, each was enhancing their property, their cultural life and musical activities. The Brunswick Church, in particular, was benefitting from the legacy of Alderman R.E. Pannett, who had died in 1920. However, both the Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodist circuits were numerically relatively small, with the Primitive Methodist Circuit being one of the smallest in the Darlington and Stockton District.<sup>19</sup> The fact that both circuits were numerically small could have strengthened the case for Union and circuit amalgamation, especially in financial terms and in the use of personnel, and buildings. However, at this stage there was no evidence that it was seen as the way forward by either circuit.

### **The Scheme for Union**

The process of moving towards Union stretched well back into the nineteenth-century. A significant barrier was removed in 1878 when laymen were admitted to the Wesleyan Conference. Further impetus was given by the inauguration of the decennial Ecumenical World Methodist Conferences in 1881. Encouragement also came from the wider ecumenical movement through the International Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. Between 1913 and 1919 more progress was made with the formation, in 1919, of a United Committee of the Wesleyan, the Primitive and the United Methodist Churches.<sup>20</sup> This produced a report, *Methodist Union: The Tentative Scheme* which recommended that the Scheme 'affords ground for

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<sup>18</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/71, PCP, April – June 1922.

<sup>19</sup> Primitive Methodist Church, 1925, *Primitive Methodist Year Book including the Minutes of the 106th Annual Conference*, p. 46. In 1925 the circuit had 216 members, the District average was 443. The Wesleyan circuit had 519 members in 1926 and the average for the Whitby and Middlesbrough District that year was 622 members. (*Wesleyan Conference Minutes*, 1926). There is further discussion of the Districts in Chapter 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Conference Minutes*, 1924, p. 67.

hope that a satisfactory basis for Union can be found'.<sup>21</sup> This went through a series of revisions and versions with strong supporters of Union in all three churches on one side and a well-organised opposition on the other, especially the Wesleyan 'Other Side'.<sup>22</sup> Organized Primitive Methodist opposition was not mobilized until 1924, which was 'more restrained but every bit as fundamental'.<sup>23</sup> Various compromises were made and at the Wesleyan Conference of 1922 it was agreed that, with good will, there were not any obstacles that could not be overcome. However, it was decided that 'no Scheme of Union could ultimately succeed apart from the good-will of the members and adherents of the three Churches concerned' and that time was needed for consideration. The Scheme was therefore to be submitted to the December Quarterly Meetings and Trustees Meetings:

on the understanding that it shall be open to them to discuss the whole question, to pronounce on the advisability of proceeding with the present proposals, to suggest amendments and to report to the next Conference.<sup>24</sup>

The responses were then to be analysed and placed in seven categories including 'For Union', 'For Union on conditions that certain amendments are carried', 'Against the Scheme' and 'Against Union'. There was some confusion between the three Churches over whether the consultation should be on the Scheme alone or on the whole question of Union.<sup>25</sup>

By 1924, named by Brake as 'the crucial year',<sup>26</sup> the three Conferences had reached a position where the Quarterly and Trustees' Meetings of the respective Churches were asked to vote on a revised Scheme for Union, the votes being taken in December 1924 and January 1925 on the question:

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<sup>21</sup> United Committee, *Methodist Union: The Tentative Scheme*, London: Epworth, 1920, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Currie, *op cit*, p. 259. The 'Other Side' was a term applied to the leading Wesleyan opponents to Union but the Primitive and United Methodists also contained some influential opposition.

<sup>23</sup> A. J. Bolton, *The Other Side: Opposition to Methodist Union 1913 – 1932*, Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1994, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Conference Minutes, 1922*, p. 66.

<sup>25</sup> R.F. Wearmouth, *The Social and Political Influence of Methodism in the Twentieth Century*, London: Epworth, 1957, p. 74.

<sup>26</sup> G.T. Brake, *Policy and Politics in British Methodism*, London: Edsall, 1984, p. 22.

Are you in favour of the Organic Union of the Wesleyan Methodist and the Primitive Methodist and the United Methodist Churches on the basis of the Scheme now submitted?<sup>27</sup>

Bolton pointed out the political nature of the Union process and that 'the outcome was governed by political factors'.<sup>28</sup> This was as much a case at the local level as at the level of the Conferences and the local responses give an indication of local views in the years preceding Union. At the time the vote was taken the relative numerical strength of the two Whitby circuits was that the Wesleyans had approximately 480 full members and the Primitive Methodists had approximately 210 full members. Thus, at this time the local Primitive Methodist full membership was around 44% that of the Wesleyans in the area.

### **The Whitby Wesleyan Methodist response to the Scheme**

The minutes of the Wesleyan Quarterly Meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1922 give details of their response to the 'revised Scheme'. The following resolution was moved by a supernumerary minister, the Rev. G.E. Waterhouse<sup>29</sup> and Mr G. Thompson, a Circuit Steward:

This Quarterly Meeting of the Wesleyan Methodist Church rejoices in the growing spirit of unity and concord among the different Methodist Churches but (*sic*) is of the opinion that the adoption of any form of organic union would be premature and would retard and not advance this spirit.

It is further of the opinion that the lack of any spontaneous desire on the part of our people on the one hand and the various divisions on the other do not warrant the Conference in proceeding further with the scheme until increased cooperation, mutual good will and enthusiasm render Union both desirable and practicable.<sup>30</sup>

An amendment was then moved by Mr R. Bell and seconded by Mr T.W. Blantern:

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<sup>27</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Conference Minutes*, 1924, p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> Rev. George E. Waterhouse had been the Wesleyan superintendent minister in Whitby from 1917 – 1920, retiring in Whitby and dying in 1940.

<sup>30</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/5, WQM, 22/11/22.

This Quarterly Meeting having considered the scheme of Union submitted by the Conference to which it gives its general approval agree with the judgment of Conference that there are no obstacles to Methodist Union which with good will cannot be overcome and therefore respectfully request the Conference to continue negotiation.

There was no record of any discussion that may have taken place but the Resolution and Amendment were put to the vote as follows: 'For Resolution 36, For Amendment 11, 'Neutral' 1.'<sup>31</sup> The outcome of the vote shows that three quarters of the members of the meeting were, at this stage, opposed to 'proceeding further with the scheme'. Underlying the specific mention of 'the lack of any spontaneous desire on the part of our people' and the need for 'increased cooperation, mutual good will and enthusiasm' is a suggestion that these factors were felt to be lacking locally. However, the fact that there was support for continuing negotiations from almost a quarter of the members of the meeting, demonstrates that such views were not held by everybody. A resolution, passed unanimously, at the Brunswick Church Annual Meeting of Trustees held on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1923 mirrored that taken on behalf of the circuit at the Quarterly Meeting:

That this Trustees Meeting rejoices in the growing spirit of unity among the various Methodist Churches, but it is of opinion (*sic*), that at the present time, the Scheme submitted is inappropriate.<sup>32</sup>

Unlike the 1922 consultation, the vote taken in 1924 was on the specific question of 'organic union...on the basis of the Scheme now submitted' and it was specified that it should be 'on this direct issue, no amendment being allowed'.<sup>33</sup> In December 1924 the Wesleyan Circuit monthly magazine, *The Dawn*, gave notice of 'the vital question of Methodist Union on the basis of the Scheme sent down by Conference'.<sup>34</sup> This set out in full the relevant words of the 1924 Wesleyan Conference with the recommendation from the Representative Session (ministerial and lay members) that provided the Methodist people desired organic union it was believed that this Scheme

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<sup>31</sup> Wesleyan Methodist Church, *Returns of Quarterly Meetings December 1922*, Bristol Conference, 1923.

<sup>32</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 2/15/16, Brunswick Trustees' Meeting Minute Book, 05/02/23.

<sup>33</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1924, p. 68.

<sup>34</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/26, *The Dawn*, Vol. 16, No. 12, December 1924, p. 1.

'affords the basis of Union which would ensure harmonious working without the sacrifice of any principle vital for Methodism'. It indicated that the vote must be taken on the direct issue with no amendment being allowed. This was an understandable restriction given that it would have been difficult to progress one way or another if large numbers of amendments had been submitted from local level. The view of the Pastoral Session (ministers only) was also included giving its opinion that 'whilst rejoicing in the mutual good will which have led to the proposals now submitted' the opinion is that 'the judgement of the local courts in all three Churches must be ascertained'. There was no editorial explanation, comment or discussion and the only additional statement was:

All are urged to attend the Quarterly Meeting in order to take part in the vote on Union on the basis of the Scheme sent down by Conference.

The attendance at the Quarterly Meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1924 was indeed good, with 61 people voting as opposed to the 48 at the meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1922, suggesting that they wished to register their views on the matter. The minutes recorded:

By instruction of Conference a vote was taken on the question, 'Are you in favour of the organic Union of the Wesleyan Methodist, the Primitive Methodist and the United Methodist Churches on the basis of the Scheme now submitted?'

Resolved that the vote be now taken. The vote was taken with the following result:

For the Scheme: 16. Against: 43. Neutral: 2.<sup>35</sup>

In the January 1925 edition of *The Dawn* there was a brief note that it had been decided to take the vote without discussion and restated the question before giving the result of the vote.<sup>36</sup> This was reported as a sentence in the middle of a paragraph between financial matters and a comment about a vacancy for a minister at Robin Hood's Bay. There was no further comment or discussion in the magazine. The vote showed that seventy per cent of the

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<sup>35</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/5, WQM, 17/12/24.

<sup>36</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/26, *The Dawn*, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 1.

circuit officials were opposed to the scheme with about twenty-six per cent in support, a slight but not significant change from the position two years earlier.

Trustees' Meetings were also requested to vote on the matter and the only records are those of the Brunswick Church Trustees who on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1925 took a vote. It was agreed to take the vote without discussion and eight people were recorded as voting in favour of the Scheme and two against.<sup>37</sup> This raises several questions. The first is the change from the unanimous vote of the Trustees against the proposals of 1922 which were then deemed 'inappropriate' and the second is the strength of the Trustee's vote in favour of the Scheme in 1925 when set against the strong circuit vote against. This could suggest that the 1924 proposals were more acceptable to the Trustees but it still represented a considerable change of heart. The Brunswick vote could suggest that the weight of circuit opposition may have been from the representatives of smaller chapels where it was possible people were more isolated and less informed than those at the main church of the circuit. There is a possibility that the recording of the vote by the secretary was written incorrectly but there is no mention of subsequent correction. There is insufficient evidence to do more than speculate but this outcome may suggest that weight of opposition was not uniformly spread.

### **The Primitive Methodist response to the Scheme**

The first reference to Methodist Union appeared in the minutes of the Quarterly Meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1922 where it was recorded, 'That we apply for 30 copies of Synopsis on Methodist Union' demonstrating that the matter was under consideration.<sup>38</sup> There is less surviving evidence concerning the Primitive Methodist Circuit, with no record of a response to the 1922 consultation. However, at the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1924 the Chairman, Rev. Marmaduke Robinson, submitted the question contained in the 1924 Primitive Methodist Conference Resolution:

Are you in favour of the Organic Union of the Wesleyan  
Methodist and the Primitive Methodist and the United

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<sup>37</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 2/15/16 Brunswick Trustees' Minute Book, 09/02/25.

<sup>38</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1,PQM, 30/8/22.

Methodist Churches on the basis of the Scheme now submitted?<sup>39</sup>

However, it was decided that as the time was 'too brief for discussion' the meeting would be adjourned until Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> December. At this adjourned meeting:

it was resolved that each person present who desires to do so may speak once and that the chairman shall close the discussion.<sup>40</sup>

The above question was re-stated but there was no indication of how many chose to speak or what was actually said. As each person could speak only once it would have been a matter of individuals making personal statements rather than engaging in a discussion of the issues, which was the reason suggested for the adjournment of the meeting of 4<sup>th</sup> December. The outcome of the voting was then given with eight votes cast for the Scheme, eight against it and one 'neutral'. To 'ensure a majority' the Rev. Marmaduke Robinson, in his capacity as Chairman, gave his casting vote which resulted in nine for the Scheme, eight against it and one neutral. There was no further comment or evidence of how people reacted more generally. Neither the vote nor its outcome were mentioned in the *Notes* for January 1925,<sup>41</sup> or in subsequent *Notes*, suggesting that it may not have been a matter of great importance or, possibly, that it was felt to be divisive and better left to rest.

### **The local and national responses compared**

Little direct evidence has survived of what lay behind the responses of the two Whitby circuits as much of what was said would not have been recorded. The Wesleyan Quarterly Meeting response to the 1922 consultation would appear to fall into the category of 'Against the Scheme' (under the sub-set 'Union at present inopportune'). The total number of Quarterly Meetings was 760, with 341 supporting Union and 193 supporting Union and suggesting amendments that were not regarded as essential (534 in total). Whitby was in a category of 89 circuits which were against the Scheme, and a further 85

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 04/12/24.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 09/12/24.

<sup>41</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/82, PCP, Jan – April 1925.

were against Union. Likewise the Brunswick Trustees' Meeting, in opposing Union in 1922, was in a minority. It was also in a minority in its own 'Whitby and Darlington District' in which 196 trusts voted for the Scheme and 61 against.<sup>42</sup>

The responses of both Whitby circuits in 1924 did not reflect those that emerged across the Connexions. Taken nationally the overall vote of the Primitive Methodist officials was 71.2 per cent in favour, of the United Methodists votes 66.1 per cent and the of Wesleyan Methodists 67.1 per cent in favour.<sup>43</sup> This compares with a fifty-fifty split for the Whitby Primitive Methodist Circuit, until the casting vote of the Chairman made it 53 per cent in favour of the Scheme, and 47 per cent against. For the Wesleyans the contrast between the voting patterns at local and national levels was even greater. In the Whitby Circuit the outcome of the vote represented approximately 26 per cent in favour of the Scheme and 70 per cent against it. In proportion this was almost the opposite of the national response which demonstrated 'wide acceptance for the proposals for Methodist Union'.<sup>44</sup> Most of the circuits in the Wesleyan Whitby and Darlington District voted for the Scheme, as did the circuits in the Primitive Methodist Darlington and Stockton District, other than circuits such as Staithes (11 in favour, 23 against) and Barnard Castle (4 in favour, 8 against).<sup>45</sup>

### **Possible reasons for the local responses**

An initial question is whether the fact that there was no United Methodist presence in the area affected the relative percentages of votes in any way. The one church which would have fallen into this category, the Flowergate United Methodist Free Church, had ceased to exist as an independent Society in 1885, becoming the 'Flowergate Mission' in the Wesleyan Methodist Circuit from 1888. As was discussed in Chapter 4, it appeared to have ceased to hold services in 1892 and therefore did not survive long

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<sup>42</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1923, pp. 71, 72.

<sup>43</sup> Currie, *op cit*, p. 273, Calculations based on official returns.

<sup>44</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1925, p. 68.

<sup>45</sup> *The Methodist Recorder*, December 24<sup>th</sup> 1924, p. 4; *The Primitive Methodist Leader*, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1924, p. 845.



enough to be included in the 1907 Union that brought together the United Methodist Free Church, the Methodist New Connexion and the Bible Christians. It is therefore unlikely that its legacy had any significant influence and it certainly would not explain the weight of the Wesleyan vote against Union.

In relation to both the Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodists it is evident that public debate was not encouraged, possibly because it may have been feared that this could be divisive and harmful to existing relationships. This was the case both in the meetings and in the public information about them. However, on such an important matter it is likely that opinions were expressed elsewhere but this is part of the 'underlife', or 'hidden organization', which is less accessible to the researcher. In both circuits the vote was taken by circuit officials who were acting on their own behalf and it is not possible to tell what the membership as a whole of the two circuits thought of the proposals. However, it is unlikely that there would have been significant differences between the membership and the circuit officials on this matter.

There are a number of factors that may help to explain the positions taken by the two circuits. As has been noted, in terms of numerical strength at this time, both denominations were gaining members, with the Wesleyans benefiting from the greater increase. In the October 1926 edition of *The Dawn* the tone of a comment by the superintendent minister gives an indication of the general feeling of optimism among the Wesleyans:

Wesleyan Methodism in Whitby is splendidly equipped for the task. Brunswick Church and the Room adjoining are the admiration of visitors and several have confessed that they have never seen any schoolroom like the Brunswick Room with its fine organ...And where could one find finer equipment for aggressive Evangelism than Wesley Hall?<sup>46</sup>

It is of note that Wesley Hall, on the East Side, with its poorer inhabitants, was singled out for its 'finer equipment for aggressive evangelism', and the west side Brunswick as 'the admiration of visitors'. He then went on to state

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<sup>46</sup> NYCR R/M/W, MIC 1877/5119, *The Dawn*, October 1926, p. 1.

that with the holiday season ending the Class Leaders and Guild Secretaries 'will be busy again making things hum' and that:

We must feel that the organisation can only reach its maximum efficiency if all members thoughtfully and prayerfully contribute in personal service.<sup>47</sup>

This was a period when the Brunswick Church was putting considerable effort and resources into its musical activities and in July 1922 a professionally qualified musician, Mr. Arthur Jackson ARCO, was appointed on a salary of 50 guineas per annum, rising to 70 guineas per annum in 1923.<sup>48</sup> Throughout the period 1922 – 1932 the accounts of the Brunswick Trustees show that the 'Organ Account' represented the largest single item of annual expenditure, ranging from £82 to £89 pounds. In addition to the new organ in the Brunswick Room money was being spent on the renovation of the organ in the church which had originally been built for a 'Church Congress' in York in the 1860s. In *The Dawn* of October 1926 the minister felt moved, perhaps as a result of criticism, to comment on 'the possible doubt in some minds' about the spending of 'a large sum' on the renovation of the organ.<sup>49</sup>

There was also some improvement in circuit finances and in *The Dawn* of January 1925 it was stated that a circuit debit balance of £29-11-9 had been turned into a credit balance of £4-14-10.<sup>50</sup> However, the circuit was normally operating a debit balance, apart from one quarter in 1932 which showed a credit balance of £19-7-4. A suggestion of pressure on the availability of preachers was expressed at the Local Preachers' Meeting for 19<sup>th</sup> September 1924 where it was reported that a request had been received to take responsibility for the Kettleless Mission services.<sup>51</sup> Kettleless was at that time quite a remote settlement on a headland between Whitby and Staithes and services were held in the railway station waiting room.<sup>52</sup> The response

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<sup>47</sup> The choice of the words 'organisation' and 'efficiency' will be considered later in relation to the choice of similar vocabulary by a Primitive Methodist minister.

<sup>48</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 2/15/16, Brunswick Church Trustees' Minute Book, 05/05/22.

<sup>49</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/26, *The Dawn*, October 1926, Vol. 18, No. 10, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 1/25

<sup>51</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, WPM, 19/9/24.

<sup>52</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/26, *The Dawn*, Vol. 16, No 7, July 1924, p. 5.

from the meeting was that as there was no Society there, that as access was difficult and there was a 'scarcity of local preachers in the Circuit' this could not be done, although 'the Brethren' were urged to offer any help they could as individuals.

Despite these pressures it would seem that the Wesleyans saw no strong advantage in Union, or that by uniting with the Primitive Methodists the opportunities for evangelism would have been enhanced. Neither does it appear that they felt a strong enough commonality of doctrine to consider 'organic union' worthwhile. From the wording of the 1922 resolution they were happy at the 'growing spirit of unity and concord' but felt there was 'a lack of any spontaneous desire' for Union. From the Wesleyan perspective the Primitive Methodists had a much smaller circuit which included some isolated chapels in the Danby area, some 15 miles distant from Whitby and with poor road access. In any case, these chapels were located well within the territory of what had become the Danby Wesleyan Circuit in 1862. Within the immediate Whitby area, Church Street Primitive Methodist Church (a new building in 1903) and Fishburn Park (opened 1866 but with some modernisation), duplicated their own provision at Brunswick and Wesley Hall but were not competing sufficiently strongly to be perceived as a serious threat to their own growth, development or financial security.

As has been noted, the outcome of the vote of the Primitive Methodists was equivocal with an even split of opinion until the Chairman cast his vote in favour. The evidence from the *Notes* for the period reflected a similar confident approach to that of the Wesleyans. In the *Notes* for April 1923 there was a report of 'great Missions' conducted on the West Side:

It is impossible to express in words how great has been the spiritual quickening in all our churches...We are more pleased than we can say to welcome so many of our young people into the ranks of earnest Christian workers.<sup>53</sup>

This mood continued in the *Notes* for October 1923 with the report of the purchase of a Smith Connoisseur organ and replacement of frosted glass

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<sup>53</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/75, PCP, April – July 1923.

with stained glass windows at the Fishburn Park church. The *Notes* continued:

The result will make Fishburn Park one of the prettiest and cosiest of churches, and the organ will greatly enrich the musical part of the services.<sup>54</sup>

The choice of words is interesting, not only for what they suggest about the general morale of the Whitby Primitive Methodists during this period, at least as reflected in public statements, but also about how they had moved in their thinking from extolling plainness of buildings and worship to feeling comfortable using words like 'pretty' and 'cosy' in relation to church furnishings and adornments. Indeed, this comment employs the word 'church' rather than 'chapel', which was less common usage among the Primitive Methodists than it was, by then, for the Wesleyans. The theme of church enhancement was continued in the April 1924 *Notes*:

Ruswarp has been provided with comfortable matting and with handsome *fleur de lys* seat coverings which make the Church more attractive than ever. It is now licensed for the solemnization of marriages.<sup>55</sup>

As noted by Maldwyn Edwards, Methodists were moving away from:

the gloomy weight of a religion that gave little colour and light to the present life, but had much to say about the life to come.<sup>56</sup>

However, the October 1923 *Notes* also contained an exhortation to attend services regularly during the winter and 'to make the best use of the opportunities they present for active Christian service'. The winter period was a recurrent theme which will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

In the *Notes* of July 1924 it was recorded that during the past four years the Centenary of the Circuit had been celebrated, that all debts on church buildings had been removed and that progress in spiritual matters was a noteworthy feature of the three churches in the Whitby area. There was a comment on the good number of people attending Sunday evening prayer

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<sup>54</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/77, PCP, Oct – Dec 1923.

<sup>55</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/79, PCP, April – June 1924.

<sup>56</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p. 225.

meetings and thanks to God 'for the signs which tell of spiritual vigour', concluding:

We hope that during the second Century of its existence the glories and triumphs of the Circuit will surpass those of the first.<sup>57</sup>

However, throughout the statements in the *Notes* there was a tendency to balance comments concerning financial matters with exhortations about maintaining the spiritual life of the chapels and appealing to church members 'to put first things first'. Robust expressions of the need for 'spiritual quickening' and 'spiritual vigour' were characteristic of this period. In the January 1925 *Notes*, the period immediately following the vote, reference was made to successful bazaars, harvest festivals and a well-attended mission at Church Street with 'a considerable number signing the Dedication Roll'. There was also a reference to two young Ruswarp men who were 'about to put their hands to the plough as preachers'.<sup>58</sup> The Church Street Primitive Methodist choir was a feature of circuit life and, on special occasions, it sang with the Wesleyan Brunswick choir, as at a Sunday School Convention in 1925.<sup>59</sup>

Although the mood reflected in the public statements of the Primitive Methodists was optimistic there was nevertheless evidence that circuit finances were a source of concern with regular references to high expenditure and the need to raise money. No detailed accounts are available for the period but the impression given in the Quarterly Meeting minutes and plan *Notes* is that Society funds were in a better state than circuit funds. There was a recurrent emphasis on 'efforts', bazaars, 'silver tree events', concert parties and jumble sales which reflected the need to supplement the regular giving of members and that of seasonal visitors. For these activities, 'the ladies' were the mainstay.

Overall, therefore, the evidence suggests that at this stage there was limited local support for Methodist Union. Neither does there seem to have been

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<sup>57</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/80, PCP, July -Sept 1924.

<sup>58</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/82, PCP, Jan - April 1925.

<sup>59</sup> NYCR 1/1/26 *The Dawn*, Vol.17, No. 3, March 1925, p. 1.

much public debate on the issues or evidence of leadership from the ministers one way or another. If underlying theological differences were discussed this does not appear overtly in the records. It would appear that both the Wesleyan and Primitives Methodists felt that there was little benefit for them either in terms of rationalisation of facilities, better use of ministers and local preachers, greater financial stability or in a united witness for mission that could lead to greater overall success than would be achieved working separately. It would not be going too far to suggest that there was evidence of a degree of complacency and denominational introspection.

Further evidence of their desire to maintain their separate identities is suggested by the fact that both circuits engaged in 'marketing' themselves in a seemingly competitive environment. A good example was the distribution of calendar/blotters, sponsored by the advertising of local businesses. The Primitive Methodist example was a single sheet blotter giving the name of the minister, and service times at Church Street and Fishburn Park and stating, 'Our Motto: Welcome'.<sup>60</sup> (Appendix 7) The Wesleyan example was a much more elaborate folder, with photographs of the ministers, the Rev. Francis Bretherton BA and Rev. J. Willoughby Thompson and the President of the 1928 Wesleyan Conference, the Rev. John W. Lightley, MA., BD., D.Litt. The introduction was quite specific about its purpose:

One great feature of the Church life of this town is the influx of visitors in the Summer Season. Many of them will see this Blotter...They may be assured of a very hearty welcome at our Churches.

This folder had several pages giving such information as statistical details of the worldwide Wesleyan Methodist Church and a page devoted to 'Methodist Memorabilia' outlining some key points about Methodism.<sup>61</sup>

Even though the Primitive Methodists had become much closer to the Wesleyans in some respects, as was evidenced by their interest in such things as stained glass windows, matting with *fleur de lys* and choral singing, the theological, social and cultural differences between them remained of

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<sup>60</sup> Author's Collection, Primitive Methodist blotter, c. 1930.

<sup>61</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Whitby Wesleyan Methodist Blotter/Calendar, 1929.

significance. The preoccupations of both circuits show signs of what Israel Galindo characterized as 'the Aristocracy Stage' of congregational development. This includes an appreciation of 'good taste', the comfort of routines and a presumption of success. It also involves becoming 'more guarded in its habits, practices and values'.<sup>62</sup> Such characteristics tend towards organizational homeostasis and to keeping things as they are rather than to taking risks or seeking new ways of doing things. Despite the fact that by the time of the passing of the Methodist Union Act of 1929 the circumstances for both circuits and the external environment were changing, drastically so in relation to the start of the economic depression, the local degree of opposition five years earlier provides some evidence of why the amalgamation of the two circuits was not actually achieved until 1944.

### **Progress towards Union**

There is little evidence of the move to Union in the records of either circuit between the 1924 Vote and 1929, by which time Connexional instructions were beginning to be received about implementation. In 1929 the Methodist Church Union Act was passed in Parliament, the purpose of which was:

to authorise the union of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the Primitive Methodist Church and the United Methodist Church to deal with real and personal and heritable and moveable property belonging to said Churches or denominations to provide for the vesting of the said property in trust for the Churches so formed and for the assimilation of the trusts thereof and for other purposes.<sup>63</sup>

It was an enabling act which did not secure Union but provided the legal framework within which this could take place. Votes were subsequently taken at District Synods and from this time onwards practical steps were taken at circuit level to begin to move towards Union. There was also increasing

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<sup>62</sup> I. Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Discerning Church Dynamics*, Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2004, p. 73.

<sup>63</sup> The Methodist Union Act 1929, in *The Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, (3<sup>rd</sup> edn), The Methodist Publishing House, 1962, pp. 227 – 247.

evidence from the preaching plans of both circuits of greater cooperation in such matters as cross-circuit use of preachers.<sup>64</sup>

### **Developments in the Wesleyan Methodist Circuit**

Although there would no doubt have been informal discussion about Methodist Union, especially when it was clear that it was going to happen, there were no further references to Union in the official minutes until 1929. At the Quarterly Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1929 it was recorded that recommendations in connection with Methodist Union would be deferred for consideration at the June meeting.<sup>65</sup> At the June meeting it was noted that:

Recommendations from the area's Secretaries, District Committee, in connection with preparations for Methodist Union were discussed. Resolved that the Circuit Society Stewards at Brunswick and Wesley (with two other named individuals) be constituted to deal with the matter.<sup>66</sup>

In March 1930 it was reported that the Methodist Union Local Committee had arranged a united Conference for officials and a public meeting at Brunswick on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1930 of the Whitby Primitive and Wesleyan Methodist Churches.<sup>67</sup> However, no records of this meeting have been found.

For ten months there were no further formal discussions of Union. Then on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1932 a special meeting was called, attended by the Chairman of the Whitby and Darlington District, Rev. A. Ernest Guile, in order to explain a proposal that the Whitby Circuit be separated from the Middlesbrough and Darlington District and joined to the York District. It was recorded that:

The proposed addition of certain northern Circuits to the Middlesbrough and Darlington District has resulted in the District becoming very unwieldy. The suggested transfer of the Whitby Circuit would strengthen the York District. Whitby would benefit geographically in its railway facilities and in other ways.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> There had been earlier examples, for instance, Wesleyan Methodist local preachers from the Danby Circuit helped out with services in the Castleton Danby and Houlisyke Primitive Methodist chapels. NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, PQM, 4/6/24.

<sup>65</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/6, WQM, 13/03/29.

<sup>66</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/6, WQM, 29/06/29.

<sup>67</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/6, WQM, 19/03/30.

<sup>68</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/6, WQM, 05/02/32.



It was resolved unanimously that the circuit was willing to join the York District and reiterated the point about it being called the 'York and Whitby District'. The inclusion of 'Whitby' in the title was regarded as important as it had been part of a District title since 1791. The comment that Whitby would benefit geographically and in other ways is interesting in that at the time there were railway lines both to Malton/York and to Stockton/Middlesbrough. The 'other ways' may have been referring to the greater commonality that Whitby had with the coastal resort of Scarborough and the largely rural North Riding of Yorkshire, rather than with what were then the heavily industrialised areas of Teesside and South Durham.

An enlarged 'Methodist Union Local Committee' was appointed at the June 1932 Quarterly Meeting' comprising of the two circuit ministers, the Society Stewards from the Brunswick and Wesley churches and twenty-one others.<sup>69</sup> A report of the Union Committee meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> May was given and provisional arrangements for 'the day of commemoration of Union of the three Methodist Churches', with Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1932, as the day of commemoration of accomplishment of Union. The report included the setting up of a sub-committee to arrange details of meetings.

The final arrangements for the 'Celebration of Union of the Three Methodist Churches' on Tuesday September 20<sup>th</sup> were announced at the Quarterly Meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1932, with the 'Commemoration of Union Day' on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1932. A decision was also taken that as a result of the 'altered circumstances' moves should be made to rename the Wesleyan Circuit as the 'Whitby Brunswick Circuit'.<sup>70</sup> The decision to rename the Wesleyan circuit was reported in the *Whitby Gazette* on 23<sup>rd</sup> September.<sup>71</sup>

The fact that rather than waiting until further discussions had been held about the implications of Union at local level a decision to rename the circuit was taken so quickly may be an indication of their desire to emphasise their continuing separate identity. However, there were some who were talking

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<sup>69</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/6, WQM, 15/06/32.

<sup>70</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/6, WQM, 14/09/32.

<sup>71</sup> *Whitby Gazette*, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1932, p. 8.

about circuit amalgamation as this was alluded to at the Quarterly Meeting on December 14<sup>th</sup> 1932 where it was recorded:

Statements having been made on Local Fusion it was resolved that the Methodist Union Local Committee meet to consider the matter and report to the Quarterly Meeting.<sup>72</sup>

There was no indication what these 'statements' were, or who was had made them, but the tone of what was recorded, and the fact that consideration was needed may suggest an element of controversy. At the very least, the minute implied that someone may have been speaking without authority to make such 'statements'. As will be seen in Chapter 6 there was no evidence of reporting back on this matter in subsequent meetings.

### **Developments in the Primitive Methodist Circuit**

As with the Wesleyan Methodists, following the 1924 vote, a further five years was to pass before Union again appeared in the minutes of meetings. A reference was made to a letter about Methodist Union at the Quarterly Meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1929 concerning recommendations about youth work and it was resolved that the Primitive Methodist superintendent minister would confer on the matter with his Wesleyan counterpart.<sup>73</sup> On 30<sup>th</sup> February 1930 it was noted that a letter concerning Union had been received but there was no indication of its contents and at the meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> May it was resolved to set up a committee to represent the circuit on Methodist Union.<sup>74</sup> Its composition was to be the superintendent minister, the circuit stewards and two representatives from each of Church Street, Fishburn Park and Ruswarp churches.

The operational difficulties concerned with the three isolated chapels at Castleton, Danby End and Houlsyke, have already been mentioned and Methodist Union did offer a solution as to their future. Matters came to a head when all the chapel officers of Castleton stated that they would cease to act on the termination of the circuit plan in June, suggesting serious difficulties, possibly relating to isolation from Whitby. As a response, at the Quarterly

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<sup>72</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/6, WQM, 14/12/32.

<sup>73</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, PQM, 30/5/29.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 27/02/30, 29/05/30.

Meeting on 29th May 1930, it was resolved to 'seek the aid of the Danby Wesleyan Circuit in order to keep the Castleton Church open'. It was also resolved to make an attempt to re-open Goathland Chapel during the months of July, August and September, which was the time of the year when there would be visitors in the area.

The need to rearrange the forthcoming Methodist Union Meeting in order to avoid a clash with the Fishburn Park bazaar was raised at the Quarterly Meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1930.<sup>75</sup> This could illustrate either the relative importance attached to bazaars and Union meetings, or simply that it was easier to rearrange the latter. A letter concerning Methodist Union was received at the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1931 concerned the Spiritual Preparation of Young People showing the importance placed on involving the young in the Union.<sup>76</sup> An announcement was made in the *Notes* for April 1931 that the three Methodist Conferences had agreed unanimously that Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May 1932 should be celebrated as Wesley Day, which fell on Whit Sunday and that 'sermons be preached in all our churches on the vital experience of the evangelical faith'. It urged the coincidence of these anniversaries as an opportunity to:

renew the creative experiences of Methodism, and that these experiences will have a new application to the twentieth century, and raise issues for it as potent as for the eighteenth.<sup>77</sup>

The tone of this joint statement reflects the importance with which Union was viewed as a catalyst for spiritual renewal and mission. The need for renewal at local level was highlighted in that the same *Notes* also made reference to the fact that the Sunday School statistics had revealed a decrease of fourteen scholars and eight teachers:

Our Sunday Schools are passing through difficult times, and we trust that 'ere long prosperity will come to us.

The continuing concerns over of the Sunday Schools of both circuits will be addressed in Chapter 6.

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<sup>75</sup> NYCR, R/M/WH, 1/2/1, PQM, 28/08/30.

<sup>76</sup> NYCR, R/M/WH, 1/2/1, PQM, 28/05/31.

<sup>77</sup> NYCR, R/M/WH, 4/2/106, PCP, April – June 1931.

The matter of District membership at Union still needed to be resolved. On 17<sup>th</sup> February 1932 a special meeting was held so that the Wesleyan Methodist superintendent, Rev. T. Seaton Davies, could explain the proposal that both of the Whitby circuits should become part of a newly constituted 'York and Whitby District'. It was unanimously resolved:

That we agree to the proposal to become part of the York and Whitby District after Union and that the new District bear the name afore-stated.<sup>78</sup>

It is of significance that it was the Wesleyan superintendent minister who was taking the lead in this matter and, as will be further explored later, this was a pattern that became discernible throughout the process of Union and circuit amalgamation.

The future of the Primitive Methodist Societies in Eskdale still needed resolution. At the Quarterly Meeting on February 25<sup>th</sup> 1932 it was proposed that the superintendent minister should meet with:

the friends at Houlsyke to discuss with them the future of their cause in the face of approaching Methodist Union.<sup>79</sup>

If they were agreeable the Quarterly Meeting would sanction their transfer into the Danby Wesleyan Methodist Circuit. The 'Castleton Friends' were also to be invited to this meeting and a similar proposal put to them. Although it was stated that the transfer would be subject to the agreement of the members at Houlsyke and at Castleton, it was unlikely that they could have rejected them under the circumstances and the alternative would have most likely been outright closure. The circuit plans show that the last service at Danby End took place in June 1929 and at Castleton Primitive Methodist Chapel in June 1931. The Houlsyke Society joined the Danby Circuit in 1933.<sup>80</sup> The ability to close these isolated chapels, with a combined membership of around twenty-five, and for alternative provision to be made by the Danby Circuit, was an organizational benefit of the forthcoming Union,

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<sup>78</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, PQM, 17/02/32.

<sup>79</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, PQM, 25/02/32.

<sup>80</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, PQM, 02/03/33.

although it did leave the Church Street Circuit with only four churches, one seasonal, as compared with the twelve churches of the Brunswick Circuit.

Further information about the forthcoming Union was included in the *Notes* for April 1932:

The uniting Conference will be held on Tuesday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, to Saturday September 24<sup>th</sup>. Steps will be taken by the inter-denominational Quarterly Meeting Committee to worthily celebrate this long-looked-for event in our own area.<sup>81</sup>

There was also a statement that there had been a decrease in circuit membership of 10 and that the total number of full members was now 210, with the comment:

The figures reflect the continuing strain through which our churches are still passing.

The final Conference of the Primitive Methodist Church was to be held between 13<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1932, at Grange Road United Methodist Church, Middlesbrough. The *Notes* continued:

It is unique in that it will be the last conference of the Primitive Methodist Church. Many of our friends have arranged to be present at some of the services.

The Primitive Methodist Conference was the first of the final Conferences of the three constituent Churches before Union. At their close each was adjourned to a Uniting Conference to be held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1932 in London. This, together with the final Wesleyan Conference, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 as they throw light both on the aspirations of the leadership and on local responses to it. A united commemoration service was held at Brunswick on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> July with an augmented choir in which the ministers of each circuit participated. A full report, including the King's message to Conference, appeared in the *Whitby Gazette* saying that Whitby had played 'a prominent part in Methodist history in the North'.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/110, PCP, April – June 1932.

<sup>82</sup> *Whitby Gazette*, 'United Methodism: Goal of Fifty Years Attained', 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1932, p 8.

The *Notes* for October 1932 were more detailed than usual, including a section on Union:

By the time that this Plan appears, the Methodist Union will have been consummated. We trust that now it has come into being all Methodists will do their very best to make it not merely successful, but abundantly successful ...*[then are given statistics about the combined numerical strength of the 'New Methodist Church']*...Truly a mighty organisation. But organisation is not everything; power is of greater moment than machinery. Let us see that by Divine Grace, the new machine has plenty of power, to make it abundantly successful in establishing and extending the Kingdom of our Lord. The achievements of the past have been great; there is no reason, except in ourselves why the achievements of the future should not excel those of past years.<sup>83</sup>

Attention was drawn to the local arrangements for the celebration of Methodist Union. These involved a week of prayer, with meetings between Tuesday September 27<sup>th</sup> and Friday September 30<sup>th</sup> at each of the town's four Methodist churches. On October 1<sup>st</sup> there was to be a joint Wesley Guild and Christian Endeavour Rally with a tea-table conference, on October 2<sup>nd</sup> a United Communion service at the Brunswick Church and on October 2<sup>nd</sup> an exchange of pulpits.<sup>84</sup> On the same day a United Young People's Service was to be held at Church Street Chapel in the afternoon. These announcements were followed by the exhortation, 'Please give these services your enthusiastic support'.

The tone and content of these statements from the superintendent minister were worded so as to encourage the membership to embrace Union for the purposes of 'extending the Kingdom of our Lord'. The use of the metaphors of 'organisation', 'machinery' 'new machine' and 'power' are of note. They show that among the metaphors and models applied to the Church as an organization was a mechanistic one and thus had an influence on how the

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<sup>83</sup> NYC R/M/WH, 4/3/1, CCP, Oct – Dec 1932.

<sup>84</sup> The Christian Endeavour was a Nonconformist Christian youth movement of American origin favoured by the Primitive Methodists and the Wesley Guild the dedicated youth movement for the Wesleyan Church. They were thus comparable organizations in each of the churches.

Church and its mission were perceived.<sup>85</sup> Morgan argued that a characteristic of such metaphors is that they lead to an expectation that organizations will operate like machines in a 'routinized, efficient, reliable and predictable way'.<sup>86</sup> The imagery and metaphors employed are of relevance when considering the purposes of Methodist Union and will be discussed further.

As with the Wesleyan Methodists the name of the circuit was changed and at the Quarterly Meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1932 it was proposed 'That the name of the Circuit now be The Church Street Methodist Circuit'.<sup>87</sup> This it remained for a further twelve years.

### **Assessment**

Taken as a whole, the evidence suggests strongly that the movement towards the 'organic union' of the two branches of Methodism in the Whitby area was driven from above and no evidence has been found of any strong pressure 'from below' during this period for such a union. Indeed, the evidence from the 1922 and 1924 votes suggest that the weight of opinion was otherwise. Also, there is little about what such a union would mean in practical terms or, indeed, of what people imagined might be its consequences for them. In the minutes of the meetings of the local preachers of both denominations, at which it might be expected that discussions would take place, there were no mentions whatsoever. However, Union and its consequences are likely to have been discussed in less formal contexts which have not left records. What is seen is that at this stage the two circuits were complying with the decisions taken by their respective Conferences and while 'rejoicing' in 'the growing spirit of concord among the different Methodist Churches' in a general sense, remained unwilling to let this affect the lives of the circuits in any significant manner. It is also by no means certain that they would have known how to proceed in practical terms.

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<sup>85</sup> For instance, the words 'machinery', 'new machine', 'plenty of power', combined with theological concepts such as 'Divine Grace' and 'Kingdom of our Lord' in 'organic union'.

<sup>86</sup> Morgan, *op cit*, p. 22.

<sup>87</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, CQM, 01/12/32.

In terms of communication, that which was 'passed down from Conference' became weakened in the process of passing and could be subverted and delayed at local level. As Kent pointed out:

The negotiators drew back from any attempt to determine in advance what would happen at the local level; there were no teeth to the scheme, and it is difficult to see how there could have been; from an institutional point of view all churches are voluntary associations, you can ex-communicate, but you cannot bind *in*.<sup>88</sup>

At the level of the 'local courts' it was mainly the Quarterly Meetings which needed to respond to the directions of their respective Conferences, but at Society/chapel level the effect could be regarded as minimal, unless amalgamations or closures were advocated. In this respect Methodist organization could be characterized as a 'loosely-coupled system' in that while decisions might be taken by Conferences, and directives issued, the mechanisms for translating these into actions were weak, with considerable opportunities for 'back-pressure' from below.<sup>89</sup> It is also not clear how far reactions at local level were the result of serious division, for instance over doctrinal issues, or how far the result of insufficient planning to deal with the practicalities arising out of Union. As Haysom speculated in the case of Waltham Forest, the local churches:

were probably continuing in the main to pursue activities and policies taken up before Union, and the reluctance to move to amalgamations may be evidence of this.<sup>90</sup>

On the other hand, it would not be fair to conclude that there was no support for Methodist Union or for early circuit amalgamation. As has been noted, there is some evidence of this. However, the voices of those holding such views are more hinted at than clearly heard in the official records, even if they had been more audible at the time.

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<sup>88</sup> Kent, *Methodist Union*, p. 16.

<sup>89</sup> K. Weick, 'Educational organizations as loosely-coupled systems', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 21, pp. 1-19. Although applied originally to educational organizations the concept can be applied to others. An example of a structurally 'tight' organization is a warship in which the commands of the captain are translated quickly into action throughout the organization. Methodism was not, in this respect, 'a tight ship'.

<sup>90</sup> Haysom, *op cit*, p. 14.



The way in which Union was approached and managed at local level was through negotiations between the parallel bureaucratic structures of the two circuits. The setting up of the Methodist Union Local Committee, with representatives from both circuits, was central to this but in practice its function was chiefly to organize the details of the celebrations of Union rather than address the wider implications of what was taking place. As a committee its power was a delegated function of the Quarterly Meetings with all decisions taken there. The superintendent ministers of both circuits had a part to play and there would no doubt have been informal contacts between them. However, as a consequence of itinerancy neither was in a position to have a long-term commitment to leading changes that would have required a number of years to achieve, regardless of what their personal views about Union may have been.<sup>91</sup> Quite apart from the constraints imposed by circuit structures and procedures, their stays were of too short a duration for them to provide sustained leadership for such a significant and complex process.

It is the 'structure' of an organization and its related procedures (e.g. formal roles and responsibilities, means of communication, financial procedures, decision making processes, disciplinary functions etc.) that sustain the organization over time and are significant factors in determining and reinforcing the long-term culture of that organization. This applies as much, if not more, to ecclesiastical organizations as to any other. When discussing the 'agency/structure dilemma' in organization theory, Michael Reed adopted the metaphor of 'opening doors through brick walls'.<sup>92</sup> As potential change agents,<sup>93</sup> the ability of the ministers to deal other than with the mechanics of implementing the requirements of the Conferences was severely limited. The deeper cultural factors based on ecclesiological understandings, denominational values and loyalty to a particular tradition and to particular

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<sup>91</sup> The Wesleyan superintendent, Rev. T. Seaton Davies, was stationed in Whitby from 1931 to 1934 and the Primitive Methodist superintendent, Rev. Ernest Metcalfe, from 1928 to 1933.

<sup>92</sup> M. Reed, 'The Agency/Structure Dilemma in Organization Theory: Open Doors and Brick Walls', in H. Tsoukas & C. Knudsen, (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Organization Theory: Meta-Theoretical Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 304.

<sup>93</sup> The term 'change agent' is used to describe the person or group of people who are charged with bringing about change in an organization, especially where an organization has become entrenched in a particular way of doing things.

church buildings would take a great deal longer to change, as was illustrated by Clark's study in Staithes.<sup>94</sup> If the national leadership's aspirations were to be fulfilled and Union was to open doors through denominational brick walls then the leadership for this to happen would have to come largely from elsewhere.

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<sup>94</sup> Clark, *Between pulpit and pew*, wrote of how even in the 1970s ministers who suggested the closure of one of the two Methodist chapels were heavily criticised by the 'elder statesmen of the chapels'. p. 81.

## **Chapter 6 The 'Whitby Brunswick' and the 'Whitby Church Street' Circuits: 1932 – 1944**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the ways in which Methodist Union was received and responded to in the two Whitby circuits and to indicate the consequences that followed from it. It will consider the relationship between the circuits during this period when they were functioning as separate organizations. The chapter will be particularly concerned with the extent to which the national leadership's aims of Union were pursued, especially in relation to evangelism, in making provision for those moving to new areas of housing and whether adjustments were made in the use of churches and personnel in order to achieve these ends. Through a number of themes it will seek to evaluate in what ways and to what degree Methodist Union made a difference during the period between Union in 1932 and the amalgamation of circuits in 1944.

The chapter is divided into two parts, the first dealing with Union and the social and economic context of the 1930s and the second with the responses of the Methodist churches in the period leading up to amalgamation.

### **Part A, Union and Context**

The Methodist circuits did not exist in isolation and were affected by broader social, economic and political events and trends, as well as by particular local circumstances. These will be examined in some detail, as will be the responses to them. Methodist Union took place during the period of the Great Depression, beginning in 1929, and Whitby circuit amalgamation during the Second World War. In their own ways both were times of crisis. The 1930s was a decade of considerable economic and social change including poverty and deprivation for some, especially in northern industrial areas, but improving standards of living for others in terms of housing, employment conditions and leisure-time activities. Hastings wrote of the 'two

Englands' of the decade, 'the one was getting richer, the other still poorer'.<sup>1</sup> These factors are reflected in the study and will be explored in relation to the life of the two Methodist circuits.

The Whitby circuits were among a majority of circuits continuing to function separately and Rupert Davies pointed out that:

Immediately after union there were 1,362 circuits in England, Wales and Scotland; 115 amalgamations took place before the outbreak of war, reducing the number to 1,233 (in some cases two, in some cases three, were reduced to one).<sup>2</sup>

Consideration will therefore be given to factors that were of special relevance in the Whitby area as well as to those that were likely to be common across other areas where circuits continued to function independently.

From September 1932 the two circuits, the former Whitby Primitive Methodist Circuit (now the Whitby Church Street Circuit) and the former Whitby Wesleyan Circuit (now the Whitby Brunswick Circuit) operated side by side, still with their separate Quarterly Meetings and Local Preachers' Meetings. As has been indicated, the three small Primitive Methodist Societies in Eskdale became part of the Danby Circuit. This meant that the Church Street Circuit became essentially a circuit of town chapels (Church Street, Fishburn Park and Ruswarp), with intermittent seasonal services at the village of Goathland. They could thus concentrate their efforts in a more localised area. The Brunswick Circuit appears initially to have been little affected by the Union itself and, as with the Church Street Circuit, remained principally concerned with managing its own internal affairs and with responding to social and cultural trends.

### **National aspirations for Union and their local consequences**

Writing ten years after Union, Maldwyn Edwards described its achievement thus:

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<sup>1</sup> Hastings, *op cit*, p 245. See also Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History*, London: Harper Press, 2010, p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Davies, *The Testing of the Churches 1932 -1982*, p. 59.

It was the greatest triumph of the collectivist principle. Old divisions were closed up, old wounds were healed, old controversies were forgotten.<sup>3</sup>

Another assessment, made by Adrian Hastings, was that although Methodist Union was accomplished:

It brought with it a sense of rather elderly achievement – well earned rest after a long day's work, appropriate enough for its septuagenarian leaders like Scott Lidgett and Sir Robert Perks.<sup>4</sup>

An important question, therefore, is the extent to which the initial optimism of the national launch of Union, and its aims, were communicated, received, or acted upon, by circuits, chapels and individual members. To what extent were those at grassroots level inspired by 'the collectivist principle', the closing of old wounds and the forgetting of controversies? How far did ministers and leading lay people see it as their role to make changes at the level of circuit and Society?

### **The initial response of the Church Street Circuit**

The views expressed in the *Official Handbook of the final Primitive Methodist Conference in Middlesbrough* in June 1932 gives an indication of the tone that was set by the denomination's national leadership.<sup>5</sup> Their statements included both looking back at the Primitive Methodist heritage and forward to the opportunities and challenges faced by the new Church. These are included at some length because they illustrate the official messages that were being conveyed to the membership. Taken overall, the views expressed were stronger on conveying aspirations than dealing with the practical issues of how the united Church might set about addressing them.

The Chairman of the final Primitive Methodist Conference, Arthur Banham, after noting the challenges faced in the aftermath of the Great War, highlighted the significance of the final conference and went on to say that:

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<sup>3</sup> M. Edwards, *Methodism and England*, London: The Epworth Press, 1943, p. 237.

<sup>4</sup> Hastings, *op cit*, p. 263.

<sup>5</sup> The quotations are taken from Primitive Methodist Church, *Official Handbook of the 113<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference*, Middlesbrough: Arthur Patterson, 1932, pages 9, 65, 67, 69 and 71.

It will be the cynosure of all Primitive Methodist hearts and homes, and it is a sound instinct that induces the pensive mood at this juncture.

The Retiring President of Conference, the Rev. Edward McLellan, spoke of 'apathy passing' and that:

We are realising that the Church is more than a social centre where congenial fellowship is to be enjoyed, and where the claims of religion are met by a decorous service and a modicum of teaching about morality.

As was noted in Chapter 5, this tension between social activities, including fund raising, and the spiritual work of the churches was already recognised at circuit level. Mr McLellan emphasised the need to 'reach the outsider' but felt that the Church had not yet come to any agreement about how to set about this. Mr James Black, the Retiring Vice President referred to the financial obligations in a period of unprecedented difficulty and the need to win over the 'large constituency of neutrals'. The President, Rev. William Younger, highlighted the demand for new buildings to serve new populations in order to 'defeat the forces of paganism which are openly mobilising for a sustained effort on organised religion'. As will be seen, the question of new premises became an issue in Whitby, in this case related to the re-housing of families on the new council estate.

In his message the Vice-President, Mr A. Victor Murray returned to the origins of Primitive Methodism and its distinctive contribution which he identified as keeping thinking and theology in close contact with ordinary humanity. He concluded with the aspiration:

Churches, like individuals, must die if they would continue to live. We drop the name 'Primitive'. May our influence in the united church soon lead to the dropping of the name 'Methodist'. And may the day rapidly come when the single name 'Christian' will be substituted to designate those who love our Lord in sincerity and truth.

As will be argued, the aspiration that Christians would give up their denominational allegiances in the interests of spreading the Gospel proved to

be particularly challenging in the face what John Kent described as Methodism's 'deeply local particularism'.<sup>6</sup>

The Whitby Church Street Methodist Circuit *Notes* for October 1932 reflected something of the leadership's sense of optimism and reproduced the statistics from the conference handbook for the 'New Methodist Church'. As noted, this contrasted the 'machinery' - by which was meant the organizational structures of the church - with the 'power' to get results in its mission. There was reference to past achievements and it was stated that there was no reason, 'except in ourselves', why these should not be exceeded by even greater achievements in the future.<sup>7</sup> However, at this stage there was no indication of any practical steps that might be taken in Whitby to capitalize on the fact that there was now only one Methodist Church.

### **The initial response of the Brunswick Circuit**

The minutes of the final Wesleyan Conference in 1932 contained relatively little mention of the changes taking place. However, there was a resolution giving thanks that 'the day of estrangement is ended' and the:

avowed purpose of union accomplished in the more effective evangelisation of the world and the service of the age.

One statement was of particular relevance as it formed a theme at local level in the period ahead. This was a special resolution concerning:

the overwhelming sense of the importance of open-air advocacy and witness, especially at the present time.<sup>8</sup>

The references to the 'present time' and 'present conditions' reinforce the feeling, found also in the Primitive Methodist conference messages, that the Church faced particular challenges posed by the economic situation and also by changes in society that were undermining commitment to formal religious allegiance. The responses were, therefore, both backward-looking with a call

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<sup>6</sup> Kent, *op cit*, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/112, CCP, Oct – Dec 1932.

<sup>8</sup> Wesleyan Methodist Church, *Minutes of Conference 1932*, London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1932, pp. 38, 47.

for the return of the open-air evangelism that had been successful in Methodism's formative years and forward-looking in relation to a feeling that the new situation also required fresh ways of engaging with people. In his address to the Uniting Conference in September 1932, the first President of the Methodist Church, the former Wesleyan J. Scott Lidgett, commented on the 'long preparation which has extended over nineteen years' and stated, 'it must be worked to be understood. *Salvitur ambulando*'.<sup>9</sup>

### **The York and Whitby Methodist District**

Before analysing responses at circuit level it is of relevance to consider a change that affected both circuits, which was their place in the newly created York and Whitby District. As has been indicated, both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist Circuits had agreed to this arrangement which was a consequence of the rearrangement of Districts at the time of Union. The move was significant for both circuits in that it severed their long-standing connections with the Cleveland, Middlesbrough and the South Durham areas. The effect was especially marked in that they moved from Districts that contained major mining and industrial communities to one that was predominantly rural, agricultural and in the process of developing its tourist trade.

The Primitive Methodist 'Darlington and Stockton District' contained centres of population such as Bishop Auckland, St. Helen's Auckland, Shildon, Crook, Spennymoor, Stockton, Darlington and extending through Middlesbrough to Saltburn on the coast and Brotton in the Cleveland Hills. In character and tradition the communities in this District were very similar to those of the Methodist Societies in the Deerness Valley which formed the focus of Robert Moore's case study.<sup>10</sup> In terms of membership in 1932, the largest circuits were at Spennymoor (850 members), Stockton (840 members), and West Auckland (700 members). The smallest circuit was

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<sup>9</sup> *The Methodist Year Book – Almanac: 1933*, London: The Methodist Publishing House, 1933, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> R. Moore, *Pit-Men, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism on a Durham Mining Community*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974.



Barnard Castle, with 106 members. At this time Whitby, with 210 members, was among the six smallest circuits in a District of twenty-five circuits.<sup>11</sup>

Whitby, therefore, had been the most southerly circuit in the Darlington and Stockton District, separated from the main centres of population by twenty miles of moorland. In character it did not have a great deal in common with the majority of circuits as the Whitby area by this time had no heavy industry. Also, the only part of the town that had terraced housing similar to that of industrial areas was Fishburn Park, which Conzen described as 'very much an industrial form of housing' with an 'excessively mechanical look'.<sup>12</sup> From a social and occupational point of view the move was therefore to a District with which there was more in common. However, it did sever the longstanding association with a strong area of Primitive Methodism and from which many of their Auxiliary preachers were drawn.

The Wesleyans, too, lost their historic link with the north-east and the Wesleyan 'Whitby and Darlington District' included towns such as Darlington and Stockton. Unlike the Primitive Methodist District it also included more rural centres, such as Reeth in Swaledale, the Wensleydale Misson, Bedale and the neighbouring Danby Circuit. Although Whitby was one of the smaller circuits, with 571 members in 1932, there were a number that had considerably fewer members, such as Richmond with about 228.<sup>13</sup> For the Wesleyans too, the new District also involved a considerable change of focus.

The newly formed 'York and Whitby District' covered an area that was then in the largely rural North Riding of Yorkshire. It included some larger centres such as York, Scarborough and Selby and towns such as Tadcaster, Thirsk, Ripon, Pickering and Helmsley. The only significant industry, other than farming, was in York itself with the railways and the manufacture of sweets as major employers. Thus, not only did the change of Districts mean a

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<sup>11</sup> Primitive Methodist Conference Minutes, *op cit*, 1932.

<sup>12</sup> M.R.G. Conzen, 'The Growth and Character of Whitby', in G.H.L. Daysh, (ed), *A Survey of Whitby and the Surrounding Area*, Windsor: The Shakespeare Press, 1958, p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> *Op cit*, Wesleyan Conference Minutes, 1932.

change of boundaries but it also meant a very significant change in the character of the District with which the Whitby Methodists of both circuits were now associated. However, it did mean that both circuits were making a fresh start, with each represented at District Synod meetings.

### **The formative stage**

The months following Methodist Union are important because they provide early clues as to how each circuit was responding to the other and the means by which early relationships were formed and conducted. Also illustrated were some of the practical consequences arising out of Union. Despite having become part of the same national organization the Quarterly Meetings of the two circuits remained predominantly concerned with their own internal affairs. There was no evidence from the minutes that the consequences of Union were high on the agenda of either circuit. However, at the Church Street Circuit Quarterly Meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1932 it was noted that the former Primitive Methodist local preachers were now eligible for membership of the Methodist Lay-Preacher's Society.<sup>14</sup> At the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1933 there was a resolution requesting 'a meeting with the Union Committee of the two Methodist Circuits of this town'.<sup>15</sup> No indication was given of the specific reason for this request but it is possible that it might have been made as a result of comments regarding the 'statements' about amalgamation, referred to at the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting, held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1932 (See Chapter 5). A report on this matter had been deferred and there is no evidence from the minutes of either circuit of any outcome. The matter may have been dealt with outside the meeting or it may have been something that was felt better not taken forward, possibly because of sensitivities surrounding the issue of 'Local Fusion'.

A financial issue of practical concern was raised at the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1933 regarding the contribution to

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<sup>14</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1.2.1, CQM, 01/12/32 Folios not numbered and meetings identified by the dates on which they were held.

<sup>15</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1.2.1, CQM, 02/3/33.

the Methodist Commemoration Fund.<sup>16</sup> The Commemoration Fund had been launched at the Uniting Conference in 1932 to help fund evangelism.<sup>17</sup> It was resolved to refer the matter to the Methodist Union Local Committee with a request to 'formulate schemes and make necessary arrangements for appeals throughout the circuit'. At the following meeting on December 13<sup>th</sup> it was recommended by the Local Committee that the contributions to the Commemoration Fund should be made on the basis of the proportional membership of the two circuits. A proposal was made that the fund should be launched in February 1934 and finished by the end of March 'in view of the financial appeals made in 1933'.

There was also some discussion of the Commemoration Fund at the Church Street Circuit Quarterly Meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1933 where it was recorded that 'owing to financial stringency' the circuit could not subscribe to the Commemoration Fund.<sup>18</sup> The following year, on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1934, there was a proposal to 'discuss ways of reducing the adverse balance on the circuit account' and that the financial state of the circuit should be brought before the members 'many of whom, we feel, do not understand the obligations of membership'.<sup>19</sup> The importance of the Commemoration Fund was highlighted in the *Notes* for October 1934 with its objective of raising £500,000 nationally 'to finance a great campaign of spiritual advance'.<sup>20</sup> However, it is not clear from the records how much the Church Street Circuit actually contributed over this period.

There is more evidence of giving to the Commemoration Fund from the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting for 14<sup>th</sup> March 1934 where the amount recorded as raised was £44 – 8s – 2d.<sup>21</sup> At the following meeting further contributions took the total up to £64. The contributions to the fund continued to be made over the following years with the last mention in December 1936

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<sup>16</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/6, BQM, 20/09/33.

<sup>17</sup> Brake, *op cit*, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, CQM, 31/08/33

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 06/06/34.

<sup>20</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/9, CCP, Oct 34 – Jan 35.

<sup>21</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7 BQM, 14/03/34.

when it had reached £131 – 7s – 5d. In contrast with the Church Street Circuit the larger Brunswick Circuit, with its twelve chapels and greater membership, was in a better position to raise money over and above what was needed for survival. It also had among its members, especially at the Brunswick Church, more people who were likely to have sufficient disposable income for giving of this kind, including legacies, highlighting difference between the two circuits in financial terms.

### **Social, moral and economic concerns**

Despite other differences between them there was much common ground between the two circuits on social and moral matters. Here a united front might have been expected to strengthen their witness as Methodists. Indeed there was much to concern the churches in general during this period including the advance of more secular lifestyles, with their visible local manifestation in the tourism and entertainment industries. It is particularly important to examine these matters in view of the fact Methodist Union was presented by the leadership as a vehicle for more effectively addressing such challenges and, as B. Aquila Barber put it, the 'ability to meet the needs of our own time'.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the period that led up to Union and beyond, the records of both circuits reflect their concerns over morality. The main preoccupations were the consumption of alcohol, gambling and the protection of Sunday from commercial activity and, especially, from what was regarded as inappropriate entertainment. These concerns reflect Moore's view that Methodists tended to focus on personal failings and that, 'their social analysis was, ultimately, individualistic'.<sup>23</sup> Both circuits retained their own temperance and social welfare officials and organizations and, significantly, Interviewee 5, recalled 'this was pretty strong at Brunswick in pre-war days' and that temperance 'was the only thing that I remember that was inter-circuit'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Barber, *op cit*, p. 295.

<sup>23</sup> Moore, *op cit*, p. 119.

<sup>24</sup> Interview 5, 16/04/09.

A good example of objections to alcohol was a resolution sent from the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> December 1933 to the Whitby Urban District Council and to the press about the sanctioning of the erection of a 'Johnnie Walker' sponsored scoring board at the local cricket ground. The objection was not only to the advertisement of alcohol but that it made the council 'parties to a deliberate attempt to corrupt the youth of the town by making them drinkers of spirits and patrons of public houses'. It argued that the council was making rate-payers part of an insidious campaign 'to ensnare and corrupt the young people'.<sup>25</sup> This campaign was successful as there is a handwritten note in the minutes next to a newspaper cutting about the issue stating that the offer of the scoreboard was eventually rejected by the Council. Another example occurred at the Brunswick Quarterly Meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1935 at which concern was expressed about the campaign of breweries 'to attract and secure the youth of our land to become the mainstay of the public house'.<sup>26</sup> On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1936 'the Chairman appealed for a more determined stand on the question of temperance, in view of the brewers' efforts to induce drinking habits on the part of young people'.<sup>27</sup>

It was during the war years that some of the strongest words were used in statements condemning the sale of alcohol. On 12<sup>th</sup> March 1941 the members of the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting urged the Government 'to consider a drastic restriction on the sale of alcohol' on the grounds that it impaired efficiency and social order as well as diverting materials away from more necessary products.<sup>28</sup> It was noted that this should be communicated, 'forthwith', to the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison. The Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting returned to the same subject later that year, this time with a long protest about Government proposals to authorise the setting up of official canteens which supplied alcoholic liquor in munitions factories, hostels, docks and harbours. It was objected that there was a linking of

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<sup>25</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/6, BQM, 13/12/33.

<sup>26</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 13/03/35.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 09/12/36.

<sup>28</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/1/40, BQM, 12/03/41.

alcohol with industrial life 'at a vital time in the life of the British Empire' and that:

This meeting is of the opinion that the Government has no mandate from the country to act as a drinks salesman for the nation's womanhood and urges the Government to replace this ill-conceived project with a policy that will safeguard and not imperil human welfare.<sup>29</sup>

These objections, during wartime, to measures designed to make access to alcohol easier for the armed forces and factory workers suggest a degree of detachment from conditions in the industrial areas most directly affected by the war and lives as lived by many ordinary people.

The tone of the statements and their intended recipients suggests the influence of the professional middle class at Brunswick who were more likely to have the confidence to write and send such missives in the expectation that they might be heeded. One factor may be that Dr Brears, a general practitioner and one of the Brunswick local preachers, had very strong views on the drinking of alcohol.<sup>30</sup> Interviewee 5 spoke of this when he recalled that 'Dr Brears was a great fellow for pumping it out from the pulpit'.<sup>31</sup> It is noteworthy that in the communications directed to outside authorities and audiences it was concern with corrupting youth or the 'womanhood of the nation' that was highlighted. The latter, in particular, reflected a view of women as the weaker sex not just physically, but morally, and in need of special protection. This somewhat flew in the face of the war work in which many women were then engaged.

However, the concerns expressed reflect the national preoccupations of the Methodist Church during this period. On the question of alcohol, for instance, the declaration of the Methodist Conference on Temperance in 1933 had urged Methodists to refrain from the use of alcohol and not involve themselves in the drinks trade.<sup>32</sup> Maldwyn Edwards wrote in 1943 that 'the

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<sup>29</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, BQM, 10/12/41.

<sup>30</sup> Dr Charles Frederick Brears, MD, ChM, LRCP, FPSG., b. 1864.

<sup>31</sup> Interview 5, 16/04/09.

<sup>32</sup> Brake, *op cit*, p. 237.

Methodist Church takes a leading part in the temperance work of this country'.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, gambling was seen as an undesirable feature of the growing leisure industry. For instance, on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1936 a resolution was passed:

That this meeting of the officers of the Whitby Brunswick Church believes that the recent introduction of the Football Pools constitutes a great peril to youth and an exploitation of the gambling spirit.<sup>34</sup>

The observance of the Christian Sunday was also continuing preoccupation of the period and Brake wrote that:

The preservation of the Lord's Day for worship was a preoccupation of all three branches of Methodism prior to Union and a statement had been presented to the final Wesleyan Conference in 1932.<sup>35</sup>

As an example, it was resolved at the Wesleyan Quarterly Meeting of 18<sup>th</sup> June 1930 that the minister should 'discuss certain forms of public entertainment now existing with the Superintendent of Police'. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1931 there was further discussion on the subject of Sunday entertainments where it was resolved that 'as a Church we stand firm for the maintenance of the Christian Sunday' and the encroaching influence of 'commercialism and secularism'.<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note the use of the terms 'commercialism' and 'secularism', which came into more common usage after the Second World War and especially so in the 1960s.<sup>37</sup> Other examples were when the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1933 'transmitted to appropriate quarters' a unanimous and emphatic resolution condemning the Whitby Urban District Council for 'permitting certain facilities for Sunday Games' and on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1936 where 'hearty support' was given for the Sunday Trading Bill to limit Sunday trading and to help to preserve the Lord's Day.<sup>38</sup> Similar statements were made during the war years concerning the

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<sup>33</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p. 117.

<sup>34</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 03/03/36.

<sup>35</sup> Brake, *op cit*, p. 544.

<sup>36</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/6, BQM, 01/01/6, 18/06/30, 03/03/31.

<sup>37</sup> For instance, Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, London: SCM Press, 1965.

<sup>38</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/1/7, BQM, 11/03/36.

opening of theatres and music halls on Sundays and dancing and the playing of cards on Methodist premises.<sup>39</sup>

The three issues of alcohol, Sunday observance and gambling were more evident than any others in terms of resolutions passed. Although reflecting Connexional concerns they were exacerbated by the fact that in a holiday resort, developing its leisure facilities, upon which many people relied for employment, these were all too obvious. They formed a potential or actual temptation not only for visitors but for their own members, especially the young, to whom they were equally accessible. Loss of younger members, with fewer attending church, posed a threat not only to their spiritual life but also to their financial viability.

Similar concerns were expressed by the Church Street Circuit but the minutes generally contained less detail. During the 1920s there were comments such as 'the importance of a keener observance of Sundays as a day of rest and religious culture'.<sup>40</sup> In 1928 the *Primitive Methodist Notes* listed 'factors that make our work difficult' which were 'the temper and habits of the day, the partial breakdown of Sabbath observance' and 'the spirit of pleasures and the lust of restlessness that seeks satisfaction in endless change'.<sup>41</sup> At the Quarterly Meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1936 there was a record of a letter, signed by the Chairman, objecting to a new Licensing Bill. However, taken overall both the Church Street Circuit minutes and the *Notes* on the plans were focussed more on circuit and chapel activity than on the wider issues. An example of this can be found in the *Notes* for July 1936 concerning chapel attendance in the summer. It was stated that while it was recognised that some members could not get to chapel every Sunday in the summer because of employment in the seasonal holiday trade:

Others can and it is hoped that the allurements of 'The Season' will not keep them away from their churches.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/1/40, BQM, 09/09/42.

<sup>40</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/2/1, CQM, 01/09/27.

<sup>41</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 4/2/97, PCP, Oct – Dec 1928.

<sup>42</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 4/3/16, CPP, July – Oct 1936.



Underlying this statement is an evident concern that 'the allurements of 'The Season' were not confined only to those who did not attend the chapels.

As far as national and international economic and political issues were concerned the priorities of both circuits during the 1930s were the uncertain economic conditions and a desire to avoid another war. At the Primitive Methodist Circuit Quarterly Meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1930 it was recorded that a 'Message to the Unemployed' would be read out from pulpits on 14<sup>th</sup> December and it was noted that at the meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1932 a letter on unemployment had been received.<sup>43</sup> Although Whitby was not a centre of heavy industry it was nevertheless affected by unemployment in the period surrounding Union. In 1933 the population of Whitby was 11,500 of whom 2,800 were 'insured'.<sup>44</sup> It was calculated that 779 were receiving insurance payments and estimated that when dependents were included the figure directly affected by unemployment was around 3,000, just over a quarter of the population. While the population figures remained more or less constant over the next five years the number of unemployed ranged between 779 and 951. A local response was the setting up of the 'Whitby Unemployed Occupational Centre'. This was at the instigation of the Rector of Whitby, Canon F.M. Sykes, who had convened a meeting of 'interested parties' in 1932. Premises were secured and a range of activities and crafts were offered as well as the distribution of soup and milk, the latter provided by the farm of the Sneaton Castle Anglican Convent. The list of committee members suggests that this initiative was largely Anglican, probably reflecting the greater resources of the Anglicans at this time in comparison with the nonconformist denominations. There was only one Methodist, Mr T. Warters, on the committee. However, during this period the better-off Brunswick Church introduced 'The Brunswick Benevolent Society' which issued tickets to poor families to obtain groceries at Christmas.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/2/1, PQM, 27/11/30, CQM, 14/12/32.

<sup>44</sup> The information in this paragraph was taken from *Whitby Unemployed Occupational Centre Annual Reports 1933 – 1943*, Horne & Sons, Whitby, 1948.

<sup>45</sup> Willis, *op cit*, p. 24.

The second recurrent issue was the desire to maintain peace after the horrors of the First World War. Between 1918 and the outbreak of war in 1939, both circuits gave strong support to the movement for peace. Articles appeared regularly in *'The Dawn'*, the Brunswick Circuit magazine, concerning the League of Nations and its work. Similar support was evident in the Church Street Circuit. On 6<sup>th</sup> September 1934 the Church Street Quarterly Meeting minutes reported the appointment of four people as representatives to a League of Nations meeting 'in connection with the campaign for disarmament' and the *Notes* in July of the same year contained a section entitled, 'Peace or War? An Affirmation of the Christian Faith'.<sup>46</sup> This called for the nations of the world to live in peace and a statement that the League of Nations was the best means to provide justice and organise peace.<sup>47</sup> Similar comments continued throughout the 1930s.<sup>48</sup> In this the Whitby Methodist churches were not alone, as Adrian Hastings pointed out:

Far more appealing to the 1930s Christian than either Communism or Fascism was Pacifism.<sup>49</sup>

Although the emphases of the circuits may have varied there is no evidence of any significant differences between them on these matters. Both showed similar concern for the social, moral and international issues of the day and expressed these concerns in various ways. There is no evidence of any disagreement or any reason why such matters could be seen as a reason for retaining separate circuits. However it could be argued that a united 'Methodist' response, especially on unemployment, would have had more impact than separate responses from each circuit and would have been consistent with the vision of a strengthened Methodist witness that had been presented at Union.

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<sup>46</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/6, BQM, 06/09/34.

<sup>47</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/8, CCP, July – Sept 1934.

<sup>48</sup> M. Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict: Methodism, Peace and War in the Twentieth Century*, London: Epworth, 2008. Hughes points to widespread support for the League of Nations in the inter-war years, but there were differences between pacifists and those who argued that there were circumstances in which the use of force was acceptable.

<sup>49</sup> Hastings, *op cit*, p. 330.

## **The leisure industry and its effects on religious life**

Although Whitby had become a holiday destination in Victorian times, from the early 1920s onwards the town council had made efforts to enhance Whitby's reputation as a popular seaside resort. Evidence of the effects of this will therefore include some references to the 1920s as well as to the 1930s to illustrate developing trends. House wrote that there was 'lively competition among coastal resorts for a share of holiday makers and their money' and this resulted in 'a progressive policy of building up entertainments...and providing more outdoor facilities on the seafront and sports fields'.<sup>50</sup> Given the decline in traditional industries such as shipbuilding and seafaring it is understandable that the council was attempting to provide alternative employment and to bring money into the area.

The holiday season began in June, peaked in August and ended in September and this was the period in which the railway company provided extra summer services to and from the coast. Before and just after the First World War most visitors came and stayed in the town for a week, or more; but from the early 1930s the LNER introduced scenic day excursion trains which usually ran on Sundays when normal traffic was lighter.<sup>51</sup> These trains originated from across the northern industrial conurbations and allowed the day-trippers to spend several hours in Whitby before taking the scenic coastal line through Robin Hood's bay to Scarborough where further time was spent before setting off home in the evening. Bus and coach services were also developed which made it easier for people to get to the coast for the day.<sup>52</sup> Whereas the principal town churches of Brunswick and Church Street benefitted from bigger congregations and larger collections from the more traditional holiday makers (usually staying from Saturday to Saturday) they did not benefit from the railway and coach day excursionists.

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<sup>50</sup> House, *op cit*, pp. 152 -153.

<sup>51</sup> K. Hoole, *North-Eastern Branch Line Termini*, Oxford: Oxford Publishing Co., 1985, p. 153.

<sup>52</sup> J. Banks, *United*, Glossop: Venture Publications, 1999, p. 26.

The industrial areas from which the holiday-makers came were particularly badly affected by the period of economic depression in the 1930s and it is likely that in some cases a cheap day at the seaside replaced holidays. As Juliet Gardiner noted:

paradoxically the 1931 financial crisis had benefitted a number of Britain's seaside resorts at a time when it was seen to be unpatriotic to go abroad...Resorts on the east coast of Yorkshire not far from the Yorkshire industrial towns, such as Whitby, Redcar, Filey and Scarborough (considered rather posher than its neighbours) that offered sand (or shingle) and bracing sea breezes flourished.<sup>53</sup>

In 1933 the railways also pioneered a less expensive alternative to hotels and guest houses in the form of 'camping coaches' (old carriages converted to basic living accommodation) which were placed in sidings in attractive locations. By 1938 these were to be found at Sandsend/East Row (5), Robin Hood's Bay (3), and Goathland (1), all locations with Methodist chapels.<sup>54</sup> It is not clear to what extent they contributed to summer congregations but it is known that at both Sandsend and Goathland chapels summer visitors were important for survival. House commented:

At the outbreak of war in 1939 Whitby had just completed a most successful holiday season, with facilities and amenities on a scale equal to the best of small British resorts.<sup>55</sup>

However, from the point of view of Whitby Methodists the resort development was seen as a mixed blessing because although it contributed to larger congregations and extra income for some chapels in the summer it also promoted secular and commercial values and activity that undermined their own members.

Given Whitby's relative lack of employment opportunities, especially in a period of economic difficulties, it is questionable if the people of Whitby were as supportive of the Methodists' opposition to opening leisure facilities on Sundays as the circuit officials believed they were, representing as they did

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<sup>53</sup> Gardiner, *op cit*, p 586/589.

<sup>54</sup> M. Bairstow, *Railways around Whitby*, Pudsey: Allenwood Press, 1989, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> House, *op cit*, p. 154.

only a very small percentage of the people of the area. Also, the views in the official records may obscure a more tolerant attitude among members and adherents, especially if they benefitted directly or indirectly from the holiday and tourist industry. For instance, Interviewee 5, whose father owned a garage, commented that he remembered Methodist criticism of working on Sundays:

but we couldn't say anything because father had to work on a Sunday, especially if a chap had a breakdown and needed his vehicle for business or wanted to get home from a holiday.<sup>56</sup>

Interviewee 2, who worked in Woolworths, also commented that that working on Sundays paid double time, which made it particularly attractive.<sup>57</sup>

The annual cycle of holiday season and winter months was of considerable significance for the life and work of the chapels, especially those situated on the coast or at beauty spots such as Goathland. The financial importance of the holiday season was highlighted by the Primitive Methodists Circuit in 1927 where mention was made of larger congregations and offerings that 'cover the deficiencies of the winter months and meet ordinary expenditure'.<sup>58</sup> In 1931 there was a Primitive Methodist *Note* about 'the winter work' and the 'dislocation caused by the visiting season' with the exhortation to 'attain a fine spiritual glow in all our churches'.<sup>59</sup> This referred to the non-attendance of members who worked in the holiday industry. The issue of poor attendance at morning services was raised in 1932 with a statement that 'modern tendencies and habits have made war on the morning service'.<sup>60</sup> A year later there was an appeal to support the services during the holiday season.<sup>61</sup> In October 1934 it was again a topic in the *Notes*:

The summer quarter is difficult, for a large proportion of our people are so busy attending the needs of visitors that they

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<sup>56</sup> Interview 5, 16/4/09.

<sup>57</sup> Interview 2, 17/3/09.

<sup>58</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/92, PCP, July – Sept 1927.

<sup>59</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/108, PCP, Oct – Dec 1931.

<sup>60</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/109. PCP, Jan – March 1932.

<sup>61</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/4, CCP, July – Oct 1933.

cannot be in their places for Sunday worship, and our week-evening activities are also suspended. Church Street has had its quota of visitors, but Fishburn Park and Ruswarp have been somewhat neglected by those who come amongst us for holiday...We trust that from October to June we may have a great time spiritually, numerically and financially, as the old schedules used to report.<sup>62</sup>

Similar exhortations appeared in the Church Street Circuit *Notes* throughout the 1930s relating both to the effects of the season and the need for spiritual renewal and action between September and June, including fund raising. The threat was not just seen as absence from church as a result of 'attending to the needs of visitors' but also 'because the out-door habit has secured such a hold on visitors and residents alike'.<sup>63</sup>

Similar concerns were evident for the Wesleyan/Brunswick Circuit. In the October 1926 *The Dawn* magazine there was reference to the 'season now ending' and that Class and Guild leaders 'will be busy making things hum'.<sup>64</sup> It is not possible to tell with any certainty whether the members of the Church Street Circuit were more affected by the need to work on Sundays in the holiday season than those of the Brunswick Circuit although this is possibly the case, given social and occupational differences. Not all the chapels in the circuit would be affected to the same extent. It is also not clear how far the fall in regular chapel attendance in the summer was entirely a result of holiday work. House, writing of the holiday economy of Whitby, states that in terms of employment in 1932, 55 males and 198 females were engaged in hotel and catering work and 683 people were employed in the distributive trades. By 1939 this had risen to 143 males and 501 females working in hotels and catering and 764 people in the distributive trades. This was the peak year for such employment and by 1955 the numbers had reduced to 124 females and 331 males in hotels and catering and 692 in distributive trades.<sup>65</sup> It was not explained how these figures were reached and there is possibly an under-reporting as some families took summer visitors in their

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<sup>61</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/9, CCP, Oct 1934 – Jan 1935.

<sup>63</sup> R/M/WH 4/3/17, CCP, Oct – Jan 1935.

<sup>64</sup> *The Dawn*, Vol. 18, No. 10, October 1926.

<sup>65</sup> House, *op cit*, p. 185.

own homes to supplement their household income.<sup>66</sup> However, with a Whitby population that remained in the mid- eleven thousands throughout this period the proportion of people so employed was not high, ranging from just below to just above ten percent of the total. There is certainly a suggestion that the 'out-door habit' was taking its toll on attendance for chapel members as well as for holiday-makers and, as will be argued, the same social trends may well have been affecting the Sunday School attendance figures.

### **Part B, The responses of the churches.**

This section will focus upon the way in which the two circuits responded to the changes that were taking place and will provide an assessment of Methodist life, work and culture during this period.

#### **Outreach, evangelism and open-air work**

Despite the threats posed by tourism it provided an opportunity for evangelism to those beyond the normal reach of the churches. The opportunity to engage in 'open-air work' and 'effectively evangelise the masses' were certainly reasons put forward in support of Union. The minutes of the Local Preachers' Meeting of the Brunswick Circuit provide some information about how this was approached. On 13<sup>th</sup> June 1934 it was reported that arrangements had been made for an open-air service on the band stand during the months of July and August.<sup>67</sup> The band stand is situated on the pier near to one of the main access points to the beach, and to the amusement arcades. It was therefore in a good position to be seen by many visitors to the town. On 12<sup>th</sup> June 1935 there was discussion by the local preachers of the possibility of conducting services on the beach and it was felt that an application should be made through the meeting's representatives on the Free Church Council to the Urban Council requesting permission to hold such services. There was also a proposal to hold open-air services in the villages and it was 'left to the Brethren to arrange where

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<sup>66</sup> Willis, *op cit*, p. 24.

<sup>67</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, BPM, 13/06/34.

possible'.<sup>68</sup> At the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1936 it was noted that permission had been granted for July, August and part of September with arrangements being left to the second minister, Rev. H. Bowyer, and one of the local preachers. It was also reported that for one week in August the Methodist Daylight Cinema would be visiting the town. The local preachers were requested to help make this a success.<sup>69</sup> However, at the meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1936 Mr Bowyer reported on the open-air work and 'expressed himself as not satisfied with the support this work had received from local preachers'. It was agreed that this should be discussed at a future meeting, although subsequent minutes suggest that this did not happen, at least as a formal part of a meeting.<sup>70</sup>

The minutes of the Church Street Circuit Local Preachers Meetings do not mention such activities and there is very little about open-air work in either the Quarterly Meeting minutes or in the *Notes*. However in October 1937 there was a report of work undertaken during the summer months:

Other forms of Christian service have been attempted with, we hope, good results. Addresses from the band stand have been given each Sunday by Anglican and Free Church ministers alternating. The Gospel has been preached to crowds. Beach services have been held in conjunction with the Brunswick Circuit. We have had the Methodist Daylight Cinema among us for a week. This form of evangelism has been made possible by the Commemoration Fund. For two nights the Gallows Close estate was circularized. Good companies of adults and children gathered round to see the pictures '*The Common Round*' and '*Barabbas*'. The other evenings were spent on the Scotch Head and enormous crowds looked and listened, and we trust were not unaffected.<sup>71</sup>

This report of open-air evangelism provides an interesting insight into the work of the two Methodist circuits and also into the broader cooperation between the Free Churches of the town more generally. The provision of the Daylight Cinema demonstrates a priority of the newly created Methodist

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<sup>68</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, BPM, 12/06/35.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 28/05/36.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 03/09/36.

<sup>71</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/17, CCP, Oct 1937 – Jan 1938.



Church and the willingness to employ what was then the 'new technology' of the film industry in the cause of evangelism.<sup>72</sup> The *Notes on the Church Street plan* indicate that there was some cooperation between the two Methodist circuits in relation to the beach services but there is no further evidence of how this worked out in practice. There is little detail in either the Quarterly Meeting minutes for the period or from the Brunswick Local Preachers' Meetings. The reference to lack of support from local preachers could indicate insufficient confidence for this type of work, an unwillingness to engage in it, or a feeling that they were already heavily committed to their regular preaching appointments. Both Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 5 remembered Cliff College 'Trekks' undertaking evangelism in the area.<sup>73</sup> However, the latter commented:

But very little, as it is named of evangelism within the area. There are these little bits of efforts that came within the classification of evangelism but they were more practical than in the religious sense.<sup>74</sup>

It is not clear if any attempts were made to quantify the success of the open air work or of follow up activities for local people who expressed an interest.

### **Sunday Schools and young people**

A decline in the number of children attending Sunday Schools was a concern of both circuits during the 1930s. As an example, at the March 1935 Brunswick Quarterly Meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1935 it was recorded:

The meeting views with concern the serious decrease in the number of scholars in our Sunday Schools, especially in the primary departments, which has continued for several successive years. The Meeting urges members of the various churches in the circuit to consider the matter and endeavour to

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<sup>72</sup> J. Arthur Rank, the film maker, was treasurer to the Home Missions Department from 1933 and promoted the use of films in evangelism.

<sup>73</sup> Cliff College, near Sheffield, had been founded in 1875 to train lay evangelists and the 'trekkers' were students who toured the country during the summer months. See John A. Vickers, *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, London: Epworth Press, 2000, p.71.

<sup>74</sup> Interview 5, 16/04/09.

obtain children for our Sunday Schools at the earliest age possible age.<sup>75</sup>

The statistics recorded in the Brunswick Quarterly Meeting minutes for those attending Sunday Schools in the Brunswick Circuit show a total of 521 scholars in 1928, 426 in 1932, 412 in 1934 and 385 in 1935.

Similar anxiety was expressed in the Church Street Circuit. At the Quarterly Meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1931 concern was expressed at 'the scarcity of scholars at Fishburn Park and Ruswarp'<sup>76</sup> and where statistics are given they show that in 1927 there were 234 scholars in the circuit, 199 in 1932 and 171 in 1937. In April 1935 the *Notes* recorded a fall of 37 scholars across the three Church Street Circuit Sunday Schools and stated that this was 'largely the result of overhauling the roll'.<sup>77</sup> From the *Notes* of January 1936 it was clear that in spite of a visit to each home by a teacher, the response to 'Young People's Day' was disappointing.<sup>78</sup> The April 1936 *Notes* recorded:

Our Sunday School work is much better organised [with] a small decrease of 10 scholars but increase of 1 teacher.<sup>79</sup>

It should be borne in mind that between 1918 and 1944 the normal school leaving age for most children was fourteen with only a relatively small number progressing from elementary to secondary education and even fewer going on to university or to train as school teachers. The statistical returns sent to the newly created York and District Synod for 1932 provided a more detailed picture for that year than is recorded by the Quarterly Meeting minutes. It should be noted that the overall number of scholars recorded differs slightly from the two sources, possibly because they were sourced at slightly different times. The statistics provided for the Synod are recorded as follows and illustrate something of the nature of the Sunday schools in the two circuits:

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<sup>75</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 13/03/35.

<sup>76</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, PQM, 26/11/31.

<sup>77</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/11, PCP, April – July 1932.

<sup>78</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/14, CCP, Jan – April 1936.

<sup>79</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/15, CCP, April – July 1936.

### Sunday School Report for 1932

|                              | Brunswick | Church Street |
|------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| No. of schools               | 11        | 3             |
| No. of officers and teachers | 74        | 30            |
| Average attendance           | 37        | 22            |
| No. who are church members   | 71        | 25            |
| No. who are scholars         | 416       | 192           |
| Average attendance           | 229       | 142           |
| No. who are junior members   | 55        | -             |
| No. on cradle rolls          | 63        | 6             |

(Source: University Of Manchester, Ryland Methodist Archive, York District Synod, September 1933)

The most significant difference between the schools of the Brunswick Circuit and the Church Street Circuit was that with 11 schools and 416 scholars the Brunswick Circuit would have had a number of small schools in rural districts whereas the Church Street Circuit had schools in only three locations, two in Whitby. The other difference is that the average attendance of teachers (Brunswick 50%, Church Street 73%) and scholars (Brunswick 55%, Church Street 73%) was considerably better for the Church Street Sunday Schools than for Brunswick, possibly reflecting ease of attendance in the urban areas as opposed to rural areas with longer distances to travel (e.g. from farms) and which could be more affected by adverse weather conditions, especially in the winter months.

The underlying causes of falling attendance were complex and not confined to the Whitby area. Evidence from, *British Sunday School enrolment, 1900 – 1996: percentage of 5 – 14 year olds* shows an overall decline in attendance during the 1930s before a rise in the immediate post-war years until the mid-

1950s followed by steady decline thereafter.<sup>80</sup> However, the decline in the number of the scholars at Wesley Hall and Church Street, was largely attributed to the re-housing of families with children in the Sunday Schools to the Gallows Close housing estate.

This was not the only reason, however, and the inter-war period was also one in which there were changing attitudes to educational work with children and young people as well as to religion. This was driven, in part, by broader developments in education combined with concerns that what was currently being offered could be a contributory factor in the numerical decline. In 1932 the minutes of the Fylingthorpe Sunday School Teachers' Meeting included a short report of the annual Sunday School Convention held in 1931 at Brunswick in Whitby. Three representatives from Fylingthorpe had attended. Miss Margaret Allen had spoken on the subject of 'Worship and Youth' and it was reported:

She gave some very good ideas and thoughts, her main theme being that worship was an awareness of God; and we had first to get that awareness ourselves and then by the atmosphere of the Sunday School help the scholars to get it too. She also stressed the fact that the Sunday School should be made as attractive as possible and not a bare room or a thing set apart from everyday life.<sup>81</sup>

The minutes of the Brunswick Circuit Education and Youth Committee from 1935 provide evidence of a desire for teachers and youth workers to receive some training. For instance, at the annual meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1935 a training class run at Brunswick by Mr Grainger B.A. was mentioned and it was suggested that the teachers from the Wesley Sunday School should be invited to join.<sup>82</sup> Significantly, no mention was made of involving the teachers from the Church Street Circuit in this training. In November 1935 the Fylingthorpe Sunday School Teachers' Meeting included a statement that 'expression work should be adopted after each lesson commencing in

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<sup>80</sup> C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2001, p. 168.

<sup>81</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Fylingthorpe Sunday School Minutes, 27/05/32.

<sup>82</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Brunswick Circuit Education and Youth Committee, 21/02/35.

January 1936'.<sup>83</sup> The theme of 'expression work' was pursued at the 1936 annual meeting of the Brunswick Circuit Education and Youth Committee in February 1936 which urged:

that schools be advised to secure pictures and means for expression work, especially for primary classes.<sup>84</sup>

On 24<sup>th</sup> February 1939 the same issue was again raised with a proposal of grants to support primary expression work.<sup>85</sup>

The regularity with which these issues were raised, coupled with the tone of some of the comments (e.g. 'should take steps to obtain them'), shows concern that some Sunday Schools were not using teaching materials or methods that were engaging the children. There is little information about who were the teachers but from the statistics included in the Brunswick Quarterly Meeting minutes the ratio of teachers to scholars during this period was about one to five. It is probable that among those included as 'teachers' were young people who were above Sunday School age and who were kept involved by teaching classes of younger children. Given that they were people who were themselves often still at school, or who had just left school, it is not surprising that they were neither trained to teach nor experienced in teaching children. Interviewee 2, who attended Wesley Hall, was a teacher there when she was about fourteen years old. She said that the school was actually held in the old Wesley Chapel:

therefore we taught John Wesley, you see. And kids, being kids, they liked to run in and out of the pews and lark about. I suppose they did not take much notice of me, but they were all right. They weren't all that badly behaved kids, being lively.

When asked if they drew pictures or made things she replied:

No, we had nothing up there. We took nothing up with us, you see, just the kids and me. So we just talked...Bible stories, that was it. The kids came up with things that had happened in

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<sup>83</sup> *Op cit*, Fylingthorpe Sunday School Minutes, 24/11/35.

<sup>84</sup> *Op cit*, Brunswick Education and Youth Committee, 14/2/36.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid* 24/02/39.

their lives and we'd talk about that – 'teacher caned me at school', that sort of thing.<sup>86</sup>

No evidence was given of anything that could be classified as expression work.

Both circuits had organisations for young adults, in the case of the Brunswick Circuit the Wesley Guild and for the Church Street the Christian Endeavour.<sup>87</sup> The 1932 statistical returns from the two circuits to the York and District Synod show that at the time of Union the Brunswick Circuit had 199 Wesley Guild members and the Church Street Circuit was recorded as having one Christian Endeavour group of 50 members and one Junior Society of 50 members.<sup>88</sup> There were also temperance societies and in 1935 it was recorded that in the Brunswick Circuit there were 232 adult and 70 junior members. For the Church Street Circuit, in particular, this period was seen in retrospect as one where work with young adults was considered especially strong. Writing in the *Whitby Gazette* in 1971 the Reverend Samuel Davies, who had been the superintendent minister of the Whitby Circuit from 1949 until 1956, said of Church Street:

It became outstanding for the success of its work among young people – several young men went forward to theological college, training for the ministry and other missionary work overseas.<sup>89</sup>

One positive development arising out of Union was the United Circuits Young Methodists' Rally held each year in either Brunswick or Church Street Churches. In the April 1936 Church Street Circuit *Notes* it was recorded:

The Young Methodist Department holds its own, though the utter lack of industrial facilities in the district make it difficult for our young folk to secure suitable employment. So many leave home. The United Circuits Young Methodist's Rally, with Dr

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<sup>86</sup> Interview 2, 17/03/09.

<sup>87</sup> The Wesley Guild was a Wesleyan organization for young people founded in 1896 and the Christian Endeavour a non-denominational youth organization founded in America in 1881 and used by the Primitive Methodists.

<sup>88</sup> John Rylands University Library Manchester, Methodist Archives and Research Centre, , Synod of York and Whitby District (Area 41), September 1932.

<sup>89</sup> S. Davies, 'Notes on Whitby Methodist History', *Whitby Gazette*, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1971.

Maldwyn Edwards as visitor, was a happy time. It was a joy to see Church Street full of Endeavourers and Guilders.<sup>90</sup>

In 1937 the Rally was held at Brunswick but the *Notes* of April 1937 commented:

The Young Methodist Department pursues its way steadily, though a better response in attendance at weekly meetings is much to be desired.<sup>91</sup>

However, it was reported that the Girls' Life Brigade services drew good attendances.

In relation to work with children and young people the overall picture during the period from 1932 until 1944 therefore presents a somewhat mixed picture. Three main factors were affecting both circuits. The first was what could be described as 'the spirit of the age', and the development of leisure activities which included opening on Sundays. Talking films had come in from the late 1920s, ownership of 'wireless sets' was on the increase (rising from one million in 1925 to nine million in 1939), newspapers were competing for circulation and there was a steady increase in ownership of private motor cars. In 1938 the Holidays with Pay Act was passed which recommended one week of paid annual leave for all full-time workers, accelerating a trend towards paid leisure time which was helping to stimulate the leisure economy. As a growing leisure resort Whitby was particularly affected by these developments and the Methodists could not isolate their own people from these influences.

The second pressure came from changing expectations in relation to education and a recognition that the didactic approaches generally employed by the many untrained and inexperienced 'teachers' were not motivating children and young people to attend Sunday Schools in the same numbers as previously. After the First World War there had been a move in day schools away from authoritarian approaches to a pedagogy that was becoming more 'child centred' with a concern to engage the interest of

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<sup>90</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/15, CCP, April – July 1936.

<sup>91</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/19, CCP, April – July 1937.

children. In 1927 a report, '*The Education of the Adolescent*', was published by the Board of Education (usually referred to as the 'Hadow Report' after its chairman, Sir W.H. Hadow). This advocated the creation of a stimulating learning environment, an understanding of how children and young people develop and arousing their interest and curiosity.<sup>92</sup> There was also an emphasis on learning through practical activity rather than 'by devoting long periods to the abstract study of ideas'.<sup>93</sup> This was the 'expression work', referred to in the minutes. Two further Board of Education reports, with Hadow as chairman of the committees, were issued during this period, *Primary Education* in 1931 and *Infant and Nursery Schools* in 1933 and these were informed by the same basic philosophy, emphasising activity and experience rather than the acquisition and storage of facts. Alongside these developments, the standard of teacher training in day schools was also improving with the 'pupil-teacher' system being discontinued and more teachers entering the system from colleges who had been trained in more modern approaches.<sup>94</sup> It is reasonable to infer from the comments of the Brunswick Education and Youth Committee that the gap was widening between the experiences of children in day schools and in Sunday Schools and that this was felt to be contributing to a loss of scholars.

The third factor affecting Sunday school and youth work in both circuits was the redevelopment of the East Side of the town of Whitby and the re-housing of families on the new council estate which was far enough away from both the former Primitive and Wesleyan chapels situated on Church Street to lead to a loss of children to the Sunday Schools. It was not just a matter of physical distance but it was also a change in lifestyle which, coupled with the erosion of established communities, contributed to fewer children in attendance.<sup>95</sup> This created 'psychological' as well as physical distance. Although a local factor in the town of Whitby it was also happening

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<sup>92</sup> Board of Education, *The Education of the Adolescent: Report of the Consultative Committee*, London: HMSO, 1925, Para. 110, p. 106.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, Para. 113, p. 108.

<sup>94</sup> J. Lawson and H. Silver, *A Social History of Education in England*, London: Methuen, 1973, p. 386.

<sup>95</sup> For instance, the houses had gardens and a communal play area was provided.



elsewhere in the country as a result of slum clearance and the building of municipal housing. An additional difficulty, already alluded to, was the fact that with a lack of any significant industry the Whitby area offered few permanent employment opportunities for young people which meant that they often had to move away to find work and were therefore unable to take their places as adult members of the chapels. This was summed up by Interviewee 5 when he commented, somewhat sadly, 'the biggest export of Whitby is its people...we lose our children'.<sup>96</sup> Other than the joint Youth Rallies, there is little to suggest that the two circuits made any concerted attempt to work together. This was possibly because Sunday Schools were seen as a means of nurturing potential members for their own chapels. Even in the area of training, where Methodist Union could have provided benefits, there was no evidence of cooperation in joint activities.

### **The Gallows Close Scheme**

One response to the movement of families to the Gallows Close council housing estate was to consider providing a Methodist Sunday School there.<sup>97</sup> This was raised at the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1937 at which it was recorded:

We regret to report a decrease of 55 scholars largely from the Primary Department which we attribute chiefly to re-housing. We suggest that consideration be given to the possibility of securing a piece of land on the Council's Housing Estate for the erection of a Sunday School. It was resolved that a small committee be appointed to examine the situation on the Gallows Close estate and report.

At the meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1937 it was noted that the Gallows Close Committee gave a progress report and was asked to continue its work. On 8<sup>th</sup> December 1937 it reported to the Quarterly Meeting that a suitable site 'for a new Church or Hall' had been offered to Methodism by George Waind, a local Councillor, business man and Brunswick Circuit local preacher.<sup>98</sup> It

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<sup>96</sup> Interview 5, 19/04/09.

<sup>97</sup> Later referred to as the Helredale council estate.

<sup>98</sup> R St. John Yorke, 'Service and Success: Christian Ideals in Business Building', *The Monthly Pictorial*, January 1930, p. 14-14. This was an article about George Waind, stating that

was proposed and carried that a resolution should be sent to the Church Street Circuit Quarterly Meeting requesting that it should nominate one third of the Trustees.<sup>99</sup> This resolution suggests both a desire to involve the Church Street Circuit in this project as a joint venture and to share the cost. Also, the Gallows Close development would affect both Church Street chapel and Wesley Hall.

There then followed an exchange of correspondence with the Church Street Circuit, which responded by setting up of a small committee to 'obtain fuller details of this matter'.<sup>100</sup> However, progress was slow and in June 1938 it was reported at the Brunswick Quarterly Meeting that matters had not developed sufficiently to enable a meeting to be held with the Church Street members.<sup>101</sup> Further attempts were made to meet but at the March 1939 Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting it was recorded that 'there was nothing further to report'.<sup>102</sup> By June 1939 it was already clear that the likelihood of war was affecting matters and at the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting Rev E. Wyman requested the names and regimental number of those members of the Militia called up, together with the names of any conscientious objectors so that particulars could be sent to the headquarters of the Methodist Connexion.<sup>103</sup>

The Gallows Close Scheme is significant in a number of ways. It demonstrates that although there was some limited cooperation between the former Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist circuits they were still essentially operating as separate organizations. Whatever may have passed between them on an informal basis, for instance between the ministers of the two circuits, the two Quarterly Meetings still needed to communicate with each other by formal letters in order to discuss the scheme. To use a metaphor, relations between them appear to have been conducted more along the lines

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'Mr. Waind is an active participater in all matters pertaining to the Wesleyan Methodist Church and is a local preacher'. p. 15.

<sup>99</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 10/03/37, 10/06/37, 08/12/37.

<sup>100</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, CQM, 09/12/37.

<sup>101</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 08/06/38.

<sup>102</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 15/03/39.

<sup>103</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 14/06/39.

of 'foreign policy' than of engaging in 'home affairs'. It is also not clear exactly what was envisaged for the council estate and the words 'church', 'mission' and 'hall' are all variously used. Given the fact that the estate was seen as an area for mission, with its population among those who were considered the hardest to reach, it is probable that a combination of mission church, Sunday School and social centre was likely. It is not clear to what extent earlier circuit amalgamation might have led to quicker responses when the offer of land was made but the need to set up two committees with separate accountabilities and reporting procedures certainly did not expedite progress. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, when the Gallows Close project was revived after the Second World War, other factors were also involved.

### **Filling the pulpits**

The core activity of the churches was worship, preaching and evangelism and the minutes of the Brunswick Circuit local preachers' meeting, in particular, provide information about the work and priorities during this period. There is less detailed information about the Church Street Circuit, where the Preachers' Meetings occupied the first items before the 'Full Board' of Quarterly Meetings. However, many of the preaching plans of the period have survived. Given the centrality of preaching and the preaching plan in the life and work of the circuits some detail of the process, priorities and content of the meetings is discussed.

The numbers of preachers attending Brunswick Circuit meetings was generally small in comparison with the total number of listed preachers, with an average of five to eight at each meeting out of a possible number in the mid-twenties. The meetings were held at different locations in the circuit to allow those who did not live in Whitby to get to them but the core attendance tended to be made up of the same people. The meetings were mainly made up of men but during the early 1930s two women became local preachers. The fact that the tributes to deceased local preachers were all concerned with men in this period emphasised what was still a masculine ethos.

An important function of the meetings was to act as something akin to a medieval craft guild or a professional body controlling such matters as who should be admitted as a local preacher, the training and examination of potential local preachers and discipline of those already admitted. There was also the question of training and spiritual development of experienced preachers. An analysis of the type of business covered and the process of the meetings gives some insight into the nature of the Brunswick Circuit Local Preachers' meetings.

The 'gate-keeping' function of admission and training can be seen in a number of cases. On 6<sup>th</sup> March 1935, as an outcome of her examinations and trial sermon, it was unanimously agreed to admit Miss Burnett to full plan. However, it was recorded that the report on Miss Basson was unsatisfactory and the secretary was delegated to inform her, 'requesting her to apply herself more diligently to her preparation for the work of preaching'. At the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1935 it was agreed that Miss Basson should be asked to transfer from the list of local preachers to that of exhorters.<sup>104</sup> On 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1937 it was recorded that Brother Gill wished to resign as a preacher and it was decided that Rev. E. Wyman and Brother Bowyer should interview him before removing his name from the plan. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1942 it was again noted that Brother Gill had intimated his desire to resign as a local preacher. However:

it was decided to ask him to fully consider the seriousness of this matter especially in view of the realisation of his ability and cordial acceptance by the congregations throughout the circuit.

Brother Gill then sent a letter of resignation to the meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1943 and this time 'the meeting felt compelled to accept the same with regret'.<sup>105</sup> No indication was given as to why Brother Gill wished to give up local preaching but it is clear from the procedure followed that the resignation of a local preacher was taken very seriously and was not accepted without

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<sup>104</sup> Exhorters were allowed to read Biblical texts and comment on them but were not permitted to preach full sermons.

<sup>105</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, BPM, 06/03/35, 12/06/35, 05/09/37, 03/06/37, 03/03/42, 08/12/43.

first encouraging the person to reconsider. At the same meeting was a request from Brother Lawson, who had failed the examination for local preaching, to be placed on the list of Auxiliaries. Similar 'gate-keeping' functions were performed by the Church Street Circuit Preachers' Meeting.

In 1937 it was decided by the Brunswick Circuit to set up a class to prepare local preachers for their task and this may have been connected with the fact that in that year examinations became compulsory for trainee preachers.<sup>106</sup> However, this was only for the Brunswick preachers and no mention was made of those from the Church Street Circuit. After the class had been established the Local Preachers' Meeting monitored progress of trainees and in 1938 it was reported that Brother W. Weatherill had shown little improvement, had been absent for twelve weeks from the study class and that he should be interviewed by Rev E. Wyman and E. Sanderson.<sup>107</sup> On a more positive note in June 1939 there was a comment concerning Brother Doughty<sup>108</sup> of Thorpe and that Rev. W. Selby should 'interview the young man and if thought satisfactory he should be given a note to preach'.<sup>109</sup> On 6<sup>th</sup> December 1939 a satisfactory report was received and it was resolved that he should be received 'on trial'.<sup>110</sup>

A complaint about the quality of some local preachers was raised on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1942. The wording of the minutes shows that this needed to be handled with sensitivity. The original wording was:

The Superintendent reported that Brother Rawlings of Lythe had expressed dissatisfaction with regard to some of the local preachers who had taken services at Lythe.

However, the section about 'dissatisfaction with regard to some of the local preachers' had been crossed out and diluted to, 'expressed his concern with

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<sup>106</sup> Vickers, *op cit*, p. 209.

<sup>107</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, BPM, 26/05/38, 06/06/39, 06/12/39, 17/06/42.

<sup>108</sup> 'Brother' was the normal form of address for men, with women referred to as 'Miss', 'Mrs' or, sometimes, 'Sister'.

<sup>109</sup> The 'note to preach' was the first stage in the process to becoming a local preacher and involved shadowing and working with an experienced local preacher.

<sup>110</sup> The period spent 'on trial' was one of probation before a person could be accepted as a fully accredited local preacher.

regard to the effectiveness of our services'. It was decided that Brother Gill should be requested to attend the September meeting where the matter could be dealt with but the September minutes make no reference to the matter, suggesting that it was dealt with outside the meeting.

There was an element of rudimentary training for preachers at some of the meetings, but this was intermittent and limited in scope during this period. Frequently this activity was covered by the expression 'a conversation', most generally about the 'Work of God in the Circuit' but sometimes with more specific topics. Examples were a 'Conversation on the Conduct of Public Worship' (05/09/35); 'Open Air Work, (05/12/35); 'The Preacher and the Pulpit', 'well received...sorry not more time given' (03/12/36); 'How I Get my Sermons', 'enjoyable and profitable'(02/03/38) and 'preaching in wartime' (06/06/40). In the last case there was a comment that 'congregations were more responsive because of the serious outlook' and 'should see these events as God's Challenge, a challenge to true comfort'.

The leadership of these conversations was generally in the hands of the local preachers themselves although some were led by one of the ministers. During the war a shortage of preachers became a concern and in December 1941 the superintendent reported:

the great difficulty he had in finding preachers to fill the appointments required and hoped the Brethren would do their best to help during the Winter Quarter.

At the following meeting in March 1942 comments were made:

on the number of local preachers whose names appeared on the plan, taking little or no work for many years and not incapacitated.<sup>111</sup>

This suggests that there were local preachers available but that not all were equally active. It is possible that travelling difficulties in winter were a factor but there was no indication that it might have been connected specifically with wartime conditions. At the same meeting a serious lapse by a local preacher was raised. This was a missed preaching appointment at Robin

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<sup>111</sup> The Manse, WCR, BPM, 10/12/41, 11/3/42.

Hood's Bay, for which there was no apparent reason. Pastor C.W. Thompson, who had arrived in the circuit in 1941 and who had pastoral responsibility for Robin Hood's Bay and Fylingthorpe, was requested to interview the preacher concerned. As a lay pastor he was subject to the authority of the Local Preachers' Meeting, generally referred to as Brother Thompson, but he actually performed most of the duties of an ordained minister for less remuneration.<sup>112</sup>

The conduct of services at the Whitby Institution (formerly Whitby Workhouse)<sup>113</sup> was also discussed during this period. Methodist services had long been held here.<sup>114</sup> The preaching plans show that there was one service every Sunday at 6.00. It appears that it was rather a demanding appointment and at the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1935 it was recorded:

Brother Humble referred to services held at the Whitby Institution and thought something might be done with regard to the conduct of these services to a mixed congregation.

It is not clear what was meant by 'a mixed congregation'. It could mean a congregation of people from different denominations but it more likely suggests people, some elderly, perhaps confused, with very mixed responses which made it difficult to plan and lead worship there. Unfortunately there was no mention in subsequent minutes of whether this matter was taken forward in any way but on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1943 thanks were expressed to Mrs Lewis for arranging a pianist for Institute services.

A second area of concern was that of transporting preachers to their appointments, especially given the isolated locations of some of the chapels. On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1936 the issue of 'transport arrangements for conveying preachers to Littlebeck, Grosmont and Esk Valley' was raised and it was

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<sup>112</sup> Fylingthorpe, Robin Hood's Bay and Hawsker were the pastoral responsibility of either a lay pastor or a supernumerary minister during the period of this study. A manse was available at Fylingthorpe.

<sup>113</sup> The Workhouse was opened in 1794 in an area on the east side known as 'The Ropery'. It later became St.Hilda's Hospital but even in the second half of the twentieth century Whitby people expressed a fear of 'ending up in St.Hilda's'. It closed in about 1980.

<sup>114</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Wesleyan Methodist Preachers' Plan, May – October, 1829. A twice monthly service is shown at 'the Poorhouse'.

agreed that a car would be provided to take them there.<sup>115</sup> Further concerns about local preachers getting to appointments were raised on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1937 when the London and North Eastern Railway Company was rumoured to be considering closing an old railway tunnel that gave walking access for preachers and worshippers to the chapel at Esk Valley. It was decided that the Rev. E. Wyman should write to the company requesting 'continuance of the privilege to travel along the road as used so long'.<sup>116</sup> This was because there was no made-up road to Esk Valley until 1951, prior to which supplies had been delivered to the hamlet by rail.<sup>117</sup> The matter of access was not mentioned again and the tunnel remained open for pedestrian access. Other than for the isolated chapel at Goathland, with its seasonal services, the matter of transport was not a problem for the Church Street Circuit, with its three 'home churches' all within walking distance. However, travelling did affect those Church Street preachers who took appointments as 'Auxiliaries' on the Brunswick plan.

The evidence in the minutes suggests that the relationship between the local preachers and the ordained ministers was good throughout the period. The ministers do not appear to have dominated the discussion and where decisions were taken it was frequently the case that one of the ministers was requested to take matters forward in partnership with one of the local preachers. There was also a social element at some meetings. For instance for 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1938 it was recorded that before the formal meeting the preachers were invited to tea in the Brunswick Choir Vestry. Tea was also provided on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1938 and there was an unusually high attendance of sixteen for this meeting.<sup>118</sup> The previous meeting in September had only had seven present and the provision of tea may have acted as an incentive to attend.

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<sup>115</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, BPM, 12/6/35, 01/9/43, 03/12/36, 03/03/37.

<sup>116</sup> The Manse Sleights. WCR, Agreement with NER 1899 (superceded), Circuit Safe, Sleights.

<sup>117</sup> P. Benham, *An Illustrated History of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway*, Hershaw: Ian Allan Publishing, 2008, p. 33

<sup>118</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, BPM, 2/3/38, 8/12/3.



Despite the fact that in organizational terms the local preachers of the two circuits remained separate, the preaching plans of both include some preachers taking services in each other's chapels. In 1934 the Brunswick superintendant minister and three Brunswick local preachers appear under 'Auxiliaries' on the Church Street plan for July 1934 and in the same period three Church Street local preachers appear on the equivalent Brunswick plan.<sup>119</sup> This was a pattern throughout the period from Union in 1932 and, as has already been noted, to a limited extent before Union took place. In particular, the ministers were usually to be found taking services in both circuits which was an expectation of the Methodist Conference.<sup>120</sup>

Preaching is an area where it can be argued that by coming together the preachers of both circuits could have strengthened their contributions for organizational, training and evangelical purposes, which would have been in accord with the aims of Union. However, there is no evidence that the two groups of local preachers met formally during this period even though there may have been some informal contact between them. Significantly, in both circuits the focus of preachers' meetings was on maintaining the worship of their own churches, with very little about evangelism beyond their own congregations. It was not until September 1944 that the first joint Local Preachers' Meeting took place and this will be discussed in Chapter 7.

### **Making an 'Effort': bazaars, fundraising and entertainment**

If the preachers and the plan were vital to maintaining the worship of the circuits, the raising of money and the social life of the chapels were central to Whitby Methodist life and culture. In contrast with the preachers, here it was 'the ladies'<sup>121</sup> who played a leading part. Methodist Union did not affect the need for the two circuits and the chapels to continue to raise significant sums

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<sup>119</sup> NYCR R/M/WHH 4/3/8, CCP, July – Oct 1934: NYCR R/M/WH, 4/1/4, BCP, July – Oct 1934.

<sup>120</sup> It was written into the Conference stationing minutes that the Church Street minister should 'change in one Sunday in every quarter with the Ministers of the Whitby (Brunswick) Circuit'.

<sup>121</sup> This was the collective term generally used in minutes. Compared with men, there were few references to individual women by name.

of money over and above that given regularly by members. It is evident that many of these activities were also important social events that bound together members and adherents, helped to foster a sense of common identity and provided a link with the wider community. However, it did reinforce their separate identities and discouraged a pooling of resources. It has been noted that the summer visitors provided extra income for some churches but the season lasted for no more than three months and for the remaining nine it was necessary to rely on their members, adherents and local people for extra income. Fundraising, with its associated activities was an important feature of church life and the life of the neighbourhoods in which the churches were situated.

An illustration of the importance of fundraising, and the techniques employed, can be found in a report in the *Whitby Gazette* in 1932 of the Church Street Methodist Church Annual Bazaar.<sup>122</sup> The report takes up three full columns of a page in the broad-sheet paper. It writes of 'a crowded congregation' and remarked that it was a 'happy thought to invite the Whitby Carnival Queen and her maids of honour to open the sale'. It described how 'the room was very appropriately decorated with carnival novelties' which were also worn by the stall holders. The report then went on to recount the opening words of thanks by the chairman, Rev. E Metcalfe, who said:

He had no need to make any apology for the holding of such an event, as it was one held year after year with the object of raising funds for the work of the church. To be quite frank, they were after money. They made no apology, because he could tell them that whatever money they got could be used to good purpose.

It describes how he joked about an article in the paper that morning that stated that the banks were full of money, 'but it was not his money (Laughter)'. He would guarantee that the money raised would be wisely used, that it would be:

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<sup>122</sup> 'Church Street Methodist Church Annual Bazaar', *Whitby Gazette*, 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1932, p. 2.

a sorrowful day if the churches became neglected...because the social, industrial and political sides of life needed a spiritual basis ...Like all good Methodists, they were always prepared to spend a little more than they had in a good cause (Applause)'.

There then followed musical entertainment with a 'tasteful rendition of *Give me youth and a day*' by a chapel member.

The bazaar took place just after Methodist Union and was attended by the second minister from the Brunswick Circuit, the Rev. F.W. Smith. He was invited to speak and based an opening joke both on the musical offering just rendered and on the success of the money raising event:

There is a saying applicable to husbands, 'If you want harmony in the home then you must provide the right notes', and he thought they had provided a very useful number (Laughter and applause)'.

He went on to speak of Methodist Union and that:

they had become brothers in one ministry, and as time went on difficulties would be swept away.

The reference to 'difficulties' is of note, implying that at this stage they were still considered of some significance. He reminded the gathering of the forthcoming annual sale on 30<sup>th</sup> November at Wesley Hall and said that he 'hoped to see many of those before him at that event (Laughter and applause)' and that 'one of the best things they could have was to have something to do for their church (Applause)'. This would have been aimed, in particular, at the wider community.

A list of the stalls and stallholders was recorded and thanks were given to 'the ladies who had worked so hard for the stalls' with further mention of 'the lady members of the congregation' who 'had charge of the tea and refreshments'. In addition, all the collectors of money in the 'Collecting Club' were named as female, who together had raised £73-11-3d. The evening closed with performances by the Bandit Concert Party and scholars of the Sunday School. The gross proceeds for the day were reported as £120, then a significant sum.

The detail of the reporting in this article, including audience reaction to speeches, provides valuable evidence of the nature of such activities. Although Methodist events, they were also community events, especially in the then crowded 'East Side' served by the Church Street and Wesley Chapels. It shows they also provided fun and entertainment. It is likely that many of the same people would attend both annual bazaars, and probably others in the town, and they would attract people who were not regular chapel-goers. As Interviewee 1 commented:

They attracted people way beyond the chapel. Oh yes, there was a bit of you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.<sup>123</sup>

In his study of 'folk religion' in Staithes, Clarke noted the importance of such people for the economy of chapels:

Nominal affiliation elicits support for coffee-mornings, bazaars, jumble sales and even in some cases extends to making gifts to chapel funds in lieu of Sunday attendance.<sup>124</sup>

It is also likely that women who attended chapel regularly would bring family members and friends, many of whom may not normally have come to services, thus providing a penumbra of support and goodwill for the chapels. Indeed, the speeches of both the Church Street and the Wesley Hall ministers demonstrate an understanding of the nature of the audience and of the purpose of the gathering, displaying humour and a lightness of touch, together with the desire to encourage people to spend money. However, both also linked this with the religious mission of the chapels. The speeches, provision of refreshments and entertainment are features of what in later times would be described as 'commercial awareness', demonstrating a regard for 'marketing' and 'customer relations'.

Entertainment itself was used for fund-raising, an example of which took place on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1933, when the Church Street Ladies Missionary Auxiliary presented a 'Masque of Noble Women'.<sup>125</sup> A photograph shows the participants dressed in costumes representing those deemed to be 'noble

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<sup>123</sup> Interview 1, 12/03/09.

<sup>124</sup> Clark, *op cit*, p. 76.

<sup>125</sup> NYCR R/M/WH,4/3/3, CCP, Jan – March 1933

women' across the centuries, such as Florence Nightingale.<sup>126</sup> They are grouped round a large Celtic-style cross covered in gold or silver paper, emphasising the Christian context of the event (See Appendix 8 for photograph). The young people were also involved in putting on events. In 1934 they presented 'The Neighbours of Sunshine Alley' and in April 1936 the *Notes* state that:

The young people of the circuit trained by Mrs. Dixon in the play *The Women's Strike* delighted audiences in Whitby and Goathland.<sup>127</sup>

The list of stalls at the Fishburn Park Christmas Bazaar on December 9th 1931 gives an indication of what was on offer at bazaars. The stalls included those for 'Works', Sunday School, Handkerchief, Fruit, Confectionary, and the 'Mens' Stall'. There was a Christmas tree and refreshments. This bazaar made £66 – 1s – 5d which was typical for the 1930s.<sup>128</sup> In the minutes of bazaar meetings it was the women who took the lead and men were allocated such tasks as putting up the stalls and, in wartime, ensuring that the blackout was in place. The religious element usually involved a formal opening by the minister with a hymn and prayers. Sometime the evening ended with a concert, as on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1930 when a 'Carnival Royal Court and Sketch' was performed<sup>129</sup> and on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1938 a concert and a sketch, 'Neighbours in Gooseberry Court'.<sup>130</sup>

In terms of chapel culture the women are portrayed in the records as the 'workers' in the sense that they made much of the goods for the bazaars and did most of the work at the events. Despite the fact that in the holding of the senior Society offices men predominated, without the significant contribution of the women the chapels and circuits would have found it hard to survive financially. They also provided much of the social and community based life of the chapels of both circuits. The *Whitby Gazette* article, previously

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<sup>126</sup> Author's Collection.

<sup>127</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, CCP, 4/3/8, July – Oct 1934; 4/3/15, April – July 1936.

<sup>128</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 2/16/2, Fishburn Park Bazaar Committee Minute Book, 1929 – 1942, 09/12/31.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid*, 10/12/30.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid*, 23/11/38.

mentioned, provided evidence of the strong social bonds between chapel members who worked together to put on such large events. This included opportunities for the exercise of leadership, co-operation, organisation and planning, together with a release of talent and an outlet for creativity. The churches can thus be seen to be far more than places of worship and they formed the focus for a whole range of other activities and a context for personal as well as spiritual development. As Kenneth Lysons noted, drawing on his own experience within Primitive Methodism, 'spiritual and secular aspects of chapel life were inter-related'.<sup>131</sup> However, this was being weakened by secular alternatives and the break-up of the community through re-housing families on the Gallows Close council estate.

There is less detail of such events from the Brunswick Circuit. A possible reason for this is that, for the Church Street Circuit, with only three churches in use throughout the year there was more detailed reporting of chapel events than for the Brunswick Circuit in Quarterly Meeting minutes. Also, the *Notes on plans* were used both to publicise forthcoming events and to report the success of events that had taken place. In relation to reducing deficits in circuit funds the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> March 1935 adopted a levy on Societies. On 7<sup>th</sup> September 1938 it was recorded that a similar scheme was again used involving each Society paying 'an additional 25% of its annual assessment spread over a period of two years'.<sup>132</sup> The Brunswick Circuit, possibly as result of the influence of professional and business people, adopted a more directed approach to raising money, whereas the Church Street Circuit relied to a greater extent on fund raising events in the local community. Brunswick Church also had the benefit of legacies and members who were in a better financial position to make greater direct contributions. As an indication of this, the Brunswick Church Endowment Fund stood at £2245-17s -9d in 1932 and had risen to £3425-

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<sup>131</sup> Lysons, *op cit* p. 136.

<sup>132</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 13/03/35, 07/09/38.

17s-9d by 1940.<sup>133</sup> This was more than double the annual income of the Brunswick Circuit Fund.

There were, however, chapel bazaars, as at Robin Hood's Bay and Briggsath and Sleights. Interviewee 1, whose husband had been a ship's master, recalled that at Robin Hood's Bay the bazaar used to take place over three days at the New Year because this was the time when many of the men who were normally at sea were at home with their families. She said that women in the village were used to taking responsibility as their husbands were away for long periods during which communication with them was not possible.<sup>134</sup> Interviewee 3 recalled the Briggsath bazaars:

Here at Briggsath there was always an annual bazaar, first Wednesday in November. We used to embroider pillow cases and have all these hand-made aprons and one thing and another on the stalls. It was held in the village hall and great heavy tables had to be brought up [from the chapel] because they weren't strong enough in the hall. Pots were brought up. And I found out what it means to be a strong Methodist!

Other important events that raised additional income in both circuits were the chapel and Sunday School anniversaries and harvest festivals, including the Church Street 'Harvest of the Sea' services. These, combined with the regular worship, gave the chapels of both circuits religious and social significance. As Interviewee 4 put it:

Esk Valley, you see, there were about twenty-one cottages at Esk Valley. See, going back people went to chapel, or church, presumably, because we hadn't anything else as meeting places, had we? And I think we met each other. You know, you came in and met up with each other and had a chat afterwards. They were more social gatherings.

The same person recalled that in country areas evening events were arranged for when there would be a full moon 'so people had the parish lantern to guide them back over the fields'.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 2/15/26, Brunswick Church Trustees Minute Book, pp 147/8, 181/2.

<sup>134</sup> A similar characteristic was noted by Batty, where in Cockenzie, Scotland, the women played 'a sustaining role'. Batty, *Scotland's Methodists 1750 – 2000*, p. 179.

<sup>135</sup> Interview 1, 12/3/09; Interview 3, 27/03/09; Interview 4, 06/04/09.

## **Worship, doctrine and Church order**

Underlying the relationship between the Brunswick and the Church Street circuits were differences that are more difficult to discern in the written records and these concern how significant were theological and doctrinal differences between them. Although there was much agreement over their evangelical approach to religion and on moral/social issues there were differences in their views concerning ecclesiastical authority and the conduct of worship. However, in the local records there is an absence of discussion of theological and ecclesiological issues. This does not mean that they were unimportant or not considered; rather that local activity was concentrated on the practical implications of decisions taken beyond the circuits. Also, given differences in background and social class and it is not always possible to separate out those factors that could be attributed to doctrinal and ecclesiological matters from those arising from other factors. As will be discussed, not all former Wesleyans and Primitive Methodists shared the same views and generalizations can be misleading.

Some clues as to these differences emerged in the interviews with people who remembered the inter-war period. Interviewee 5 recalled that there were differences over worship and that some former Primitive Methodists did not like what they saw as the more formal 'liturgical' worship of the Wesleyans, in particular, the singing of an anthem and of the Lord's Prayer. He also recalled:

The Prims didn't like the change of hymn book - that was in the 1930s - and the revision of the communion service.

He also said:

The Primitives preferred mostly extemporary prayer. [Wesleyan worship] was too Anglican, to start with, and it wasn't personal from the preacher.<sup>136</sup>

However, in Whitby, the distinction in worship was not simply a denominational matter and it also reflected differences between the

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<sup>136</sup> Interview 5, 16/04/09.



Brunswick Church and the three other town churches. Interviewee 5, himself a former Brunswick member, commented on Wesley Hall:

That was, they may forgive me for saying so, that was more of a mission-type service.

The 'forgive me for saying so' perhaps implied that Wesley Hall had a rather simple form of service when compared with Brunswick. Interviewee 2, a former member of Wesley Hall, was more direct:

Well, put it like this, the Primitive Methodists and Wesley Hall were more alike than Brunswick. Brunswick was the big church. Brunswick was where the money was. They didn't have poverty in Brunswick Church. The people were business people and had money. They gave money like Mr Pannett. People – ship owners – ran Brunswick. That's where the nice people were...The Primitive Methodists and the Wesleyans at Wesley Hall were more alike in so far as the standard of the people that went.<sup>137</sup>

She spoke of the worship at Wesley hall during this period:

But Wesley Hall had the poor people and it used to be fun – I won't say fun – that is not the word, but at Wesley Hall the old, old Wesleyan people wanted to shout out Hallelujah! You couldn't do that at Brunswick.

She went on:

It's a funny thing to say so, don't get me wrong. It was rather a class distinction in Whitby, in so far as the poor folks went to Wesley Hall and that, and the business people, the people with money, with nice houses and nice manners, nice ways, very sedate, went to Brunswick.

The style of worship that she described at Wesley Hall was more typical of the Primitive Methodists than the Wesleyans, with its freer form and greater emphasis on extemporary prayer and congregational participation. However, this was also mixed with the issue of differing social backgrounds. She subsequently moved to live 'on the Railway' (Fishburn Park) and attended the former Primitive Methodist Fishburn Park chapel:

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<sup>137</sup> Interview 2, 17/03/09.

Nice and friendly - people were nice – they were all your neighbours, you see. Oh, it was nice. We had some lovely concerts at Fishburn Park as well.

When asked to compare worship at Fishburn Park with that at Wesley Hall, she said:

If you were to match them up it was similar, quite similar. We settled straight in. There was no question of going away again. We stayed, we liked it, they made us welcome.

In her account it is the people who are mentioned and the feeling of fitting in and being made welcome. Interviewee 4, who normally attended Esk Valley Chapel, had similar reactions to worshipping at Brunswick saying, 'I sort of felt a bit lost'.<sup>138</sup>

These are the views of only two people but they represent voices that are not normally heard in the official records of the period. It was something of an exaggeration to say that only 'people with money' attended Brunswick but Interviewee 5 had listed:

butchers, drapers, business people, yes, of course solicitors – Pannett himself was a solicitor in the town. And, of course, we had master mariners...

In comparison with much of the East Side they were nevertheless better off financially and this was reflected not only in the buildings but also in the style of worship and the nature of the social and cultural life associated with the churches.

Other than Ruswarp and Goathland, the Church Street Circuit had no village chapels by this time. The former Wesleyan village chapels generally had simpler forms of service than Brunswick with more taken by local preachers. However, some, such as Fylingthorpe, had choirs and Interviewee 3 remembered that this choir would sing in other chapels for such events as harvest festivals and chapel anniversaries.<sup>139</sup> A particular memory of Interviewee 4 was of Sandsend chapel:

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<sup>138</sup> Interview 4, 06/04/09.

<sup>139</sup> Interview 3, 27/03/09.

And you know, those farmers, as soon as they sat down [mimics snoring] and the preacher just raised his voice...<sup>140</sup>

There could also be competition between chapels of the same former denomination, as was the case between Fylingthorpe and Robin Hood's Bay. Interviewee 1 recalled that 'there was considerable rivalry' and that, despite being only half a mile apart, 'never the twain shall meet'. This went back to the time when Fylingthorpe was a farming community and Robin Hood's Bay a fishing village (See Chapter 3). However, she said there also were social differences with the ordinary seamen living in the old village and the master mariners residing 'at the top of the bank'.

When considering the factors that lay behind resistance to circuit amalgamation it must therefore be born in mind that at local level these were complex and deep seated. They related not just to differences that people may have held over matters of doctrine, church order and style of worship but to cultural factors based on occupational background, social class and how people saw themselves and their identities. As early as 1932 Harrison pointed out:

The real difficulties of Union were all in the obscure region of sentiment, and there argument failed altogether.<sup>141</sup>

These matters are rarely expressed overtly in the written documentation from the period.

## **The Second World War**

With the outbreak of war in September 1939 the Quarterly Meetings became more concerned with the practical consequences affecting the circuits and churches. For instance, there were references to the war lighting restrictions, with winter evening services being moved to the afternoon and the difficulty of finding enough preachers to fill appointments and travelling restrictions.<sup>142</sup> There were issues affecting the use of church premises such as

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<sup>140</sup> Interview 4, 06/04/09.

<sup>141</sup> A.W. Harrison, 'These Two Hundred Years: The Historical background of Methodist Union', *Methodist Recorder*, Vol. 23, 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1932.

<sup>142</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, BQM, 5/9/42.

requisitioning by the military of the schoolroom at Fishburn Park.<sup>143</sup> However, routine circuit and Society business continued to occupy most time at meetings.

The war had some effect on church membership and attendance. House wrote that in Whitby there was 'a considerable exodus of residents' during the war with some returning in 1943 – 1944 and that 'in common with all coastal resorts Whitby lost much of its holiday trade in the war years.'<sup>144</sup> A list of Methodists from the Brunswick Circuit on active service, printed in *The Dawn* magazine in December 1942 shows 160 members involved on war work, including the Womens' Land Army and Civil Defence.<sup>145</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> March 1944 there was a report at the Brunswick Local Preachers' Meeting of 'having good services in various places but no definite increase in attendance was reported'.<sup>146</sup> The membership records show that the Brunswick Circuit membership fell from 564 in 1939 to 531 in 1942 and then rose to 541 in 1944. The Church Street membership on the other hand fell from 178 in 1939 until it reached 135 at the time of the amalgamation of the circuits in 1944. However once amalgamated the membership of the former Church Street Circuit chapels rose to 140 in 1945 suggesting a return of members at the end of the war.

The overall picture, therefore, was that the war led to some loss of membership but there was a modest recovery as the war ended. There was a loss of summer visitors but also additional attendance at some chapels by members of the forces stationed locally. Interviewee 2 recalled:

The lads...used to come in, there was a lot came to church, but there was more that came for refreshments afterwards!<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/2, CQM, 12/3/42.

<sup>144</sup> House, *op cit*, pp. 97, 154.

<sup>145</sup> *The Dawn*, 1942, December 1942, p. 1.

<sup>146</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, BPM, 01/03/44.

<sup>147</sup> Interview 2, 17/03/09.

Despite the difficulties and challenges presented by wartime conditions, the various surviving records convey a remarkable sense of 'business as usual'. Giving money continued very much as normal, an example was in the February 1944 minutes of the Briggswath and Sleights Leaders' Meeting that it had been an excellent year for Overseas Missions, the total raised being £37-7s-11d an increase of £3-14s-3d on the previous year and the Women's Meeting had raised £112-10s -0d. As the war drew to a close there was an increasing sense of a return to normality. For instance, in September 1944 there was a proposal at Briggswath and Sleights to return to evening services again if lighting restriction permitted together with a recommendation to obtain a new notice board for the church with the names of the ministers and times of services printed on it.<sup>148</sup>

The war years present a picture of the circuits carrying on very much as before with their routine activities, despite Whitby becoming a garrison town and centre of a training area for troops. However, the wartime restrictions, the influx of troops and the involvement of their own members in war work meant that it was also a period of changed priorities and the widening of horizons. This provided the context within which the Brunswick and the Church Street circuits amalgamated in September 1944.

### **Assessment**

The period covered by this chapter is one that is generally viewed through the distorting 'lens' of the Second World War. On the one hand it was a period of change, but it was also one of continuity and in relation to the Free Churches generally Adrian Hastings referred to:

a multitude of apparently thriving little chapels, still keeping up much of the old sectarian life of Sunday schools and faith teas and lantern lectures and revivalist preaching.<sup>149</sup>

However, he continued, 'it was none the less true that this age of maturity was also an age of decline'. This state of affairs was reflected in both of the

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<sup>148</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/6, Briggswath and Sleights Leaders' Meetings, 20/2/44, 19/09/44.

<sup>149</sup> Hastings, *op cit*, p. 264.

Whitby circuits and the use of the words 'apparently thriving' is consistent with the evidence that financial matters were of continuing concern for both circuits throughout the period. The evidence from this study also illustrates the tension during this period between 'the old sectarian life' and the forces of modernity that were threatening it.

Although both circuits were affected by these changes the evidence is that the numerically smaller and financially weaker Church Street Circuit was the more concerned of the two about losing members during the holiday season. As other opportunities for entertainment and self-development became available the lives of fewer people became centred upon the churches. This was compounded by the breaking up of long-standing communities as a result of re-housing. Clive Field has pointed out that with competition from the commercialized entertainment industry it was the very comprehensiveness and success of Methodist culture that was its own undoing.<sup>150</sup> The decline in membership became evident from 1936 (Church Street) and 1937 (Brunswick), with the loss of members more critical for the smaller Church Street Circuit.

The specifically religious differences between the two circuits are not strongly evident from the documentary evidence but emerged in the interviews. Both circuits were concerned with evangelism and there was some limited cooperation between them over services at the band-stand and on the beach. They co-operated with each other in providing hospitality for the District Synod held in Whitby in 1936. There were other joint activities such as the inauguration of the Methodist Advance Campaign in 1934 which, it was said, 'helps us to understand one another better'.<sup>151</sup> However, in July 1934 there was note of concern in the comment from the Church Street minister that the United Passiontide Services were 'fairly well attended' and in July 1935 this was taken further with the comment that:

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<sup>150</sup> C. Field, 'A Sociological Profile of English Methodism', *Oral History Society Journal*, Vol.4, No.1, 1976, p. 77.

<sup>151</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/7, CCP, April – July 1934.

The services of Passion Week ...were helpful but our folk have yet to realise the value of Holy Week as a devotional standpoint.<sup>152</sup>

The former Primitive Methodists had not been as familiar with the more liturgical use of the Christian calendar and festivals as the Wesleyans and this is reflected in the response. It is even possible that some were hostile to such activities, seeing them as 'too Anglican'. Both of the circuits celebrated Wesley Day on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1938, the Wesley Bicentenary, but they did it separately.<sup>153</sup> The Church Street Circuit held a Rally at Church Street Church and there is no evidence that they joined with Brunswick for any events. However there was some mutual support over evangelism with a note at the Church Street Quarterly Meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1939:

That we support our friends at Brunswick for an open air meeting to be held on the station car park on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1939.<sup>154</sup>

Overall therefore, the evidence suggests that during this period the two circuits were still functioning as separate denominations rather than as a united church, or even as a uniting church. There were things that were shared in common but the differences between them inhibited early moves to uniting in one circuit. 'Our friends at Brunswick' sums the relationship up quite well; a willingness to co-operate but a desire to retain a separate identity. As Lysons observed, in the first few years after Union, 'little seemed to change at local level'.<sup>155</sup> Also, the slow progress over the opportunity to open new Methodist premises on the Gallows Close council estate suggests the additional difficulty of working through bureaucratic committees. It illustrates that the process of communication between the two circuits coupled, perhaps, with a lack of trust prevented them seizing the opportunity offered to them, even if there had been whole-hearted support.

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<sup>152</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/8, 4/3/12 CCP, July – Oct 1934.

<sup>153</sup> A report of the Wesley Day Bicentenary Celebrations at Brunswick Church was printed in the *Whitby Gazette*, 27<sup>th</sup> May 1938, p. 12, and included an account of the life of John Wesley written by the Rev. E. Wyman, the Brunswick superintendent.

<sup>154</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, CQM, 8/12/39.

<sup>155</sup> Lysons, *op cit*, p 106

## Chapter 7 The Circuits Amalgamate

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse in greater detail the process that led up to circuit amalgamation in September 1944. The previous chapter provided a setting for these developments by considering the relationship between the two circuits during the 1930s in the context of the economic and social realities that both were facing. The outbreak of the Second World War, and the changes that came with it, added to the pressures for the amalgamation of the two circuits.

### The first seven years, 1932 - 1939

After Methodist Union in 1932 any impetus there might have been for the early merger of the former Whitby Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist circuits appears to have been lost if, indeed, it had any priority. There was evidence that some people favoured early circuit amalgamation but the records suggest that once the initial period surrounding the Union itself had passed both circuits settled back into their previous routines and continued to operate largely as they had done before, with their separate meetings and officials. Methodist Union had not seriously addressed the question of what was to happen at local level and there were few mechanisms or 'levers' by which aspiration at the centre could be turned into action at the periphery. As Tabraham pointed out, 'Conference had no power to close churches or compel circuits to join together'.<sup>1</sup> In Whitby a Methodist Union Local Committee, formed before Union, continued to meet but this had dealt with such practical matters as how to organize a joint response for contributing to the Commemoration Fund. However, at the Church Street Quarterly Meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1936 there was a note that three delegates were appointed:

in response to the invitation of the Brunswick Circuit to send delegates for a preliminary discussion on the question of circuit amalgamation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> B. W. Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn), London: Epworth, 2010, p. 152,

<sup>2</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, CQM, 03/03/36.



It was added that the meeting would be adjourned should any question arise before the June meeting. The lead was being given by the Brunswick Circuit as it had been over the Whitby circuits becoming part of the York and Whitby District. No records have been found for this 'preliminary discussion' and they were not reported back to the Quarterly Meeting.

At the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1936 the Secretary reported the above correspondence with the Church Street Circuit stating that it had appointed representatives to meet the representatives of the Brunswick Circuit 'to discuss the proposed Union of the two Circuits'.<sup>3</sup> The outcome of the discussion was reported back to the Brunswick Quarterly Meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1936:

The Report was received of the representatives of the Whitby Brunswick and Whitby Church Street Circuits Committee meetings held on 14<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April 1936. Finance, Ministerial, Staffing and other matters were thoroughly discussed. *There appeared to be no obstacle to the fusion of the two circuits say in 1938* but it would probably be desirable to place matters before members.<sup>4</sup>

The section of the minute in italics had been crossed out but remains legible with 'Stet' added. This amendment, presumably at the instigation of the Chairman, the Rev. Edward Wyman, raises a number of questions. The minute, as originally recorded by the secretary of the meeting, suggested that the Whitby Brunswick and the Whitby Church Street Circuits Committee was recommending a move to 'the fusion of the two circuits' within about two years. The deletion of this phrase from the minutes, leaving only the section about the desirability of placing the matter before members, suggests some opposition, possibly outside the meeting, to making any such formal recommendation, or of taking a decision without reference to the membership.

Despite the limited evidence it is possible that although the Committee, comprised of members of both circuits, were in favour of the amalgamation

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<sup>3</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 11/03/36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 10/6/36.

of the circuits there was enough opposition generally for the suggestion of moving towards 'fusion' in 1938 to be expunged from the official record. There is no record how, or even if, the matter was placed before members. The possibility of circuit amalgamation does not appear in relation to the discussions about possible new premises on the Gallows Close estate in 1937 and 1938 which was seen as a venture involving co-operation between two separate circuits.

The only other reference to the merger talks in 1936 was made in an article in the *Whitby Gazette* of 1<sup>st</sup> September 1944 entitled 'Whitby Methodist Circuits Amalgamate'. This is in a paragraph informing a general readership about Methodist Union in 1932:

At that time, although effect was given to the decision in many centres, there seemed little prospect of local amalgamation, the two circuits having worked independently and with complete understanding and goodwill, for one hundred and twenty three years. The first movement to form one Circuit for Whitby and district was made in 1937, and some encouraging progress was made, but it was not until last year that proposals took definite form, on which agreement was reached.<sup>5</sup>

From the style and detail of the article it appears to have been based on material supplied by the Brunswick and the Church Street superintendent ministers, possibly reproduced verbatim. Neither of these ministers had been in post in 1936 and it is probable that the date 1937 in the article was incorrect as all the recorded references in Quarterly Meeting minutes were for 1936. Given the circumstances in which the article was written and the intended audience, together with a desire to present the events in a positive light, the statements about 'complete understanding and goodwill' and 'some encouraging progress' need to be treated with a degree of caution. The underlying question is that if there had been such understanding and goodwill why it had taken twelve years to come to agreement about circuit amalgamation. The use of the word 'some' in relation to 'encouraging progress' also contains a suggestion that there were also *some* significant

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<sup>5</sup> 'Whitby Methodist Circuits Amalgamate', *Whitby Gazette*, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1944, p. 6.

blockages to progress as well. Whatever the case, it remains a fact that from 1936 it took another eight years for the circuit amalgamation to take place and this was in the very different circumstances of the Second World War.

The sensitivity of the relationship between the circuits throughout the 1930s is suggested in a letter from the Rev. E. Wyman, the Brunswick superintendent, to the Rev E. W. Challenger, the Church Street superintendent, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1938. This concerned the proposed Gallows Close council estate project. Mr Wyman wrote that:

the Brunswick Methodist Circuit expressed the earnest desire for the friendly co-operation of the Church Street Circuit and would be very willing to consider any proposals sent by the Church Street Quarterly Meeting. Would you kindly convey this to your meeting on Wednesday next?<sup>6</sup>

The way that this was phrased, including the request for proposals, suggests a degree of sensitivity in the handling of the relationship between the circuits and a desire to make the Church Street Circuit feel that it was being fully involved and not being dictated to by a senior, or more powerful, partner. The expressions 'earnest desire' and 'friendly cooperation' are suggestive of a feeling that the Church Street Circuit was in need of some cajoling and reassurance. The tone of the letter was supportive overall, wishing Mr Challenger 'every good wish for a happy and successful gathering' at the next Quarterly Meeting. Nevertheless there was no suggestion of possible circuit amalgamation and the tone is one of diplomacy between separate organizations rather than discussions taking place within the same organization.

### **The wartime years**

Between 1937 and 1939 no formal progress was made with circuit amalgamation although informal discussions may have continued. It was during the early months of the Second World War that the matter was again

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<sup>6</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/25, Schofield letters, Correspondence general, 1922-1957, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1938.

raised. At the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1939 it was recorded that:

The Superintendent Minister requested the Quarterly Meeting to re-open discussion on the amalgamation of the Whitby Circuits. It was agreed that the Rev. W.E. Selby confer with Rev. E.W. Challenger with a view to the matter being brought before the Church Street Quarterly Meeting... any recommendations to be sent to the GPC.<sup>7</sup>

It is possible that the impetus for this initiative came from the outbreak of war in September as a result of which people were making other large adjustments in their lives. This was the opinion of Interviewee 5 who felt that 'wartime conditions were the final pressure that made them unite'.<sup>8</sup> It is also possible that the minister's request reflected pressure from District level, although no corroborating evidence has been found of this.

The matter was raised a week later at the Church Street Circuit Quarterly Meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1939 at which it was recorded:

That we receive the letter from the Brunswick Quarterly Meeting inviting us to form a committee to meet them for a preliminary discussion on the subject of Circuit Amalgamation.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that the minute refers to 'preliminary discussions' supports the view that little progress had been made in the preceding seven years and that it was regarded as a fresh start to the negotiations. This was followed by a resolution that a report of the meeting should be referred to the next Quarterly Meeting and that 'no decisions made except by a majority vote'. Although this could simply be a procedural arrangement it may be suggestive of nervousness about possible undertakings being made by a minority outside the meeting or of pressure being exerted for such undertakings to be given.

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<sup>7</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 06/12/39.

<sup>8</sup> Interview 5, 16/04/09.

<sup>9</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, CQM, 14/12/39. The underlining of 'Circuit Amalgamation' in the minutes is very unusual and is of significance.

During the next three months some progress was made and at the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1940 it was reported:

With regard to the committee appointed to go into the question of the amalgamation of the two Whitby Circuits, the Rev. E.W. Selby reported that two meetings had been held, one dealing with financial matters and one dealing with pastoral oversight. Since then, owing to the prevalence of illness, it had been impossible to hold further meetings. Also, during the Quarter the *Methodist Recorder* had published a statement of the Rev. Oliver Hornabrook in which he suggests that amalgamation schemes would have to be shelved until after the war.<sup>10</sup> However, in view of the fact that this scheme presents no difficult problems the conversations would be continued.<sup>11</sup>

This shows that the Committee was beginning to address organizational and operational matters and the inclusion of the words that 'this scheme presents no difficult problems' is suggestive of a change in attitude and approach, together with a sense of urgency not found in earlier references.<sup>12</sup>

There were fewer and less detailed references to circuit amalgamation in the Church Street Circuit Quarterly Meeting minutes, with no reports of the work of the representatives' meeting with Brunswick. However, at the meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1940, there was a proposal from Mr G. Wood, one of the two Circuit Stewards, that the minister, Rev. E. W. Challenger 'be asked to retain the position of Circuit Minister until the question of the amalgamation with the Brunswick Circuit be settled'.<sup>13</sup> The words, 'be settled' imply that the details were still by no means agreed, otherwise, 'takes place' would be seem to be more appropriate. It was recorded that the vote in favour was unanimous and that Mr Challenger 'replied appropriately'. Reference was also made to Mr

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<sup>10</sup> *The Methodist Recorder*, 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1940, p. 3. The Rev. J. Oliver Hornabrook was General Secretary of Home Missions and he stated that 'the circuits must hang on with their teeth as it is no time to make radical changes'.

<sup>11</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 06/03/40.

<sup>12</sup> This committee was sometimes referred to as 'the Joint Committee', and later as 'the Amalgamation Committee'.

<sup>13</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, CQM, 04/03/40.

Challenger's Jubilee celebration, having completed fifty years in the ministry.<sup>14</sup> He was therefore nearing the end of his itinerant ministry.

Rev. Wilfrid Selby gave a progress report at the Brunswick Quarterly Meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1940, saying that the Amalgamation Committee had met and that 'the same would be continued as opportunities came to hand', suggesting a loss of momentum.<sup>15</sup> This meeting had actually been adjourned and the wording of the minute of the preceding General Purposes Committee on 30<sup>th</sup> May said that steps should be taken to resume negotiations 'with as little delay as possible'.<sup>16</sup> The latter comment could imply that the meeting had broken down in disagreement, which is supported by the fact that four years were yet to pass before the amalgamation was brought about. It is possible that wartime restrictions and pressure of war work were affecting the ability to meet, especially as Whitby was a garrison town with heavy coastal fortifications.<sup>17</sup> However, there is evidence that progress was being impeded by other factors. At the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1940 there was a note of thanks to the Church Street minister, Rev. E. W. Challenger, 'for kindly services rendered whilst our Circuit had no minister recently'.<sup>18</sup> The reason for this was that the Mr Selby had resigned on the grounds of ill health. His letter of resignation had been received at the Brunswick General Purposes Committee of 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1940 and this led to a discussion of how it would be handled, including the second minister and a circuit steward arranging to meet the Chairman of District. It was noted that the Rev. T. Grant Tyler had already been nominated as the successor to Mr Selby. Further light was thrown on the matter in a letter from Mr Selby, now residing in Buxton, to Mr J. Schofield, then secretary to the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting. The letter is undated but refers to the bombing of Whitby

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<sup>14</sup> Mr Challenger had been the Primitive Methodist Superintendent Minister of the Whitby Circuit from 1903 to 1907 and had returned as Superintendent of Church Street Circuit in 1937.

<sup>15</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 05/06/40.

<sup>16</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/42, GPC, 30/05/40.

<sup>17</sup> Details of the extent of the militarization and fortifications can be found in *Defence of the UK: North Yorkshire and Cleveland*, North Yorkshire and Cleveland Defence Study Group, Momentous Publications, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 09/09/40.

on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1940 which had caused damage to the windows in the Brunswick Room:

You seem to have been having exciting times since we left the town. It was something of a shock to learn of the damage Brunswick had suffered.<sup>19</sup>

He went on to express appreciation for the support he and his wife had received:

Of necessity our remembrance of the twelve months at Whitby are chequered ones. My heath (*sic*) with the disappointments attendant thereon, explain that ... I have been very fortunate in the Quarterly Meeting secretaries with whom I have been brought into association. At no place has that been more signally true than at Whitby.

It is possible that Mr Selby's illness contributed to some of the preceding delay in the amalgamation negotiations but it would not be enough to explain subsequent delays.<sup>20</sup> However, the immediate need to deal with the loss of the superintendent after such a short time in the circuit would itself have taken time and energy away from circuit amalgamation.

The negotiations to appoint a new Brunswick Circuit Superintendent Minster were successful and Rev. T. Grant Tyler took up post in September 1940 and remained until the amalgamation in September 1944.<sup>21</sup> The lack of progress towards circuit amalgamation may also have led to the request by Rev. E.W. Challenger, the Church Street superintendent, who had initially agreed to remain in post until the amalgamation, that consideration should be given to another minister for the circuit as he felt that it was time he retired 'to make place for a younger ministry'.<sup>22</sup> A committee was therefore formed to find a new minister. The Quarterly Meeting was adjourned until the appointment sub-committee could make a recommendation and it was

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<sup>19</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 2/1/3 Schofield Letters, undated.

<sup>20</sup> Rev. Wilfrid Ewart Selby died in 1943. The tribute in the Methodist Conference minutes for 1943 (p 130) states that he had been ill for two years before his premature retirement, referring to his 'gentleness' and 'deeply emotional nature'.

<sup>21</sup> Rev. T. Grant Tyler had been due to leave in 1943 but was able to stay on as a result of Methodist Conference suspending ministerial changes in 1943 except in defined circumstances.

<sup>22</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, CQM, 18/09/41.

reconvened on October 14<sup>th</sup> 1941 with a recommendation that the Rev. E. Metcalfe, then in Ashton-Under-Lyne, be invited to superintend as from the conference of 1942.<sup>23</sup> This was carried unanimously and it was resolved a 'ladies committee to inspect the manse furniture periodically which has been in store'.<sup>24</sup>

Like the Rev. E.W. Challenger, the Rev. E. Metcalfe had previously served in Whitby as Primitive Methodist superintendent minister, from 1928 – 1933, the period that had included Methodist Union in 1932. He did not, however, represent a significantly 'younger ministry', having been born in 1876 and entered the Primitive Methodist ministry from Hartley College, Manchester, in 1903.<sup>25</sup> He therefore had already served thirty-nine years in the ministry and was sixty-five years of age. It is likely that he was appointed because he was familiar with Whitby, its people and the circuit politics. He would superintend the Church Street Circuit up to circuit amalgamation and then retire from the full-time ministry. The Brunswick Circuit superintendent, Rev. T. Grant Tyler, would also leave the circuit when amalgamation took place, meaning that new ministerial appointments would take up posts and lead the combined Whitby Methodist Circuit forward from a fresh beginning. This provides further evidence of a strategic plan at District level in relation to how the circuit amalgamation would be managed and, possibly, also some pressure for it to take place. There is support for this in a minute of the Brunswick Circuit General Purposes Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1942 where it was:

Resolved that the Circuit Stewards inform the Chairman of the District Synod that the Brunswick Circuit is open to resume conversations respecting fusion whenever the Church Street Circuit is willing.<sup>26</sup>

The words 'resume conversations' imply that there had been a halt to negotiations. Also, the wording of this minute provides support for the view

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<sup>23</sup> There were two circuits in Aston-Under-Lyne, the Primitive Methodist Circuit and a United Methodist Circuit.

<sup>24</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, CQM, 14/10/41.

<sup>25</sup> Obituary, *Methodist Conference Minutes*, July 1953.

<sup>26</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/42, Brunswick Circuit General Purposes Committee Minute Book, 1939 – 1952, 07/09/42.



that it was the Brunswick Circuit that was expected by District to take the lead on circuit amalgamation and that it was the Church Street Circuit that had been showing a lack of willingness to progress it. However, there was some collaboration between the two circuits and a note in the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting minutes of 17<sup>th</sup> June 1942 recorded that the minister and members of Church Street had joined in enthusiastically over eight weeks of prayer and praise in connection with 'our Methodist Forward Movement in Whitby'.<sup>27</sup>

### **The final stages, 1942 - 1944**

Despite the seeming pressure to take the matter forward there then followed a period of two years before circuit amalgamation appeared again in the minutes of either of the two circuits. This was at the Church Street Quarterly Meeting of 7<sup>th</sup> December 1943. Here there was:

A very full discussion re the proposed amalgamation of the Whitby *Methodist* Church Street Circuit with the Whitby *Wesleyan* Brunswick Circuit. It was unanimously agreed that the Amalgamation take place. All present voting in favour.<sup>28</sup>

The words 'Methodist and 'Wesleyan' had been crossed out but are still legible. The original wording could have been an error by the secretary to the meeting but this seems unlikely given that it was over ten years since 'Wesleyan' had been used officially. This leads to speculation as to whether the secretary, or others, wished to leave a personal record in the minute book of his views about which of the former branches of the church had represented the 'true' Methodism. i.e. Primitive Methodism. Nevertheless the voting was unanimous and so whatever had been said in the 'very full discussion' there was no dissent recorded.

An outline report of the Amalgamation Committee was given at the Brunswick General Purposes Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1943, with a recommendation for approval. Further details were provided at the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting that was held on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1943, a day after

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<sup>27</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, BQM, 17/12/42.

<sup>28</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/2, CQM, 07/12/43.

that of the Church Street Quarterly Meeting. The report of the Amalgamation Committee of 15<sup>th</sup> November 1943 was read as follows:

Resolves that this meeting of the united Committee appointed to consider the question of Amalgamation of the Whitby Brunswick and Church Street Circuits is of the opinion that the time has now arrived when such a step should take effect, and recommends the respective Quarterly Meetings to approve of amalgamation taking place as from Conference 1944.

The Committee recommends that each Church be asked to meet its assessment as at present and that a proportion of any surplus that may accrue in the Circuit Steward's Financial Returns shall be earmarked for an additional Manse at such time as it may be possible to secure three full-time ministers.<sup>29</sup>

It was then moved that the meeting should approve the Scheme for amalgamation as set out in the report of the Committee, as attached in the minute book.

The minute book recorded that the ministers had met to consider the matter referred to them by a meeting of 'the Officials' on October 25<sup>th</sup> 1943. The suggestion was that the number of ministers in the amalgamated circuit remained the same, namely three and a lay pastor, with an alternative suggestion that 'in view of the letter received from the Synod Secretary' and in the event of only two ministers being appointed to the amalgamated circuit:

The Superintendent Minister shall have Pastoral Charge of Brunswick, Sandsend, Lythe and Newholm Churches.

That the second Minister shall have charge of the following Churches: Church Street, Sleights, Grosmont, Esk Valley and Goathland.

That an arrangement be made with the Superannuated Ministers in the Circuit for an agreed number of appointments, and with the Pastoral Charge as follows: Rev.E. Metcalfe, Fishburn Park and Ruswarp, Rev.E. Challenger, Wesley Hall.

That the work of the Lay Pastor be as present.

That a general interchange of Sunday services be arranged.

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<sup>29</sup> NRCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, BQM, 08/12/43.

The Committee adopted the alternative suggestion and decided to seek only two 'approved list' ministers.

At the end of the typed report of the committee a handwritten note had been added recording that an arrangement had been made with the united Committee to pay each of the two supernumerary ministers £15 per quarter for the responsibilities outlined in the plan. In terms of pastoral responsibilities across the two former circuits this meant that the superintendent had four former Brunswick Circuit churches, the second minister had three from the former Brunswick Circuit and two from the former Church Street Circuit, the Rev. E. Metcalfe would be responsible for Fishburn Park and Ruswarp, and Rev. E.W. Challenger for Wesley Hall.

The role of the lay pastor is an interesting one. Lay pastors were expected to undertake most of the functions of an ordained minister but without the same pay and status of a minister.<sup>30</sup> At this time the lay pastor had oversight of the Societies at Robin Hood's Bay, Fylingthorpe and Hawsker and in most respects functioned in the same way as a supernumerary ministerial appointment would have done. This group of chapels was therefore a sub-section of the circuit, with its own manse, and was either the responsibility of a lay pastor or a supernumerary minister. The opening of a large youth hostel in the vicinity had been used in the mid-1930s as a pretext to try and obtain the services of an ordained minister from the President's List of Reserve<sup>31</sup> or, alternatively, a probationary Home Missions minister.<sup>32</sup> These attempts were not successful and in 1939 a lay pastor, Mr T. Wilson, of Cliff College, was employed, to be followed by Mr C.W. Thompson in 1941. Mr Thompson expressed dissatisfaction at the Brunswick Quarterly Meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1943 that he had not been appointed as an 'authorized person' to administer the Sacrament and it was agreed to that he would be given an

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<sup>30</sup> From 1947 the Methodist Conference urged circuits no longer to employ them and some offered for ordained ministry, including Pastor C.W. Thompson who left the Whitby Circuit in 1945. See F. Baker, 'Lay Pastors', in N. B. Harmon, *The Encyclopaedia of World Methodism*, Nashville: United Publishing House, 1974, page 1403.

<sup>31</sup> This was a list of ministers who were not immediately required for stationing.

<sup>32</sup> NYRC R/M/WH, 1/1/7, BQM, 11/03/36.

opportunity 'to be a partaker of the Sacramental Service'.<sup>33</sup> In relation to the circuit amalgamation there is a note in the minutes of the Fylingthorpe Leaders' Meetings for January 28<sup>th</sup> 1944 that Pastor Thompson had referred to:

the changes about to take place due to the Amalgamation of Circuits in Whitby to take effect from next Conference.<sup>34</sup>

He indicated that he was considering preparing 'a series of Lectures on the Working of Methodism'. This is one of the few references in the minutes of individual Societies that include any reference to circuit amalgamation. In most of those that survive there was no mention of it happening, probably because the effects at that level were perceived to be minimal. The other place where it might be expected that circuit amalgamation and its consequences would be discussed was at the Local Preachers' Meetings. However, there were no references to this in the minutes, whatever may have been said outside the meetings.<sup>35</sup> Taken along with the other evidence it suggests that there was little expectation of any significant changes, at least in the short term.

In March 1944 further preparations were made for the amalgamation. At the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> March it was recorded:

Mr. Foster and Mr. Barratt (seconded) that this meeting officially confirms the decision of the Circuits of Brunswick and of Church Street and that this recommendation be forwarded to the District Home Missions Chapel Committee. Carried Unanimously.<sup>36</sup>

In May 1944 approval was given for the amalgamation by the District Synod and in July 1944 at the Methodist Conference in Leeds.<sup>37</sup> It was also resolved that the Rev. Willie Rhodes of the Barton-on-Humber Circuit be asked to succeed the Rev. T. Grant Tyler as superintendent and the Rev.

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<sup>33</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, BQM, 09/6/43.

<sup>34</sup> The Manse Sleights, WCR, Fylingthorpe Leaders' Meetings, 28/01/44.

<sup>35</sup> The Church Street Circuit included the preachers' meeting as the first three of four agenda items at the Quarterly Meeting, before the 'Full Board'. The matters dealt with were limited to the selection, supervision and examination of local preachers.

<sup>36</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, BQM, 08/03/44.

<sup>37</sup> *The Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church held in Leeds, July 1944*, London: Methodist Publishing House, 1944, p. 13.

Arnold B. Jones of the Middlesbrough Circuit to be asked as the second minister, as from the September 1944 Conference. Pastor Thompson was requested to remain for another year.

The preaching plan for the combined Whitby Circuit was an early item for discussion and one that subsequently led to some tension between the two circuits. The matter was raised at the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1944. The Amalgamation Committee had recommended a 'new form of Circuit Plan in Book Form' which, in addition to containing the preacher's appointments, would contain 'several useful pages of information about Church Rules etc'.<sup>38</sup> The cost of setting this up was estimated to be about £17 and thereafter £6 for each quarter. However, the Brunswick General Purposes Committee, held on 5<sup>th</sup> June, recommended that at this stage it was not felt appropriate to have such an expensive plan and that the existing plan should be amended to meet the situation with further consideration after amalgamation.<sup>39</sup> This recommendation was carried with 33 votes for the motion, 2 against and 1 neutral. The Brunswick Circuit had, in fact, introduced a 'War Emergency Plan' in 1942 which was a double sided sheet rather than a short booklet and so the GPC recommendation was simply to carry on with current practice for the time being.

The meeting also considered recommendations from the Amalgamation Committee that on the first Sunday after amalgamation a united service should be held in the morning at Church Street and in the evening at Brunswick and that 'our other places of worship should be closed during these services'. This led to discussion of whether other churches should be closed on that day and this resulted in an alternative suggestion that all churches should have their normal services and that 'a united mass meeting to be held in the afternoon and our Sunday School children and Teachers be invited to attend'. It was also reported that the Amalgamation Committee had arranged for the Reception Service for the new ministers to be held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 1944 with the new Whitby Circuit's first Quarterly

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<sup>38</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, BQM, 07/06/44.

<sup>39</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/42, GPC, 05/06/44.

Meeting then held at 5.30 on that day 'on the Brunswick premises'. It was then recorded:

We are reminded that all the present Circuit Committees and officials will cease to be in office after the Amalgamation takes effect.

It was finally noted that this would be the last Quarterly Meeting to be officially attended by the Rev. T. Grant Tyler and Rev. Collins and appreciation was expressed for their ministry especially to young people and 'the men and women in HM forces who have been stationed in the district'. This was heartily endorsed and the meeting showed approval by acclamation.<sup>40</sup>

In comparison with the Brunswick Circuit there is less information about circuit amalgamation in the minutes of the Church Street Circuit. Throughout the process the records suggest that the lead was taken by the Brunswick Circuit with the Church Street Circuit adopting a more reactive position. At the Church Street Circuit Quarterly Meeting on 8th June 1944 it was announced that the celebration services had been arranged on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September and Monday 4<sup>th</sup> September (Appendix 9). There was also a response to the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting over the recommendations concerning the proposed 'Book Form' preaching plan:

A letter from Mr J.W. Foster was read re the new Book Plan and the Amalgamation Services which recorded that the Brunswick Quarter Day had rejected the proposal of the Amalgamation Committee to introduce next Quarter the New Book Plan. Full discussion on this point took place and it was agreed unanimously that a letter be sent to Mr Foster that this Quarterly Meeting regrets very strongly the decision of the Brunswick Quarterly Meeting in turning down the proposal of the Amalgamation Committee'.<sup>41</sup>

The reaction of the Church Street Circuit Quarterly Meeting to the Brunswick rejection of Amalgamation Committee's recommendation for a Book Plan is a

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<sup>40</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, BQM, 7/6//44.

<sup>41</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, CQM, 1/2/2, 08/06/44. 'Quarter Day' was a term adopted by the Primitive Methodists as an alternative to 'Quarterly Meeting'. Originally it was a full day, or half day.

further evidence of the sensitivity of those who considered themselves to be the weaker party in the forthcoming amalgamation. Given that the decision of the Brunswick Circuit was on the rational grounds of cost, especially as it was still during wartime, and that the idea had not been rejected out of hand but deferred until after the amalgamation, is indicative of other factors at work. It suggests that these included a feeling by the Church Street Circuit that the Brunswick Circuit Quarterly Meeting was really the one taking the decisions.

A degree of distrust is also suggested in relation to the winding up of the Church Street Circuit's financial matters. Throughout the period of the study the circuit had struggled with circuit finances with frequent references in the Quarterly Meeting minutes to financial deficits.<sup>42</sup> After the rare recording of a 'small credit balance' on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1942 the deficit increased to £35 –15s-11d on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1942, £47-6s-7d on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1943, £54-11s-2d on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1943, £62-7s-8d on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1943, £73-4s-2d on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1943 and £60 on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1944.<sup>43</sup> The most likely cause of the level of circuit debt was a combination of low membership and the fact that many Church Street Circuit members were of relatively modest means. However, at the final Quarterly Meeting of the Church Street Circuit on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1944 the circuit fund showed a balance in hand of £25 with the comment: 'This statement considered to be very satisfactory and unanimously accepted'. There then followed:

Discussion took place regarding the credit balance standing in the circuit fund and it was decided to place this money for the present in a separate account to stand in the joint names of the Circuit Stewards Geo. A. Wood and John D. Hodgeman on behalf of the Circuit churches.<sup>44</sup>

This 'separate account', in the name of the Church Street Circuit Stewards, suggests that the money was being kept separate from the funds of the new

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<sup>42</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/2/1, CQM, 31/05/22; 02/09/26; 31/08/33; 06/06/34; 09/07/37; 11/06/42.

<sup>43</sup> Additional comments illustrating role of women in raising funds include, 'Effort to be arranged by Sisterhood if they are agreeable', 'Ruswarp ladies to be approached to run an Effort', 'Vote of thanks to the ladies who assisted in the bring and buy sale'.

<sup>44</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/2, CQM, 23/08/44.

Whitby Circuit and the expression 'Circuit churches' is taken here to mean the former Church Street Circuit. In the proposals for amalgamation from the Amalgamation Committee it had been indicated that any surpluses from each circuit should go into a fund for an additional manse. The turning of a deficit budget of £60 in June 1944 into a credit budget of £25 in August 1944 also raises a question of how this was done. A possible explanation is that at the Quarterly Meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1944 a proposal had been made to accept an offer of £80 by the Rev. E. Metcalfe for the Church Street manse furniture.<sup>45</sup> This would have turned the deficit into a £20 surplus, but its origin would actually have strengthened the argument for the surplus going to the manse fund of the new circuit. Whatever the case may be, the minutes were signed by the new superintendant minister, the Rev. W. Rhodes, at the first meeting of the combined Whitby Circuit Quarterly Meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> September. The final entry of 'this the last meeting of the officials of the Church Street Methodist Circuit' was a tribute to George Wood, Circuit Steward' for his 'outstanding services' and 'high standard of efficiency'.

The Brunswick Circuit funds were also in deficit and it was reported at the General Purposes Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1944 that there was a debt of £100 on the circuit accounts. The Circuit Steward, Mr C. Thompson, wanted to see the debt cleared before September when the circuit amalgamation would take place and he thought that the Church Street Circuit would also close their account free of debt. It was agreed to recommend to the Quarterly Meeting 'that a personal appeal be sent our members to liquidate the debt'.<sup>46</sup> Again a contrast can be seen between the Church Street Circuit, which relied heavily on 'the ladies' and their 'Efforts' to raise money, and the Brunswick Circuit where it was felt that direct appeals to members could be made. It may also indicate a greater degree of central authority of the Wesleyans,

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 03/09/44.

<sup>46</sup>NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/42, GPC, 05/06/44.



exercised at local level, that such an approach could be adopted whereas the Primitive Methodists relied on a greater degree of fund raising activity.<sup>47</sup>

The imminent circuit amalgamation was reported in the *Whitby Gazette* of 1<sup>st</sup> September 1944:

The coming week will be marked by an epoch making achievement in Whitby Methodism. The two Circuits hitherto existing and working side by side in the town and the immediate locality are to be amalgamated, thus giving tangible effect to the union brought about in the country in 1932, when the Wesleyan Methodist Church, and the Primitive Methodist Church, and the United Methodist Church joined forces and became *The Methodist Church*.<sup>48</sup>

The article gave a description of the new circuit of sixteen churches that would be under the care of four ministers and one lay pastor.<sup>49</sup> The Rev E.W. Challenger, who had served twice in the Primitive Methodist Circuit,<sup>50</sup> provided brief histories of the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist Circuits. Of Brunswick Church he wrote:

A large number of professional and business men have been devoted members of this church and it would be difficult to overestimate its influence upon the civic and domestic life of the town and district.

For the former Primitive Methodist Church Street there was the following comment:

Among its officials were men of outstanding personality and devotion. Possibly it is best remembered for the remarkable band of women who toiled unceasingly for the welfare of the church. It was in this church that I began my first term of ministry in Whitby.

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<sup>47</sup>Robbins, *op cit*, p. 223. Robbins points out the differences between 'bureaucratic centralization' and 'local initiative'. The Primitive Methodist emphasis on lay participation favoured the latter, as well as the fact that many Primitive Methodists did not have a large disposable income.

<sup>48</sup>'Circuits Amalgamate', *Whitby Gazette*, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1944, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup>As in the scheme for amalgamation, this included the two supernumerary ministers.

<sup>50</sup>1903-1907; 1937-1942.

In relation to the defining characteristics of the two circuits the above comments concerning 'professional and business men' and the 'band of women who toiled unceasingly' are a reflection of what is evidenced in the records of the two circuits. However, it must be kept in mind that Wesley Hall, on the east side of the river, shared many of the social characteristics of the Primitive Methodists of Church Street and Fishburn Park. Interviewee 2 recalled the energy that the Wesley Hall women put into Bazaars and how there was a Christmas Club:

The poor people of the church would put 1d or 2d a week away, and they marked on a card – they were very proud of those cards.

For the Brunswick Circuit much more was recorded about the 'professional and business men' of Brunswick Church than about the 'poor people' over the bridge at Wesley Hall. However, the village chapels were more broadly representative of the mixed communities in which they were located.

### **Assessment**

The process by which the circuits amalgamated gives some insight into the organization of the two Whitby circuits, the means of communication between them and the local sensitivities surrounding the process. Rupert Davies stated that few circuit amalgamations took place before the outbreak of the war.<sup>51</sup> He also pointed to:

the widespread inability to reduce the number of Methodist chapels except very slowly and over a large number of years

and that there were 'far too many circuits labelled Barchester (P), or (U), or (W), until 1948'.<sup>52</sup> In these respects the situation in the Whitby area reflected the national picture, but without a United Methodist circuit involved. However, there were exceptions, some locally, with the Malton, Tadcaster, Easingwold

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<sup>51</sup> Davies, *op cit*, p. 59.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

and Helmsley circuits having their applications for circuit amalgamations approved by the York and Whitby District Synod as early as 1933.<sup>53</sup>

The outcome of the vote about Methodist Union in 1924 was discussed earlier in the study and it was shown that the results in Whitby for both the Primitive and Wesleyan Methodist Quarterly Meetings were more heavily against Union than the vote overall nationally. It was argued that this was mainly because both denominations in Whitby at that time felt sufficiently confident of their own ability not only to survive but also to prosper and that the reasons for remaining independent outweighed any advantages that might have been gained from Union. To some extent the two circuits also served different sections of the population, but with considerable overlap, especially on the East Side. There was also the influence of 'sentiment' and the emotional attachments, based around local histories, traditions, personalities and places of worship.<sup>54</sup> This was suggested in the records and interviews but its influence is difficult to quantify as it was largely part of the 'underlife' or 'hidden organization'.

Loyalty to chapels was evident in that people who moved to the West Side often remained loyal to East Side chapels. An example from Wesley Hall is that a list of class members from 1937 shows a spread of addresses including two from the village of Ruswarp and several who lived in the Fishburn Park area of the town, where attending Fishburn Park Chapel would have been more convenient.<sup>55</sup> There were also some Wesleyans who lived on the West Side but preferred the less formal worship at Wesley Hall to that of Brunswick.

As far as premises were concerned, at circuit amalgamation the Church Street Circuit had the Church Street and Fishburn Park chapels and while both had good accommodation, including schoolrooms, they could not match

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<sup>53</sup> John Rylands University Library Manchester, Methodist Archives and Research Centre, York and Whitby District Synod (Area 41), September 1933, Item XLVI.

<sup>54</sup> A.W. Harrison, *op cit*, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/17, Brunswick Circuit Circuit Schedule Book, 1932 – 1943.

those of Brunswick either in terms of capacity or facilities.<sup>56</sup> In addition, the West Side chapel, Fishburn Park was situated away from the centre of the town in an area of terrace housing unlikely to be known to most visitors or to attract them to worship there. Apart from the seasonal chapel at Goathland, their other chapel at Ruswarp was in a location at some distance from the centre of the village and only accessible by a narrow footpath. The character of the two amalgamating circuits therefore differed considerably. The Brunswick Circuit was made up of twelve chapels spread across a wide rural and coastal area with some, such as Briggswath and Sleights, Robin Hood's Bay and Fylingthorpe, having quite significant memberships (respectively 65, 41, 37 in 1944). It justified two full-time ministers, usually having one or more active supernumeraries and, from 1939 – 1945, a full time lay pastor. In the summer months there were also missioners and Wesley Deaconesses in the area who were connected with the Brunswick Circuit.

The Church Street Circuit on the other hand became, in effect, a local federation of three chapels (the 'home churches') with a seasonal village outpost. The focus of nearly all its activity was within the town of Whitby itself and therefore its response to circuit amalgamation would have related predominantly to the future of these urban chapels. From an economic point of view it could be argued that in relation to out of season congregations only two Methodist churches were needed in the town, one on the West Side and one on the East Side. Even with summer visitors and for hosting circuit events, the capacity would normally have been sufficient, Brunswick having 940 seats, Church Street 350, Wesley Hall 200 and Fishburn Park 140.<sup>57</sup> This was a combined total of 1630 seats for a town membership of 355 in 1944. For Fishburn Park it could be argued that the chapel served a discrete area of the town, providing a Methodist presence there. Given Fishburn Park's generally working class population it is possible that some members and adherents would have felt socially and culturally out of place at the

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<sup>56</sup> *Methodist Church Building: Statistical Returns: Including Seating Accommodation as at July 1940*: Department of Chapel Affairs, p. 274. In addition to the church Brunswick was listed in 1940 as having 3 'school halls' and three other rooms.

<sup>57</sup> *Methodist Church Buildings: Statistical Returns, op cit*, p. 274.

Brunswick Church, quite apart from differences in styles of worship. The Fishburn Park Sunday School also provided a focus for the children living 'on The Railway' and it is unlikely that all would have transferred to Brunswick in the event of closure. Although Wesley Hall was not the original 'Wesley Chapel', there was a strong attachment by the Brunswick Circuit to retaining a presence on the East Side where it had its origins.

However, all the churches remained open and all continued to serve the same groups of people as before the Union of 1932 and this remained the case for many years after the amalgamation of the circuits in 1944. It has been argued that this unwillingness to rationalise was a price that was paid nationally for Methodist Union to be achievable. As Turner has pointed out:

The Union was a merger without the teeth which a commercial or industrial merger would have had. The price of union was non-interference with the circuits in the first stage.<sup>58</sup>

Non-interference with circuits also translated itself into non-interference by circuits with individual chapels and Rupert Davies argued that although there was rationalization in some areas in others 'no movement of any sort was discernible for several years'. In the case of Whitby it was for several decades. He continued:

no amount of argument about the misuse of manpower and the needs of the Gospel would shift trustees who were determined to keep *their* chapel open.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, the situation in Whitby was as described by John Kent:

Although gradually at local level many ex-Wesleyan, Primitive and United circuits joined together in what were called *amalgamated circuits*, this usually meant that all chapels involved remained open, and the opportunities for efficiency and evangelism were not faced.<sup>60</sup>

In Whitby and district the evidence suggests that the declining number of members in the Church Street Circuit, falling from 179 in 1939 to 135 at the time of amalgamation in 1944, was the principal reason why amalgamation

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<sup>58</sup> Turner, 1983, *op cit*, p. 340.

<sup>59</sup> Davies, 1983, *op cit*, p. 364.

<sup>60</sup> Kent, *op cit*, p. 17.

came when it did and in the way that it did. There were actually many more members in 1944 in the two Brunswick Circuit town churches alone (248) than in all four Church Street Circuit churches (135). The total for all twelve Brunswick Circuit churches was 541. It was unlikely that this situation could support the cost of a full time minister for the Church Street Circuit alone, especially in wartime circumstances. From that time the new 'Whitby Methodist Circuit' became a two minister station and when Pastor C.W. Thompson left to train for the ministry in 1945 he was not replaced. However, as an attractive location for retirement, Whitby and district did have the services of some active supernumerary ministers who took considerable responsibility within the circuit, including for Robin Hood's Bay and Fylingthorpe, as well as using visiting ministers during the summer season.

Throughout the period of 'working side by side' the records show that the leadership for amalgamation came predominantly from the Brunswick Circuit, as did initiation of the Gallows Close/Helredale housing estate scheme which, as will be seen, was revived after the war. Taken overall, the evidence suggests that there was considerable resistance from the Church Street Circuit to being 'taken over' by the Brunswick Circuit and this contributed to the sensitivities and delays that have been discussed. When amalgamation finally came it led to a reorganisation of pastoral responsibilities but it did not result in early rationalisation of provision or any chapel closures, which only started to happen in the mid-1960s. This delay in rationalisation was partly assisted by the fact that the early post-war period experienced a phenomenon that has been referred to as 'late Christendom'<sup>61</sup> leading, as elsewhere, to a modest revival in the fortunes of the Whitby Circuit. This and the way in which the two circuits started to function as the Whitby Methodist Circuit will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>61</sup> H. McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 31.

## **Chapter 8 A new beginning? The Whitby Methodist Circuit: 1944 - 1953**

### **Introduction**

The years 1944 – 1953 bring to a close the period which forms the main focus of the research. It was during these years that the structures of the new 'Whitby Methodist Circuit' were brought into being and it was characterised by modest numerical growth, reflecting the national trends, but also of increasing financial pressure. A significant preoccupation at this time was the organization of the pastoral oversight of the new circuit, together with the possibility of the addition of a third full-time minister. There were concerns about mission and outreach, as well as continuing to respond to moral and social issues. Further moves were also made to establish a Methodist presence on the expanding Helredale council housing estate. The decade ended with 'A Conference Call to Each Methodist Society' from the Liverpool Conference of 1949 for all Societies to conduct a survey of the condition of Church Life and decide what action to take as a result of this.<sup>1</sup>

After considering the early meetings of the new circuit this chapter is organized principally around the above themes but the artificiality of such divisions is recognized and there is considerable imbrication and overlap between them.

### **The Whitby Circuit comes into being**

The Whitby Circuit was inaugurated in September 1944 at a time when the end of the war was in sight. Writing of this period, Rev. E. Willis observed:

There were considerable adjustments to be made but it was with a great sense of relief that Whitby greeted the end of the war. These were uneasy years.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Methodist Church, *The Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church*, July 1949, London: Methodist Publishing House, 1949, Appendix 2, pp. 202 – 208.

<sup>2</sup> E. Willis, *Brunswick Methodist Church Whitby, Centenary Year 1991 – 1992*, Ripon: E.C. Willis, p. 24. Mr Willis was a former Whitby Superintendent Minister (1979 – 1986) who

The celebration services for the circuit amalgamation, held on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1944 were followed by the first formal meetings of the new Whitby Methodist Circuit. These will be considered in some detail as they demonstrate how the transition was handled, the relationship between the two former circuits, and the way in which the new circuit organization was brought into being.

### **The Whitby Circuit Quarterly Meetings, September – December 1944**

The first united Whitby Methodist Circuit Quarterly Meeting was held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 1944 at Brunswick Church. In terms of the presentation of the minutes it was a continuation of the former Brunswick Circuit practice. All four ordained ministers attended as well as Pastor C.W. Thompson and the four Circuit Stewards from the two former circuits, together with forty-seven others from the former circuits, the majority being former Brunswick Circuit members. The first substantive item was to authorise the opening of a bank account for the Whitby Circuit at the Midland Bank 'and any cheques etc to be signed by any two Circuit Stewards for the time being'. This indicated the transitional status of the circuit structures and procedures at this stage.<sup>3</sup>

It was agreed that the former Brunswick General Purposes Committee would continue 'on the lines as at present constituted with the addition of three lay members to be elected by this Meeting' and three representatives were duly elected, two from former Brunswick and one from former Church Street.<sup>4</sup> The only other items of business at this meeting were the announcement regarding the recommendation of Pastor Thompson as a candidate for the ministry and a proposal 'that the Circuit Ministers draw up a new form of Circuit Plan and submit the same to the next General Purposes Committee

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wrote the Brunswick Church centenary booklet and would have had access to people who remembered the war years.

<sup>3</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/1/40, QMW, 06/09/44. This was a continuation of the Brunswick Quarterly Meeting Minute Book.

<sup>4</sup> The Brunswick General Purposes Committee had been established in 1936, incorporating the work of several smaller committees, thus reducing the number of meetings that needed to be attended.



for consideration before the next Quarterly Meeting'. The adoption of the Brunswick Circuit's use of a General Purposes Committee provides an example of the continuation of Brunswick Circuit practices into the new circuit, but now incorporating former Church Street Circuit members.

A comparison of the minutes of the General Purposes Committee with that of Quarterly Meetings shows that it was a steering group at which recommendations were made to the Quarterly Meeting, giving considerable power to those who were its members. In the Whitby Circuit it therefore maintained the same functions. Interviewee 5 recalled, it 'eliminated long meetings' and was 'where the detail was thrashed out'.<sup>5</sup> There had been no need for such a committee for the Church Street Circuit as the Quarterly Meeting membership was much smaller, with attendance normally being between seven and twelve people as opposed as to around fifty for Brunswick. This had made it possible for the Church Street Circuit to deal with most matters at the Quarterly Meeting itself, other than infrequent occasions where it was felt that a sub-committee was needed for a specific task. The question of circuit size was therefore a factor both in terms of determining the organizational structure of the former circuits and also contributing to their organizational culture. However, it represented a considerable change for the former Church Street officials.<sup>6</sup>

The proposal for the form of preaching plan was discussed in Chapter 7 and the way this was handled in the new circuit throws further light on the relationship between the former Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists. The 'Book Plan' was considered at the General Purposes Committee, held on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1944. Here, 'after much discussion', it was moved by the former Brunswick Circuit Steward, Mr C.Thompson, and seconded by the former Church Street minister Rev. E.W. Challenger that this form of plan should be adopted provided that the estimated costs were not exceeded and that the

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<sup>5</sup> Interview 5, 16/4/09.

<sup>6</sup> See R. F. Wearmouth, *The Social and Political Influence of Methodism in the Twentieth Century*, London: Epworth Press, 1957. Wearmouth argued that after Union the adoption of the customs and conventions of the Wesleyans 'inhibited the genius of the Primitives and United Methodists'. p. 78.

cost of production did not exceed the approximate cost of the two previous plans.<sup>7</sup> This was agreed by 'a large majority' and put to the following Quarterly Meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1944 where it was supported 47 for and 7 against.<sup>8</sup> Given the response of the Church Street Quarterly Meeting of 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1944, which had very strongly regretted the decision of the Brunswick Quarterly Meeting to turn down the 'Book Plan', there is a suggestion here of a compromise having been reached; to go ahead with the 'Book Plan' but to make cost a limiting factor, with the proposal diplomatically coming from a former Brunswick Circuit Steward and being seconded by a former Church Street minister.

At the same meeting a potentially sensitive matter was dealt with. This related to the fact that the new circuit could only have two official Circuit Stewards. It was proposed that Mr Ernest Frankland (former Brunswick) and Mr George Wood (former Church Street) should be appointed as Circuit Stewards for the coming year. However, it was also proposed that Mr Charles Thompson (former Brunswick Circuit) and Mr John Hodgeman (former Church Street Circuit) should be asked 'to serve the circuit as Stewards in an unofficial capacity'. It is not clear what 'an unofficial capacity' would mean in practice but appears to have been a way of providing 'emeritus' recognition for their previous service as Circuit Stewards in their respective circuits, although it was not stated for how long this would continue.<sup>9</sup> In the list of circuit officials subsequently appointed for the Whitby Circuit about a quarter were from the previous Church Street Circuit which reflected fairly closely the memberships of the two former circuits. Despite the tensions, as over the 'Book Plan', the evidence suggests attempts were being made to accommodate each other.

From the perspective of September 1944, with the two circuits, comprising a total of sixteen chapels, now amalgamated into one, the prospects appeared hopeful. At the Circuit Quarterly Meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1944 the

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<sup>7</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/42, GPW, 27/11/44.

<sup>8</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, QMW, 06/12/44.

<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere they are referred to as 'Junior Circuit Stewards'.

combined circuit full membership was reported as 677. The circuit fund showed a credit balance of £30-7s-7d. By the Quarterly Meeting on 7th March 1945 the circuit membership had risen to 680, and the circuit fund continued to be in credit.<sup>10</sup> In March 1946 there were thirteen Sunday Schools in the circuit with a total of 434 scholars, an increase of 65 on the previous year, with 67 teachers.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Local Preachers' Meetings**

It might be expected that of all meetings, the Local Preachers' Meetings would give some indication of the direction the new circuit would take, especially in relation to mission and evangelism. The first of the meetings, on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September 1944 at Brunswick Church was the first joint circuit Local Preachers' Meeting to take place. It was not particularly well attended by local preachers but the two new Whitby Circuit ministers, the Rev. W. Rhodes (superintendent) and the Rev. A.B. Jones (second minister) and the two active supernumerary ministers, the Rev. E. Metcalfe and the Rev. E. W. Challenger were present. Ten local preachers were in attendance, eight from the former Brunswick Circuit and two from the former Church Street Circuit. The meeting opened with the welcome of the two new circuit ministers but as far as the formal minutes go there was no indication that this was in any way a significant meeting and no mention was made of the fact that the Brunswick preachers had now been joined by their Church Street colleagues. It is possible that something was said 'off the record' about the significance of the first Local Preachers' Meeting of the Whitby Circuit but the minutes read as if as they were simply a continuation of the Brunswick Circuit's normal business. This is consistent with the view that the former Church Street Circuit preachers were being absorbed into the Brunswick structure rather than a new or modified structure being created.

However, one of the two women at the meeting, Mrs G.W. Wood of the former Church Street Circuit, was appointed as Local Preacher's Secretary. It

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<sup>10</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, QMW, 07/03/45.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 6/3/46.

was recorded that 'time did not permit of any lengthy discussion of the work of local preaching' but that the Rev. A. Jones would 'introduce a topic' at the next meeting'.<sup>12</sup> While certainly true that the agenda for this meeting was full of routine business, not connected with amalgamation, the lack of such a discussion also supports the view that this was simply an enlarged 'Brunswick' meeting. At the following meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1944 the Rev. A. Jones 'gave a most helpful and productive address on the aims and work of the Local Preacher', followed by discussion, but there was no indication that this was linked to the new situation that then existed.<sup>13</sup>

The question of transport for preachers to get to their appointment remained an important issue. It was proposed:

That every appointment within a radius of three miles from the starting point shall be considered a walking one.

The immediate cause of this resolution was explained in the minutes of the Quarterly Meeting held a few days later on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1944. Here it was indicated that an account had been received from a garage proprietor in Sleights for 'over £20' for the hiring of taxis 'without the knowledge of the Secretary of the Preachers' Travelling Fund'. It was explained that the matter had already been discussed at the Local Preachers' Meeting and the recommendations that had been made there were endorsed unanimously by the Quarterly Meeting with the chairman undertaking 'that he would send a copy of these suggestions to each preacher'.<sup>14</sup>

These 'walking appointments' were remembered by Interviewee 1 who was a local preacher:

For instance, if you lived in Whitby and were appointed to take a service at Newholm or at Ruswarp you were supposed to walk. If you lived in the Robin Hood's Bay area and you were preaching at Hawsker, it was assumed you would walk. Naturally it did not always work out that way, there was usually

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<sup>12</sup>The Manse, Sleights, WCR, PMW, 5/11/44.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 29/11/44.

<sup>14</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/1/40, WQM, 06/12/44.

someone who would offer you a lift, but officially they were walking appointments.<sup>15</sup>

This case of unauthorised claiming for transport was clearly seen as a serious matter given that £20 was a considerable sum of money at this time. It also illustrates the difficulties for preachers getting to appointments, especially in bad weather and on unlit roads in the dark, sometimes exposed to winds directly off the North Sea. Interviewee 3 remarked on this:

They must have been devoted and not wanting to let anybody down; it didn't matter what the weather was like!<sup>16</sup>

### **Pastoral reorganization**

Central to the amalgamation of the circuits was pastoral reorganization, initially based on the plan that had been agreed in 1943.<sup>17</sup> This had relied on the two active supernumerary ministers taking responsibility for Fishburn Park and Ruswarp (Rev. E. Metcalfe) and Wesley Hall (Rev. E.W.Challenger). The matter of allowances for the stipendiary ministers, noted in the handwritten addendum, was raised at the first General Purposes Committee of 1946, held on 25<sup>th</sup> February:

Mr. E. Frankland read an 'Anonymous' letter addressed to him as Circuit Steward with reference to allowances for Ministerial Staff.<sup>18</sup>

This was accompanied by a typewritten brief, approved by Rev. W. Rhodes, to be read at the Quarterly Meeting if the subject matter was raised. This outlined the position in relation to supernumerary ministers, indicating they were at liberty to enter into arrangements with circuits, as was the case with Mr Challenger and Mr Metcalfe, who had an agreement to accept thirteen preaching appointments each year for an allowance of £60 per annum. It was noted that the Stewards were not aware of any desire that these arrangements should be altered.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview 1, 12/03/09.

<sup>16</sup> Interview 3, 27/03/09.

<sup>17</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, BQM, 08/12/43.

<sup>18</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/42, GPW, 25/02/46.

This item is of interest for a number of reasons. Firstly the fact that the word 'Anonymous' was placed in inverted commas suggested that people probably knew precisely who had written it and there was no questioning as to whether anonymous material should be allowed on the agenda. It is possible that the author was one of the circuit officials or a member from one of the churches. The fact that a statement was prepared for use if the matter was raised at the Quarterly Meeting suggests that it was there to deal with an issue that could have been contentious and for which a response would be best agreed in advance. However, there was no mention in subsequent minutes that the matter had been raised and so the statement may not have been required. It illustrates the micro-political nature of the workings of meetings in order to engineer desired outcomes, as well as demonstrating the power of the General Purposes Committee to influence the decisions of full Quarterly Meetings, in this case by pre-emptive planning. Bolton commented that 'the union process was a matter of politics' and this was true as much at the local as the national level.<sup>19</sup>

A weakness in the pastoral plan was that the use of active supernumerary ministers for pastoral oversight was not sustainable. At the Quarterly Meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1946 the Rev. Ernest Metcalfe tendered his resignation on the grounds of ill health, although he was willing to continue to take a certain number of preaching appointments.<sup>20</sup> At the subsequent meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1946 it was reported that there had been communication with the District Home Missionary Committee and that, as the circuit had given up a full-time minister during the war when the Brunswick and Church Street circuits amalgamated, an application had been made for a third minister. The request went to District Synod in May 1947 and it had been pointed out by Synod that the third minister would have to be 'in full connection' rather than a probationary minister.<sup>21</sup> It was reported that the Rev. W. Rhodes had

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<sup>19</sup> A.J. Bolton, *The Other Side: Opposition to Methodist Union 1913 – 1932: An Examination of Some Contemporary Documents*, Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, QMW, 04/09/46.

<sup>21</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, QMW, 04/12/46. A minister served a period of probation before ordination and reception into full connexion. They were expected to continue their studies and work under the supervision of the circuit superintendent minister. Until 1956 they

considered the situation and suggested a pastoral oversight plan which would be further discussed by the General Purposes Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1947.

This plan was the first major post-war attempt to reorganise the circuit taking account of the location of the chapels, perceived pastoral needs and of the anticipated ministerial staffing. The following is a summary of the proposals of the General Purposes Committee.<sup>22</sup> First, to sell the second Whitby manse, 'Whitehurst', thus making funds available to purchase a manse in the village of Sleights. This would mean that the residences of ministers would be: minister No.1 (the superintendent) living in 'Rosslyn' (Whitby), minister No. 2 living in Sleights and minister No. 3 residing at Fylingthorpe. An active supernumerary, without a manse, would live in Whitby.

Secondly, in terms of the pastoral charges of ministers (with 1947 membership numbers added):

No.1 would be responsible for three of the Whitby town churches, Brunswick (*189 members*), Church Street (*76 members*) and Fishburn Park (*35 members*), a total of 300 members.

No.2 would have pastoral charge of Briggswath and Sleights (*63 members*), Ruswarp (*21 members*), Grosmont (*19 members*), Esk Valley (*24 members*), Littlebeck (*27 members*) and Goathland (*6 members*), a total of 160 members spread over quite a wide area in the Esk and Murk Esk river valleys.

No.3 would be responsible for Fylingthorpe (*44 members*), Robin Hood's Bay (*40 members*), Hawsker (*30 members*) and the 'New Estate'. This would mean 144 members in existing chapels to the south-east of Whitby together with a brief for developing the Methodist work on the Helredale council estate.

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were not allowed to marry. They were also cheaper to employ. See Brake, *op cit*, pp. 241 – 243.

<sup>22</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 01/01/42, GPW, 13/01/47.

The 'active supernumerary' would be responsible for Wesley Hall (70 members), Newholm (13 members), Sandsend (9 members) and Lythe (21 members) giving 113 members in an area to the north-west of Whitby.

The reorganisation of the circuit would mean that the chapels of the former Church Street Circuit would be divided between two ministers and thus more fully integrated into the new circuit, thus losing its discrete organizational identity. The superintendent minister would be responsible for the Brunswick and Church Street churches, the two former 'Circuit' churches, together with Fishburn Park. The membership was significantly larger here than for the other ministers but was concentrated in the town, involving little travelling. Also much of the lay leadership of the circuit was also to be found in these churches.

Under the new organization the circuit would, in effect, be sub-divided for pastoral oversight based predominantly on geographical areas. The active supernumerary would have a considerable workload, especially given the 'mission church' nature of Wesley Hall and its congregation, quite apart from responsibility for the village chapels. Provision would be made for the development of the work on the council estate and the General Purposes Committee of 13<sup>th</sup> September specifically suggested that the arrangements would 'enable younger men to deal with the developments envisaged in connection with the new Society to be formed'. Significantly, there was no mention of closing chapels or of rationalizing provision – the plan involved keeping everything going as well as developing new work on the estate.

It is of note that it was 'younger men' who were envisaged as being responsible for the work on the council estate and may suggest a feeling that this was not the kind of activity suited to more established older ministers. It could also have been viewed as 'good experience' for a younger minister and that a younger man might be able to relate better to young families on the estate. Underlying this, however, may have been previously mentioned tendency to see evangelism as something of a specialist activity, a mission



posting, and no longer the main concern of ministers who served already established congregations.

The minutes of the January 1947 General Purposes Committee do not give details of the discussion that took place other than indicating that there was a 'long discussion' concerning 'the obligation to take a third minister at the earliest possible date' and that steps should be taken to obtain the minister at the Conference of 1948.<sup>23</sup> The outcome of the vote, however, suggests that there were considerable reservations about the proposals with 15 voting for, 12 against and 3 'neutral'. The chairman declared the vote carried but it had not been strongly supported. As minutes from subsequent meetings suggest, the weight of opposition may have resulted from concerns about finding the money to pay for a third minister.

At the Quarterly Meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1947 the report of the General Purposes Committee was considered and a recommendation made that:

The committee after long conversation recommended that whilst recognising the obligation of the Circuit to take a third minister at the earliest possible date, consider that steps should be taken to obtain a minister at the Conference of 1948.<sup>24</sup>

It was also indicated that it would be a 'great disadvantage to the Circuit Work' if the two current ministers, the Revs. W. Rhodes and A. Jones left together, as well as receiving a new third minister at the same time. The General Purposes Committee had therefore recommended that Rev. W. Rhodes should be invited to remain as superintendent for a fifth year, a recommendation that was carried with 41 for and 6 'neutral'. The active supernumerary based in Whitby, Rev. E. Challenger, was also invited to continue to give his services. However, he responded that he could not give a definite promise to carry on beyond September 1948.<sup>25</sup> The active

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<sup>23</sup> See Methodist Church, *Minutes of the Annual Conference, July 1944*, London: Methodist Publishing House, 1944, p. 13. It had been envisaged by Conference that the Whitby Circuit should be staffed by three married ministers.

<sup>24</sup> R/M/WH, 1/1/40, QMW, 05/03/47.

<sup>25</sup> Mr. Challenger was born in 1871 and so was 77 years old at the time. He was eventually persuaded to carry on with these responsibilities until 1950.

supernumerary at Fylinghorpe, Rev. R.H. Ludlow, was also invited to remain in the circuit also demonstrating the degree to which these ministers were relied upon.

The position of Mr Challenger was discussed again at the Quarterly Meeting on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1947 where he requested that 'he really wanted to be freed from work and responsibility as soon as possible but did not want to let the people down at Wesley Hall'. However, he was urged to carry on his 'splendid work'. The record continues:

Mr Challenger, after some deliberation, said he would do all in his power to assist the Circuit.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from financial considerations the desire to retain the services of Mr Challenger may also have been related to his popularity. This was mentioned by Interviewee 2 who recalled:

Mr Challenger. Yes, he was a good man. He was a worker. He was full of beans. He visited. He was in all three [town] churches and wherever he went you knew you were going to get a good service. They used to follow him round, some of the congregation. He was a good man was Challenger, yes.<sup>27</sup>

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that unreasonable pressure was being exerted on an elderly man to remain 'active' when he had stated quite clearly that he wished to relinquish this significant pastoral responsibility. The comment by Interviewee 2 is also of note as three of the town churches were mentioned but, from the context of the remarks, Brunswick was excluded. Mr Challenger was a former Primitive Methodist and the expression 'a good service' meant to the former Wesley Hall interviewee the less formal and possibly more entertaining style adopted.<sup>28</sup>

The restoration of a third minister was raised at the General Purposes Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1947 at which it was pointed out that, while

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<sup>26</sup> NYCR R/M/W, 1/1/40, QMW, 04/06/47.

<sup>27</sup> Interview 2, 17/03/09.

<sup>28</sup> Methodist Church, *Minutes of the Annual Conference 1960*, London: Methodist Publishing House, 1960, p. 180. The obituary for Mr Challenger, who died in 1959, singles out his challenging preaching and, as an active supernumerary, building up the congregation at Wesley Hall.

desirable, 'the expenses could not be met on present assessments'. At this point it was recorded that:

Mr G. Waind stated that if a third minister was going to be invited, he would suggest the Rev. A. Gordon Jones of London and should a third minister be appointed he would be responsible for £100 of the stipend.<sup>29</sup>

This offer poses a number of questions. It is not possible to determine whether Mr Jones's name had been raised in other discussions or if the suggestion was new to members of the committee. There is also no evidence of what connection, if any, existed between Mr Waind and Mr Jones. The wording does not make it clear whether the offer to pay the £100 was linked specifically with the appointment of Mr Jones or whether it was a more general offer to pay towards the stipend of any third minister appointed. However, the linking of a specific name so closely with the offer does suggest at the very least a desire to influence the choice of appointment.

Mr Waind had offered land in 1937 for the new Methodist premises to serve the council housing estate and all of the interviewees remembered him as a strong character. Interviewee 5, in particular, commented that 'George Waind thought he could run the place from his arm chair'.<sup>30</sup> The minutes do not contain any record of the discussion that took place but the decision was taken to confirm the application for the appointment of a third minister. It was made clear, however, that in terms of the cost it would require 'raising assessments for each Society at once by at least 10 to 15%'. All members, apart from two, voted for applying for a third minister.

Ministerial staffing was then discussed at the Quarterly Meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1947. It was pointed out by the Circuit Steward, Mr E. Frankland, that 'before the fusion of the two circuits there were three full time ministers and one lay pastor'.<sup>31</sup> He warned that extra costs would be involved, including the refurbishment of the manse and that:

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<sup>29</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/42, GPW, 18/08/47.

<sup>30</sup> Interview 5, 16/04/09.

<sup>31</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/41, QMW, 03/09/47.

he wished the representatives of all our Societies to realize their responsibility for additional income to meet the expenses each quarter. He did not approve of getting into debt and expected Stewards to organise Special Efforts to wipe it off. We must so organise our income that it meets our expenses each year.

The proposal for the restoration of a third minister was carried with 32 votes for and 2 against. It was then moved that the Rev. A. Gordon Jones BD, of London, should be invited as third minister in 1948. However, an amendment was put forward that the Circuit Stewards should 'make the usual enquiries for a third minister', but this was lost in a vote of 16 for the amendment and 19 against. A vote was then taken on inviting Mr Jones and this was carried 19 for and 8 against. The closeness of the vote on the amendment shows that that there was some unease about making the invitation in this way.

At the meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1947 Mr E. Frankland again raised the cost of a third minister saying that an increase in the assessment for each Society by 15% would be needed. It was moved that there should be an increase for each Society of 10% from the March quarter but there was a successful amendment that the fixing of the increased assessment should be left over until the next quarter 'and that each Society do what they can to increase their contributions'. This suggests a resistance at Society level to increasing the circuit assessments and possibly a feeling among some that they would not themselves receive a great deal of benefit from the additional appointment. It was also reported that the Rev. A. Gordon Jones had declined the invitation to the circuit, with no reason given.

The year 1948 began with a continuing modest rise in membership and with a report at the March Quarterly Meeting that there had been an increase of 22 members across the year and the membership had now risen to 709.<sup>32</sup> Rev. R.H.Ludlow was again asked to remain for another year as active supernumerary at Fylingthorpe and Rev. E. W. Challenger was also asked to remain 'in charge of Wesley Hall' for another year. At the meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> June the membership returns showed an increase of nine and an invitation was

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<sup>32</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, QMW, 03/03/48.

issued to Rev. Samuel Davis, of Middlesbrough, to replace Rev. W. Rhodes as circuit superintendent.<sup>33</sup>

Finding enough preachers to fill all the appointments was raised at the Quarterly Meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1948 where a letter from the Local Preachers' Meeting was received.<sup>34</sup> The letter in question had arisen out of discussion at the local preachers' meeting of 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1948 where it had been resolved:

That a letter be sent to the Quarterly Meeting calling attention to the desperate position on the plan and asking if some means can be devised whereby services could be amalgamated.<sup>35</sup>

This would have been a practical solution in the context of the new circuit. A shortage of preachers was a national problem affecting the wider Methodist Church and Macquiban wrote that:

the critical situation regarding local preachers was reported to the Conference in 1948, particularly as it related to the future existence of rural Methodism.<sup>36</sup>

In this respect the Whitby Circuit, covering some isolated chapels, was stretched for resources yet there is no indication of what, if any, measures had been taken to address the matter. The only mention of the local preachers was a resolution that letters of thanks should be sent to car owners for conveying preachers to their appointments.<sup>37</sup> There was no evidence at subsequent meetings of if and how this was followed up. The Methodist 'Connexional' system of church organization, in which 'Court' reported to 'Court' through a hierarchical pyramid made action slow to take and, possibly, encouraged inaction.<sup>38</sup> Interviewee 5 felt that membership of District Synod

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<sup>33</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, QMW, 02/06/48.

<sup>34</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, QMW, 08/09/48.

<sup>35</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, PMW, 03/08/48.

<sup>36</sup> T. Maquiban, 'New Ventures in Hard Times: Local Preaching from Methodist Union to the late 1960s', in *Workaday Preachers: The Story of Methodist Local Preaching*, Ed. G. Milburn and M. Batty, Peterborough: Methodist Preaching House, 1995, p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> NYCR R/M/W, 1/1/40, QMW, 01/12.48.

<sup>38</sup> Wearmouth, *op cit*, This is an example of what Wearmouth refers to as 'bureaucracy, unintentional, unpremeditated, earnest and sincere' p. 77.

was a 'closed shop' and that 'we sometimes had a report back', suggesting that communication was weak.<sup>39</sup> Minutes of meetings generally show little evidence of 'feeding back' or following up 'matters arising'.

Where preachers could not be found to fill appointments it was left to individual chapels to make their own arrangements, as was noted in the minutes of the Thorpe Society Leaders' Meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1948.<sup>40</sup> It also resulted in the use of helpers or auxiliaries, volunteers accepted by the Local Preacher's Meeting, who used pre-prepared 'readers' services' and this developed as a feature over the following years in the circuit, the term 'reader' being used as a title for those doing this work, and 'readers' eventually being invited to Local Preachers' Meetings.<sup>41</sup> However, fundamental issues about the number of chapels and services, especially where there was duplication in Whitby, were not addressed at this time. It was a case of trying harder to do the same things, in the same places, in the same ways, but with fewer resources, rather than seeking more radical or creative solutions.

### **Mission and evangelism**

One of the objectives of Methodist Union had been to release energy and resources in order to 'more effectively evangelize the masses'<sup>42</sup> and this was to be partly achieved through a more coherent local response. Evangelism was discussed at the Local Preachers' Meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1945 where it was confirmed that the Methodists would co-operate with the Free Church Council in the arrangement of open-air services during the summer.<sup>43</sup> This suggests that evangelism was seen less as something that they did on behalf of Methodism but in conjunction with the other Free Churches of the town

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<sup>39</sup> Interview 5, 16/04/09.

<sup>40</sup> The Manse Sleights, WCR, Thorpe Leaders' Meeting Minute Book, January 1934 – Jan 1958, 06/02/48.

<sup>41</sup> The term 'reader' as used here should not be confused with the office of Reader (sometimes, incorrectly, 'Lay Reader') in the Church of England which, in terms of training and responsibilities, is more akin to that of a Methodist Local Preacher.

<sup>42</sup> Primitive Methodist Church, *Conference Minutes*, 1932, p. 274.

<sup>43</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, PMW, 29/05/45.

and district.<sup>44</sup> However, there were also practical reasons for consultation and co-operation. At the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1945, towards the end of the holiday season, there was a brief comment about these services, 'We have tried to bear our witness in the open-air during the summer months'.<sup>45</sup> Although it is unwise to read too much into a single comment, the wording suggests that their contribution was not seen as very successful. It may also reflect some reticence among local preachers to engage open-air work, feeling more comfortable working in formal church settings. Rupert Davies wrote that after the war 'Methodism was urged by its leaders to take up its traditional task of evangelism',<sup>46</sup> yet open-air evangelism increasingly appeared to be viewed as an activity more appropriate for specialist evangelists (e.g. missions led by Cliff College 'Trekks', Deaconesses and 'Christian Commandos')<sup>47</sup> than for local preachers or even Methodist ministers. This trend had been remarked upon in the 1930s by the Methodist historian, Henry Bett:

There was a time when every Methodist witnessed to the saving grace of God, by word and deed; when every Methodist preacher had an evangelistic message...There is little of this to-day, alas! Instead we have missions and missionaries.<sup>48</sup>

Likewise, Macquiban wrote that from Union onwards continual decline was a 'constant preoccupation' and that:

The need to stimulate revival was never far away, a persistent and nagging problem for the Connexion.<sup>49</sup>

However, at the Local Preachers' Meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1945 a more positive note was struck when it was agreed to authorise 'the young people of the Band of Preachers' to conduct services.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The local Free Church Council consisted of the local nonconformist churches. The Anglicans and Roman Catholics remained outside.

<sup>45</sup> Circuit Records, The Manse, Sleights, PMW, 22/08/45.

<sup>46</sup> Davies, 1982, *op cit*, p. 40.

<sup>47</sup> The Christian Commando campaign, then current, used trained missionaries who set out to reach those not normally in contact with the churches.

<sup>48</sup> Bett, *op cit*, p. 175.

<sup>49</sup> Macquiban, *op cit*, p. 87.

<sup>50</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, PMW, 15/11/45.

Related to mission in the wider sense was the concern with social and moral issues, especially alcohol, which remained prominent in the early years following circuit amalgamation. Examples included objections by the Quarterly Meeting to extending licensing hours on Victory in Europe Day, references to poor attendance at temperance meetings, and to a perceived threat from the brewers to 'win young people to drinking habits'. There were also objections to cinemas opening on Sundays, as they had done for troops in the war.<sup>51</sup> Interviewee 5 remembered the emphases laid on temperance at this time and Interviewee 2 said that the toast at her wedding had been drunk in lemonade, but added:

funnily enough, home-made wine did not count, but it could have a kick like a mule!<sup>52</sup>

The emphasis on temperance and preserving the traditional Sunday demonstrate continuity with what went before. This resulted partly from continuing Connexional concerns and partly because the same people remained members of the Quarterly Meeting and continued to influence its agenda. However, the resolutions concerning these matters in the minutes of meetings decreased in number after 1946, although this should not be taken that the concerns themselves diminished.

### **The Helredale estate scheme revived**

The greatest local challenge in terms of outreach and evangelism for the Whitby Circuit was presented by the council estate. Here were many people who did not have, or had lost contact with the churches. The first reference to this after circuit amalgamation was made at the Local Preachers' Meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1944, which considered the issue of 'the developing opportunities on the east side of the town', a reference to the expanding council housing estate. It was recorded that 'we be ready to take advantage of them should they arise'.<sup>53</sup> However, the words 'should they arise' does not suggest any great sense of urgency or active planning for an evangelical

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<sup>51</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, QMW, 07/03/45, 06/03/46, 04/09/46.

<sup>52</sup> Interview 2, 17/03/09.

<sup>53</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, PMW, 29/11/44.



campaign at that time. Rather it conveys a more general feeling that something ought to be done, but uncertainly as to what this would be or who would do it. Indeed, it was a further four years before the matter of a site for premises to serve the new estate came back on the agenda of meetings. As has been discussed in Chapter 6, the two circuits had failed to make progress from the time the land was first offered in 1937 until the outbreak of war, which interrupted any further developments.

The first post-war reference to the Gallows Close estate (now referred to as the Helredale estate)<sup>54</sup> appeared in the minutes of the Local Preachers' Meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1948 where:

The question of Helredale was brought before the meeting; we feel there was a need for some work to be done there.<sup>55</sup>

As George Waind was a local preacher it is possible that this discussion influenced him in making a renewed offer of the land. The estate was growing and David Kynaston wrote that there were those at this time who were 'actively seeking a new and better post-war environment for the British people'.<sup>56</sup> The expansion of the Helredale area now included an estate of 'pre-fabs' a few hundred yards from the proposed site of the Methodist premises.

The renewed offer of land was discussed at the General Purposes Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1948 where it was agreed that a sub-committee should be elected to consider the renewed offer of a site for the building a new Methodist Church.<sup>57</sup> In the minutes the words 'Centre' and 'Hall' were pencilled in above the word 'Church' which suggests that there was uncertainty at this stage how to describe what was proposed. However,

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<sup>54</sup> Gallows Close was the original name of the council housing estate. The area was subsequently renamed the Helredale estate, which covered a wider area. The actual location of the site was at Mount Pleasant and this name is also sometimes used in the minutes.

<sup>55</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, WLP, 30/8/48.

<sup>56</sup> D. Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945 – 51*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007, p. 31.

<sup>57</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, QMW, 22/11/48.

it suggests clearly that the need was felt for something more than a conventional church building.

The recommendation to form a sub-committee was confirmed at the meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1948 at which the premises were referred to as 'a Methodist Centre'. The sub-committee was requested to 'go into the matter in all its details' and report to the General Purposes Committee and subsequently to the Quarterly Meeting on March 8<sup>th</sup> 1949.<sup>58</sup> The sub-committee consisted of the circuit ministers (2 stipendiary and 2 active supernumerary ministers), the two circuit stewards, a representative from each of Brunswick, Church Street and Wesley Hall and George Waind. It may have been felt that the other town church, Fishburn Park, set in its own discreet neighbourhood, would have been relatively unaffected.

The 'New Site Sub-Committee' met on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1948 and produced a typed report.<sup>59</sup> Firstly, it was agreed that the site was 'ideal for development as a centre for religious and social work'. This recommendation was important in view of subsequent events. It was recognised that the new housing estate provided 'a definite challenge for Methodism' and that there was a need for Christian witness in a part of the town where there was no real centre for worship. It was estimated that a building suitable for the needs of the community would cost somewhere in the region of £2500 - £3000.

A more problematic aspect of the proposal was whether it would be possible to provide pastoral supervision for the work at Helredale as well as maintaining the existing arrangement of Societies. Doubt was expressed:

we came to the conclusion that before we could really begin to plan for a new centre, we must centralise our work in the town.

Given its East Side location it would be the Church Street and Wesley Hall Societies that would be most affected and the question was posed:

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<sup>58</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, QMW, 08/3/49.

<sup>59</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/40, GPW, 20/12/48 (New Site Sub-Committee minutes are contained in the General Purposes Committee Minute Book).

Should sentiment and attachment to certain buildings be a hindrance to developing the work of the kingdom amongst people we are anxious to win for the Church and for Christ?

This question reaches to the heart of the matter and, as will be discussed, it anticipated where most difficulty was experienced. In order to take matters forward it was felt that the sub-committee should make arrangements:

for additional officials and members from Church Street and Wesley Hall to join in a general discussion on the matter of reorganisation.

From this report it is evident that the committee was happy with the location of the site and the terms upon which it had been offered. The crucial issue was the 'centralisation' of the work in the town and the consequences arising from this. The sub-committee gave unanimous support for the report.

A meeting of the Societies of Church Street and Wesley Hall was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1949. This was presided over by Rev. W. Rhodes, the superintendent minister, and was attended by fifty-three people, although the numbers present from each Society are not given. There was no record of the discussions, simply a statement of the resolution and the outcome of the vote upon it. The resolution was as follows:

That this united meeting of the Societies of Wesley Hall and Church Street recommends the Circuit Quarterly Meeting to accept with hearty thanks the generous offer of Mr G. Waind of the site [for the estate] and trusting in the guidance and blessing of God, we pledge ourselves to endeavour to develop the work of the Methodist Church in this area with the greatest vigour.<sup>60</sup>

The outcome of the vote was thirty-six in favour and seventeen against, which gave a slightly greater than two to one majority. What is not recorded is the detail of the options that were discussed and whether the closure of one chapel was favoured over the other as the key element of the 'centralisation' referred to in the sub-committee report. The recording of the vote gives no indication of whether one Society was more supportive of the proposals than the other.

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<sup>60</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/1/42, GPW, 28/02/49 (report included in minutes).

Formal acceptance of the offer was made at the Quarterly Meeting held on March 8<sup>th</sup> 1949, saying:

That we accept with hearty thanks the generous offer of Mr. Geo Waind of a site [at Helredale] and trusting to the guidance and blessing of God, we pledge ourselves to endeavour to develop the work of the Methodist Church in this area with the utmost vigour.<sup>61</sup>

The outcome of the vote was thirty-one in favour and five against, with George Waind abstaining from voting. It was also resolved that the matter of the formation of a Trust in connection with the new site should be left in the hands of the sub-committee and that this committee be empowered to suggest names. At this stage it seemed as if the Methodist Centre would go ahead.

However, at the Quarterly Meeting on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1949 there was an unexplained minute which reads:

That in reply to the letter from the Whitby Free Church Council, we regret we cannot undertake further responsibilities in connection with the services at Helredale.<sup>62</sup>

It is possible that the shortage of preachers influenced the decision but this would be surprising given the apparent priority accorded to establishing a presence and premises there. It is possible that as the Methodists were planning their own Centre for the estate they wished to disengage from ecumenical arrangements, although this would seem unlikely, as they would be wishing to increase their profile in the area, especially in the light of an earlier statement about developing the work with 'utmost vigour'.

It is also not clear what the nature of these 'responsibilities' were or the level of commitment that was involved, but Interviewee 1 recalled:

Occasionally we used to take a service in a large house...it wasn't a place of worship but services were held there and I think it was (pause)...I certainly remember preaching there.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/1/41, QMW, 08/03/49.

<sup>62</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/1/41, QMW, 07/12/49.

<sup>63</sup> Interview 1, 12/03/09.

Two interviewees remembered the Salvation Army being active in the Helredale area. As Interviewee 2 put it:

... they were always in the town, the Salvation Army...On a Saturday tea time you'd hear the drum start, then you'd hear the band playing and then they'd come up with their flags flying. A good army then, there was a lot of them!<sup>64</sup>

She went on to describe how children would follow the band and how 'we all used to go and listen to the Sally Army'.

Impending difficulties for the new premises emerged at the Quarterly Meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1950 where it was resolved:

That we recommend the letter from Mr G Waind re Mount Pleasant [Helredale] be the first item on the agenda of the June Quarterly Meeting, and that in the meantime we ask the District Chapel Committee to send a deputation to view the site and make recommendations.<sup>65</sup>

The contents of the letter were not given but in view of what followed it almost certainly included a stipulation that new premises should be built on the site within three years and that if this could not be guaranteed the offer would be withdrawn.

The site was duly viewed on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1950 by a 'Commission' from the York and Whitby District which produced a report of its findings. The purpose was to inspect the site and to look at the two nearest churches, Wesley Hall and Church Street. In summary the main findings were as follows. First, it was felt that the location was not appropriate as it was 600 yards from the nearest houses and that the expansion of the estate was not on the road where the site was located. Secondly, there was no Society there at present and 'no workers to spare from other churches in the circuit'. The site was out of question until a full-time worker could be appointed and 'no additional ministerial help could be expected in the circuit for some years'. The following resolution was passed to the superintendent of the circuit 'for his action':

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<sup>64</sup> Interview 2, 17/03/09.

<sup>65</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, QMW, 08/03/50.

The Commission is very appreciative of the generous offer of Mr George Waind, but considers that this site is not in the best position to meet the needs of this estate, especially in view of the location of the houses yet to be built.

There are obvious difficulties in fulfilling the stipulation that the building work must begin in the next three years, and unless the donor is willing to withdraw that condition we regret that we cannot recommend the quarterly meeting to proceed with the conveyance of the site.<sup>66</sup>

The final reference to the project for new premises, thirteen years after the first offer of a site was first made, occurred at the Quarterly Meeting of 7<sup>th</sup> June 1950 stating:

That we support the recommendations of the General Purposes Committee (*held on 1<sup>st</sup> June*) re the offer of the site at Mount Pleasant [Helredale]. The recommendation is as follows : The Quarterly Meeting gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Mr G. Waind in offering a site at Mount Pleasant, but in view of the Commission's Report does not feel that it can proceed under the conditions stated. If Mr. Waind is able to waive the conditions, the Quarterly Meeting will gladly accept the site for future use.<sup>67</sup>

Only one of the oral history interviewees could recall anything of the detail of what took place at this time, although others were aware that something had been going on concerning the council estate. Interviewee 5, who had some recollections, said:

What is now Mount Pleasant is a turning off the Barrett estate and George Waind did own a site and there was very serious concern as to its development. It did get very serious consideration...yes, I think, I think – and this is purely personal – I think one of the factors that stopped the development of that site, or the acceptance of the offer of it, was the inability of Wesley and Church Street to unite to form the nucleus of the new membership. I may be completely wrong but that is my reaction to it. I can remember it being a matter of discussion for a period of time and I remember how disappointed George Waind was of his offer not being accepted.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/42, GPW, 12/5/50. The report is included within General Purposes Committee minutes.

<sup>67</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/1/41, QMW, 7/6/50.

<sup>68</sup> Interview 5, 16/4/09.

When asked why he thought that the people from Wesley Hall and Church Street felt unable to come together at this stage he referred to the issue of loyalty to chapels and listed the influence of a number of people, originally from the East Side, but who had moved to the West Side, and who were 'walking across the bridge' to attend their former chapels. He continued:

This is the drawback with so many churches, whatever it is, there is too much loyalty to bricks and mortar and not to the Church that meets within. And that's the trouble with unification within the town, within the circuit.

Interviewee 5 also referred to the relative proximity of Hawsker Chapel to the proposed new premises and recalled that there was anxiety among some there that they might lose members who lived in Stainsacre to a new church.<sup>69</sup> He continued:

It went on for donkey's years. They all had a jolly good natter but nothing materialised. It would have been workable had Church Street and Wesley Hall decided to come together.

When speaking generally about Methodist commitment to evangelism on the council estate he said:

We tried, what you referred to as the Gallows Close estate, and the Salvation Army came in and so we left them to it...But I wouldn't say that we were evangelical in the sense that there was a set mission, enterprise or programme. We went out carol singing but no one sees you. They hear you and answer the door and that's all you get out of that.

The attempt to provide premises to serve the council housing estate is important for this study because it illustrates a number of significant features of Methodist organization and culture both of the Connexion as a whole and in relation to the local situation of Methodism in the Whitby area. Robbins wrote of this period that:

There was general agreement that new churches for new estates were needed (and were provided, to some degree) but individual congregations always found good reasons why others should move and they should stay...There was general

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<sup>69</sup> The hamlet of Stainsacre lies approximately midway between Hawsker and the proposed site.

agreement that new estates should not be 'spiritual deserts' but 'transplanting' raised predictable issues.<sup>70</sup>

It also reflects underlying issues similar to those identified by Israel Galindo in his taxonomy of congregational lifespan. Here, in the 'Dissolution Stage' the commitment of members of the congregation to each other and their collective memories become obstacles to adaptation to change and 'the buildings, property, and programs become mere cultural artefacts'.<sup>71</sup>

When evaluating the report of the District Commission it is difficult to judge the basis for the evidence or who were consulted by them. The point about the distance from the estate contradicts the view of the New Site Sub-Committee that the site was 'ideal for development as a centre for religious and social work'.<sup>72</sup> Although it was true that the site was not on the council estate itself it was much closer than the other two East Side chapels. It also reflected, with hindsight, a short term view about where new housing, both council and private, would eventually be situated. In this respect the report contradicted local opinion based on local knowledge. While it was true that there was no Society there already it did not address the fact that the whole point of the project was to develop a new Methodist presence in a part of the town where there were people who were felt to be in need of both spiritual and social provision. The existing town churches had originally been built in the heart of the communities that they served. Yet, despite the movement away of population, the Methodist church provision remained exclusively in the older parts of Whitby with an increasing number of members living elsewhere in the town.

The opinion, included in the report of the District Commission, that there were 'no workers to spare from other churches' reflects the desire of a significant number of members at Wesley and Church Street to retain the *status quo* rather than see it 'centralised' to release workers and resources for building up the new centre. This is indicative of the way in which

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<sup>70</sup> Robbins, *op cit*, p. 295.

<sup>71</sup> Galindo, *op cit*, p. 76. Galindo's taxonomy has eight stages, of which the Dissolution stage is the last.

<sup>72</sup> NRCR R/M/WH, 1/1/42, GPW, 20/12/48.



Methodism had moved from its formative period, demonstrating high levels of energy in building up the movement, to a position defensive of the 'status quo' and a reluctance to take risks. As Wearmouth observed, 'there was a general sense of passion spent'.<sup>73</sup>

The point made in the Commission's report about 'no additional ministerial help in the circuit for some years' was based on a decision of the circuit itself. At the General Purposes Committee of 1<sup>st</sup> June 1950 it was recorded that despite an obligation to take a third minister, 'under our present financial circumstances we were not prepared to do so'.<sup>74</sup> An explanation for this 'obligation' was provided at the General Purposes Committee on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1951:

Mr. E. Frankland reported to the Ministerial Invitation Committee that the Chairman of District had written to him asking if the Circuit was prepared to take its third minister as required by Conference. The Steward had replied that he had hoped that longer notice would be given, as we were hardly in a position to take a third man. The main reason for the offer is that a number of lay pastors have now entered the ministry, and the majority being married men, there was a shortage of manses.<sup>75</sup>

Pastor C.W. Thompson was, in fact, one such lay pastor, having trained at Hartley Victoria College and entered the ministry in 1947. An additional factor in the failure to provide premises for the council estate, and one that is very difficult to evaluate, is how far there was personal opposition to George Waind himself, and thus to his proposal. It has been noted that he offered to pay part of the stipend of a third minister and appeared to link this offer with a particular individual. Three of the oral history interviewees remembered him as a man of strong character who liked to be in control. It is possible therefore that there were those who simply wished to frustrate what he was trying to do. He may also have been seen by some former Primitive Methodists as an assertive Wesleyan businessman whose offer was posing a threat to the future of Church Street Chapel.

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<sup>73</sup> Wearmouth, *op cit*, p. 50.

<sup>74</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/42, GPW, 01/06/50.

<sup>75</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/42, GPW, 26/02/51.

## **The 1949 Methodist Conference Call**

A final issue that throws light on the relationship between the Connexion, and the local organisation at circuit and Society level was a 'Conference Call to Each Methodist Society' issued by the Conference of 1949. The 'Preamble' set out the purpose of the call:

The Conference of the Methodist Church, meeting in Liverpool, July 1949, solemnly and affectionately calls every Church in the Connexion to self-examination and to prayerful consideration how best it can serve the needs of its own area, and strongly urges each Society in Great Britain to immediate consideration and action along the lines of the following Call.<sup>76</sup>

This was set out as a two-fold task. Firstly, 'to SURVEY the present condition of church life with the utmost frankness and sincerity'

and:

as a consequence of the Survey the Conference directs the local Church to determine the immediate ACTION required in order that the Church may be a complete instrument to be used by God for his purpose.

There then followed a section on 'Method', giving the four items of the survey; the spirit and development, the membership, the witness and evangelism and the organisation and outlook of the churches. These were broken into a number of sub-questions. The timescale involved the survey being complete for the June 1950 Quarterly Meetings, which would then report to District Synods. This very specific 'Call' from Conference to conduct local surveys provides an opportunity to examine how initiatives at the apex of the organization, the Methodist Conference, were received, interpreted and acted upon at local level and what this shows about the organizational structure and culture of Methodism at the time.

The 'Call' was made specifically to 'churches' and 'Societies' and it was not clear what role circuits would have in conducting the survey. Although the 'Call' was directed at 'Societies' it is difficult to envisage a situation in which

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<sup>76</sup> *The Minutes of Annual Methodist Conference, 1949*, London: Methodist Publishing House, 1949, p. 202.

the circuits could not have a significant role, quite apart from the value of being engaged in such an exercise in its own right. In the records of the Whitby Circuit there was no initial reference to the 'Call' or survey at Quarterly Meetings, or at the General Purposes Committee, but it does appear in the minutes of two surviving sets of Society Leaders' Meetings.

At the Briggswath and Sleights Leaders' Meeting of 26<sup>th</sup> August 1949 it was recorded that:

Rev. W.R.E. Clarke made special reference to the call of our 1949 Conference to each and every Society for them to survey their local opportunities and urged them to take such action as necessary to bring the work of God to the highest standard possible.<sup>77</sup>

The details of the Conference Call were then set out in the minutes in some detail, stating that it was to take place at the beginning of the Connexional Year 1949–50. No discussion was recorded of the means by which the above would be undertaken and the main preoccupation of subsequent meetings was with finance, including the introduction of an envelope system for collections. This was seen as important in relation to increasing the church's assessment from £160 to £180 each year in order to help to balance the circuit's accounts. The only further specific reference to the Conference Call at Briggswath and Sleights was made at the Leaders' Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1950 where it was stated:

The Rev W.R.E. Clarke gave us an outline of the necessity for a call to Spiritual Holiness, emphasising the great necessity of examining our position regarding Class Leaders and membership class tickets.

This suggests that a finding of the survey may have been the failure to meet in classes.<sup>78</sup> However, the circuit debt continued to be the major item of

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<sup>77</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 2/1/6, Briggswath and Sleights Society and Leaders' Meeting Minute Book, 1940 – 1951, 26/08/49: 28/08/50.

<sup>78</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s the failure of members to meet in classes, a loss of 'fellowship' and difficulty finding Class leaders were recurrent topics at the York and District Synod Class Leaders' Committee. Borthwick Institute, University of York, MRD/1, Class Leaders' Committee minutes, 04/04/33, 02/04/35, 10/08/35, 05/04/38, 06/04/38, 04/10/44.

discussion at meetings and the means by which the remaining £63 owed by the Society could be raised.

The other surviving Society minutes that contain reference to the Conference Call are from the church at Grosmont. Here it was again introduced by Rev.W.R.E.Clarke, at the Leaders' Meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1949, where it was recorded that:

Mr. Clarke suggested that the matters put forward at Conference be discussed on each occasion when he is appointed to preach at mid-week services during the winter. All the leaders present were in accordance with Mr.Clarke's proposals.<sup>79</sup>

There was no further recorded discussion of this matter, or references to what actually happened, and the next Leaders' Meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1950 dealt with routine matters of the Poor Fund, a jumble sale, a proposal for a concert in the Autumn and plans for the Sunday School Anniversary.<sup>80</sup>

At the Quarterly Meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1950 it was recorded:

That the Circuit Report on the 'Conference Call' be received and forwarded to Synod, and that we express our gratitude to Mr F.W. Lewis for the care and time devoted to the report'.<sup>81</sup>

Mr. F.W.Lewis had been given the task of gathering and collating the results of the survey from the Societies. However, although the report was produced there is no evidence from this or subsequent Quarterly Meetings of specific issues being addressed as a result of it or of any plan of action by the circuit based upon it.<sup>82</sup> At District level the Conference Call appeared as a brief agenda item at the September 1950 York and Whitby Synod:

Full consideration was given to the Call to the Church and the plan for Pastoral Action. Suggestions were outlined for the putting of the whole into action.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Grosmont Leaders' Meeting Minute Book, 1940 – 1954, 13/9/49.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 13/3/50

<sup>81</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/1/41, QMW, 07/06/50.

<sup>82</sup> The Circuit Report does not appear to have survived.

<sup>83</sup> John Rylands University Library, Methodist Archives and Research Centre, York and Whitby District Synod, Area 41, September 1950, Item 29.

Although the surviving evidence is patchy and is unlikely to give the full picture, from what remains there is no evidence of a systematic approach to following up the findings of the survey, yet the 'Call' placed great emphasis on actions to be taken, principally by Societies. This represents a potential weakness in what was proposed because by placing the emphasis at the level of individual Societies there was a lack of local strategic planning, especially in situations in which the priorities of individual Societies could come into conflict with those of circuits. Also, given the limited timescale of less than a year, the Call's objectives appear to be over-ambitious. At best it provoked some discussion about priorities at a time when financial pressures were being felt.<sup>84</sup> An illustration of potential conflicting interests is the scheme to provide premises to serve the Helredale council estate. The 'Call' included such questions as:

Are you planning definite evangelistic work in any new housing estate or development in your area?<sup>85</sup>

and

Is your Church involved in circuit problems, such as regrouping of churches and the re-drawing of circuit boundaries, the closing of unnecessary buildings, and the rearrangement of ministerial manpower?

As has been seen, the unwillingness of Societies to undertake rationalisation to release resources for new work came into conflict with the rational planning approach implicit in the methodology of the 'Call'. The 'obscure reason of sentiment'<sup>86</sup> easily came into conflict with what in later years would be called an action planning cycle.

At District level a response to the 'Call' was to arrange regional meetings of the circuit ministers in York, Ripon and Pickering. A 'Plan for Pastoral Action' was drawn up. The meetings highlighted how few classes were meeting and the need for the training of class leaders. They concluded that:

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, Representative Session, Item 17. At the September 1950 York and District Synod there was reference to the 'heavy financial demands' that were being made.

<sup>85</sup> Conference Call, 1949, *op cit*, p. 202.

<sup>86</sup> Harrison, *op cit* p. 4.

The spirit of fellowship so vital in the old type of class meeting needs to be recaptured.<sup>87</sup>

They also felt that members, Leaders and even ministers often felt little concern for those outside the church and that they should be 'constantly undertaking evangelical work'. However, in the Whitby Circuit at this time the main concern was predominantly with the circuit debt and the maintenance of the system as it was, rather than initiating change. It was this inability to show sufficient flexibility in the face of new circumstances that was one of the factors that contributed to the decline in numbers that gathered pace in the following decades. As Interviewee 5 put it, 'the Whitby Circuit left it until it was too late'.<sup>88</sup>

### Assessment

With the close of the 1940s and start of the 1950s the circuit was reaching its post-war peak in numbers, reflecting what Hastings referred to as 'the modest religious revival, common to the whole nation, of those years'.<sup>89</sup> This was achieved in 1951-52 when the circuit membership reached 753. Sunday School numbers had also been on the increase, rising from 434 in March 1945 to 451 in March 1946, again reflecting the general trend. As Cliff pointed out:

There had been an increase in the birth rate, which was reported in increased enrolments in the Sunday Schools. The Methodist schools, for example, increased by 16% between 1943 and 1953.<sup>90</sup>

A feeling of optimism was reflected at District Synod with comments such as 'we rejoice that the decline in Church Membership has been arrested' and 'we believe the tide has turned in a number of Circuits'.<sup>91</sup> This could have encouraged complacency and confidence in maintaining the *status quo*.

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<sup>87</sup> Borthwick Institute, University of York, MRD 3/1, Class Leaders' Committee, 29/03/50

<sup>88</sup> Interview 5, 16/4/09.

<sup>89</sup> Hastings, *op cit*, p. 465.

<sup>90</sup> P. B. Cliff, *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England 1780 – 1980*, Redhill: National Christian Education Council, 1986, p. 272.

<sup>91</sup> Ryland Methodist University library Manchester, Methodist Archives and Research Centre, York and Whitby District Synod (Area 41), September 1950, Item 10.

However, although the seeds of decline had long been sown, the fact that flowers were still blooming obscured the difficulties ahead.

In the Whitby Circuit there was, from 1952 onwards, a steady decline in overall membership with 702 members in March 1955, 674 in March 1960 and 651 in March 1965.<sup>92</sup> Despite the growth in numbers, the circuit finances had moved from a small 'balance in hand' in 1947, to a debt of between four and five hundred pounds in 1950. In 1952 there was a discussion at the Quarterly Meeting of the forthcoming Year of Methodist Evangelism in 1953 with the 'serious responsibility of parents', highlighting the concern that children and young people should not be lost to the churches.<sup>93</sup> After the war there had been a revival of the town as a holiday resort but patterns of holiday-making were changing and, with the rise of private motoring, many more people came to the town on day trips, with more traditional visiting patterns declining.

In 1956 a reorganisation of Districts led to the loss of the name of Whitby in the District title, renamed the York and Hull District, reflecting more closely the major centres of population rather than historical legacy. At the Quarterly Meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1956 it was recorded that:

While regret was expressed at the loss of the name from the district heading, it was felt that nothing would be gained by making any protest. There was no suggestion, either, of our applying to be transferred to the Darlington and Durham District'.<sup>94</sup>

Interviewee 5 remembered rather stronger feelings being expressed:

I can remember the furore when the Whitby name was dropped from the district.<sup>95</sup>

The mid-1960s saw the beginning of chapel closures with the closure of Lythe in 1965, Sandsend and Ruswarp in 1966, Goathland in 1967 and

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<sup>92</sup> All figures taken from reports of Quarterly Meetings.

<sup>93</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/41, QMW, 03/09/52.

<sup>94</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 1/1/14. QMW, 05/09/56.

<sup>95</sup> Interview 5, 6/5/09.

Church Street, the first of the four town churches to close, in 1968.<sup>96</sup> Wesley Hall closed in 1983, Fishburn Park in 1996 and Brunswick on Easter Sunday in 1997.<sup>97</sup> However, the history of the decline in membership and the period of chapel closures do not fall within the scope of the present study. As a period it is worthy of detailed scholarly research in its own right.<sup>98</sup>

Taken overall, the evidence from this period shows that circuit amalgamation was in reality the absorption of the former Primitive Methodist Circuit by the numerically and financially stronger former Wesleyan Circuit. This is evidenced by the fact that it was the structures and working practices of the Brunswick Circuit which continued, but now with the former Church Street members within them. As Wearmouth argued, in any sphere of human activity, there is a danger:

lest amalgamations of societies unequal in size, substance and influence may submerge the virtues of the smaller

in which case 'amalgamation may spell absorption and atrophy'.<sup>99</sup> However, there is no evidence that the former Wesleyans were deliberately attempting to destroy the Primitive Methodist traditions and, as has been shown, demonstrated some sympathy for their feelings. In fact, at the level of individual churches the changes were less significant than for the circuits. At church level concerns remained, as before, with maintaining their own life and work, with traces of their former denominational cultures continuing to survive for many years after Methodist Union.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Borthwick Institute, University of York, MRD 6/3, Closure of Chapels (York and Hull District)

<sup>97</sup> 'Worshippers face long wait for new home. Brunswick to close on Easter Sunday 1997', *Whitby Gazette*, 13<sup>th</sup> November 1996, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> In 2011 the places of worship in the Whitby Circuit are Briggswath and Sleights, Hawsker, Robin Hood's Bay, Fylingthorpe and Littlebeck. The Whitby congregation worships in the Whitby Mission to Seafarers' chapel.

<sup>99</sup> Wearmouth, *op cit*, p.78.

<sup>100</sup> A superintendent minister who served in the Whitby Circuit several decades after circuit amalgamation could still 'recognise the traditions which were very much alive', citing the independent-mindedness of Fishburn Park, 'they were a law unto themselves, typical ex-Prim'. (Letter, Personal Collection)



## Chapter 9 Assessment and Conclusion

### Introduction

This study has investigated, in depth, the process of Methodist Union as experienced within one local context, including the period between Union in 1932 and the amalgamation of circuits in 1944. It has done so, in particular, in the light of organizational, social and cultural factors. Although other studies could provide a broader perspective, they do not explain the particular factors involved in any given local situation. As Royle pointed out, 'local history is full of little surprises that challenge the stereotype' and why local studies can make important contributions to larger-scale historical analysis.<sup>1</sup> Both types of study are equally valuable and complement each other.

An objective was to investigate, 'in a highly-organized church' the influence of organizational factors, especially at the level of the circuit.<sup>2</sup> This was partly because much has been written in relation to Methodism's Connexional structures, both supportive and critical, and because this is a area that has not been fully investigated, especially in a local context. In this respect, the study has made an original scholarly contribution by drawing upon organizational concepts that have become familiar in the field of Congregational Studies but less so in historiography.

Methodist Union was 'for the most part a movement from above',<sup>3</sup> but it was at the local level that the church functioned and interacted with the communities in which it was set. In one respect Union achieved an important objective in that it constituted a symbolic coming together of previously separate denominations, thus helping to fulfil the theological imperative that 'they may be one'.<sup>4</sup> However, it was intended to be more than this, with the

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<sup>1</sup> E. Royle, 'When did Methodists stop attending their Parish Churches?', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Vol. 56, October 2008, p. 296.

<sup>2</sup> Edwards, *Methodism in England*, p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> Wearmouth, *The Social and Political influence of Methodism in the Twentieth Century*, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> John 17, v. 22.

clearly expressed aspiration of making the united Methodist Church more efficient in the use of its resources, both human and physical. This would, it was hoped, render it more effective in witness, resulting in an outburst of evangelical activity. This hope was summed up in the year of Union in a commemorative 'pageant' of Primitive Methodism:

The need of a great Spiritual Revival and the conviction that a United Methodist Witness will help to promote it, also lies behind this dream of Methodist Union.<sup>5</sup>

The factors that influenced the amalgamation of the Methodist denominations were complex and varied, involving organizations that, despite sharing close 'family resemblances' in terms of doctrine, polity, structures and procedures, had previously functioned almost entirely as separate entities. Also, as Field pointed out, a good deal of support for Union had been 'extremely half hearted' and 'artificially created by the powers-that-be at Westminster'.<sup>6</sup> For this reason an understanding of organizational factors and the process of change within organizations are of particular relevance. However, what goes into making any given organization and the distinctive and subtle culture of that organization depends on a complex mix of variables including those related to social class and attitudes to the exercise of power and authority. The objective of this chapter will be to highlight these factors in the light of the evidence from the study and by relating local and national factors as relevant.

### **The Methodist family of churches**

As MacCulloch has noted, the Methodist denominations 'shared a common ethos' a feature of which was the characteristic organizational structure that had been adopted.<sup>7</sup> In this sense Methodist Union was more of a 'family reunion' than a union of churches that had little in common.<sup>8</sup> Wesleyans

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<sup>5</sup> Barber, *op cit*, p. 299.

<sup>6</sup> C. Field, 'A Sociological Profile of English Methodism, 1900 – 1932', in *Oral History Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1976, p. 85.

<sup>7</sup> D. MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, London: Allen Lane, 2009, p. 753.

<sup>8</sup> Robbins, *op cit*, p. 222.

tended to think of their Church as 'the Mother of Methodism' and the other branches as 'her children'.<sup>9</sup> For this reason they regarded Union as a 'homecoming' of these 'children' but this was not necessarily a helpful metaphor, especially in the case of the Primitive Methodists who had their origins in expulsion by the Wesleyan Conference.<sup>10</sup> Also, creating unity within families of any kind is not necessarily a straightforward matter and Methodism was no exception.

Writing in 1932 on the psychology of Methodism, Dimond stated 'Methodism is a highly organized religion'.<sup>11</sup> He argued that the structure and the exercise of authority within it had its origins in the personal style and approach of John Wesley and that his will and authority came to be exercised through a hierarchy of officers and church courts. However, as originally envisaged by John Wesley these systems and structures were not put in place as a basis for an alternative Church to the Church of England but as a means of nurturing and encouraging the faith of those who were already in it, as well as providing a structure for accountability and discipline. Young pointed out that it was only towards the end of his life that Wesley 'countenanced the erection of chapels as more than meeting places',<sup>12</sup> encouraging his followers to worship in the Anglican parish church, a situation pertaining for some Wesleyans well beyond the middle of the nineteenth-century.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, for many years after the death of John Wesley the Methodist denominations avoided using the word 'Church', preferring instead to retain the earlier term 'Connexion', with the Wesleyan Methodists not officially adopting 'Church' until 1891 and the Primitive Methodists until 1901.

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<sup>9</sup> 'The Union Mandate', *Methodist Recorder*, January 18, 1923, Leading Article, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> They were not in this respect like the prodigal son, who had left the household of his own free will!

<sup>11</sup> S. G. Dimond, *The Psychology of Methodism*, London: The Epworth Press, 1932, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> Young, *op cit*, p. 174.

<sup>13</sup> E. Royle, *When did Methodists stop attending their parish churches?* pp. 275 – 296.

The differences between these denominations were not so much in relation to 'the similarity of their organization and departments'<sup>14</sup> as to the relative balance of power, especially between the ordained ministry and the laity and between the Connexion, the Districts, the circuits and the individual Societies. Whereas the Wesleyan Methodists had a 'top-down' form of Connexionalism, originating in the original 'Connexion' with Wesley himself, the Primitive Methodists developed a form of Connexionalism from below. Primitive Methodism had moved from the period of revivalism, to a focus on circuits, then a period of 'Districtism', then a strengthening of the Connexion.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Kendall wrote that it was not until the District method of stationing was abandoned in 1879 that 'complete organic unity' was achieved.<sup>16</sup> Thus, although the structure of the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists was superficially similar, the underlying approach differed considerably. To draw upon a concept derived from Geert Hofstede, the Wesleyans had a tolerance of greater 'power distance' than the Primitive Methodists. Hofstede defined 'power distance' as:

'the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations...expect and accept that power is distributed unequally'.<sup>17</sup>

In this respect, also employing spatial imagery, Wearmouth argued that 'Wesleyanism tended to be irrigated and directed by Headquarters; the other [Methodist] denominations drew life and energy from below'.<sup>18</sup> An example of the latter had emerged in 1926 in the Whitby Primitive Methodist Circuit when a complaint about the minister, in the form of an unofficial petition, was sent to the District. The circuit's response was that taking the matter to the District was regarded as 'subversive of discipline', 'against our laws and usages', and that 'the highest meeting to which a private member can appeal

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<sup>14</sup> H.B. Kendall, 'The Primitive Methodist Church and the Independent Methodist Churches', in W.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman and G. Eayrs, (eds), *A New History of Methodism*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909, p 597

<sup>15</sup> Snell and Ell, *op cit*, p. 137.

<sup>16</sup> Kendall, *The Primitive Methodist Church and the Independent Methodist Churches*, p. 594

<sup>17</sup> G. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival*, London: Profile Books, 2003, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> Wearmouth, *op cit*, p. 77.

is the Station Quarterly Meeting'.<sup>19</sup> 'District Brethren' were told firmly that their involvement would only be welcomed 'in proper circumstances'. As Kent pointed out, for 'Low Methodists' such as the Primitive Methodists, 'disciplinary authority belonged to the local meetings of the circuit'.<sup>20</sup> This helps to explain their sensitivity to the perception that the former Wesleyans were in any way dictating to them. The other difference lay in forms of worship with some Wesleyans using the Book of Common Prayer long after Wesley's death and Primitive Methodists preferring spontaneous, extemporary worship. This emphasis was broadly consistent with the findings of this study but there were some local features that diverged, for instance, the commonality of worship style shared between Wesley Hall and the Primitive Methodists.

The study also found that the official discussions at local level did not deal in any depth with the theological differences between the two denominations which underlay their organizational differences. Rather, they emerged in more indirect ways. These included the differences over that relative balance of power between the ordained ministry and the laity and the administration of the sacraments, which reflected the greater emphasis that Primitive Methodists placed upon the theological doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Also, by the time of Union the differences between them were becoming less clear. The work of the Primitive Methodist scholar, A.S Peake,<sup>21</sup> had introduced more modern approaches to Biblical scholarship and the support by Sir William Hartley, both organizational and financial, had provided the Primitive Methodists with additional status and respectability.<sup>22</sup> It is possible that local discussions on theological matters did take place but these have not left records, whereas in places where such discussion might have been expected to take place, such as Local Preachers' Meetings, there is no evidence. At local level, discussion focussed upon the practical

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<sup>19</sup> NYCR R/M/WH 1/2/1, PQM, 02/12/26

<sup>20</sup> J. Kent, *Jabez Bunting, The Last Wesleyan*, London: Epworth, 1955, p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> Dr Arthur Samuel Peake (1862 – 1929) was appointed to the staff of Hartley College, Manchester in 1892.

<sup>22</sup> G. Milburn, *Primitive Methodism*, p. 86.

implications of the decisions that had already been taken by the Conferences.

However, given the differences of emphasis it was evident from this study that in terms of organizational structures both the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist circuits were in many respects similar. They had the same business meetings, held to the same pattern and had the same circuit and Society officials. Where organizational differences existed they could be accounted for mainly by the relative sizes of the circuits most notably the adoption by the larger Wesleyan circuit of a General Purposes Committee, acting as a steering committee for the Quarterly Meeting. For the same reason the Wesleyan Methodists were more likely to delegate matters to sub-groups, reporting back to the Quarterly Meeting, whereas the Primitive Methodists preferred to retain most business within the confines of the Quarterly Meeting itself. This meant that the Wesleyan Quarterly Meeting was often asked to ratify recommendations of sub-groups comprised of senior circuit officials whereas similar business was dealt with by the full Primitive Methodist Quarterly Meeting. As was demonstrated in the matter of payments to the two active supernumerary ministers, the members of the General Purposes Committee were able to plan how to influence the Quarterly Meeting if contentious matters arose.

In the amalgamation of circuits the similarity between the organizational structures (as opposed to other factors such as doctrine, praxis or social differentiation) could be viewed as both an advantage and a disadvantage. It was an advantage in the sense that both denominations had an understanding of how the other functioned for both used similar terminology, a common 'Chapel language'.<sup>23</sup> However it was a disadvantage in that the Connexional organizational structure, especially at local level, was better suited to maintaining itself and its systems than to adapting to change. This was especially so as it was not possible for local leadership to be exercised

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<sup>23</sup> Young, *op cit*, p. 170.

over time by the ordained ministers and when strong and influential local forces may have been resisting change.<sup>24</sup>

### **The influence of Connexional bureaucracy**

At the local level the records of meetings, the preaching plans and the detailed collection of statistics are characteristic of bureaucratic organizations. A bureaucracy functions rather like a machine and the use of machine metaphors at the time has already been noted.<sup>25</sup> The term, 'fusion' was also sometimes used for Methodist Union; a bringing together of different elements to make one, as with metals. Interestingly, however, a more common metaphor for Union was 'organic union', drawn from biology rather than from engineering. Brake described the lines of communication between the different strata of the Connexion as through 'pyramidal administrative structures' in which committees communicated with committees at the various levels of the Connexion.<sup>26</sup> Charles Handy closely associated bureaucracy with what he described as 'the role culture' in which:

The task of an organisation can then be subdivided box by box until you have an organisational flow chart of work, with a system of prescribed roles (specified by things called 'job descriptions') and held together by a whole set of rules and procedures.<sup>27</sup>

Although not referred to as 'job descriptions' the roles of officials such as Society Stewards, Sacramental Stewards and Chapel Stewards were specified as 'Duties of Stewards' and the responsibilities of the various 'courts' or meetings were laid out in some detail as in the 'book plan', eventually adopted by the Whitby Circuit.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> In Clark's study of Staithes he was told that older people used to say 'don't take any notice of ministers, don't let them get a whip hand over you, because they're only ships that pass in the night'. *Op cit*, p. 78.

<sup>25</sup> NYCR R/M/WH, 4/3/1, PCP, Oct – Dec, 1932, e.g. 'But organization is not everything; power is of greater moment than the machinery'.

<sup>26</sup> Brake, *op cit*, p. 77.

<sup>27</sup> C. Handy, *Gods of Management: the Changing Work of Organisations*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn), London: Century Business, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Plan and Official Directory, January 7<sup>th</sup> –April 12<sup>th</sup> 1952, pp. 3–5.

The strength of a bureaucratic organization lies in maintaining efficient systems within a relatively stable environment. In a sense, this is a function of *the* Church, and any Church, to carry forward its mission and message from generation to generation. In Methodism this was a strength in providing a stable, disciplined yet supportive environment for the original converts who became its settled members, as well as an organization that could nurture and use their talents. The construction of the circuit preaching plans display something of the complexity of the railway timetables of the period, especially those of the larger Brunswick Circuit and in relation to circuit and chapel life 'the Plan' occupied a similar position. As was seen in Chapter 8, difficulties arose when it was not possible to make provision for all the preaching appointments or when appointments were missed. The plan had become so well established that it was very difficult to adopt alternative solutions, such as combining services, as was actually suggested.

However, this study is set in a period when Methodism was facing changes within a society that was itself in transition. Methodist Union was based on an assumption that it would provide opportunities for new approaches at local level. Morgan cautioned that:

Mechanistically structured organisations have great difficulty adapting to changing circumstances because they are designed to achieve predetermined goals: they are not designed for innovation...Changing circumstances call for different kinds of actions and response. Flexibility and capacities for creative action thus become more important than narrow efficiency.<sup>29</sup>

In such a situation decisions need to be taken relatively quickly in order to adapt so as to thrive, or even to survive. As the study demonstrated, this was not the case with the two Whitby circuits, especially between 1932 and 1944 when they were working in parallel with each other.

It was not true that the Methodists were ignoring the changing environment, especially in relation to more secular lifestyles, as the resolutions on such matters as drink, gambling and Sunday observance demonstrate.

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<sup>29</sup> Morgan, *op cit*, p. 35.



Nevertheless, the responses were essentially concerned with resisting change rather than considering new ways of engaging with society. Other than the use of films, the solutions were seen principally in a return to the methods of the past, especially 'open-air work', this at a time when people were becoming increasingly familiar with the radio and cinema. The one area in which there was a clear attempt to adopt more modern approaches was in Sunday School teaching, a response to declining numbers, but in organizations that rely on volunteers this was not easy to do.

The effects of bureaucratic process were also illustrated in the approach to providing new premises to serve the Helredale council estate between 1937 and 1950. The fact that, until 1944, it had to be taken forward through the committees of two separate organizations which communicated with each other through formal channels, at the very least, made the process a slow one. It was not much easier after 1944 although the process was now within the one Whitby Circuit. A characteristic of bureaucratic organizations is that they are susceptible to what systems theorists define as 'homeostasis', the tendency of social systems, as with biological systems, to maintain themselves in their current state and to resist change.<sup>30</sup> The structures can themselves provide a mechanism to delay action by those who wished to do so. There is some suggestion that this happened with the scheme to provide Methodist premises for the Helredale estate, although it is difficult to confirm from the records how much this was the case and how much other factors were also involved.

It is significant that both Wesleyan Methodism and Primitive Methodism had their origins and early success as radical new responses, also during periods of economic, international and social turbulence. In the case of Wesleyanism this was through evangelical field preaching and forming Societies and classes, often breaking the ecclesiastical rules and conventions of the day. In the case of the Primitive Methodists it was through holding camp meetings

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<sup>30</sup> F. Toates, 'Homeostasis, regulation and control', in Open Systems Group, (ed), *Systems Behaviour*, London: Harper and Row, Third Edition, 1981, 'whenever something shifts away from equilibrium corrective action is automatically taken so as to return to equilibrium' p. 208.

which were seen as a threat by the Methodist authorities at a time when they were keen to demonstrate their loyalty to the ruling establishment.<sup>31</sup> The initial success of both movements depended on 'cutting through the red tape' of existing organizations (of the Church of England and the Methodists respectively) but their continuance and maintenance then relied on putting in place structures and systems which themselves created 'red tape' of their own.<sup>32</sup> The evangelical charisma of the formative stage became, in effect, institutionalized. There is a paradox in that Methodism developed from a 'fresh expressions'<sup>33</sup> movement, into 'Connexions', then into denominations and finally into the Methodist Church, a trend reflecting the development of Christianity itself from the apostolic era onwards. However, a movement reflects looseness and flexibility whereas a Church embodies a settled structure.

In Methodism the emphasis on the role of 'Church courts' became especially significant with individuals having less formal power to act by virtue of their offices than in some other religious organizations.<sup>34</sup> For instance although the Roman Catholic Church exhibits strong features of bureaucracy (exercised through the Curia),<sup>35</sup> individuals in the form of the Pope, bishops and priests are able to exercise more authority by virtue of their Offices in terms of spiritual oversight, collegial decision making and in day-to-day management decisions.

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<sup>31</sup> The naming of the Brunswick Wesleyan Methodist Church in Whitby reflects the desire to be seen to be loyal to the Hanoverian dynasty, as did the naming of other Methodist churches of the period, incorporating 'Brunswick' or 'Hanover' in their names.

<sup>32</sup> 'Red tape' is a term derived from the red tape used by lawyers and officials to tie together bundles of documents and by extension to the rigid adherence to rules and protocols.

<sup>33</sup> The term 'Fresh Expressions' was adopted in the early years of the twenty-first century to describe alternative approaches to 'Church', especially in relation to those not being reached through existing church structures.

<sup>34</sup> This does not mean that there were not those who exercised considerable power and influence, following Wesley the prime example being Jabez Bunting (1779 – 1858). See J. Kent, *Jabez Bunting: The Last Wesleyan*, London: Epworth, 1955.

<sup>35</sup> The Curia is the structure of officials through which the Roman Catholic Church is governed and administered representing the delegated authority of the Pope.

## Models and myths of evolution and change

In their studies of business organizations Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman noted how the foundational stories of organizations (sometimes referred to as 'foundation myths')<sup>36</sup> continue to 'convey the organization's shared values, or culture'<sup>37</sup> long after the time of the founder.<sup>38</sup> Indeed the 'pageants' written around the time of Methodist Union give strong support to that view, extolling as they do the contributions of their founders, saints and leaders, those:

heroic men and saintly women who freely gave their lives to the work of founding and upbuilding this Church.<sup>39</sup>

Likewise, at local level both the Wesleyan Methodists and the Primitive Methodists kept alive their own distinctive narratives and heritages though such events as bicentenary/centenary celebrations and chapel and Sunday School anniversaries. By so doing, they were rehearsing and reinforcing their own values, and ecclesiastical identities. For the Wesleyans, in particular, this included local foundation myths centred on life of John Wesley and his visits to Whitby which highlighted the special place accorded by John Wesley to the 'affectionate people' of Whitby.<sup>40</sup> The early choice of Whitby as head of a District also contributed to its identity and explains why the name was such an important issue when the newly inaugurated York and Whitby District was formed at the time of Union. For the Primitive Methodists their foundation

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<sup>36</sup> The use of the word 'myth' is not a judgement of historical truth of otherwise but is applied to a narrative that provides a justification for and pattern for current behaviour. See Eliade, M., 'Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities', in F.W. Dillistone, (ed), *Myth and Symbol*, London: SPCK, 1966, pp. 35 – 50.

<sup>37</sup> R.H. Peters and T. Waterman, *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*, New York: Harper and Row, 1982, p. 75.

<sup>38</sup> See P.Forsyth, *The brand and the burning: issues in Wesley historiography and Methodist Identity*, paper delivered at Wheaton College, Illinois, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2009, for the connection between 'Wesley's own creation myth: his self-identity and that of the 'connexion' he established'. p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Ritson, *op cit*, Preface.

<sup>40</sup> Within the study this was seen most clearly in the celebrations organised by the Brunswick Circuit to commemorate the bicentenary of his Aldersgate experience on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738. These were spread over ten days culminating in a meeting on May 24<sup>th</sup> 1938.

myths included not only Mow Cop,<sup>41</sup> but also the story of the visit of William Clowes, which was re-enacted at the circuit's centenary celebrations in 1921.<sup>42</sup> Although the Primitive Methodists acknowledged the role of Wesley, he was less significant than their own founders and there were some Primitive Methodists who felt that the Wesleyans made too much of him. These foundation stories bred deep loyalty to their own traditions and Lysons claimed:

To most lay persons of pre-union days the disappearance of their own denomination meant the end of the deepest loyalty of their lives.<sup>43</sup>

These local foundation stories contributed to their particular denominational world views, they marked the boundaries between them and helped to identify 'who is a part of this community and who is not'.<sup>44</sup> This explains, in part, why the former Primitive Methodists reacted in the way they did over the handling of the 'Book Plan' issue at the time of circuit amalgamation, the other factor being that they felt they were being dictated to by the former Wesleyans. For these reasons the process of Methodist Union and its aftermath need to take account not only the overall denominational cultures of the participating denominations but also the local manifestation of those cultures as carried and expressed through local story and tradition, bearing in mind that there were differences *within* as well as *between* denominations.

The inter-relationship between the churches and their environment has been identified as an important feature of this study. In this respect the systems theory model also provides a helpful perspective on such organisational change in that it focuses not just on the organization but also on the environment within which the organization is set, together with the interrelationship between them. Open systems theory is concerned with the

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<sup>41</sup> Patterson, *op cit*, 'The events at Mow Cop... will be dear to the hearts of all the people called Primitive Methodists' p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> A good example is the reference in the Primitive Methodist plan notes (NYCR R/M/WH, 4/2/67) of April – June 1921 to the open air service at the Town Hall held to mark the Centenary of William Clowes first preaching there in Whitby.

<sup>43</sup> Lysons, *op cit*, p. 102.

<sup>44</sup> Galindo, *op cit*, p. 27.

interchange that takes place between the organisation and the environment and the interrelation between the system and the sub-systems of which it is composed.<sup>45</sup> This applied both to Methodist Union at the national level and also to its reception, interpretation and implementation at local level which was influenced by the particularities of the local environment. A system is defined by its boundaries. In theory, 'organic Union' was concerned with bringing three separate denominational systems into one but in practice they continued as separate systems at local level in the Whitby area and elsewhere for many years to come.

It is an argument of this thesis, therefore, that the application of theories of organization can contribute to the understanding of the process of Methodist Union. However, theories are no more than 'schemas that help us to understand the world more accurately'.<sup>46</sup> This is further complicated by taking account of the non-overt, sub-rational aspects of organizational life.<sup>47</sup> What such theories can do, however, is to provide models, concepts and a vocabulary which can be drawn upon alongside other disciplines such as sociology or social psychology.

### **Reactions and responses to the changing environment**

The development of the Whitby district as a holiday and leisure destination brought into sharper focus the advance of more secular lifestyles which were partly a consequence of shorter working hours, holidays with pay and with generally growing material prosperity. The leisure industry provided an alternative and competing use of newly-created 'leisure time' and money, including on Sundays. The breaking up of established communities as a result of re-housing during this same period was another factor placing pressure on the churches. As has been noted, there were also considerable tensions because, while officially condemning many of these developments, especially relating to Sunday opening of leisure facilities and the drinks trade,

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<sup>45</sup> G. Morgan, *Images of Organization*, London: Sage Publications, 1986, p. 46.

<sup>46</sup> Galindo, *op cit*, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> The submerged and out of sight part of the 'organization iceberg' . Plant, *op cit*, pp. 128/9.

members of the churches themselves benefitted from the holiday and leisure trade or relied on it for seasonal employment. There was an evident concern, expressed in meetings and in the exhortations of ministers, that members who ceased to come to church regularly in the summer might get out of the habit and not return, hence the emphasis on encouraging a renewal of commitment once the season was over. Likewise there was a concern that young people, upon whose continuing involvement the future of the chapels largely depended, would be lured away by the secular alternatives on their own doorsteps, quite literally so in some cases. Young made a point that it is often overlooked in the portrayal of chapel life that 'Chapel was fun'.<sup>48</sup> However, 'fun' was now becoming more readily and exotically available elsewhere and in a holiday resort this was happening in such a conspicuous manner that it could not be ignored.

The loss of children from Sunday Schools was also a matter of concern throughout the period of the study. The Sunday Schools were particularly important because they frequently provided a point of contact with families who may not have been a part of the core membership of the chapels but who supported the anniversaries, 'efforts', bazaars and fund raising events. This was especially the case with the poorer families from the East Side where it had been easy and convenient to send the children to the Sunday Schools in their immediate neighbourhood. However it became less so if it involved getting them down from the Helredale council estate and back again, especially the younger ones.

In terms of occupation and economic background there was little discernible difference between those who attended Wesley Hall and Church Street Chapel. The services at Wesley Hall were described as lively and exuberant, by that time a characteristic more commonly associated with Primitive Methodist worship than that of the Wesleyans. It was the Brunswick Church with its Brunswick Room and generous legacies that corresponded more closely with the general view that Wesleyan Methodism represented, in

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<sup>48</sup> Young, *op cit*, p. 20.

social terms, 'the upper reaches of Nonconformity'.<sup>49</sup> Its membership, as well as being numerically greater than the other churches, contained more of the professional and affluent trades-people, such as George Waind, than did the others.<sup>50</sup>

In the Whitby area there was some evidence of divisions of a different kind at Robin Hood's Bay and Fylingthorpe between those whose chapels reflected their particular origins in farming or seafaring and fishing communities as similarly identified by Clark in Staithes.<sup>51</sup> This study illustrates that the distinctions that people felt between themselves within Methodism locally could depend quite significantly on factors other than doctrinal denominational loyalty and that in a study of Methodist Union these need to be identified, analysed and accounted for. It is all too easy to assume that the way in which people reacted to Methodist Union were based only upon wider denominational factors.<sup>52</sup> While these were undoubtedly important they can obscure other influences operating at local level which do not come to light in wider studies.

### **'Existing and working side by side'<sup>53</sup>**

From Union in 1932 until circuit amalgamation in 1944 the former Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist circuits continued to function largely as separate organizations. As has been outlined, organizations that function as bureaucracies tend to preserve the *status quo* and to be structurally resistant

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<sup>49</sup> Young, *op cit*, p. 16.

<sup>50</sup> An interesting footnote, however, is that the Primitive Methodist circuit shared a warm relationship with the local nobility in the person of the Reverend the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquis of Normanby (1848-1935), who was an Anglican priest. He allowed them to have picnics on his estate and was sent a message by the Quarterly Meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1926 (R/M/WH 1/2/1) congratulating him on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. He responded by thanking them, including the words 'When I look back on my long life I think the most wonderful realisation that it brings to me is the reality of the love of God' (NYCR R/M/WH, 1/2/1, 02/12/26).

<sup>51</sup> Clark, *op cit*, pp. 16 – 17.

<sup>52</sup> Field, *op cit*. Field's study identifies the perceptions of class differences with some Wesleyans regarding the Primitive Methodists as 'occupationally inferior' and 'evangelistically vulgar' and some Primitive Methodists accusing the Wesleyans of 'snobbery, smugness and sacerdotalism'. p. 85.

<sup>53</sup> *Whitby Gazette*, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1944, 'The two Circuits hitherto existing and working side by side', p.6

to change, whether the pressure comes from within or without. This is especially so if those holding influential positions are actively opposed to change and when following rules and procedures can be used to slow or even block progress. Interviewee 1 spoke of such personal power:

There were undoubtedly chapels where Mr So-and So was the boss and if the minister dared to suggest anything different there was disapproval at least...it was very much a case of personalities and in some churches there were business meetings where everybody would look at Mr So-and So to see what his reaction was and many would not wish to differ...There were some chapels where it was almost a dictatorship.<sup>54</sup>

The exercise of personal power and influence was undoubtedly a factor, as was illustrated in the case of influence exerted in relation to a ministerial appointment, but it is not always easy to detect in the minutes of meetings alone, illustrating the value of oral testimony.

The role of bureaucratic procedures and how they can be used to resist change emerged in this study. The evidence suggests that it was the smaller Church Street Circuit in which there was most resistance to amalgamation stemming from a fear that there would be a loss of identity in an amalgamation with the larger Wesleyan circuit.<sup>55</sup> This was especially the case as their two largest chapels, together containing about eighty percent of the total circuit membership, were in Whitby itself, with the addition only of Ruswarp and the seasonal Goathland chapel. All the other village chapels were formerly Wesleyan Methodist, including those serving the larger villages of Robin Hood's Bay, Fylingthorpe, Grosmont and Briggswath and Sleights.

The conduct of relationships between the two circuits, certainly at official level, can be characterized as one bureaucracy communicating formally with another through 'official channels' and committees, including letters being sent between them. This was the situation in the years leading up to Union in

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<sup>54</sup> Interview 1, 12/03/09.

<sup>55</sup> Field, *op cit*. Field identified Primitive Methodist's fears as 'the undermining of their traditions, the closure of their chapels', massive centralisation of authority, and the (Wesleyan) connexion's more bourgeois image'. p. 85.



1932 and, following Union, it continued to be the practice until circuit amalgamation in 1944. Paradoxically, the records of meetings suggest that the process of Union and circuit amalgamation, rather than releasing extra time and resources for evangelism and outreach, itself took time and energy. Where evangelism was considered it largely involved doing the same things as previously rather than looking at new approaches. In this they were engaging in what Argyris has described as 'single-loop learning', continuing to do the same things but perhaps in an improved form, rather than engaging in 'double-loop' learning which involves seeking new and different responses in the face of the changed situation.<sup>56</sup> The evidence from Whitby suggests that commitment to previous ways of doing things had become a significant inhibitor of change. As Pfeffer noted:

The interesting thing about commitment is that it causes individuals, because they are bound to a course of actions and a set of beliefs, to persist even when evidence suggests that action and decisions should change. It makes organizations and their administrators resistant to change, and causes persistence in activities long after the wisdom of persistence should have been discredited.<sup>57</sup>

As voluntary organizations churches are built upon commitment and in terms of the current research 'circuit officials' could equally substitute for 'administrators' in the above quotation. Turner argued that there had been a lack of strategic planning for Methodist Union and that:

At local level, it soon became obvious that Methodist Union had offered no really new ideas about church organization, but simply provided an uneasy compromise which yielded little experimentation.<sup>58</sup>

This contention is amply supported by the evidence from this study and what could be considered 'experimental' in terms of evangelism (e.g. the use of films from the Methodist Film Unit) would have most probably been used whether or not the circuits had amalgamated earlier. A particularly telling point was that no evidence was found in the minutes of the local preachers'

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<sup>56</sup> C. Argyris, *On Organizational Learning*, Cambridge, Mass: Blackwells, 1992.

<sup>57</sup> J. Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations*, Marshfield, Mass: Pitman Publishing Inc, 1981, p. 290.

<sup>58</sup> Turner, *Methodism in England 1932 – 1998*, p. 10.

meetings of any discussions or initiatives arising out of Union, or of the possibilities it presented. From the minutes alone it would be difficult to tell that Methodist Union or circuit amalgamation had taken place at all.

During the period between the summer of 1939, up to circuit amalgamation in 1944, the war imposed considerable changes. The negotiations between the Brunswick and Church Street circuits, leading up to their amalgamation in September 1944 took place in a period of dislocation, flux and uncertainty. It is likely, but not certain, that the changed priorities of wartime and the financial restrictions that were imposed hastened the progress of the formation of the one Whitby Circuit, especially as the Church Street Circuit had become progressively weaker in numerical and financial terms in relation to the Brunswick Circuit.

### **A lost opportunity: the Helredale Estate Scheme.**

From 1937 onwards, the handling of the proposed 'Methodist Centre' to serve the council estate also illustrated the way in which circuit procedures could be a significant factor inhibiting new developments. It is impossible to know how matters would have progressed had the war not intervened, but subsequent developments show that even after the war and the creation of the united Whitby Circuit it was still not possible to gain the level of cooperation and commitment needed for the project to go ahead. It is evident that this would have involved the closure of one of the two East Side chapels to create the necessary resources. However, as Robbins pointed out, despite the fact that there was general agreement that new churches were needed for new estates, 'individual congregations always found good reasons why others should move and they should stay'.<sup>59</sup> Underlying this response was the fact that the chapels themselves were seen as more than functional buildings of bricks and mortar. They had become a component within a semiotic system which helped to perpetuate the local ecclesiastical cultures of both denominations. Scott argued that:

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<sup>59</sup> Robbins, *op cit*, p. 295.

Artefacts can embody and represent particular constellations of ideas. Indeed, the symbolic weight of some objects can outweigh their material essence (e.g. the bread and wine in the communion service or the goal posts in the football match).<sup>60</sup>

It is significant that while Methodists (and Nonconformists generally) were often critical of the symbols employed and sometimes revered by Churches such as the Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholics, it was not that they themselves did not possess and even revere symbols. Rather they created different symbols of their own which were often not recognised as such. In fact, not having such symbols was, in itself, a symbolic statement. The layout of the churches, with a central pulpit, often above the communion table, was a statement of the centrality of preaching. Also, much of the symbolic power of the chapels was based upon shared memories, often across several generations of the same families. It drew upon the particular heritages of the chapels concerned, such as the Church Street Primitive Methodist chapel's connections with the fishing industry, celebrated and reinforced through an annual Harvest of the Sea service. Likewise, the centenary booklets produced by chapels bear testimony to the links with their past and as the Brunswick Church Centenary booklet put it, of 'all these witnesses to faith around us like a cloud'.<sup>61</sup>

There could also be a particular attachment to a chapel building through continuing connections with the founder, or founders, as in the case of Littlebeck, 'the little Chapel in the valley', which had connections with the Ventress family.<sup>62</sup> These feelings of attachment to a building could be heightened when local people had made considerable sacrifices to build and maintain a chapel, a point often reinforced and celebrated in chapel and Sunday School anniversaries. Turner noted this characteristic:

'Local' people feel an enormous sense of belonging to their particular chapel, often due to family ties. Chapel – its life, its ethos, its people – could not easily be let go, and consequently

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<sup>60</sup> W.R. Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas and Interests*, (3<sup>rd</sup> edn), London: Sage, 2008, p. 85.

<sup>61</sup> E.C. Willis, *Brunswick Methodist Church Whitby: Centenary Year 1991 – 1992*, p. 28.

<sup>62</sup> M. Ventress, *Littlebeck Methodist Church 1890 – 1990*, Littlebeck Church, 1990.

closures pointed to non-viability rather than to a great enthusiasm for union'.<sup>63</sup>

Likewise Clark also commented on this tendency and of how:

the chapel is as significant as a monument to previous generations as it is the House of God.<sup>64</sup>

The aspirations of the leaders of Methodist Union were based upon hopes that people in the circuits and chapels would behave both spiritually and rationally in the broader interests of the Methodist Church and its evangelical mission. They may have failed to take sufficient account of the emotional power of such local attachments or they may have hoped that these feelings would diminish in the light of the new possibilities offered for outreach, evangelism and renewal. Loyalty to a particular church building was not limited to Methodists alone, however, and Barker, reporting the views of Archbishop Donald Coggan stated that, 'loyalty in Whitby is to individual churches and not to the parish'.<sup>65</sup>

### **Leadership for Union and circuit amalgamation**

Within the structure of Methodism there were also factors relating to leadership and the means by which it was exercised at various levels. This was especially so in relation to how the vision and will of the Connexion, expressed through Conference, would be communicated to and responded to in the circuits and Societies. Within the Methodist organizational structure the itinerancy of the ordained ministry was a central feature of Connexionalism, the adoption of the term 'local preacher' emphasising the difference between the local and the Connexional in terms of role and functions. It was symbolized by ordained ministers being received into 'Full Connexion'. This was true in both the Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodist denominations, although there had been historical differences between the 'high' view of the Wesleyans, with 'delegation' of authority from above and the Primitives 'low' view of 'commission' from below.

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<sup>63</sup> Turner, *Modern Methodism in England*, p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> Clark, *Between pulpit and pew*, p. 89.

<sup>65</sup> Barker, *Essence of Whitby*, p. 43.

The question of the nature of the leadership exercised by the ordained ministry requires some exploration, especially the extent to which it might be expected that ministers would act as agents of change in the process of Union. On one level it might be argued that the concept of being in Full Connexion would include within it the expectation that ministers would provide leadership of a change that represented the will of the three participating Connexions, expressed through their respective Conferences. There was some evidence of such support from ministers, but at the Quarterly Meetings of both denominations during the period leading up to Union and afterwards there was little discussion about how this success would be achieved. The response was to change the names of each circuit and largely carry on as before. The focus of leadership of the ordained ministers, both by training and experience, was pastoral and did not include within its remit providing leadership of major organizational transition and change.<sup>66</sup> During the period from the mid-nineteen-twenties until circuit amalgamation in 1944 the average length of stay of ministers in both Whitby circuits was between three and four years, ranging from a minimum of one year (as a result of ill health) to a maximum of five years. The fact that the itinerant ministers moved from circuit to circuit meant that they did not have time to develop strong commitments to particular places. Undoubtedly there would also have been a range of views among them about the desirability of Union. However, the exact length of tenure depended on the Quarterly Meeting inviting ministers to remain beyond the normal three years, which gave the officials of that meeting considerable power over the minister (and his family, especially when children were in school). The degree to which the minister could lead initiatives that involved long term change, especially a change as fundamental as this, was therefore limited. As Schein has argued,

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<sup>66</sup> The descriptions of ministerial education and training for the period do not include training for leadership beyond the pastoral sphere and duties of ministers were seen as principally administrative (e.g. dealing with finances and accounts, reports etc.) See W.B. Brash, *The Story of our Colleges 1835 – 1935*, London: Epworth Press, 1935, pp. 160 – 163.

in organizations that have reached a stage of maturity or decline, 'managed change will always be a painful process and will elicit strong resistance'.<sup>67</sup>

The process of Methodist Union was therefore one of complex change throughout the Connexion, but presented more challenges at the level of individual circuits and Societies than at the apex where clearer mechanisms existed for action to be taken.<sup>68</sup> In the Whitby area the evidence suggested that Union was regarded as a matter of evolution rather than as revolution and, to adopt a seafaring analogy, the speed of progress of the 'Union convoy' was dictated by that of the slowest vessel within it. Writing at the close of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Townsend referred to an old ministerial joke that:

Methodists didn't know the meaning of the word change and were unwilling to embrace the concept.<sup>69</sup>

Although this statement would gain support from the outcomes of this study there were Methodists who supported Union and the potential changes that came with it. There were also others who, while supporting Union as a general concept, were unwilling to support changes that affected their own chapel or time-honoured ways of doing things.

### **The Whitby Methodist Circuit: a new beginning?**

The study demonstrates that the early consequences of circuit amalgamation were principally in the pastoral oversight of the circuit and affected the ministers more than they did the majority of chapel members. The amalgamation of the circuits also affected the circuit officials. For people in the pews, however, the Union and circuit amalgamation had little evident effect and is hard to detect from the records of surviving Society Leaders' Meetings. The issues and concerns remained the same as before, centred on fund raising and routine chapel and Sunday School activities. The 1933

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<sup>67</sup> E.H. Schein, 'Coming to a New Awareness of Organizational Culture', in *Sloan Management Review*, Winter, 1984, p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> An example is the decision to amalgamate the Primitive Methodist Hartley College and the United Methodist Victoria College as Hartley Victoria College, Manchester. Brash, 1935, *op cit*, p. 161.

<sup>69</sup> M. Townsend, 'Don't panic, don't panic', *Methodist Recorder*, December 24<sup>th</sup> 2009, p. 20.

Methodist hymn book had been adopted by both circuits soon after it became available and although there was evidence that some former Primitive Methodists did not feel it sufficiently reflected their theological preferences there is no suggestion of continuing or serious opposition. There had already been some exchanging of pulpits between ministers and local preachers, even before 1932, and this seems to have caused no difficulty and the responses of chapels were based on the characteristics of the individual preachers as opposed to their former denomination. As discussed, it was a former Primitive Methodist minister, Rev E.W. Challenger, who was particularly appreciated by the people of Wesley Hall.

The early post-war years provided a short period of modest numerical growth in membership, reflecting membership growth nationally. In the Whitby Circuit it reached its peak in 1951-1952 which corresponded with Methodism's peak after the war.<sup>70</sup> Sunday School numbers also grew, partly reflecting the beginnings of the post-war baby boom, and before the alternative entertainment provided by television was a feature of most homes. From the perspective of that short era of social and religious conservatism after the war it was possible for Methodists at the time to believe that such growth would continue and this may have contributed to a feeling that existing approaches were working and there were no compelling reasons for change. There is some support for this in that there is no evidence that the 'Conference Call' of 1949, with its survey of the present condition of church life, led to any changes or innovation in the circuit.

Based upon the findings of this study it could not be said that a 'new Methodism' emerged in the Whitby Circuit as a result of Union or of circuit amalgamation. It essentially became an enlarged Brunswick Circuit with former Church Street Circuit chapels and members in it. The same people attended the same chapels as before, although there was some mixing at circuit level. This was encouraged, after the period of the study, by the setting up of the 'Whitby Methodist Youth Eisteddfod' in 1954, in which young people from the circuit's Sunday Schools competed each year in a variety of

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<sup>70</sup> H. McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 52.

activities in the Brunswick Room.<sup>71</sup> The Harvest of the Sea service continued to be a Church Street event until the closure of the chapel in 1968.

It was, as Interviewee 5 pointed out, only as people from elsewhere came to the area, who had not been nurtured in the local traditions, that previous differences diminished. The new membership was often the result of Methodists moving to Whitby and nearby villages for retirement. Paradoxically, it was the attractiveness of the area that encouraged retired people to live there but lack of secure employment opportunities that caused many young people to leave.

### **Concluding comments**

From this study a number of issues emerged. The first is the fact that both the Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists had similar organizational structures which both hindered and helped in the process of Union and circuit amalgamation. As has been noted, it helped in having similar structures and processes and a common organizational language. However, this also was a hindrance in that the process of change was slow, particularly where vested interests could use the bureaucratic procedures as a means of inhibiting change. This was especially the case when change threatened the closure of chapels and merger of Societies, even if this could be justified in terms of evangelical outreach and benefit to the wider community. When, from the mid-1960s onwards, closures did start to take place it was falling membership and lack of financial viability that drove the process; a 'defensive withdrawal', rather than regrouping for outreach and evangelism.

There was another way in which the structural similarity of the two organizations was a disadvantage, indeed one which affected all three uniting denominations. It meant that at Union the need was not felt to ask searching questions about whether their form of organization remained the best one for the Methodist Church in the new era. If Methodist Union had been a coming together of Churches with different organizational structures, polity and processes (for instance, emphasizing the 'structural tightness' of

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<sup>71</sup> The Manse, Sleights, WCR, Circuit Education and Youth Committee, 06/03/54



episcopal authority, or the 'structural looseness' of a congregational system) it would not have been possible to avoid asking such fundamental questions. As Cameron has pointed out, the distinctive feature of religious organizations is 'a tight link between structure and beliefs'.<sup>72</sup>

Although this study has argued that there were common factors across Methodism associated with Methodist Union and its aftermath, and in this respect its findings correspond with and confirm those identified by other studies, it has also shown that local factors affected the process in ways that were unexpected, subtle and significant. As Royle has pointed out, 'good local history can check the impulse to generalisation'.<sup>73</sup> Likewise, fresh perspectives can be gained from an inter-disciplinary perspective drawing upon theoretical concepts and tools of analysis that had not been developed to any great extent during the period covered by the study and have not yet been much applied in studies of this type. An original contribution of this study, therefore, has been to draw upon elements of organization theory in order to place a particular focus on the role of organizational factors and how the distinctive Methodism form of organization, as it existed at that time, had a significant influence on the process. It is hoped that this contribution will provide a starting point for others to take forward and, especially, to encourage further academic studies of Methodism in the twentieth-century at the local level.

### **Further research and development opportunities**

In more specific terms the research could be developed in a number of ways. An interest of the researcher is to undertake a comparative study of a broader geographical area in order to provide comparisons between the processes and outcomes of Methodist Union in the coastal towns of Scarborough, Filey and Bridlington.<sup>74</sup> For instance, in Scarborough the

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<sup>72</sup> H. Cameron, 'A perspective from the study of religious organisation', in H. K. Anheier, (ed), *Organisational theory and the non-profit form: Proceedings of a seminar series at the LSE Centre for Civil Service*, London: Centre for Civil Society, 2001, p. 59.

<sup>73</sup> Royle, *Writing the local history of Methodism*, p. 13.

<sup>74</sup> There are proposals that from September 2012 the Whitby Circuit will become a part of an enlarged 'North Yorkshire Coast Circuit'.

former Primitive Methodist Circuit maintained a much longer separate existence and only joined the former Wesleyan Circuit as one Scarborough Methodist Circuit in the mid-1960s.<sup>75</sup> These towns share some common characteristics such as fishing, seafaring and tourism. They also include inland village communities. However, they differ in their historical development, size, social geography and relative accessibility, all of which contributed to the local culture. Such a contrasting study of Whitby, Scarborough, Filey and Bridlington would investigate how such variables might have affected the responses of the different circuits to Union and how this could have influenced subsequent developments. It could also provide an opportunity for further investigation of the effects of the holiday and leisure economy on the churches within the broader context of societal changes that were weakening commitment to formal religious observance.

The researcher would also wish to extend the use of organization theory as an interpretative framework into other contexts. As a component of a local study, organization theory suggested particular lines of enquiry that were relevant to Methodist Union and to the process of change in ecclesiastical organizations more generally. These included the significance of the informal organisation, the effects of bureaucratic structures, the nature and effectiveness of channels of communication and the functions of ecclesiastical leadership. Such a study could be a historical one but it may also be related to changes in the Methodist Church, or other denominations, at the time of writing. In Methodism these include debates about the nature of Connexionalism, the future of Districts, proposals for larger circuits with greater power to take decisions over pastoral oversight, team ministry, the deployment of members of staff and the rationalization and utilization of premises. Some of these issues emerged in the study of Union and some of the same arguments and vocabulary are being employed in the current debate.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> J. Bayes, *One More Step*, Scarborough: Westborough Church Council, c.2000, p. 29.

<sup>76</sup> For instance see 'Shaping up for mission', *Methodist Recorder* June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, pp. 1-2 and 'Heartened by creative reflections', *Methodist Recorder*, June 30<sup>th</sup> 2011, p. 7.

A number of other areas emerged from within the study that could form the starting points for more detailed research in their own right. The role of women emerged as a significant factor in the life and work of the circuits, especially in relation to raising funds and the organization of social activities. However there are considerably fewer references to women as individuals in the records than there are to men, largely because at the time of the study the ordained ministers were men, most local preachers were men and men held the senior circuit offices. However, women appeared more often in leadership roles in the smaller Societies, especially in connection with music and work with children. Further research is suggested to investigate the nature of their contribution in both formal and informal situations, including within their homes and the wider community.

As with women, the lives and work of local preachers could provide a starting point for further investigation. The records of local preachers' meetings provide some information but greater depth of understanding is needed, especially concerning their call, training, theological views and their spirituality. Similarly, the role of lay pastors arising from Union suggests an opportunity for further research. Like the local preachers they exercised a lay ministry but in functional terms they undertook responsibilities that were similar to those of ordained ministers. Such a study would need to be more broadly based than on a limited geographical area. However, local conditions are likely to have played a part in how they were deployed and the degree of freedom they were able to exercise in their ministry. Such a study could investigate how they related to ordained ministers, to local preachers, church officials and congregations.

The study also suggested opportunities for more research about the Sunday Schools and provision made for young adults. It emerged that there were differences between the educational experiences that the children were having in Sunday Schools and in the schools they attended during the week. There is scope for further research into the curriculum, the recruitment of Sunday School teachers, their training (if any), the uptake of training and the teaching methods employed. It would also be helpful to find evidence of how

many of the children who attended the Sunday Schools went on to enter into full membership and how many retained a looser attachment to the churches and their activities.

The period covered by the research included the Second World War and some of its effects on the life of the churches were discussed. However, there is scope for more detailed investigation into how Methodist life was affected at both local and national levels. The circuit and Society records were concerned principally with routine matters but the oral history interviews gave a better picture of church life in wartime, especially the consequences of having a large number of service personnel stationed in the area. Much of what took place at this time was not written down, partly because of security concerns (e.g. concerning the use of premises) and partly because people were too busy with war work. However, it is likely that more could be discovered if this was a specific focus of some research although it would probably be necessary to investigate more widely than a single circuit in order to have a sufficiently robust evidence base.

In a wider sense the research highlighted the fact that there are no comprehensive general ecclesiastical histories of Whitby and the surrounding area. What does exist tends to be concerned with the earlier Christian history of the area. This includes St. Hilda and the Saxon abbey, the Synod of Streanaeshalch in 664, and the later Benedictine abbey. More recent periods have so far been neglected and, especially so, the twentieth-century. Similarly there are no comprehensive scholarly histories of Methodism in the area and what has been written is not recent, fragmentary, or uncritical. There is a particular need for more research to be conducted into Primitive Methodism based on the analysis of archive material of the early period of the movement in this area.

An important outcome of this study has been to suggest that while it is possible to talk about *the* process of Methodist Union there were, in fact, *many* processes of Methodist Union taking place across the country. Overall denominational factors based on differences of doctrine, ecclesiology and

praxis were important influences but these were mixed with complex local variables that can only be understood through careful and detailed research at the local level. It is hoped that other local studies will be undertaken in a variety of locations which might include industrial and suburban areas, market towns and rural locations. Such studies would add richness and depth to the wider historical perspective on the process of Methodist Union and its place in the history of the Methodist Church.

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The abbreviations in brackets are those used for identification in the thesis.

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|       |                                      |            |
|-------|--------------------------------------|------------|
| 1/2/1 | QM Minute Book (PQM, CQM from 09/32) | 1916- 1942 |
| 1/2/2 | QM Minute Book (CQM)                 | 1942 -1944 |

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|        |                                      |             |
|--------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1/1/4  | QM Minute Book (WQM)                 | 1908 – 1919 |
| 1/1/5  | “                                    | 1920 - 1927 |
| 1/1/6  | QM Minute Book (WQM, BQM from 09/32) | 1927 – 1934 |
| 1/1/7  | “                                    | 1935 - 1940 |
| 1/1/40 | “ (BQM, QMW from 09/44)              | 1941 – 1948 |
| 1/1/41 | (QMW)                                | 1949 – 1966 |
| 1/1/42 | Gen Purp Cttee (BGP, GPW from 09/44) | 1939 – 1952 |

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|             |  |             |
|-------------|--|-------------|
| 4/1/3       | Wesleyan Plans (168 docs, WCP)                 | 1885 - 1932 |
| 4/1/4       | Brunswick Plans (37 docs, BCP, CPW from 09/44) | 1934 – 1944 |
| 4/1/5       | Whitby Plans (CPW)                             | 1944 – 1968 |
| 4/2/38-103  | Prim Plans (PCP)                               | 1914 – 1930 |
| 4/2/104-111 | “ “  | 1930 - 1932 |
| 4/3/1 – 20  | Church Street Plans (CCP)                      | 1932 - 1937 |

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|               |                                      |                   |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1/1/25        | Correspondence, Schofield            | 1941 - 1942       |
| 1/2/6         | Briggswath and Sleights Leaders' Mtg | 1941 – 1949       |
| 2/11/1        | Ruswarp Trustees minutes             | 1925, 1945 – 1965 |
| 2/11/2        | Ruswarp Treasurer's accounts         | 1909 - 1951       |
| 2/15/16       | Brunswick Church Trustees            | 1907 - 1939       |
| 2/16/1        | Fishburn Park Trustees               | 1896 – 1938       |
| 2/16/2        | Fishburn Park Bazaar minutes         | 1924 - 1941       |
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|  |             |
|--|-------------|
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| Briggswath and Sleights Leaders' Meeting minute book   | 1940 - 1954 |
| Circuit Education and Youth Committee                  | 1935 –1971  |
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| Grosmont Leaders' Meeting minute Book                  | 1934 –1986  |
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| Hawsker Property ledger                                | 1891 - 1992 |

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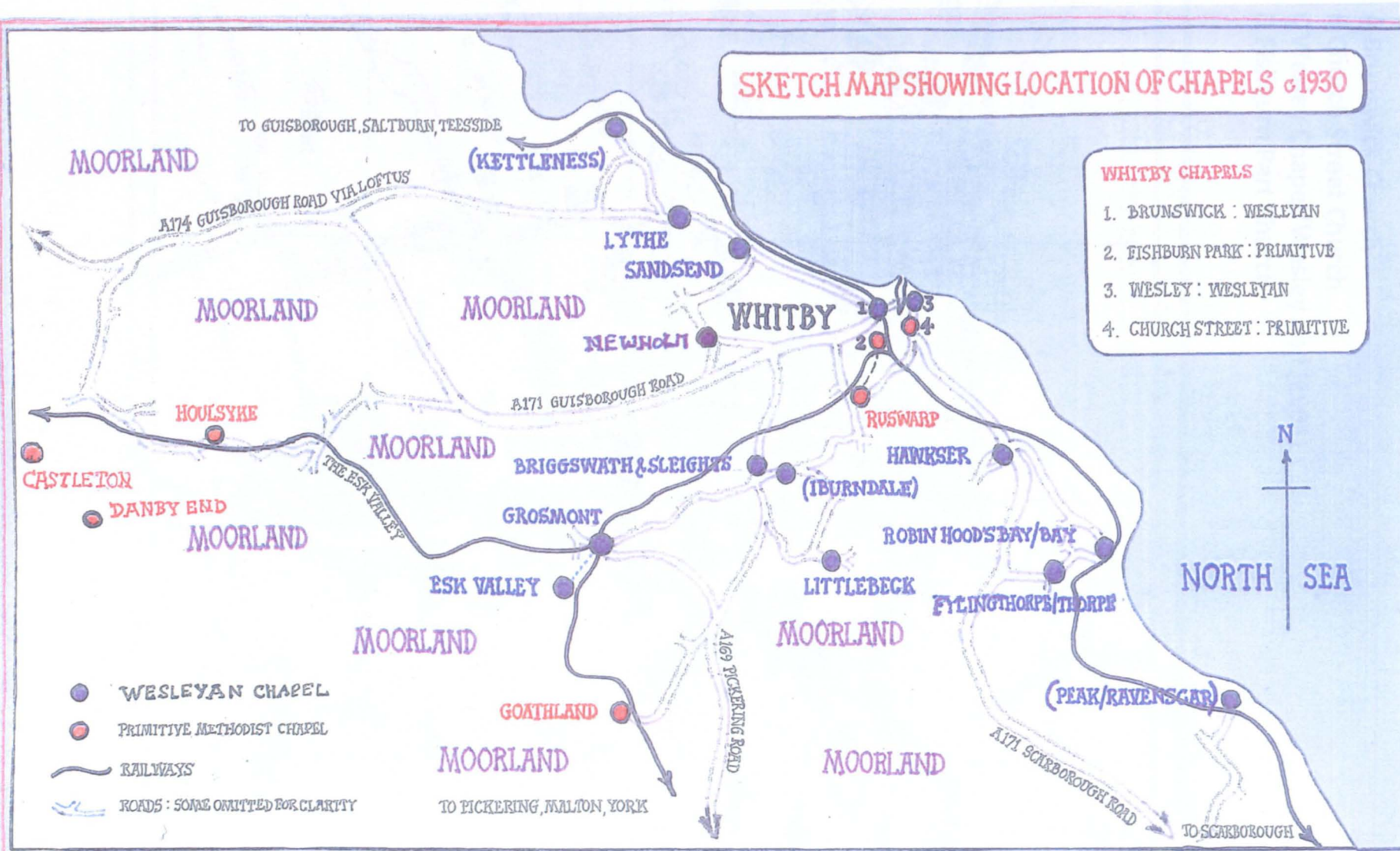
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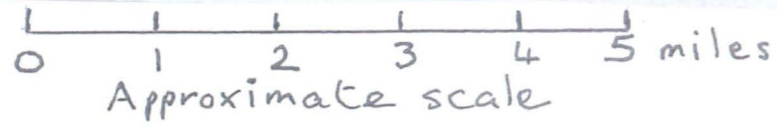
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## **Details of Interviewees**

The five interviews were conducted between 12<sup>th</sup> March and 16<sup>th</sup> April 2009. Each lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. All interviewees were laypeople. The interview process was approved by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2008, Registration No. 08337.

The Core Questions (Appendix 4) formed the basis for the interviews but with additional open-ended questions based on the particular experiences of the interviewees.

The information below provides brief information about each interviewee. All were originally from a Wesleyan background but had experience of the churches of both former circuits.

### **Interviewee 1**

Born c. 1925. Particular knowledge of Robin Hood's Bay and Fylingthorpe. Also a local preacher with experience of the Whitby Circuit in the early post-war years.

### **Interviewee 2**

Born 1920. Particular knowledge of Wesley Hall and the churches in the town of Whitby. Former Sunday School teacher at Wesley Hall. Experience of living conditions on the East Side during the inter-war years and the development of the Helredale council housing estate.

### **Interviewee 3**

Born 1928. Particular knowledge of Methodism in the villages of the Whitby Circuit and of the local farming community. Held offices of Society and Circuit Steward in the Whitby Circuit.

### **Interviewee 4**

Born 1925. Knowledge of town and country Methodist churches. Involvement in Sunday School work. Particular experience of Goathland and Briggswath and Sleights.

### **Interviewee 5**

Born 1920. Particular knowledge of Brunswick and the town churches. Held various Society and Circuit offices. Some memories of the Gallows Close/Helredale scheme for a Methodist Centre.

## **Core Interview Questions**

### **Introduction**

The interviews will be of conversational style using, where possible, open questions and a series of prompts or supplementary questions. This is in accord with the 'grounded theory' approach in which the theory is derived from the data as opposed to the strict testing of a hypothesis (Glaser, B. and Strauss, A., *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Chicago: Aldine, 1967) The objective is to provide the respondents with the maximum opportunity to identify for themselves the key issues, using their own language and terminology. This is why, after the preliminary questions eliciting basic information, the earliest questions in the schedule are the most open. The early responses will determine which other questions will need to be asked and in what form (e.g. as a means of eliciting greater detail).

The interviews will take place, at the convenience of respondents in their own homes or on chapel premises, between September 2008 and August 2010.

### **The Schedule**

#### **Preamble**

Thank respondent for being willing to take part in the interview. Reinforce points about confidentiality and right not to answer questions or to withdraw completely. Confirm agreement about tape-recording or note taking. Ask if there are any further questions or queries before starting.

Remind participants of the overall aim of the interview:

*'The purpose of the interview is to ask you what you remember about the life and work of the Whitby Methodist Circuit and the chapels within it and, especially, about the different Methodist traditions found within the circuit'.*

#### **Preliminary information questions.**

*For lay respondents*

For how long have you been involved in the Whitby Circuit?

Which chapel, or chapels, have you attended?

For approximately how long have you attended this chapel or these chapels?

Did the chapel or chapels identify in any way with the former Wesleyan or Primitive traditions?

What roles have you performed in chapels and or circuit?

For approximately how long have you hold these roles?

*For respondents who are former ordained itinerant ministers*

When were you stationed in the Whitby Circuit?

Were you the superintendent or second minister?

Which was your principal chapel and were you particularly associated with other chapels in the circuit?

To what extent did you become aware of the different Methodist traditions?

How did these show themselves?

### **Open questions to explore main themes**

*For lay respondents*

Please tell me about your earliest memories of Methodism in the Whitby Circuit and what, for you, stood out as the main features of its life and work?

*For respondents who are former itinerant ordained ministers*

When you took up your ministry in the Whitby Circuit what appeared to you to be the main features of its life and work.

Possible prompts: structure of worship; preaching; prayer; hymns and music; holy communion; ministers; local preachers; church furnishings and fittings; dress of ministers when leading worship; differences between chapels.

Other than regular Sunday worship what special chapel and circuit events stand out in your memory and why?

Possible prompts: chapel and Sunday school anniversaries; circuit rallies; Christmas and Easter; harvest festivals; Harvest of the Sea; blessing of the fleet; Sunday school and chapel outings; visits of well-known preachers and evangelists; bazaars, events and fund raising activities.

Please tell me about the regular meetings and other activities that took place on a regular basis.

**Possible prompts:** circuit and chapel business meetings; local preachers meetings; specific meetings for men, women and young people/children.

Over time did any changes take place in the pattern of regular activities and what were these?

### **More specific questions**

*These questions will be used to supplement and enlarge upon issues that may have emerged as a result of the open questions.*

To what extent do you think people were aware of the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist origins and traditions of their chapels and how did this show itself in practice?

How would you yourself define any differences in tradition?

Have you heard people talking about the 'old days' (e.g. about the Union or before) and what kinds of things did they say?

How far did Methodists meet and share activities with Christians from other denominations and in what ways, for instance other nonconformists, Church of England, Roman Catholic? Did this change in any way over time?

How far were you aware of the influence of the Methodist Church at national and regional levels and if so in what ways?

Are you aware of ways in which the different chapels in the circuit were brought together and how successful was this?

Can you recall any particular people (ministers, local preachers, others) who have had a particular influence on the life and development of Methodism in the Whitby Circuit? What was their particular contribution?

Have there been any particular difficulties or challenges for the circuit during your period of involvement?

Overall what would you say have been the most significant changes in circuit and chapel life during *the period* of your involvement?

Is there anything that I have not asked about that you feel is *important about* Methodism in the Whitby Circuit?

Thank you for your time in answering these questions. If there is anything else that you remember or feel is important please contact me.

## Amalgamation of Whitby Methodist Circuits, Celebration Services.

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METHODIST CHURCHES.

WHITBY CIRCUIT.

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AMALGAMATION OF THE WHITBY METHODIST CIRCUITS.

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### CELEBRATION SERVICES :

SUNDAY, September 3rd, 1944.

..... MONDAY, September 4th, 1944.

The respective Quarterly Meetings of the two Circuits unanimously decided that the two should unite and become one Circuit. Approval of the scheme was given by the District Synod in May and by the Methodist Conference held in Leeds in July this year.

In the new Circuit there are 16 Churches, 682 Members ; Sunday Schools and 35 Local Preachers.

### PROGRAMME OF SERVICES.

Sunday, September 3rd.

10-30 a.m.

6-30 p.m.

|                       |              |                  |                       |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Brunswick             | ... Preacher | Rev. W. Rhodes   | Rev. W. Rhodes        |
| Church Street         | ...          | Rev. A. B. Jones | Pastor Thompson       |
| Wesley Hall           | ...          | At Brunswick     | Rev. E. W. Challenger |
| Fishburn Park         | ...          | Mr. I. Lawson    | Mr. J. Booth          |
| Briggswath & Sleights | ...          | Pastor Thompson  | Rev. A. B. Jones      |
| Ruswarp               | ...          | Dr. C. F. Brears | Mr. Haigh             |

Sunday Afternoon at 2-30, UNITED SERVICE IN BRUNSWICK ROOM.

Conducted by Rev. W. Rhodes, New Superintendent Minister.

Address by Rev. Arnold B. Jones. Singing by UNITED CHOIRS

All members and friends, members of Youth Organizations, Sisterhoods, Sunday School Teachers and their Scholars, etc. are urgently invited to be present.

Monday, September 4th.

SERVICE at 3-15 p.m., preacher,

REV. A. WESLEY MASSEY, M.A., B.D., of Scarborough,

Chairman of the York & Whitby District.

4.30 p.m., FAITH TEA ... ONE SHILLING EACH.

6.15 p.m., AMALGAMATION MEETING & RECEPTION OF NEW MINISTERS.

Chairmen : Messrs. E. Frankland and Geo. W. Wood, Circuit Stewards.

Words of Welcome to New Ministers by Circuit Stewards and others.

Anthem by UNITED CHOIRS conducted by Mr. Arthur Jackson, A.R.C.O., M.R.S.T.

Collections for Circuit Fund.