

ANATOMY OF A RELIGIOUS REVIVAL: STOCKPORT METHODISTS IN THE 1790s

Robert Glen

*The red skies of Paris sobered the
English Sunday and filled the English churches*

John and Barbara Hammond

The links between economic and social change have long fascinated scholars and stimulated an extraordinarily wide range of inquiries. Legions of investigators, for instance, have focused on the myriad social transformations caused by the Industrial Revolution. Yet these scholars have typically come up short when attempting to explain the complex religious trends found in industrializing societies. To be sure, historians of English religious development (and related topics) have formulated some provocative hypotheses. At the dawn of the twentieth century, Elie Halevy formulated his famous "thesis" to the effect that the ethos fostered by the Methodist Revival prevented revolution in Britain. More recently, E.P. Thompson proposed an oscillation theory in which religious millennialism alternated with radical political activity during the Industrial Revolution. As a corollary, he proposed that Methodism in particular functioned as a counter-revolutionary force during the years when the Continent was being swept by waves of revolutionary violence (especially from 1789 to 1848). The present study of a religious revival in and around a single urban centre, Stockport, provides new information and conclusions on many of these issues.¹

Economic and social changes at Stockport have been traced in considerable detail in part because of its close proximity to Manchester (only about seven miles of countryside separated the two towns in the eighteenth century). Beginning in the 1730s, silk was spun (or "thrown") in Stockport mills, and by the end of the century this small market town had been transformed into a nationally renowned centre for cotton spinning in factories and cotton weaving on handlooms in the town and surrounding district. The town's population increased at least five-fold during those decades and reached about 15,000 by 1795. This assured that other industries and services would blossom as well. Contemporary directories list a growing array of occupations, including milliners, fruiterers, tea dealers, braziers, wine and liquor merchants and hordes of



A romanticised view of Stockport, 1797.

"hucksters." Social conflicts likewise grew apace. Ranging from food riots to strikes to campaigns for radical political reform, these disturbances severely strained the capacities of local government officials and institutions. As the maintenance of basic law and order was becoming an increasingly problematic task for perplexed political and religious leaders, many came to believe that a downward spiral into anarchy had begun.²

Stockport can clearly provide fertile ground for an examination of various hypotheses linking the causes, courses, and consequences of religious revivals to the various economic, social and political changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution. Did economic distress cause revivals, or were revivals helped by prosperity? What types of people responded to revivalism? What was the relationship between political developments and the appearance of religious revivals? These are the types of questions that can perhaps be answered best of all at the local level.³

Contours of Revivalism

In contrast to the relatively quiescent religious scene of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, religious revivals were becoming a fairly common occurrence in the Stockport district from the mid-eighteenth century onward. Each revival, of course, had certain unique features, but for the purposes of this discussion, a Methodist revival will be assumed to involve, at a minimum, significant growth in Methodist members for more than one year.⁴ Using this admittedly broad definition, it is clear that at least three revivals occurred between the onset of sustained "field preaching" by the Wesleys and George Whitefield in 1739 and the last decade of the century. The first, in the 1740s, was stimulated by preaching visits to the Stockport district by such luminaries as John and Charles Wesley, Benjamin Ingham, David Taylor, and John Nelson. During the second, around 1760, Stockport Methodists built their first chapel, and a well-to-do farmer's son, Matthew Mayer, underwent a profound conversion experience. He would soon become a successful local preacher, a frequent host to the visiting John Wesley, a friend to many important itinerant preachers (including Thomas Rankin, Joseph Benson and John Pawson), and a special guest at many of the Methodist Conferences held during the last four decades of the eighteenth century.⁶

A third revival occurred during the early 1780s when Stockport was still part of the Manchester Circuit. It was stimulated in part by the presence of the young but increasingly prominent itinerant, Joseph Benson. While stationed in the Manchester Circuit (1778-80), Benson became well acquainted not only with Mayer but also with such leading Stockport Methodists as George Garside (a liquor merchant), John Whitaker (a cotton manufacturer), and William Lavender, Sr. (a linen draper). When a new and considerably larger chapel was built in 1781, all four of these local men were prominently listed among the trustees. At that time, Mayer wrote to Benson: "Blessed be the Lord - he is carrying on his work among us at Stockport, our congregations are still large, our society gradually increases and believers daily (sic) added."⁷

Following each of these revivals there were notable slumps. In 1787, for example, John Wesley was informed on a visit to Stockport and the nearby village of Bullocksmithy (present-day Hazel Grove) that "the people in general were dead and cold." Consequently, he "strongly applied (the sermon text), 'Now it is time to awake out of sleep.'" On his next trip to Stockport in 1783, he tried out what was apparently a new sermon entitled "On Faith", but to no avail. In the meantime, the prominent Methodist visionary, Elizabeth Ritchie, had drawn somewhat negative conclusions based on her own visit: "The Stockport Society love the whole truth; but, as yet, few of them enjoy the full liberty of the gospel."⁸ These various signs of spiritual lethargy probably contributed to Mayer's desire to get Benson appointed to the fledgling Stockport Circuit in 1789, but Benson wanted a larger stage for his talents. (In the end, he got his wish and was appointed to Birmingham). In the next few years, there were fears that a Stockport local preacher named Thomas Smith was hindering the Wesleyans' progress. Precipitous membership declines in 1790-91 and Smith's subsequent association with a shadowy Park Chapel congregation suggest the possibility of a local Methodist schism.⁹ The decreases in Stockport Circuit membership corresponded with increases in anti-Methodist literature and satiric prints in the late 1780s and early 1790s, although the precise impact of these national trends on Stockport or other individual localities is difficult to trace.¹⁰

Then, without warning, a five-year period of expansion and revival occurred (see Table). The largest annual numerical growth (225 members) and percentage increase (45%) occurred in the very first year, that is, after John Wesley's death in 1791 and between the conferences of that year and 1792. The revival fervour was still strong in the following year, as Robert Miller, one of the two circuit ministers, testified:

I preached out of doors in many places, to very large congregations. We had the pleasure of seeing the work of the Lord prosper in the Circuit, so that at the end of the year, we left more than two hundred increase, most of whom were converted."

Table 1: Stockport Wesleyan Methodist Circuit Membership 1787-1801

Year	Number of Members	Change from the preceding year:	
		Numerical	Per centage
1787	880	—	—
1788	846	-34	-3.9
1789	827	-19	-2.2
1790	830	3	0.4
1791	655	-175	-21.1
1792	950	295	45.0
1793	1060	110	11.6
1794	1200	140	13.2
1795	1400	200	16.7
1796	1420	20	1.4
1797	1345	-75	-5.3
1798	1165	-180	-13.4
1799	1157	-8	-0.7
1800	1000	-157	-13.6
1801	866	-134	-13.4

Source: Minutes of the [Wesleyan] Methodist Conferences, 19 vols. (London, 1811-1877), I, 197, 206, 217, 229, 243, 256, 272, 291, 310, 338, 372, 409; II, 16, 54, 96.



A tub preacher drawn by Lancashire's "Tim Bobbin" (John Collier), 1773.

As a result, the twelve-year-old Hillgate Methodist Chapel had to be enlarged. Yet growth on that scale could not be sustained. By the fifth year (1795-96), numerical and percentage increases were negligible – a harbinger of years of sustained declines that were to follow. Overall, the revival pattern is clear. From 1787 to 1791, membership decreased by 27 per cent; from 1791-96, it increased by 117 per cent; and from 1796 to 1801, it fell by 39 per cent. This broadly conforms to national trends. David Hempton has observed that "the years 1794-5 and 1800-1 were respectively the best and worst for Methodism before the mid nineteenth century."¹²

Causes

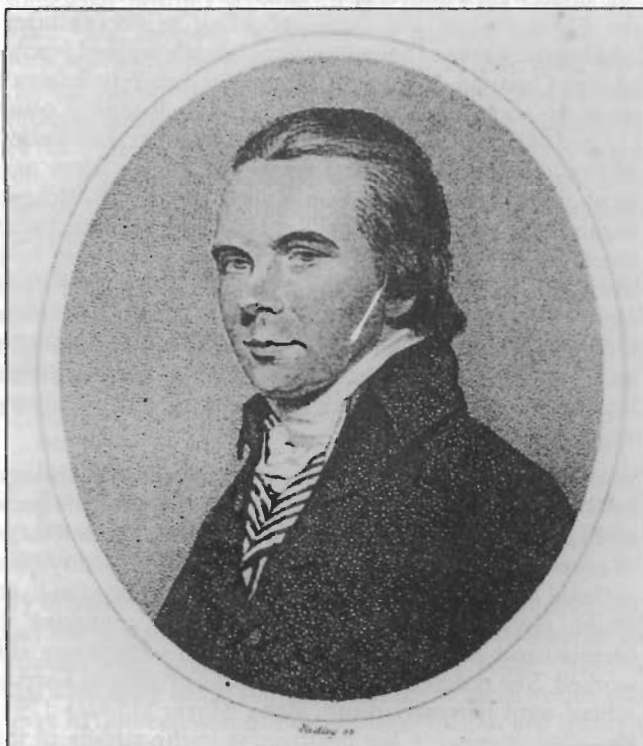
What triggered the Stockport revival of the 1790s? As with most important historical questions, there can be no single answer. Among the multifarious events and trends, one must try to distinguish between long-term preconditions that set the stage for revival; sustaining factors that helped to prolong the revival after its commencement; and the actual triggers or precipitants that were at work in, or shortly before, 1791-2. Among the long-term preconditions were the strong religious traditions in the area, the memories of successful earlier revivals, and the existence of a persistently large population of "unchurched" people who did not regularly attend any religious services. Part of the problem was lack of adequate facilities. The Bishop of Chester thought that Dissent (and he probably included Methodists in this term) flourished where sittings in the Church of England sanctuaries were inadequate.¹³ In the Stockport district, Anglican churches and chapels had space for less than one-fifth of the population in the late eighteenth century. There was thus ample need and justification for religious revivals.

A number of developments probably helped to sustain the Methodist revival once it started, among them growth in other local denominations and revivals among the Methodists in other regions. For instance, the Rev. John Meldrum of nearby Hatherlow Independent Chapel (Bredbury township) was busy on many fronts at this time. Among other things, he oversaw the building of a belfry, the opening of a cemetery, and perhaps most importantly, the construction of a gallery in the chapel to provide more seats. Local Quakers were also active. Sarah Stephenson, a Quaker preacher, referred to her 1792 visit to Stockport as "a baptizing season." By 1795, Quaker leaders chose Stockport as the site for their Northern Counties Yearly Meeting, an honour bestowed on the town only on one other occasion during the century. There is extensive evidence of revivals in other parts of England, especially in

the North, but hardly any of them predated Stockport's. While accounts of the astonishing revival at nearby Macclesfield or the fervent proselytizing of Ann "Praying Nanny" Cutler may have energized pious Stopfordians, they did not trigger the Stockport revival.¹⁶

Warfare has been cited as a cause of some revivals, but it cannot be used in this case because Britain was at peace with revolutionary France until 1793.¹⁷ Business trends likewise provide no clear relationship with revivalism despite the widespread belief that bankruptcies and business setbacks, like natural disasters, were punishments sent from God. Failures in the cotton industry and in other trades were more a feature of the period from 1793 onward than the earlier years of the decade.¹⁸ Disease has been known to trigger religious revivals, and the Stockport district was probably visited by the typhus epidemic that was especially virulent in Manchester in the mid-1790s.¹⁹ No such epidemic is known to have occurred in 1791-2.

Three causal factors seem most likely to have triggered the awakening of those years. The first, economic distress, is relatively well-documented. High grain prices in 1789-91 led to increased pressure on the family budgets of the poor. While the abundant harvest of 1791 somewhat mitigated this trend, the deficient harvest of 1792 led to further distress and anxiety. In the meantime, the government had passed the oppressive Corn Law of 1791, provoking much opposition in industrial districts. One response to the distress by Stockport Methodists was to establish the Strangers' Friend Society in February 1792 along the lines of the society established three months earlier in Manchester. It aided those from the ranks of the deserving poor who otherwise might receive little or no help under the Old Poor Law (especially the numerous migrants who did not have a legal settlement in Stockport or nearby townships). As an explicitly Methodist organization, it helped to promote the image of Methodism as a denomination sympathetic to those in need, and it also put Methodists in direct contact with many who might not otherwise learn much about Methodism and the sense of community it engendered.²⁰



Robert Miller, Stockport Wesleyan Methodist preacher. 1792-93

Another cause was undoubtedly the presence of charismatic, hard-working, and conciliatory religious leaders. Robert Miller's effective outdoor preaching in various parts of the circuit (mentioned above) comprised only one part of this phenomenon. Of greater significance was the career of William Myles as Stockport Circuit minister from 1791 to 1793. According to his own account, his "labours were blessed with success" during 1791-2 in large part due to his gruelling monthly routine. "One fortnight I travelled in the circuit," he writes, "and the other fortnight I walked about 48 miles round the town, and preached every evening." During the next year, Myles faced additional challenges, many of them associated with the rise of English Jacobinism.

Being stationed a second year in Stockport circuit, I found it a time of great exercise, occasioned by the general commotion of all ranks of people with regard to national affairs. I endeavoured to promote peace, exhorting them to moderation, and showing them from the Scriptures, that it was our duty to honour the King, to submit to governors, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake...²¹

The emergence of new, young local preachers (like John Collier, discussed below) probably contributed to the onset of the revival, but the absence of Stockport Circuit plans (that is, preaching schedules) for these years make it impossible to determine precisely when most local preachers began their work.

The third causal factor, millennialism, is somewhat more amorphous but nonetheless potent. Both religious and political millennialism were at work. Mark Noll, J.F.C. Harrison, Clarke Garrett, and other historians have shown that for many people, the times seemed "out of joint" and that there was a widespread sense that the last decade of the century marked the end of an age. This feeling was inspired above all by the amazing, and then horrifying, events unfolding in revolutionary France (events themselves triggered in part by economic distress). While some turned to the consolations of Romanticism, others sought solace in religion.²² By one estimate, prophetic works published in Britain doubled from the period 1775-89 to the period 1790-1804. Among the prognosticators was Robert Moody, who wrote from London in 1787 about his belief in a half-century "jubilee" that had begun in 1742:

This jubilee or cleansing of the sanctuary therefore ends in A.D. 1791, near the vernal equinox or Easter-tide; when, consequently, we have good reason to hope that our blessed Redeemer will appear a second time...to the utter shame and confusion of wicked and ungodly men.²³

For those familiar with Moody's prophecy, the death of John Wesley in March 1791 must have seemed particularly ominous. A Stockport physician and millennialist, John Mitchell, was probably the best-known local representative of this prophetic deluge. Like Moody and many others, he interpreted various contemporary events as signs that the Second Coming was imminent.²⁴

Many people also felt that this "Age of the Democratic Revolution" heralded the advent of some sort of political millennium. This can be seen in the works of Thomas Spence, William Godwin, and others in England, not to mention the flood of Continental works on similar topics. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791-2) had a profound impact in many urban centres and became "very popular" at Stockport according to a local observer. During 1792 there was at least one



James Gillray, "Presages of the Millenium . . ." (1795).

unsuccessful attempt to establish a Jacobin club near Stockport. By August, a society had been set up at Stockport itself, and it was soon in contact with the London Corresponding Society and various radical groups in the provinces.²⁵ A line from a radical popular English ballad of 1790 explicitly linked political and religious trends: "... State-craft and priest-craft, if people are wise, When brought to a level will never more rise." A few years later, some Stockport men were being prosecuted for singing a song with a virtually identical theme.

Obviously, millennialism of these types, dynamic leaders, and economic distress cannot provide explanations for all revivals, either at Stockport or elsewhere. Indeed, it seems probable that the causes of revivals are either unique and contingent or at least that they vary widely from time to time and place to place. The Stockport evidence suggests that there can be no single (or simple) formula employed to predict the onset or intensity of religious revivals.

Revival Vignettes

Although the revival years of the 1790s witnessed the deepening of religious commitment by hundreds of Stopfordians, details on only a few of them have survived the pages of the *Arminian Magazine*, the Methodists' main periodical publication. Sometimes, even these details are rather sparse, as with Matthew Mayer's only daughter, Sarah, who later became Mrs. John Middleton (1779-1838).

She underwent a conversion experience in the first year of the 1790s revival and then, according to her obituary, "during the whole of her subsequent life she walked worthy of her Christian vocation." With four other individuals there is somewhat more information. Joseph Collier (1770-1842) was already a Wesleyan member, but Robert Miller (the circuit preacher) persuaded him to serve as a local preacher in the villages around Stockport. "Joseph began to exhort the villagers," a later writer states, "with much trembling, but with some freedom of spirit, to look unto God their Saviour." His preaching skills developed rapidly. By the mid-1790s, he had become a full-time itinerant preacher. John Brownell (1771-1821) became a local preacher apparently also during the revival before leaving the Stockport district in 1794 to do missionary work in the West Indies.²⁷

With Ann Clowes (1776-1797) one can see a clear linkage between religious revivalism and personal crisis. She grew up in a religious family, but her faith was shaken at the age of seventeen when she went to work in a local factory. She suffered through six months of spiritual agony (and, no doubt, physical exhaustion) before being converted to Methodism by two of the young women with whom she worked. She proceeded to teach a class of girls in Sunday school until her early death. Betty Mayer (1772/3-1794) also died young, but her death came in the middle of the revival and, perhaps as a result, had some rather unusual

characteristics. She was on her deathbed for thirteen days and at first suffered both from physical pain and from doubts about her salvation. Yet when she gained a sense that her sins were forgiven, her pain was relieved and she "...began praising the Lord in ecstasies of joy." She also had visions: "I have seen a glorious sight! I have seen my place in heaven! There is a glorious crown for me!" As she drew closer to death, she experienced supernatural aural phenomena (auditory hallucinations) when she twice heard "very fine music" from heaven.²⁸ While the revival probably helped to inspire Mayer, her deathbed experiences in turn probably contributed to the revival impulse. If local people did not hear about her final ecstasies by word of mouth, they could have read about them in the obituary published in the *Arminian Magazine* a year later.

These accounts by no means provide a random sampling of Stockport Circuit Methodist converts in the early 1790s. The obituaries tend to be weighted towards those who became at least somewhat prominent Methodists as adults and, of course, included only those who remained Wesleyan Methodists to the end. Still, this information, when taken in conjunction with other contemporary evidence, suggests certain generalizations. The converts tended to be young (all five of the aforementioned individuals were born in the 1770s), at least moderately well-educated, and deeply transfixed by their conversion experiences. While occupational evidence is limited, it is known that many factory workers (like Ann Clowes) joined the Methodist ranks in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Stockport.

Apart from biographical information, there were many other indications of a revival spirit in Stockport and its district. At Levenshulme, the Methodist faithful opened their first chapel in 1796. At Marple and New Mills, the Sunday schools were recording spectacular increases in 1795-7, increases foreshadowed in Stockport itself. There, the Methodist Sunday School grew by an average of 37 per cent per year in 1793-6. This growth was probably helped by Joseph Benson, who returned to preach the annual Sunday school sermon in 1793. There exists a vivid (albeit somewhat hostile) account of his preaching around this time: "Mr. Bensons (sic) alarming manner, his zeal, the deep and awful language in which his strange ideas were clothed, his uplifted hands, penetrating looks, and singular attitude, render every idea singularly and alarmingly awful."³⁰ It is not surprising that the collection taken following Benson's sermon was substantially larger than that of 1792 when, ironically, the local economic situation had been much brighter.

Yet Benson was not a revivalist of the most extreme sort. Returning to Stockport for a lovefeast in 1794, he was unsympathetic to the direction the revival seemed to be taking. He later wrote that:

my mind was much grieved at the noise and disorderly behaviour of some well-meaning persons during the love-feast; who, with their loud amens, knocking, &c., greatly disturbed the congregation, and prevented all serious and rational attention to the things spoken.³¹

By this time, of course, Benson, the Stockport Methodists, and the whole Connexion were embroiled in a series of disputes over governance, doctrine and practice, disputes that ultimately led to schism. A sketch of these events will serve to illustrate some of the social dynamics and tensions at work in revivals. It will also point to the conclusion that revivalism and conflict often went hand in hand.

Growth and Controversy

The controversial issues of the 1790s were complex, but they centred on the problem of how power was to be distributed in the Wesleyan Methodist denomination. That John Wesley had been authoritarian in matters of Methodist governance hardly needs to be stressed. Just a year before his death he was writing to a friend that "as long as I live the people shall have no share in choosing either stewards or leaders among the Methodists.... We are no republicans, and never intend to be. It would be better for those that are so minded to go quietly away."³² After Wesley's death in 1791, three loose factions emerged in the Stockport Circuit.³³ One included the strict advocates of the "Old Plan," which involved continued adherence to the Church of England and prohibition of the sacraments in Methodist chapels. Matthew Mayer, George Garside, and other Old Planners tended to be wealthier, older and more conservative in politics and religion than the Stockport Methodists in general. Because of his long friendship with Wesley and his position as a leading trustee and prominent local preacher, Mayer occupied a special position in the Stockport Circuit, one that he used with great circumspection. He came to embrace a fairly traditional paternalistic ideal which led him to devote considerable time and money to the needs of the poor. At the same time, he never "preached what might be properly called a *controversial sermon* He was also a good subject, loyal to his king, and a friend to his count(r)y; he never would give any countenance to those who were disaffected to the government..." These views were in complete conformity with the patriarchal views that his friend Joseph Benson was advocating in his sermons to the annual Conferences, among other places.³⁴

The second faction favoured a more moderate "New Plan" that involved the celebration of the sacraments in Methodist chapels but no formal break with the Established Church. Few if any of the New Planners were radical in their political views in the 1790s. William Lavender, Jr. (a linen draper and trustee) and George Beaumont (a popular local preacher) were the leaders of this group in Stockport, as were John Harrop and Robert Thornley in Ashton-under-Lyne. (Ashton was part of the Stockport Circuit until 1811.) A large number of the itinerant ministers in the Wesleyan Connexion shared their views.

The radical members of the third group were sometimes called "Tom Paine Methodists" because of their hostility toward both the Established Church and the corrupt national government. They demanded more power in the Wesleyan Connexion for local preachers and individual Methodist members as well as more power in the state for "freeborn Englishmen." They particularly supported the Methodist lovefeast and the religious freedom it seemed to engender. A later writer described the lovefeast as "a religious entertainment, well calculated to confirm the faith of believers, to quicken careless professors, to help the poor of the Society; and to encourage all present to seek the Lord." With its programme of singing, prayer, distribution of cake and water, offerings for the poor, and testimonies of personal religious experiences, lovefeasts provided a mixture of evangelism, entertainment and charity which the poorer Stockport Methodists eagerly supported. James Needham and John Knott, a local preacher, were probably the best known members of this group in and around Stockport. Knott allegedly wrote the 1794 pamphlet *Rights of Swine; An Address to the Poor*, which gives a sense of the potent mixture of religion, economics and politics that infused local debates at this time. The tract reads in part:

Great God! What spectacle so affecting to a reflecting mind as Great Britain in her present state! – on the one hand, we see the impudent nobles advertising their “Grand Dinners,” in the very face of the Hungry Poor, whom they have ruined!! On the other hand, Widows, orphans, and others, are weeping, and often dying for want of bread! What can be more odious in the sight of Heaven, than Feast-and-Famine in the same Nation?

The author proceeds to advocate annual parliaments and universal suffrage as his main cures for these woes. While the numbers of “Tom Paine Methodists” probably remained small, the biographer of Needham stated that “...many promising young men were in the most imminent danger of being completely ruined by the dreadfully pernicious notions of impracticable equality, and gross impious infidelity.”³⁵

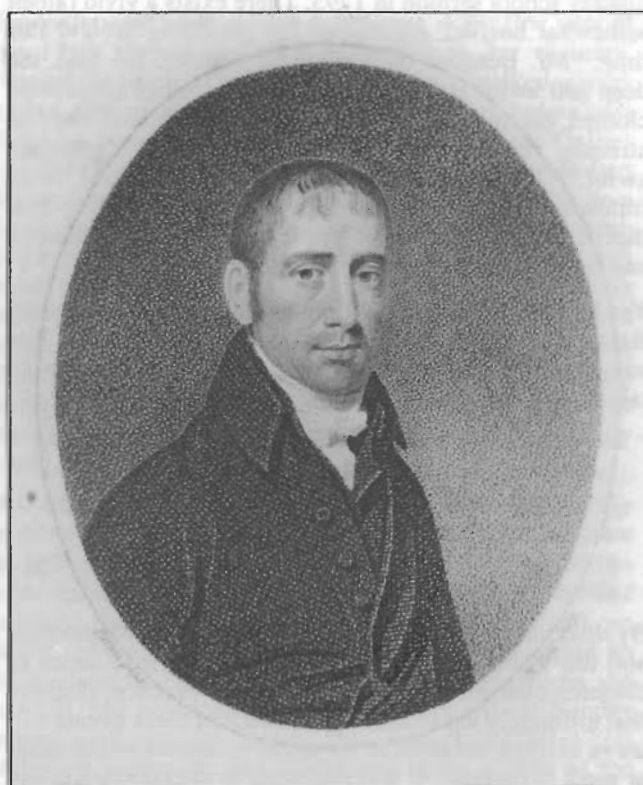
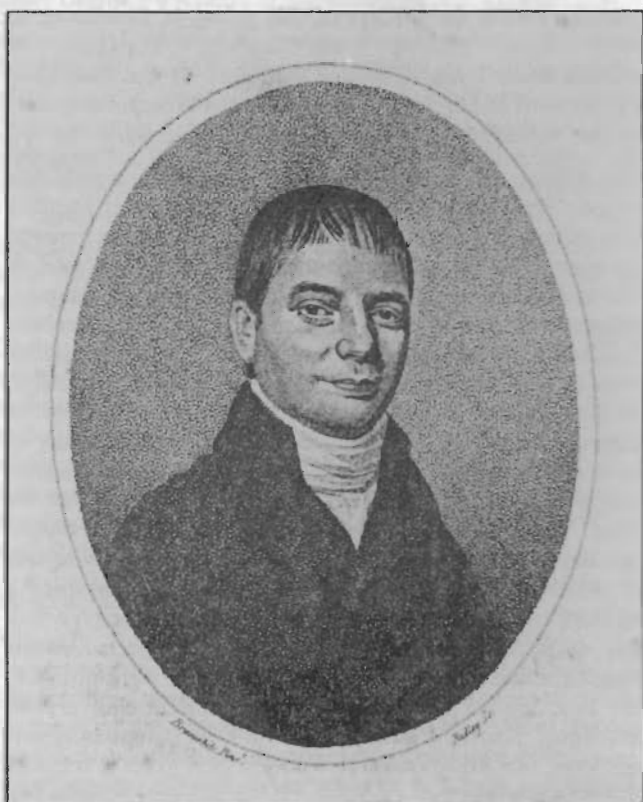
Controversy among these groups of Methodists emerged within months after Wesley’s death. At the Manchester Conference of 1791, Thomas Rankin discovered that “new men and new manners began to reign.” Events in revolutionary France began to be reported unsympathetically in the two leading Manchester newspapers during the last half of 1791 and thus helped to provide a continual stimulus to discussion and debate. While stationed at Manchester in 1790-3, Adam Clarke found that “even religious people...caught the general mania. The pulpits of all parties resounded with the pro and con politics of the day...” On the main reform that was being proposed for the Methodists, the celebration of the sacraments in Methodist chapels, Clarke believed that the majority in the Wesleyan Connexion favoured change.³⁶

Although it is unknown whether this was true of Stockport Circuit Methodists, there is evidence of considerable support for change of some sort. Already in 1792, communion was being celebrated in Red Hall Chapel near Ashton, and Bullocksmithy Chapel would soon follow suit. This, along with the spread of Jacobin literature and organizations, no



The last hours of John Wesley, 1791.

doubt helped to convince local Methodist leaders that they needed to act. Mayer, Garside, and Whitaker joined a committee of thirty-four prominent Stopfordians to promote a loyalty address to the king in December 1792. A few days later, the Methodist preachers, the two stewards (Mayer and Garside again), and other leaders of the Stockport Methodists proclaimed their unanimous support for the loyalist address. After the Conference of 1793, the leading Stockport trustees refused to allow one of the newly appointed circuit ministers (William Simpson) to take his post because he favoured administering communion in Methodist chapels. Mayer and the others were ultimately persuaded to relent, but perhaps significantly, Simpson was not reappointed to Stockport in 1794.³⁸ For reasons that remain obscure, much less controversy arose over the administration of the sacrament of baptism in the Stockport Circuit. One of the other new ministers in 1793, John Pritchard, began baptizing on 16 November (apparently without objection), and unlike Simpson, he was reappointed to the Circuit in 1794.³⁹



John Brownell and James Needham, two Stopfordians active in the 1790s revival.

Another itinerant preacher with Stockport connections was becoming one of the most prominent advocates of Methodist communion services at this time. Samuel Bradburn, later known as the "Methodist Demosthenes," had friends at Stockport dating from the period he served in the Manchester Circuit (1789-91). In the spring of 1793, he travelled through Wales, Cheshire and Lancashire to gain support for the New Plan. While it is not clear if he passed through the Stockport Circuit on this occasion, his views were gaining considerable support both nationally and locally. Bullocksmithy and Red Hall joined about one hundred societies that applied to the 1794 Conference and were allowed to begin holding communion services.⁴⁰ Bradburn proceeded to play a leading role in the "Bristol Dispute" of 1794-5 over the celebration of communion in the Bristol Circuit. Opposition to Bradburn and his proposals led to meetings of the Stockport, Manchester and Salford trustees in the autumn of 1794. The result was the establishment of an association (or Methodist "corresponding society") involving trustees in these three towns and the trustees of about sixty other Methodist chapels who were in sympathy with the Old Plan.⁴¹ Such was the importance of the Stockport Circuit in these proceedings that Pawson mentioned Stockport developments in a 1795 pamphlet, and Thomas Coke visited the Circuit soon thereafter to try to promote conciliation.⁴²

Other changes were also underway. James Needham underwent a conversion experience in 1794, dropped his Jacobin friends, and entered on a life of "Deep piety" that led to him becoming an exhorter, a local preacher, and finally a full-time itinerant preacher in 1799.⁴³ William Lavender Jr. was moving in a different direction. While he could support the main body of trustees on the loyalist address and the Bristol Dispute, by 1795 he was shifting towards the radicals on a number of issues. Specifically, Lavender, Beaumont, and others were becoming interested in the views of the Rev. Alexander Kilham. In his *Progress of Liberty, Amongst the People Called Methodists* (1795) and in his sermons and other writings, Kilham was advocating lay representation at annual conferences and the right of individual congregations to choose circuit ministers and class leaders and to determine who could become a member and who was to be dropped from the membership lists. In addition to the popularity of the reforms he advocated, Kilham had considerable personal appeal based in large part on his dramatic pulpit style: "there was a solemnity in his look, an earnestness in his manner...and an unction accompanied his word which more than compensated for every natural defect; he commanded attention still as night."⁴⁴ His influence would grow with each passing year in the mid and late 1790s.

Animosity and Decline

The Manchester Conference of 1795 managed to exacerbate the Stockport rift in at least three ways. First, it agreed on the cumbersome "Plan of Pacification," which required the approval of the majority of trustees, the majority of stewards and class leaders, and the consent of conference in order for communion to be administered in any Methodist chapel. It was a tumultuous meeting with crowds demonstrating outside during its sessions and the trustees meeting simultaneously under the presidency of Matthew Mayer. In the end, Mayer and the Old Planners felt vindicated. Despite "the alarming and increasing Progress of Innovation from the old plan of primitive methodism...and the dreadful effects of Strife and Division occasioned thereby in various parts of the Kingdom..." they claimed that three-fourths of

the Methodists wanted no change. The Plan of Pacification seemed to represent a strong barrier to innovation. As Mayer and the trustees stated in an address to the Conference before its adjournment: "Resolved, That the thanks of this Meeting be *unanimously* given to the President and the Members of the Conference, for their kind Attention to the Business of the Delegation of the Trustees..."⁴⁵ A second action of the Conference complemented the first: Alexander Kilham was soundly reprimanded for promoting his democratic religious views.

A third irritant was furnished by the appointment of the Rev. Jeremiah Brettell to the Stockport Circuit. Sometimes eponymously referred to as "Mr. Brittle," he quickly lived up to that epithet. One of the first things he set about doing was to collect signatures for a national Methodist petition supporting the government and its wartime policies. To help further the loyalist cause, he delivered a sermon entitled *Fear God. Honour the King*. Later in life, Brettell wrote that during the first of his two years in Stockport: "Paine's politics had circulated among the lower classes; and these proved a great obstruction to our peace and prosperity."⁴⁶ The radical faction of Stockport Methodists in fact became incensed. They accused Brettell of making the pulpit a stage for party invective and circulated a petition demanding the removal of both him and his fellow circuit minister. They gained only forty-three signatures, however, and the 1796 Conference took little note of their complaints. The same Conference expelled Alexander Kilham from the Connexion and passed regulations meant to increase itinerant preachers' control over local preachers, including an order to "Let no Local Preacher keep love-feasts without the appointment of the Superintendent..."⁴⁷

An early biographer of Kilham stated that around this time, the radicals established a "Corresponding Association" of their own to complain about the treatment of Kilham and the high-handed conduct of local trustees and stewards. Whether or not there was a formal association, it is clear that in the Stockport Circuit there was considerable activity from August to December 1796 and that local radicals were in contact with those in other circuits. Their views are best summarized in two publications associated with the local preacher George Beaumont and his like-minded colleagues. They condemned the Conference as an "inquisitorial conspiracy" and went on to list a number of grievances that emphasized the rift between rich and poor Methodists. Collections for the relief of the poor were allegedly distributed unfairly by the stewards. Wealthy members were accused of trying to expel certain poorer members on false charges. Beaumont also claimed that local preachers were appointed not on the basis of ability but through favouritism, with senior or more eloquent preachers sometimes "destined to obscure corners, and almost empty houses."

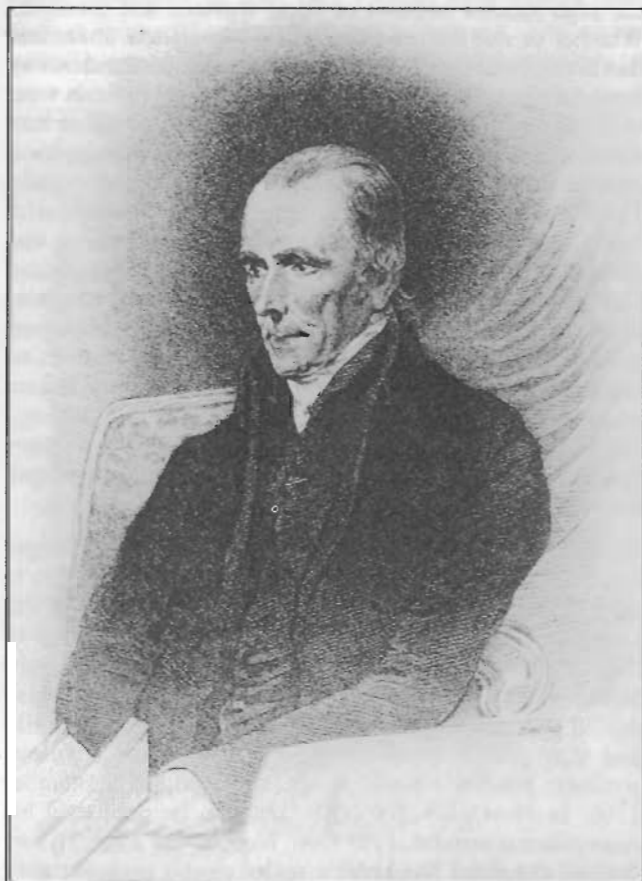
Brettell responded with a categorical denial of the charges in his *Address to the Members of the Methodist Societies in the Stockport Circuit*. He castigated the "New Theological Legislators," as he called them, and charged that some of the complaints were based more on personal animus toward Mayer and Garside than on religious principles. He also denied that money for the poor was distributed arbitrarily and that poorer members were expelled on frivolous grounds. Brettell's *Address* appeared around September 1796. In November, for good measure, he published his controversial sermon, *Fear God. Honour the King*.⁵⁰ Since Brettell remained Stockport's senior circuit preacher until the ensuing summer conference, local debates continued

during much of 1797. In that year, Brettell or his supporters were probably behind the Stockport re-publication of the *Apology for the Methodists* by Michael Thomas Sadler, a seventeen-year-old Derbyshire lad who was as uncompromising in his youth for the cause of Wesley's religion as he was to become as an adult under the banner of factory reform.⁵¹

Meanwhile from Ashton, James Harrop wrote that Brettell was telling the faithful that the reformers "were alienated from God and the connection and that all our endeavours would prove fruitless..." In the same letter, Harrop furnished a graphic account of events that occurred on the morning of Sunday, 27 August at Red Hall Chapel. After the sermon, Matthew Mayer rose to announce that he would be preaching in the afternoon.

He was going on with telling them how long he had preached and what good he had done in the course of 30 years when as with one burst of general indignation the people rushed out of their seats and would hear him no longer. The noise of their feet silenced him. I felt for him. He was dismayed. His lips and hands trembled and manifest agitation seized his limbs.

The names of a majority of the Red Hall congregation would soon be found on the rolls of Kilham's schismatic group, the Methodist New Connexion, which was founded in the same month.⁵² The psychological strains of the schism took their toll on others besides Mayer and the leading schismatics. A pious Methodist layman at Stockport, Thomas Marsland, sometimes spent all night praying at this juncture. According to his biographer, his "wife was afraid that the sorrow which he then experienced would endanger his health; and, remonstrating with him on the subject, he replied, 'I cannot bear to see our little flock split in pieces by the monstrous hand of ambition.'"⁵³



Jeremiah Brettell, Stockport Wesleyan Methodist preacher, 1795-97.

Under the circumstances, the local Wesleyan leadership decided to compromise on some of the most contentious issues. On a visit early in 1797, Kilham found that local preachers had gained the right to advise in stationing themselves and the right to hold lovefeasts whenever they felt their societies required them. Such concessions may have helped to mitigate the declines in members and the losses to Kilham's schismatic group. Although the New Connexion allowed communion in all its chapels and lay representation at its conferences, it initially attracted only about seventy-five Wesleyan seceders at Stockport. Among them was George Beaumont, who became a New Connexion itinerant preacher and much more radical in his religious and political views in the following years.⁵⁴

Yet none of these measures sufficed to halt the declines in Wesleyan membership, and the New Connexion's membership also languished. The religious squabbles probably drove a number of people away from Methodism and organized religion altogether in the late 1790s and early 1800s. A Stockport deist, Abraham Binns, reflected the sentiments of at least some in this group in a 1796 pamphlet. While he denounces the "flaming patriots" of the alehouse, he reserves special scorn for quarrelling religious groups: "Religion! what is it but a species of sacred gambling? every party assiduous (if facts may speak for themselves) to convert men from one course of vice to another."⁵⁵ An alternate religious path was followed by Gamaliel Swindells, a Wesleyan who left to join the Kilhamites. He soon found, however, "that what power had been conceded by the Preachers of the New Connexion in favour of the people, was only in favour of rich Members..." As a result, he seceded (again) after the turn of the century and helped to establish the Revivalists and Free Gospelers, soon to be known as the Independent Methodists. This new sect proceeded to attract converts from both Wesleyans and New Connexion Methodists.⁵⁶

The years 1796 and 1797 marked the high points of the controversy in the Stockport Circuit, and the former year witnessed the peak of Circuit membership for the decade. It was probably rapid growth that had helped to stimulate controversy (and not vice versa). As membership more than doubled from 1787 to 1796, it became increasingly difficult to maintain the same type of control and respect for authority within the Circuit that had been possible earlier. In the following years, membership declined and controversy abated, and here again, the relationship was probably one of cause and effect. As the number of members dropped to a level that was lower in 1801 than it had been in 1787, the remaining members were probably those who were more willing to accept the leadership of the trustees and the Conference. This process was surely aided by the phenomenon of the "revival convert," that is, the individual who found himself or herself suddenly and unexpectedly caught up in the religious fervour. These individuals generally retain their religious commitments for shorter periods than do those who follow a more gradual path to religious conversion. A man who saw many revivals in the North was able to trace the careers of many revival converts. He stated that in extreme cases, people were awakened to their sinfulness and converted during the course of a single religious meeting and then, "perhaps, the very same evening, returning to a set of ungodly relations and companions," they abandoned Methodism altogether.⁵⁸

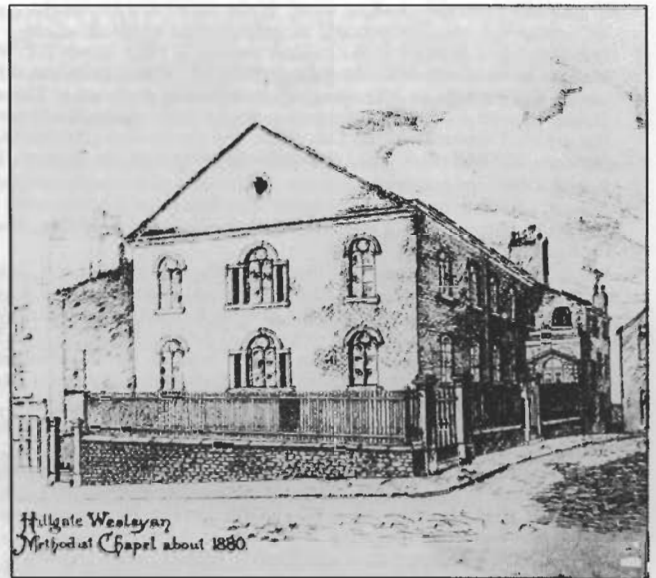
Perspectives on Revivalism

The Stockport Methodist revival of 1791-6 furnishes useful new evidence on the English revival phenomenon.

Difficulties in determining short-term causes, even at this micro-level, suggest that each revival may have had a particular constellation of causes which was not necessarily visible in other revivals, either locally or elsewhere. The Stockport revival ultimately attracted hundreds of new members to Methodism. The surviving evidence suggests that for many of them, "the moral revolution of conversion" was among the major events of their lives, which were otherwise untroubled by any attraction to political revolutions and radical ideologies. Few, if any, of them "oscillated" between radical politics and chiliastic religion as E.P. Thompson has claimed to be the case.⁶⁰ Indeed, the conclusions of Bernard Semmel, W.R. Ward and David Hempton seem much more consistent with the Stockport evidence. They see Methodism as a religiously progressive and "modernizing" force that created a "new person" who placed religious responsibilities at the centre of his or her life. At the same time, Semmel in particular regards Methodism as an essentially conservative force in secular affairs: the bulk of Methodist leaders and members undoubtedly favoured the status quo in politics, economics and social relations.⁶¹

This paradox of "progressive conservatism" has led to a recent attempt by Alan Gilbert to reconceive and relabel the Methodist phenomenon of these years. He has concluded that Methodists came to embody "moderate radicalism" when they turned their backs on the Established Church and the established power it represented. Methodism's "very existence expressed mildly radical protest," he writes in one passage, and in another he stresses the "radical element, the undercurrent of protest, the reformist sympathies and egalitarianism" of the Methodists.⁶² Using the term "moderate radicalism" to describe the views of Stockport Methodists seems inappropriate, however, because the various denotations of the term *radical* are bound up with fairly well-defined political positions. If ultra-radicals wanted annual parliaments and universal manhood suffrage (perhaps in a secular republic), moderate radicals probably wanted something less extreme like triennial parliaments and household suffrage. Transferring widely-used political terminology into the religious arena appears to be ill-advised in this case. Even though some "Tom Paine Methodists" could be found in the Stockport Circuit, its membership contained many more Methodists for whom the label "radical" and even "moderate radical" seems unsatisfactory (Matthew Mayer and the old Planners come immediately to mind). Still, while there is no convenient term to evoke the progressive and conservative strands in Methodism, that paradoxical configuration accurately describes the Stockport experience.

Many of the prominent revival converts of the 1790s were younger, poorer, and more liberal theologically than the members who had passed through the slump of the late 1780s. Controversy was probably inevitable in such circumstances, but while it was conducted by such respected figures as William Myles and Matthew Mayer, it did not suffice to bring revivalism to an end. When it was taken up by an uncompromising outsider (Brettell) and those from the lower ranks of the local Methodist membership, the revival ground to a halt. Yet during the storms and stresses of the Industrial Revolution, the end of one revival often



Hillgate Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, built 1781.

contained the seeds of the next. Religious declines typically inspired renewed anxieties about the imminence of the Second Coming, about the immorality of male and female workers, and about the growth of infidelity and the large number of the "unchurched." These concerns reached fever pitch in the annual reports of the Methodist Sunday School (whose average annual growth in 1796-1800 fell to less than one quarter of what it had been during the preceding three years). The authors of these reports heaped scorn on the worker who sacrifices his wages to "sottish indulgences" and "brutish gratifications" and on the infidel who becomes "blinded by sophistry...until immersed in a routine of dissipation, and whirled in a vortex of licentiousness, he glories in his shame."

Such fears led to redoubled proselytizing efforts, numerous fund-raising and church-building campaigns, and many more revivals in the nineteenth century. As a result, additional thousands of Stopfordians would be "born again" into the Methodist faith. Thus, as in most of the textile regions of the English North, Methodists and their revivals played a major role in assuring that the gentle showers of the "Second Great Awakening" would produce recurrent and bountiful spiritual harvests in Stockport and its surrounding district. The story of the 1790s Methodist awakening, in particular, reveals the complexities, the ambiguities, and for some individuals, the apparently transitory nature of this enduring revival phenomenon.

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NOTES

- 1 Elie-Halevy, *A History of the English People in 1815*, trans. E.I. Watkin (London, 1987; 1st ed., 1912-3), 339, 359-74; E.P. Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class* (2nd ed.; Harmondsworth, 1968), ch.11 'The Great Yorkshire Revival 1792-6: A Study of Mass Revival among the Methodists,' *Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, 7 (1974), 46-76. The present study focuses primarily on the town of Stockport with additional information on the parts of the Stockport Wesleyan Methodist Circuit that lay within the ancient county of Cheshire. For detailed accounts of the Lancashire and Derbyshire portions of the Circuit, see E.A. Rose, *Methodism in Ashton-under-Lyne*, 2 vols. (Ashton, 1967-69) S. Evans, *New Mills Wesleyanism: Its History, Traditions, Rise, and Progress* (New Mills, 1912).
- 2 Robert Glen, *Urban Workers in the Early Industrial Revolution* (London, 1984), esp. chs. 2-4; G. Unwin with A. Hulme and G. Taylor, *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights: The Industrial Revolution in Stockport and Marple* (Manchester, 1924). The best directory listing of Stockport occupations in the 1790s is P. Barfoot and J. Wilkes, *The Universal British Directory of Trade, Commerce and Manufacture*, 5 vols. (London, 1790-98), IV, 475-82.
- 3 For discussions of the relevant historiography, see H. McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1984), ch. 2; F.S. Piggin, 'Religion and the Industrial Revolution: An Analysis of E.P. Thompson's Interpretation of Methodism,' *University of Wollongong Historical Journal*, 2:1 (1976), 8-37. A useful recent treatment of Methodism in this period is M. Batty, *Stages in the Development and Control of Wesleyan Lay Leadership 1791-1878* (Peterborough, 1992), chs. 2-8.
- 4 Revival typologies are explored in greater depth in the 'Symposium on Religious Awakenings,' *Sociological Analysis*, 44 (1983), 81-122; and R.E. Richey, 'Revivalism: In Search of a Definition,' *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 28 (1993), 165-75.
- 5 The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (hereafter WJ), ed. N. Churnock, 8 vols. (New York, 1909-16), III, 142; Rose, *Methodism in Ashton*, I, 12; *idem*, 'Methodism in Cheshire to 1800,' *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 78 (1975), 22-3; An Extract of John Nelson's Journal (Bristol, 1767), 63.
- 6 Stockport Public Library, Stockport Sunday School MSS (thereafter SPL, SSS MSS, B/T/3/21/1, Letters to Matthew Mayer (esp. those dated from 1765 to 1780); W.D. Lawson, *Wesleyan Local Preachers* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1874), 315; J. Rigg, 'Methodism in Stockport,' *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 50 (1827), 21. The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine and its predecessors, the *Arminian Magazine*, and the *Methodist Magazine*, (hereafter WMMag)
- 7 Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands University Library of Manchester (hereafter MARC), MAM PLP 73.66.1, Mayer to Benson, Portwood, 26 Feb. 1781; see also SPL, SSS MSS, S/T/3/21/1, Benson to Mayer, Leeds, 9 Oct. 1780; same to same, Hull, 9 Feb. 1788. The Wesleyan Methodist Connexion contained scores of geographic subdivisions known as "circuits." The annual conference usually appointed two itinerant or travelling preachers to each circuit, where they served, typically, for only one or two years.
- 8 WJ, VII, 300; John Wesley, *Sermons*, ed. A.C. Outler, 4 vols. (Nashville, 1984-87), III, 491-501 (Sermon #106); A. Bulmer, *Memoirs of Mrs. Elizabeth [Ritchie] Mortimer* (London, 1836), 107.
- 9 The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (hereafter WL), ed. J. Telford, 8 vols. (London, 1931), VIII, 113, 197; *Manchester Herald*, 12 Jan. 1793. Smith wrote the first book printed in Stockport, but it sheds no light on the grounds for his disputes with the Methodists; see original *Miscellaneous Poems* (Stockport, 1790). He continued to have contacts with the Methodist reformers according to John Pawson: *The Letters of John Pawson (Methodist Itinerant, 1762-1806)*, ed. J. C. Bowmer and J.A. Vickers (Peterborough, 1994), I, 128. Unlike the itinerant "circuit preachers," the local preachers were permanent residents of their circuits and generally preached only part time. They were officially under the supervision of the circuit preachers. See n. 7 above.
- 10 R. Treffry, *Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Benson* (New York, 1842), 107-8; C. Field, 'Anti-Methodist Publications of the Eighteenth Century: A Revised Bibliography,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 73 (1991), 237-42, 280. The satiric engravings include [Thomas Rowlandson], *Old Cantwell Canvassing for Lord Janus* (July 1788); [Isaac Cruikshank], *Self Murder or the Wolf Tried and Convicted on his own Evidence* (28 Aug. 1791).
- 11 Robert Miller, 'Memoirs of the principal Occurrences which have passed in the seven and thirty Years Experience of Robert Miller, Minister of the Gospel,' WMMag, 24 (1801), 197. Miller must have been referring to the total (gross) number of new members without taking into account the year's losses. The net increase in 1792-3 was 110.
- 12 D. Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850* (London, 1987), 74. On the chapel expansion, see Matthew Mayer and others, *Address of the Trustees of the Methodist Chapel in Stockport, to the Conference Assembled in Sheffield* (Stockport, 1805), 6.
- 13 William [Cleaver], *Charge Delivered by William Lord Bishop of Chester, to the Clergy of his Diocese* (Oxford, 1799), 10-13. Cleaver served as Bishop of Chester from 1787 to 1800. A perceptive, anonymous observer of religious outpourings in Lancashire and Yorkshire emphasizes the importance of pre-existing religious sentiments in explaining the onset of revivals: 'Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in the Prayer Meetings,' by "A Well Wisher to Zion," WMMag, 21 (1798), 242.
- 14 'Statistical View of Dissenters in England and Wales. Cheshire,' *Congregational Magazine*, 3 (1820), 458; J. Cocks, *Memorials of Hatherlow and of the Old Chadkirk Chapel* (Stockport, 1895), 75. See also J. Meldrum, *The State of Religion* (Stockport, 1796).
- 15 Quotation in W. Evans and T. Evans, eds., *The Friends' Library*, 14 vols. (Philadelphia, 1837-50), IV, 194; D. Butler, 'The Circulating Yearly Meeting for the Northern Counties, 1699-1788,' *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, 52 (1968), 201-2.
- 16 G. Slater, *Chronicles of Lives and Religion in Cheshire and Elsewhere* (London, 1891), 25; W. Bramwell, *The Woderful [sic] Woman, of Strong Faith & Mighty Prayer . . . Ann Cutler, Commonly Called Praying Nanny* (Tunstall, 1821), 17-27. Baxter, "Great Yorkshire Revival," 50-1, employs inaccurate statistical data for Stockport and thus incorrectly concludes that revivals in Yorkshire triggered revivals in Stockport.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 59; W.G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago, 1978), 9.
- 18 Owen Davies, *A Sermon Preached at the Octagon Chapel, Chester, February 25, 1795* (Chester, 1795), 7. On the 1793 bankruptcies of a major Stockport cotton spinner and the Stockport Bank, see William Bailey and Co., *A List of Bankrupts...from Jan. 1, 1786 to June 24, 1806...* (London, 1806), entries for Abraham Illingworth and John Dumbell; P. Giles, 'The perplexed and ill-managed affairs of the Stockport Bank' 1791-1827,' *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 88 (1992), 65-8.
- 19 R. Wells, *Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England 1763-1803* (Gloucester, 1988), 208, 423, 435; J. Wheeler, *Manchester: Its Political, Social and Commercial History, Ancient and Modern* (London, 1836), 94.
- 20 *The Nature, Design, and General Rules, of the Stranger's Friend Society, Instituted at Stockport, February 6, 1792* ([Stockport?, 1792]), pr. s. sh. Adam Clarke, 'An Account of a Charitable Institution,' WMMag, 21 (1798), 418-26; G.B. Hindle, *Provision for the relief of the poor in Manchester 1754-1826* (Manchester, 1975), 78-83, 111; D.G. Barnes, *A History of the English Corn Laws from 1663-1846* (London, 1930), 59-62, 71.
- 21 William Myles, 'Memoirs of William Myles, Preacher of the Gospel,' WMMag, 20 (1797), 315.
- 22 M. Noll, 'Revolution and the Rise of Evangelical Social Influence in North Atlantic Societies,' in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, ed. Noll, D.W. Bebbington, & G.A. Rawlyk (New York, 1994), 122-3; J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1979); C. Garrett, *Respectable Folly: Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore, 1975); K. Hanley and R. Selden, eds., *Revolution and English Romanticism: Politics and Rhetoric* (Hemel Hempstead, 1990).
- 23 R[obert] M[ooody], *Observations on Certain Prophecies in the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of St. John which relate to the Second Appearing of our Lord* ([London], 1787). See also J.K. Hopkins, *A Woman to Deliver Her People: Joanna Southcott and English Millenarianism in an Era of Revolution* (Austin, Texas, 1982), xiv; T.R. Knox, 'Thomas Spence: The Trumpet of Jubilee,' *Past and Present*, 76 (1977), 75-98;
- 24 His views were published in J[ohn] M[itche]ll, *The First Part of a New Exposition of the Apostle John* (Stockport, 1800); *idem*, *The Second Part...* (Stockport, 1801).
- 25 'A Brief Memoir of the Late Mr. James Needham,' WMMag, 43 (1820), 4. Internal evidence suggests that this memoir was written by John Leech, one of the Stockport Circuit ministers in 1795-6. See also Glen, *Urban Workers*, 118-130; J. Fruchtman, Jr., *The Apocalyptic Politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley* (Philadelphia, 1983); *idem*, *Thomas Paine and the Religion of Nature* (Baltimore, 1993).
- 26 John Freeth, *The Rights of Mankind* ([n.p., 1790]), pr. s.sh.; Public Record Office, Treasury Solicitors' Papers 111/1026/4298, Examinations of Thomas Halton and Joseph Hibbert, 20 July 1794.
- 27 W[illiam] H[orton], Obit. of Mrs. Middleton, WMMag, 61 (1838), 715; Peter M'Owan, 'Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Collier,' WMMag, 73 (1850), 337-39; Obit. of John Brownell, WMMag, 45 (1822), 614.

- 28 J. Brettell, 'Account of Ann Clowes,' *WMMag*, 20 (1797), 299-301; Henry Mayer, 'An Account of the Death of Betty Mayer,' *WMMag*, 18 (1795), 286-288. Betty was apparently a cousin of Matthew Mayer. For a similar auditory hallucination at Macclesfield, see J. Rogers, 'A short Account of Mrs. Martha Rogers,' *WMMag*, 8 (1785), 190.
- 29 William Myles, *A Chronological History of the People Called Methodists*, 4th ed. (London, 1813), 428; W.R. Goudie, *Grove Methodist Sunday School, Marple, Cheshire. 1795 to 1945* (Oldham, 1945), 5; *Annual Report of the Thornset [sic] Sunday School, to January 1st, 1797* (Stockport, 1797), pr. s.sh.; *A Report of the Present State of the Methodist Sunday School in Stockport* (Stockport, 1794), 3. The annual reports of the latter school for 1795-6 document its continued rapid growth.
- 30 Quotation in "An Early Manchester Methodist. An Extract from the Diary of John Wrenshall," *Journal of the Lancashire and Cheshire Branch of the Wesley Historical Society*, 3 (1975-9), 34-5; see also James MacDonald, *Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Benson* (London, 1822), 254. Benson was stationed for a second time in the Manchester Circuit from 1791 to 1794.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 259.
- 32 *WL*, VIII, 196.
- 33 Cf. the different categories in John C. Bowmer, *The Lord's Supper in Methodism 1791-1960* (London, 1961), 18. His perspective is nevertheless useful in that it points to the large numbers who were probably indifferent towards the conflicts of these years.
- 34 'Memoir of Mr. Matthew Mayer,' *WMMag*, 39 (1816), 245; Joseph Benson, 'A Sermon Preached at the Conference held at Leeds, July, 1793,' *ibid.*, 17 (1794), 10-18, 63-74; Batty, *Stages*, 13-17. Such was Mayer's prestige that after his death in 1814, Benson travelled to Stockport and delivered two funeral sermons.
- 35 Myles, *Chronological History*, 9; 'Rise and Progress of Methodism, in Stockport,' *Stockport Monthly Magazine*, I (1840-1), 179; 'Memoir of Needham,' 4. For the radical pamphlet purportedly written by Knott, see *Rights of Swine; An Address to the Poor* ([Stockport?], 1794), which appeared in editions of various lengths. The eight-page edition has been used here for the quotation (p. 6) and the radical proposals (p. 8).
- 36 United Library (Evanston, Illinois), 'A Short Account of Mr. Thomas Rankin, Minister of the Gospel,' 9 (because of the erratic pagination of this MS, the pagination of the United Library's accompanying typescript has been used here); D. Clare, 'The Local Newspaper Press and Local Politics in Manchester and Liverpool, 1780-1800,' *Transactions of The Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 73-4 (1963-4), 111; [John Middleton Hare], *The Life and Labours of Adam Clarke, LL.D.* (London, 1834), 124; 'Original Letter of Dr. Adam Clarke,' ed. H. Sandwith, *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* [hereafter *PWHS*], 18 (1931-2), 27.
- 37 Pawson, *Letters*, 113; *Manchester Herald*, 5 Jan. 1793; *At a Meeting held at the house of Jeremiah Adshead...* (Stockport, 1792), pr. s.sh. For a statement of loyalty by the next Conference, see *Minutes of the [Wesleyan] Methodist Conferences* [hereafter *WMMin*], 19 vols. (London, 1811-1877), I, 280.
- 38 MacDonald, *Benson*, 222-3.
- 39 SPL, SK 72, "Register For the People Called Methodists, Stockport in the County of Chester."
- 40 Batty, *Stages*, 92-3; *WMMin*, I, 294-5. For Bradburn's earlier preaching visits to Stockport, see MARC, Samuel Bradburn, "Memorandum Book," I, entries for 22 March, 24 Oct. 1790; 15, 19 Sept. 1791.
- 41 John Stonehouse and others, *The Proceedings at Bristol* (Manchester, 1794); *Address of the Trustees of Manchester, Salford, and Stockport, to the Methodist Societies at Bristol, and elsewhere* (Manchester, 1794).
- 42 John Pawson, *An Affectionate Address to the members of The Methodist Societies* ([Liverpool], 1795), 24; John Grundell and Robert Hall, *The Life of Mr. Alexander Kilham* (Nottingham, 1799), 214.
- 43 "Memoir of Needham," 4-6; [Joseph Beaumont and James Everett], *Wesleyan Takings: or Centenary Sketches of Ministerial Character* 2 vols. (London, 1840-51), I, 337-8.
- 44 Quotation in E.A. Rose, 'The Methodist New Connexion 1797-1907. Portrait of a Church,' *PWHS*, 47 (1989-90), 243. See also Alexander Kilham, *The Progress of Liberty, Amongst the People Called Methodists* (Alnwick, 1795); W.H. Lockley, *The Story of Stockport Circuit of the United Methodist Church: A Series of Lectures* (Stockport, 1909), 3-4.
- 45 Matthew Mayer and William Pine, 'Address from the Delegated Trustees assembled at Manchester, to the Conference,' *WMMag*, 18 (1795), 472; for the Plan, see Joseph Bradford and Thomas Coke, 'To the Members of the Methodist Society,' *ibid.*, 467-71. Cf. *WMMin*, I, 322-7.
- 46 Brettell, 'Memoir of the Rev. Jeremiah Brettell: Written by Himself,' *WMMag*, 53 (1830), 725; *idem*, *Fear God, Honour the King. A Sermon Preached at the Methodist Chapel, in Stockport, January 24, 1796* (n.p., [1796]). The best narrative of these events is Rose, *Methodism in Ashton*, I, 31-2. For further insights into Brettell's sometimes stormy career, see the dramatic episode in Bristol described in 'Letters from William Pine to Joseph Benson, 1794-1796,' ed. K. Morgan, *Bristol Record Society*, 45 (1994), 160.
- 47 *WMMin*, I, 344.
- 48 [J. Blackwell], *Life of the Rev. Alexander Kilham* (London, 1838), iv and 238.
- 49 *An Appeal to the Members of the Methodist Connexion* (Stockport, 1796); *Address of the Local Preachers, Trustees, Leaders, &c. (Agreed upon by a Committee at Stockport) To Their Brethren in the Circuit, &c.* (Stockport, 1796). The *Appeal* contains accounts of two meetings at which Robert Thornely served as chair and George Beaumont served as secretary; as a consequence, those two men are sometimes given as the authors of the tract.
- 50 Jeremiah Brettell, *An Address to the Members of the Methodist Societies in the Stockport Circuit* (Stockport, 1796). For the sermon, see n. 46.
- 51 Michael Thomas Sadler, *An Apology for the Methodists* (Stockport, [1797]).
- 52 MARC, Kilham MSS, Harrop to Robert Oastler, Ashton, 5 Sept. 1797; E.A. Rose, *The Heritage of the Red Hall Methodist Church Audenshaw 1782-1982* (Audenshaw, 1982), 12-14.
- 53 W.H. Clarkson, 'Memoir of Mr. Thomas Marsland, of Stockport,' *WMMag*, 66 (1843), 795.
- 54 Grundell and Hall, *Kilham*, 142; Norman W. Mumford, 'The Administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Church after the Death of John Wesley,' *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 176 (1951), 65; M. Mills, 'Rev. George Beaumont,' *Methodist New Connexion Magazine*, 44 (1841), 231-3; P. Stigant, "Wesleyan Methodism and Working Class Radicalism in the North, 1792-1821," *Northern History*, 6 (1971), 108.
- 55 Abraham Binns, *Remarks on a Publication, Entitled, "A Serious Admonition to the Disciples of Thomas Paine, and All other Infidels"* (Stockport, 1796), 17.
- 56 S. Peacock, *Memorials of Mr. Gamaliel Swindells* (Stockport, 1833), 6; J. Vickers, *History of Independent Methodism: Sketches of Worthies, origins of Circuits, Expositions of Principles and Polity* ([Bolton], 1920), 214-15.
- 57 The years 1791-96 may have also comprised the peak years for disputes in the Wesleyan Connexion as a whole. The title page of *Free Inquiry, Mutual Deliberation, and Liberty of Conscience proved to be the only Bonds of Lasting Union amongst the Methodists* (Bristol, 1796), states that "Near Fifty Pamphlets and Circular Letters" on Methodist controversies were published during those years.
- 58 'Thoughts on the Revival,' 242 (cf. n. 13 above); M. Argyle and B. Beit-Hallahmi, *The social psychology of religion* (London, 1975), 42-3.
- 59 C.M. Elliott, 'The Ideology of Economic Growth: a Case Study,' in *Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution*, ed. E.L. Jones and G.E. Mingay (London, 1967), 83.
- 60 Thompson, *Making*, esp. pp. 429-33. For good antidotes, see P.T. Phillips, 'Methodism, Political order, and revolution,' *Studies in Religion*, 5 (1975-76), 186-90; A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914* (London, 1976), 83, 87.
- 61 B. Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution* (New York, 1973), 81-109; W.R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England 1790-1850* (London, 1972), ch. 2 and *passim*; D. Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, 74-5. Similar views can be found in I.R. Christie, *Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: Reflections on the British Avoidance of Revolution* (Oxford, 1984), ch. 7; J.M. Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation: Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England 1740-1982* (London, 1985), 35-6.
- 62 A.D. Gilbert, 'Religion and political stability in early industrial England,' in *The Industrial Revolution and British society*, ed. P.K. O'Brien and R. Quinault (Cambridge, 1993), 95, 91, and *passim*. D. Hempton seems to follow Gilbert when he describes Methodism "more as an expression of social radicalism than as a reinforcement of ancien régime control" in 'Motives, Methods and Margins in Methodism's Age of Expansion,' *PWHS*, 49 (1994), 195.
- 63 *Annual Report of the Methodist Sunday School in Stockport* (Stockport, 1797), 1; *idem* (Stockport, 1802), 2. The intervening annual reports contain detailed membership statistics. on the threat from deism, see also J. Nightingale, *A Short and Easy Method with The Deists, &c.* (Macclesfield, 1800).