

METHODISM

METHODISM IN SCOTLAND AND IN PERTH

AN ESSAY

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Introduction & Acknowledgements

The story of the development of Methodism in Scotland, even the accounts of John Wesley's visits to this country in the latter part of the eighteenth century, are a small part of the story of Scotland itself. It is a story however well worth telling, even in summary. The essay that follows is only that – a summary – with a particular emphasis on the Methodist *society* in the city of Perth.

I have relied on the documents and books listed in the 'Sources' section, but have also tried to set the story within a firm context of the contemporary society within which the Methodist story was taking place. This is I believe especially important in looking at John Wesley's visits to Scotland. There is always a tendency to view these in isolation from the tumultuous times in which they took place. Scotland in the period following the defeat of the *Jacobite Rebellion* at Culloden in 1746, was not only a country undergoing great change, but it was also to be in many areas of human activity a world leader. This then is the country into which John Wesley first ventured in April 1751.

I owe a particular debt to the late George Davis, of Arbroath, whose short book '*Wesley in Scotland*' [1999] was an inspiration to me. I have drawn upon it for an understanding of Wesley's twenty two visits here. Similarly I am grateful to Margaret Batty of Edinburgh, who has both helped me with her knowledge of the early itinerancy, and kindly guided me through the difficulties of trying to say a lot in few words.

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Chapter 1

METHODISM IN SCOTLAND

METHODISM in Scotland is a small part of the country's Christian Church. With a Membership of some 3,000 in 40 Local Churches, it is nevertheless particularly active ecumenically within the Scottish community.

Like Methodism all over the world it owes its origin to the work in the 18th century of the Rev. John WESLEY [1703-91], an Anglican Clergyman, whose experience of the *warm heart* was to propel him into a lifetime of travelling as an evangelist throughout the British Isles. His brother was the Rev. Charles WESLEY [1707-88], preacher and hymn writer, and sometimes called the 'sweet singer of Israel'.

John Wesley's first visit to Scotland was in April 1751, some 13 years after his famous *conversion* experience, when he made a two day visit to Musselburgh in East Lothian. He came north with one of his Preachers, Christopher Hopper [1722-1802], at the invitation of a Captain Gallatin, quartered in Musselburgh with his troops. Wesley rode north from Berwick-on-Tweed, commenting that "*the Scottish towns are like none which I ever saw, either in England, Wales or Ireland*". He used the opportunity to make his first visit to Edinburgh on the 25th, describing it as "*one of the dirtiest cities I have ever seen*". His dismay however did not prevent him from preaching in Musselburgh that same evening. He rode back to Berwick the following day.

Despite these apparently poor impressions, Wesley in all was to make twenty two visits to Scotland between then and 1790, just a year before his death. All but one of these visits was in the months of spring, April to June. The exception being a visit in August 1767 en-route home from Ireland. His visits were in large part to the populous east coast, and to Glasgow and the south west. The most northerly point of his journeys was to Inverness. He never visited 'Gaeldom' in the north and west of the country; unlike his fellow Englishman, Samuel Johnson [1709-84], whose famous *Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* in the company of James Boswell [1740-95] in the autumn of 1773 took him to the Islands of the Inner Hebrides. Over twenty years after Wesley's first visit to Scotland, Johnson and Boswell's Journey was no doubt still regarded by many in the south as an adventure to a country which had been the scene of rebellion well within living memory. Wesley, for his part, reading Johnson's account of that Journey whilst in Aberdeen in 1776, described it as "*a very curious book*".

The troops visited by Wesley in Musselburgh were a reflection of the then very recent unrest that had engulfed not only Scotland, but also large parts of

England. There had been major Jacobite *risings* in 1715 and 1745, and the year 1751 was only five years after the Battle of Culloden, the last major land battle fought in Britain, when the Jacobite army of Charles Edward Stewart [1720-88], the *Young Pretender* to the throne, was defeated by the armies of the Hanoverian Government of the United Kingdom. The north and west Highlands were still under a repressive military occupation. Wesley could not have been immune to these events. The Union of the Parliaments of England and Scotland in 1707 had anyway taken place in his childhood. In 1745 however when Charles Edward Stewart's Jacobite army defeated General John Cope at Prestonpans on the 21st September, and was thought to be preparing to march south from Edinburgh into England, Wesley was in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He had witnessed at first hand, and recorded in his *Journal*, the panic amongst the more affluent citizens there. He travelled then through the North of England where there was fearful excitement and tumult in anticipation as to what the Jacobites were to do next. In the event they headed into England by Carlisle, reaching Derby at the end of the year, before turning back to Scotland. During this period, the Britain across which Wesley rode to spread his understanding of *Scriptural Holiness* must have seemed even to him on occasion a rather dangerous place. He was not deterred.

Neither did Scotland's notoriously poor roads and estuarial ferry crossings deter him on his journeys. There were of course no railways, although the second half of the 18th century did see an improvement in the quality of the roads – both military and turnpikes. Scotland's economy was also changing, both in terms of agricultural improvement, and developing industry. This was the time of the beginnings of the *Industrial Revolution* in all of Britain, and Scotland was a major place of change and of population movement.

Scotland was anyway to Wesley a manifestly different place from the England in which his travels until then had largely taken him. Not least, its Church was *Presbyterian*, from a very different Reformation to the one that had spawned his own *Anglican* Communion. The social and religious culture which had given rise to an Evangelical Revival in England, had a rather more limited impact in Scotland. There were however *awakenings* in various places, as far apart as Nigg, Kilsyth and Cambuslang – and Wesley's friend from Oxford, George Whitfield [1714-70] had been in Scotland before him. The Kirk however, its ministers and eldership, no doubt felt themselves to be very different to the English Anglicanism that Wesley increasingly found himself at odds with.

The Edinburgh that he lightly dismissed in 1751 however, was also in the 18th Century the developing centre of a European scale *Enlightenment* of understanding, around philosophers and thinkers like David Hume [1711-76], and economists, engineers and architects such as; Adam Smith [1723-90], James Watt [1736-1819] and Robert Adam [1728-92]. It was also during the period of Wesley's visits to Edinburgh that the *New Town* commenced building.

The Church of Scotland had its own outstanding culture, as well as its own stresses and tensions. If the Rev. Hugh Blair [1718-1800] was one of Edinburgh's darling society preachers, and a leader of the *Moderate Party* in his Church; the Rev. John Witherspoon [1723-94], a leader of the more traditional *Popular Party*, demonstrated that in all sorts of ways, Scotland was during the 18th century an influence in World affairs. In 1768 Witherspoon left Scotland, to become by invitation President of the College at Princeton, New Jersey [later to become Princeton University], and in due course a signatory to the American Declaration of Independence.

Into this *other* Britain, or North Britain as it was commonly referred to in the 18th century, John Wesley painstakingly brought his own small Methodist revolution. He came to value and enjoy the hospitality of Presbyterian ministers and elders, and was able to rejoice in the many times that they afforded him both their homes and their pulpits. Where Wesley went however, he frequently left behind him small groups of those people whom he regarded as appropriate to become *societies* of the *People called Methodist*. Methodism was taking root in Scotland.

His reach was often surprising, with an ability to touch Scottish society in unexpected places. In May 1784 on his 19th Journey to Scotland, Wesley preached in Elgin, staying with the family of Thomas Sellar and his wife Jane Plenderleath. Jane was a minister's daughter from Dalkeith, and was also a Methodist. She brought her small son, Patrick, then four years old, to Wesley for him to place his hands upon the boy's head, and to bless him; something of a practice amongst Methodists if the opportunity presented itself. Patrick SELLAR [1780-1851] became 'a totemic figure in Scottish history, a figure of vilification' [1]. He was the Factor of the Sutherland Estates in the 19th century and notorious as a principal agent in the 'Highland Clearances'!

Eventually however, Wesley's welcome in Scotland was to suffer something of a setback, when the Rev. Dr. John ERSKINE, a respected Presbyterian minister published an opposition to Methodism's 'Arminian' doctrinal position. 'Calvinism' and 'Arminianism' had eventually collided! In consequence, many ministers of the Kirk declined Communion and Baptism to Methodists. In 1785 Wesley then ordained his own preachers for Scotland, with permission to administer the Lord's Supper 'in the Presbyterian manner'.

Whilst many Methodist Preachers stationed in Scotland came from England, there were others of Scottish birth. Men like Robert Dall [1745-1828], born in Dundee, who travelled on foot through north east and south west Scotland proclaiming the Gospel to all who would listen; once walking 600 miles to and from a Mission. There were others; Duncan McAllum [1755-1834], a Highlander and Gaelic speaker, Duncan Wright [1736-91], born in Perthshire,

and many others whose names are now largely forgotten to Methodism. The country also generated its own leaders of wider Methodism, such as Alexander Mather [1733-1800], converted whilst living in London, who was to become the second President after Wesley's death of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion in 1792-3. Mather was born in Brechin, and as an impressionable boy had been with the Jacobites in the Rebellion of 1745. The Methodist Gospel really did have a ministry of reconciliation.

In the early 19th century, John Nicolson [1790-1828], a Shetlander by birth evangelised Shetland. Nicolson had been in the Royal Artillery, and became a Methodist whilst living in London. He returned to Shetland in 1819 where his preaching led to the creation of three 'classes' along the lines of what he had experienced in the south. He appealed to the Wesleyan Conference for help, and was visited by Duncan McAllum on their behalf. In 1822 Samuel Dunn [1797-1882] and John Raby [*died* 1858] were sent to work in Shetland as missionaries, under the direction of Dr. Adam Clarke [1760-1832]. Clarke was President of Conference that year [*for the third time*] and subsequently visited Shetland himself on two occasions. By 1866 the Methodist membership in Shetland reached its peak at just over 2,000. Shetland to this day comprises its own 'District' of British Methodism.

John Wesley's own response to Scotland however often seems to have been one of some bemusement. Perhaps he felt that he better understood Ireland, where he also travelled, but with greater apparent success. Of Scotland he once commented, "*Oh what a difference there is between South and North Britain – everyone here at least loves to hear the Word of God; and none takes it into his head to speak an uncivilised word to any for endeavours to save their souls*". On the other hand, he also complained that whilst his Scottish congregations were politely attentive, they also appeared to be unmoved by his message.

There was often debate within Methodism as the years passed, both in Scotland and at British level, as to whether or not Methodism had any real place in Scotland. Even in the mid 19th century there was doubt within some Wesleyan circles, as to should Methodism even then be in Scotland. Writing in 1856, Rev. Peter PRESCOTT [1824-93], and then in the Airdrie Circuit was asking "Does Scotland need Methodism?" Prescott was still a young man, and he clearly thought that it did not. That place however was not to be denied, and through the 19th Century Methodism developed from its base of *societies* to a more main stream Church. Particularly in Glasgow and the west of Scotland the Wesleyan Methodists became an important part of the growth of Protestantism in a newly industrialising community. Although in Edinburgh the Methodists were still thought of in some quarters as being *largely English*, in the heyday of the Wesleyans in Glasgow there were a sufficient number of Churches to run a 'Wesleyan Sunday School Football League'.

Other strands of Methodism, principally the 'Primitive Methodists', were eventually to be a part of the Methodist story in Scotland. There were Primitive Methodist Churches in Glasgow and the west of Scotland, Edinburgh and Dundee, whilst they made their strongest appearance in Lanarkshire on the back of the newly developing iron and steel industry in the later years of the 19th Century; and amongst the fishing communities of the Berwickshire Coast. The three principal strands of Methodism however, the Wesleyans, United Methodists and Primitive Methodists, came together in 1932 to form the present day Methodist Church in Britain; this Union in a sense reflected the same spirit that brought a major re-union to the Church of Scotland in 1929.

Methodism was, and remains, a membership-based Church, with each 'member' having a Class Ticket. The Methodist Church in Scotland is arranged into Circuits, to which the Ministers [Presbyters] are stationed, and the Circuits are represented in the Synod of what is now known as the 'Methodist Church in Scotland'. It is a part of the British 'Methodist Conference'. Each Circuit is under the care of a Superintendent Minister.

Methodism was never really static. At the time of Wesley's death there were only eight Methodist 'Chapels' opened in Scotland. Throughout the 19th and early 20th Centuries Methodist societies emerged in various places; some prospered, some survived, and some disappeared. Always strongest in the west of Scotland's industrial heart, and from Edinburgh up the east coast, it reached its peak in numbers in the late 1950s at about 13,500 members [although this number did not include the remaining *societies* in Berwickshire and Dumfries which were administered by English Districts; or indeed Shetland]. Methodism in Scotland however was never to achieve the proportional numerical relationship to the Church of Scotland as it did to the Church of England in the south.

Since the end of the Second World War, Methodism in Scotland has undergone great change, particularly in the west and in Lanarkshire. Many of the larger Churches and Central Missions disappeared with the shifting population patterns of the post-war years. Methodism has only partially been successful in catering for its own constituency as people were moved out of the overcrowded centres of the cities and major towns. In a generation in which all the mainstream churches have suffered fairly drastic numerical decline; so has Methodism, with a membership now of about 3,000 people. The east of Scotland however, but not Berwickshire, has remained active and fairly intact along the lines of its earlier development.

Methodism in Scotland has been involved closely in the years since the Second World War with the major ecumenical movements of the day; from the purchase of 'Scottish Churches House' in Dunblane as a *home* for all of Scotland's Churches, through the 'Scottish Churches Council', to the present 'Action of Churches Together in Scotland' [ACTS]. Famously however in 1979 the Synod of

the Methodist Church in Scotland rejected a proposed Union with the Church of Scotland, who on the same day at their General Assembly, approved the proposal unanimously. Many however regard Methodism as 'punching above its weight', spiritually and ecumenically. This Methodism of the 21st century however seeks still to bring John Wesley's word of *holiness* to a contemporary world.

Note [1] *Eric Richards 'Patrick Sellar' [Polygon 1999]*

Chapter 2

JOHN WESLEY & METHODISM IN PERTH

The town of PERTH is an ancient settlement located at the navigable head of the River Tay in the east of Scotland. It was granted the status of a Royal Burgh in 1124/27 by the Scottish King, David 1 [1085-1153]. By the 14th century it was regarded as one of ‘the four great towns of Scotland’. Notwithstanding that, by the late 16th century its population was perhaps no more than some 4,500 people, and even by the mid-18th century only the size of a modern small market town.

At the heart of Perth is the Medieval ‘St. John’s Kirk’, the scene in 1559 of the delivery of a famous sermon ‘against idolatry’ by the reformer, John Knox [1512-72], an event regarded as one of the beginnings of the Reformation in Scotland.

Although a place of manufacture, trade and commerce, Perth was to be caught up in the violence of the Jacobite *risings* of the first half of the 18th century, being occupied by insurgents in both 1715 and 1745 – the latter only some 23 years before John WESLEY’S first formal visit to the town.

That first recorded visit to Perth was in 1768. There was already a Methodist society meeting in the Meal Vennel, although the story of its origins is not known. What is known is that John Wesley had heard good reports of it, and apparently looked forward to visiting it. The relationship with Perth however was never for Wesley to be an easy affair.

His capacity for covering long distances on horseback was prodigious. He probably passed through Perth, perhaps even changing horses, in May of 1761. He had stayed at Glamis on the Friday night the 8th May, and records in his Journal “*We rode [from Money musk] to Glamis, about sixty four measured miles, and on Saturday 9th about sixty six more to Edinburgh. I was tired*”; although not too tired to preach in Edinburgh that same evening. He was of course in many senses a driven man, with a clear and urgent mission to proclaim ‘Scriptural Holiness’ wherever he was able to go.

His first ‘recorded’ visit however was not until the Weekend of 23rd/25th April 1768. He had been visiting the Methodist Society in Glasgow. On Saturday 23rd he tells us “*I rode over the mountains to Perth*”. There appears to have been some anticipation on his part about the visit, because he records that he “*had received magnificent accounts of the work of God in this place, so I expected to find a numerous and lively society*”. He was to be severely disappointed. “*Instead of this, I found not above two believers and scarce five awakened persons in it*”. There is a touch of exasperation – “*Finding that I had all to begin, I spoke*

exceeding plain in the evening to about a hundred persons in the Room". He goes on "but knowing that this was doing nothing, on Sunday, I preached about eight o'clock at the end of the Watergate. A multitude of people soon assembled, to whom I cried aloud 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near'." He attended St. John's Kirk twice during the day, and preached again in the evening, and afterwards "explained the nature of a Methodist Society". On leaving Perth to travel on to Brechin on Monday 25th he recorded his ongoing concerns about his 'society' in Perth; "In truth, the Kingdom of God, amongst these, is as yet but as a grain of mustard seed". Not surprisingly on his journey back south in May he made sure that he was able to be in Perth again, to strengthen what he had begun. He seems to have been in a cheerful frame of mind, travelling from Dundee on Thursday 5th with friends, "We rode through the pleasant and fruitful Carse of Gowrie". Apparently arriving in Perth about mid-day, he had time in what must have been good weather for some leisure "In the afternoon we walked over to the royal palace of Scone". Its occupant, William Murray [1st Earl of Mansfield] he had met through his brother Charles many years before, when Murray was a student with Charles at Westminster School.

*In April 1770 he was back in Perth for a longer visit. It was his 12th journey to Scotland, and again he had been in Glasgow "where I had spent two days with much satisfaction". He must have wondered if his second formal visit to Perth, the first had strictly been two, would allow him to continue this note of optimism. He tells us that "I had designed to go straight to Perth", but was tempted instead to take in Edinburgh on the way. He was in Perth however by the afternoon of Saturday 21st – as he said "pushing through violent wind and rain"! Notwithstanding, he preached that evening in the Tolbooth, and again at eight o'clock on Sunday morning. The weather was too inclement to allow him to preach outdoors, and so in the evening he preached in the Court House. Perhaps his feeling towards his *society* in Perth was gaining in optimism, because he described this latter occasion as "a solemn and comfortable hour". The weather that had kept him indoors over Sunday must have improved on Monday, because once again he tells us "I walked over to Scone ...".*

Wesley then embarked upon what must have either been the most courageous journey he was ever to make on his Scottish travels, or his most foolhardy. On the Tuesday he spent "a few agreeable hours with Dr. Oswald", whom he describes as an "upright, friendly, sensible man", and also meeting with "Mr. Black, the senior minister at Perth" whom he described as "likewise". Then on the Wednesday 25th "Taking horse at five we rode to Dunkeld". The journey proceeded by Blair Castle to Dalwhinnie. He and his companions stayed there at "the dearest inn that I met in North Britain", and where they heard of "three young women, attempting to cross the mountains to Blair, swallowed up in the snow". Notwithstanding this, Wesley and his party pressed on north. "By noon" he wrote "we were at a full stop; ... we dismounted, and striking out of the road warily, sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right, with many stumbles, but

no hurt, we got on to Dalmigavie, and before sunset to Inverness". The mountains were covered in snow, yet the journey took Wesley only two days. He was almost 67 years old.

He spent the week-end of 25th/28th April 1772 in and around Perth. It was his third formal visit, out of six, to the town. It was arguably perhaps the most significant in terms of later memory. He had preached in Edinburgh on that Saturday morning the 25th, and had ridden north immediately thereafter. Crossing the ferry over the Forth at Queensferry, he was in Perth by the evening to visit the Methodist society there on his way to Aberdeen. Surprisingly for one undertaking such a journey on horseback, he was then 68 years of age.

The visit turned out to be something of an opportunity for visiting old friends, making new ones, and even sightseeing. On arrival however he immediately *"sent to the Provost to desire the use of the Guildhall"*. He preached there on the Sunday morning the 26th, and *"it being very cold"*, again in the evening. The Provost had in the meantime invited him to *"lodge at his house"*, an invitation which Wesley accepted, no doubt given the weather, with some gratitude. The Monday and Tuesday were spent in conversation and sightseeing. Then he had *"Three or four hours in conversation with Dr. Oswald and Mr. Fraser"*. This was followed by a visit to Methven, and then on to Dunkeld. Wesley said that the *"air was sharp"*, but notwithstanding that he was prevailed upon by his companions to preach there in the open air, and this he did, to *"a multitude of people"*. With dry optimism he added *"and I trust, not in vain"*! On the Tuesday he visited Blair Atholl, walking *"through the Duke of Atholl's gardens"*; but by the evening was back in Perth to preach to *"a large and serious congregation"*.

It was then that he had to record in his Journal that *"afterwards they did me an honour I never thought of – presented me with the FREEDOM OF THE CITY"*. This is an event which has been celebrated many times by the Methodist People in Perth – for instance on its Two Hundredth 'anniversary' in 1972, and again with an enacting of Wesley riding into Perth on horseback as part of the Celebrations in 2003 of the 300th Anniversary of his birth.

After his receipt of the 'Freedom of the City' in 1772, Wesley made three more formal visits to Perth, in May 1774, May 1776, the year of American Independence, and at the end of April 1784.

Coming to Perth on Thursday 19th May 1774, he was again in a state of some disappointment. He had been in Glasgow and Greenock, where he recorded *"that there is no increase in the Society"*, in respect of both places. His gloom was not lifted on his arrival in Perth, where he discovered that *"the morning preaching had been given up"* and that *"consequently the people are few, dead, and cold"*. His prognosis was blunt, *"These things must be remedied, or we must quit the*

ground ...” On Saturday 21st he “preached in the evening to a large congregation”. There was however a touch of despair in his subsequent comment, “*But I could not find any way to their hearts*”. What followed was scathing, “*The generality of the people here are so wise that they need no more knowledge, and so good that they need no more religion ...*”. By the Sunday he talked of endeavouring to “*stir up this drowsy people*”. But then he was preaching at five o’clock in the morning on the text ‘Awake thou that sleepest!’ By the Monday he was off to Dundee and Arbroath.

Two years later in May 1776 the Perth society was clearly still a concern to him. This was to be a flying visit, coming on Tuesday 14th from Edinburgh en-route to Dundee, although he might normally have gone through Fife; he preached “*at six on the South Inch, though the wind was cold and boisterous*”. His comments now on the society were more in sadness than anything else, “*Many are the stumbling blocks that have been laid in the way of this poor people. They are removed, but the effects of them still continue*”. By Wednesday he was on his way to Dundee.

It was to be eight years before he returned, travelling from Edinburgh on Friday 30th April 1784. Of Perth itself he opined that it was “*now but a shadow of what it was, though it begins to lift up its head*”. Then, perhaps regretting his negative comment, he went on to say that, “*It is certainly the sweetest place in North Britain, unless perhaps Dundee*”! He preached that evening in the Tollbooth “*to a large and well behaved congregation*”. Perhaps his apparently warm reception was a reflection both of his own advancing years, he was then almost 81, and the regard in which he was by then held in many places. Perhaps it is an exaggeration to say that Wesley became ‘a legend in his own time’, but he was certainly by 1784 very well known. He preached again at five o’clock the following morning before departing for Dundee. On his return journey south, he travelled through Fife, staying at Melville House, the home of the Earls of Leven. Two years later in 1786 his journey to the north east of Scotland omitted Perth, again going through Fife, not now travelling on horseback, but by coach.

By the time of Wesley’s 22nd Journey to Scotland in 1790, he was within days of being 87 years old. Again, his journey north from Edinburgh took him through Fife, staying at Melville House. On his way South on Wednesday 26th May, he stopped to preach in Brechin, but “*was so faint and ill that I was obliged to shorten my discourse*”. In one day he then travelled from Forfar, through Coupar Angus, and stayed overnight in Auchterarder. He had expected “*poor accommodation*” but was pleasantly surprised the “*food, beds, and everything else were as neat and clean as Aberdeen or Edinburgh*”. He must have been grateful. Perhaps his low expectation of Auchterarder was prompted by his observation over the years of its slow recovery from being burned by the Jacobite

troops of the Earl of Mar in 1715. It must be presumed that he passed through Perth on Thursday 27th, but he made no mention of it in his Journal.

It is difficult now to really have any adequate understanding as to what kind of man John Wesley appeared to those who came into contact with him in the eighteenth century.

Sir Walter SCOTT [1771-1832], one of Scotland's greatest literary figures and author of the *Waverley* novels, and writing almost forty years after the event, described hearing Wesley preach; "*When I was about 12 years old I heard Wesley preach standing on a chair in Kelso churchyard. He was a venerable figure and told many excellent stories*". [2] According to Wesley's own *Journal* this event took place on the evening of Friday 14th June 1782, and was three days short of his 79th birthday. He tells us "*I spoke strong words in the evening, concerning judgement to come: and some seemed to awake out of sleep*". What neither Scott nor Wesley tells us however, is the nature of those '*many excellent stories*'? The account does give us just a glimpse of what Wesley's preaching style might have been like. What Scott was also not able to know was that the following morning this *venerable* old gentleman fell down the stairs in his host's home, "*my head rebounding once or twice from the edge of the stone stairs*". The only injury that he would own up to however was, "*the loss of a little skin from one or two of my fingers*". That same day he rode the forty odd miles to Alnwick in Northumberland, preaching also there in the evening, and again on the Sunday.

We do know also that he was acquainted with Dr. Samuel JOHNSON [1709-84], who's *Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* we have seen he had read. Johnson spent "*two hours with that great man*" in December 1783, making a telling observation; "*John Wesley's conversation is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour*"!

For such a man, who is reckoned to have travelled some quarter of a million miles in fifty years of his exacting ministry, there was indeed not much leisure. It is little short of miraculous therefore that he devoted so much of his concern to the little Methodist *society* whom he found meeting in a 'room' in the Meal Vennel, Perth in 1768.

[2] This story was recounted by Scott in a letter to the poet, Robert Southey, who himself wrote a 'Life of John Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism' in 1820.

Chapter 3

METHODISM IN PERTH AFTER WESLEY

Methodism in Perth somehow survived, and even prospered, despite John Wesley's anxiety about it. The Methodists did not 'quit the ground'. From their small Meeting Room in Meal Vennel, by the early 19th century the *society* had secured a building around the corner in South Street called the 'Tabernacle'. Vacated by others, and purchased with some help from the wider Connexion, the site was to remain in Methodist hands until the 1950s. By mid-century however this building was pulled down and replaced with the first floor 'chapel' built in line with South Street. The Vennel beneath this new Room was called 'Wesley Place' in recognition that it was believed that Wesley had himself preached on this spot.

The early life of the Perth *society* should not however be seen in terms of before and after the death of John Wesley. It was a continuous experience, but a history which can only really be illuminated in any detail through the snapshots of Wesley's own recorded visits. Beyond that record it is difficult to see its life from this distance of time. The Rev. John Bishop writing in 1940, regarded 'the work of the congregation in its early days' as being 'built upon apostolic labours'. He referred particularly to one of John Wesley's preachers Thomas Rutherford, who even whilst Wesley was himself still travelling – and who was 'stationed' as early as 1772 in a circuit comprising Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen and Arbroath – "preached often in the morning at Dunkeld at a very early hour, and after walking the fifteen miles to Perth, preached on the North Inch in the afternoon, and in the chapel at night". Since 1772 was both the year that John Wesley received the 'freedom' of Perth and preached in Dunkeld, perhaps Rutherford's own practice of preaching in Dunkeld was not unconnected to Wesley's own visit. This was also Rutherford's first station; he died in 1806. Even when Wesley was not present however the Perth Methodists were proclaiming the Gospel of God in the open air, and John Wesley expected no less from the kindred spirit he saw in the young Thomas Rutherford.

However even before Wesley's first visit to Perth, from 1765 the Conference stationed itinerants to have a responsibility for the Perth *society*, although seldom in the beginning for more than one year, such was the discipline of Methodist system. Because of the size of those early circuits, the itinerants in effect 'rotated', serving only two months or so at a time in one location within the circuit.

By 1809 however Duncan McAllum [1755-1834] was stationed to Perth itself for one year. Again like Rutherford, McAllum was one of 'Mr. Wesley's Preachers'. As we have seen, a Highlander and Gaelic speaker, he was an *itinerant* for 50 years. Famously in 1778 the young McAllum had volunteered for work in Africa. Wesley wrote to him and succinctly dealt with the suggestion – "You have nothing to do at present in Africa. Convert the heathen in Scotland". Thirty years on, Perth was in a sense a part of McAllum's 'Africa'.

As Methodism developed however, so did the length of time that a *preacher* might be stationed in a particular place; although it was the mid-19th century before those appointments in Perth generally extended beyond one year to two years, and only during the latter half of the century that three years became a more accepted appointment period. This method of stationing ministers in places for short periods of time was one of the most significant differences between Methodism and the Church of Scotland, with its settled parish ministry. The shortness of their time within Perth however did not necessarily inhibit their contribution to the wider Perth community. One such itinerant minister was the Rev. John Burton [*stationed* 1861-64], of whom it was said that "the fame of his preaching spread far beyond the city, and people came from other places – even as far away as Glasgow and Aberdeen – to spend the week-end in Perth, and to hear this remarkable preacher". Apparently it eventually became necessary to issue tickets for admission to his evening services. Burton had been in the Wesleyan Ministry for some 36 years when he arrived to take up his appointment in Perth and was approaching sixty years of age.

By the third quarter of the 19th century the Trustees of the 'chapel' in South Street decided to build a 'new Church' on the garden ground behind their existing premises. Scott Street had been newly made, and the new building was to be entered from there. The foundation stone laying in August 1879 was a civic occasion; both the Provost and the local Member of Parliament being in attendance. The new Church was opened only a year later in August 1880 by the Rev. George Olver, the Principal of Battersea College, London. The 'old' Chapel was thereafter to be known as Wesley Hall, until its eventual sale in the 1950s.

In the years following the opening of this 'new Church', the Methodists in Scott Street were still seeking to make new Christians. In February 1894 during the ministry of the Rev. Henry Barraclough, they held a fortnight of 'Special Services' conducted by the Rev. William R. Bevan [*died* 1918]. Bevan of course was like them a Wesleyan, and at the time a minister in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It has to be admitted however that at the *post mortem* meeting in March the Leaders were more interested in the finances of the enterprise; "*the collections not having reached the sum required*"; than they apparently were in new people. It was agreed however to award Mr. Bevan "*£2 for expenses – all other expenses amounting to £2.14.6d*".

In March 1905 there were further 'Special Mission Services', this time conducted by a layman, Mr. Dickson Johnston, from Sunderland; and by the end of that year they were holding a three day 'Temperance Mission'. This later activity was under the ministry of the Rev. Arthur J. Summerfield, who was a young man in his first appointment. The remainder of his ministry seems to have concentrated on 'Mission' appointments, although he was young enough to also serve for four years as a forces chaplain during the First World War.

Shortly before Summerfield left in 1906 to go to the London [South] Mission circuit, there were 140 members of the Church in Scott Street, with a further 8 *on trial* [a category of membership no longer existing]. The membership of the Methodist cause was never large in comparison to the Church of Scotland parishes.

The 20th century however brought new challenges for the Wesleyans in Scott Street, as indeed for the nation in which they lived; and that was to be the effects of the First World War, when nine of its young men died in action. That little band are still remembered by name, along with those lost in the Second World War, at the Remembrance Sunday services in November each year. There were 52 names recorded on the Church's 'Roll of Honour' as serving in HM Forces during the First World War – presumably a 'Church Family' net which was cast far beyond the actual 'membership'. This 'Roll', under the title the 'Temple of Fame' was beautifully prepared by Charles McDonald in February 1915, and originally contained only 17 names. Eventually McDonald's own name, serving with the 'London Scottish', was to be recorded as a death in the margin of his own 'Roll'. 'Charlie' MacDonal was remembered as a charismatic young leader within the Church, whose loss was perhaps for many, a death too far.

Two Ministers served the Church during the First World War: the Rev. J. Lewis Crawford arriving in 1913, a young man in his late 20s; and the Rev. E. Albert Evans, who had been in the ministry since 1879, and was to die in the final year of his appointment in Perth in 1919.

In 1919 however in the wake of the First World War, a newly arrived Minister, the Rev. John W. Faraday, intimated to the Leaders Meeting 'that he had taken 28 names off the Church Roll'. No reason is recorded. In 1921 following the arrival of the Rev. Wilfred Homer, the total membership was reported to be down to 65. By their own standards, the Wesleyans in Scott Street were in this aftermath of War, at a very low ebb.

In 1922 however a new young minister arrived. He was the Rev. Harry Mortimer, and Perth was his third station. Unusually for the time he stayed in Perth for five years. In Wesleyan Methodist terms, Perth was then described as a 'Mission', and

it was the spirit of Mission which characterised Mortimer's ministry in the town. Like John Burton sixty years before he was able to develop a lively Sunday evening witness. Tickets were however not necessary as he on occasion hired the Perth Theatre for the Services. His ministry in the Church was remembered by older members until recent times. A bye-product of his 'success' was that the Church was able to invest in its infrastructure; renovation of the Wesley Hall, electric lighting introduced to the Church, and a new much needed Manse purchased in the Glasgow Road. When he left in 1927 Mortimer went on to Inverness, and later to the famous 'Dome' Church in Brighton.

Writing in 1940 Harry Mortimer described his time in Perth in the following terms:

"Memory brings back to me five years of marvellous spiritual revelation. I can call it no other; it was as though the whole Church was 'riding as on an incoming tide'. Before my ministry in Perth I had heard of many qualities which are necessary to a real living Church – Faith and absolute dependence upon God, Sacrificial giving to Christ's work. Enthusiasm etc. I want to say here and now, that it was at Perth – in the Methodist Church, that I saw these living powers demonstrated. What happy days those were; the whole city was uplifted!"

The Minister who followed him, Rev. Earnest Kneen, and who was in Perth for three years, reflected some of the emotion that must still have been in the Church during his own ministry. He later evoked the words of Paul to the Philippians, "I thank God for my remembrance of you". That 'remembrance' is echoed in the following words:

"When I begin to recall you, I can see each one of you – in the congregation, the choir, the Wesley Hall, on the Inch, in your homes and in ours".

There are two areas of parkland in Perth bearing the name Inch, 'north' and 'south', and each close to the city centre. Ernest Kneen's reference to the Inch suggests that the Methodist 'open air' witness continued in this time.

A consequence of these ministries however was that by 1930 the membership was back up to 144; but then dropped to 112 in 1934, and 107 in 1935. By early 1937 it was only 108, although the Leaders stressed that of these, '70% were regular attendees'. By September of that year however it had risen to 121. This was the year that the Rev. John Bishop came to Perth.

Bishop was in many ways like Mortimer, adopting a proactive style to his ministry. For instance, on the first Sunday of February 1938, he also hired the Perth Theatre and held a special 'Sportsman's Service', inviting the local football team amongst others.

At the beginning of the Second World War, Bishop recorded the membership of the Church as being 152, but added that “we do not retain on our Church roll the names of those who have ceased to attend”. He also was anxious to remind his readers of the new Men’s Fellowship, and the growth in the Sunday School.

That War was to be another time of change for the Methodists in Perth, and indeed for the execution of ministry. When John Bishop left Perth in 1940, he was followed by a ‘Probationer’ minister in a two year appointment, the Rev. Donald Rathbone LEE, who was eventually to be a President of the Methodist Conference; then in 1942 by the Rev. William ROBSON, who was to stay until 1947. Robson had the kind of experience that demonstrated just how Methodism in Scotland was sometimes misunderstood by the now Methodist Connexion. He received a letter from the Secretary of Conference to tell him that he was to leave Carlisle, and be ‘stationed’ to ‘FIRTH’ in Scotland. Unable to find such a place on his map, he had to telephone Westminster, to be told that it was a typist’s error, and that it should have read ‘PERTH’!

The War brought many members of the armed forces to the Methodist Church in Scott Street. Under Robson’s ministry the Methodists ran a canteen for the troops, held a ‘Sunday evening social hour’, and provided fellowship and comfort to the many young people far away from their homes; whilst also to suffering the death in action of more of its own young men. Writing in 1980 Robson recalled the ‘years of War’ in Perth:

“One remembers the families of those who were killed in action, were wounded, some became prisoners of war. The Church was full of Service men and women. They and the Church were enriched in Fellowship, hospitality and care. So many friendships were formed and a great many have been kept in good repair”.

In 1947 the Rev. Douglas Moralee became minister in Perth. During his ministry there was a considerable increase in the membership of the Church. The 152 of 1940 was 180 anyway by 1947, and became 250 by 1950. Moralee was another young man. His theme of ministry in his four years in Perth was summed up by him as ‘We March Forward’. The ‘forward march’ was to embrace many things; from the replacement of the railings taken for munitions during the War, to the redecoration of the Church itself. But for Moralee himself, there was clearly an urgent spiritual imperative; with the membership standing at its highest during the 20th century, he felt himself able to look to a confident future. Writing in 1950 he said:

“We do not know what the future holds in store, but we believe it holds great things. Like David Livingstone we say: ‘We will go anywhere, so long as it is

forward'. We praise him for all that is past, and trust him for all that is to come".

The post-war years also saw a move away from the short term 'itinerancy' to a development of longer periods of ministry. Whilst the Revs. Ernest Moulton, Albert Cornah, Harold Hadwen and Tom Turner served only 3 to 5 year terms, the Rev. Norman Birtwell served sixteen years, the Rev. May Gladwin eight years, and the Rev. Jean Murrie ten years.

Throughout its history the Methodist Society in Perth has enjoyed a strong lay leadership, with periods in which 'Methodist families' from the town of Perth provided the Stewards, Circuit Stewards, Local Preachers and Class Leaders etc., to form the bedrock on which the itinerant ministers could stand in the development of the ministry of the whole Church. In later years with increased ease of travel, the membership of the Church has been more widely drawn than from just Perth itself. *[It is intended to develop a subsequent study of this lay leadership].*

Following its placement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries within Wesleyan Methodism's large northern circuits, the Methodist *society* in Perth was for much of its existence in Methodist terms a 'single station circuit', that is 'one minister – one church'. In 1959 however it became a part of the 'Dundee and Perth Circuit', and eventually from 1968 the 'Dundee, Perth and Blairgowrie Circuit'. Since the year 2000 it has been one of five Churches in the 'Angus, Dundee and Perthshire Circuit'. This circuit currently has two Ministers, the Rev. David FIRTH and the Rev. Mary PATTERSON, who together form a 'ministry team' along with the local preachers serving the local Churches.

The history of a Church and of its people can never even begin to tell all the stories that could be told; and so much anyway is now lost to us by the passage of the years. The Methodists in Perth however have a full and eventful story to tell, of which the foregoing is in reality only a tiny part. To echo the words of John Wesley himself however, written of Perth in 1774, the 'People called Methodist' have most certainly not "quit the ground"!

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