WHO WERE WESLEY’S OWN PREACHERS?

JOHN H. LENTON

In the early 1740s John Wesley took the reluctant step to allow lay preachers. Very quickly his “attitude changed to an eager use of the new method” and he gathered around him men, mostly lay, who would travel in the circuits he formed. They were to preach to the societies, and in the open air, to whomever would listen. They faced strong opposition in most areas and many other problems. They frequently gave up as a result. Each year from 1744 they met in a “Conference” called by Wesley to discuss their practice and doctrine, provide training, report on their success or otherwise (they had to bring a correct record of the numbers of members in their circuit and explain decreases), and discover where Mr. Wesley would station them next.

A database has been compiled containing information on all of Wesley’s Preachers, that is those who entered before Wesley’s death in 1791, or at least 800 of them, some of whom must remain only doubtful. The term “Wesley’s Preachers” is often used of modern British Methodist ministers, and by them of themselves. In the database we deal only with those who actually were Wesley’s Preachers, i.e., during his lifetime.

It began with a list of 677 prepared over many years by the late Dr. Frank Baker of Duke Divinity School, NC. Throughout it is based not only on the Minutes of Conference, i.e., those accepted “On Trial” or later “Full Connexion,” or found on the printed stations, but also those who from other references can be shown to have travelled as Itinerant or Travelling.

More details can be found in J. H. Lenton, My Sons in the Gospel (Loughborough England: Wesley Historical Society, 2000). See A. Raymond George in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and E. Gordon Rupp, eds., A History of The Methodists Church in Great Britain (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 2:144. Women preachers were never stationed by Wesley, though he encouraged some. See Paul W. Chilcote, John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1990). At the Wesley Historical Society in 2000 on which this article is based, my friend the Rev. Margaret Jones asked the pertinent question as to how what women preachers did differed from the male preachers. A full answer to that will hopefully come in a further publication.

Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from the First. By the Late Rev. John Wesley (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1812). There are two main editions, 1812 and 1862. The 1812 edition has been used throughout except where indicated, or where the death was after 1811, in which case the Minutes printed that year are used. Before 1765 what was printed in 1862 is used, with additions based on what will be Vol 10 in the Bicentennial edition of Wesley’s Works.
Preachers. Only from 1765 was there a regular printed series of Minutes for each year’s Conference, so that before 1765 we are usually dependent on stray references, e.g., in letters, or in manuscript minutes only printed much later and often incomplete.

In the Minutes Wesley called them “Preachers” or “Preachers of the Gospel.” “Travelling Preachers” is how they came to be designated for example in the Minutes in 1780 so that they could be distinguished from “Local Preachers” who worked at their trade during the week and were usually only available for preaching on Sundays. In the early 19th century they became called “ministers.” It was only in September 1821, after a discussion on this at Conference that year, that the titles of the British Preachers’ portraits in the Methodist Magazine change from “Mr. Willm. Dixon, Preacher of the Gospel” to the “Revd John Bell.” Even then the editor was not sure and retreated in October to “William Hinson Preacher of the Gospel” before resuming in November with “Revd. John Lancaster”! I have therefore used many other sources, not only for the period 1744-1764 but also the period from 1765, to supplement and correct the printed Minutes. The most significant of these other sources are the lists found in the historians Myles, Crowther, or Holroyd. Myles is important because he classifies them as “3 races.” The first race (220 names) entered before 1765, the second (470) before Wesley’s death. He then points out differences between them. Others have used his figures since. All three usually employed the Conference Minutes as their main source. They therefore say someone entered or left at the time of the Conference when this was reported. So a man who actually

3Wesleyanism never formally separated from the Church of England. Once they began to administer Communion (officially from the Plan of Pacification of 1795) they became de facto ministers of Christian congregations. The very similar lay exhorters responsible to Whitefield have been listed by Dallimore in 1980. A few were the same. See Arnold Dallimore, George Whitefield (West Chester, IL: Cornerstone Books, 1980), 2:153-159. As with Wesley there were Superintendents looking after each of four Associations. Men wishing to join became probationers until they were definitely accepted. Fifteen were full time, the others part time.

4William Myles, A Chronological History of Methodism (London: Thomas Cordeux, 4th ed., 1813), Myles’ dates have been suspect with historians for a long time, partly because local historians could show his dates for chapels in their area were wrong. However, I have found his dates for preachers often reliable when the explanation in the text about those dates is allowed for. He lists a few Local Preachers, also those who became or were already clergy of the Church of England.

5Jonathan Crowther, A Portraiture of Methodism or The History of Wesleyan Methodists (London: Richard Edwards, 2nd ed., 1815). Crowther’s listing is less complete than Myles, but fuller than others such as Pawson. His lists are slightly different from Myles. There is also a list in Charles Atmore, An Appendix to the Methodist Memorial .... (Bristol, England: R. Edwards, 1801). See also note 12 below.

6J. B. Holroyd, A Chronological and Alphabetical List of the Wesleyan Ministers (Haslingden, 1819). This is useful because it is later than the others. It is the same date as the first of Hill’s Arrangements. It is in some ways more useful than this because Hill’s says nothing about those who had left, unlike Holroyd. It is very rare. I know only of a copy at Garrett and a photocopy of this in the Wesley Historical Society Library at Oxford Brookes University.
started traveling in September 1777 is recorded by them as starting at the next Conference 1778. Similarly a man who left after the Conference of 1784 is not recorded as leaving until 1785 when this was recorded at Conference. Manuscript letters and diaries, printed local histories and memoirs have also been used. Preachers who began traveling in a Circuit after the 1790 Conference, but before Wesley's death, are included since Wesley may be assumed to be responsible for their appointment to travel. So are clergymen who traveled with Wesley, who are recorded as preaching (John Meriton) or those who preached regularly to Wesley's societies in their area in his lifetime (Walter Sellon). Also included are those from the British Isles sent by Wesley to serve abroad until 1784 for the American church (e.g., John King). After the Christmas Conference 1784 set up the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, that church was independent. Americans who entered there before 1784 are not in, unless they served in Nova Scotia or Britain, so appearing in the British Minutes after 1784.

The purpose of the database is to try to analyze what can be found out about them; age at various points, marriage if any, cause of death, place of birth, class, education, writings, reasons for leaving, children, relationships, the circuits in which they traveled, offices held, length of service, ordination, their leaders, common factors and experiences, though equally significant is the range and variety.

There have been some new discoveries from looking at the database. For example, there is the matter of age at entry and death.

It has been assumed that Wesley's Preachers were young at entry. This was partly put about by Wesley himself to indicate the contrast between "the whole body of aged, established, learned clergy" opposed to Methodism and the "handful of raw young men without name, learning or eminent sense" who were its chief support. Many were young, particularly at that relatively early point of 1753. Ages are not always known (or necessarily accurate). Jonathan Catlow of Keighley possibly entered at 16 in 1748.
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three 17–year-olds, two early, Glassbrook and Greaves, the third being Adam Clarke’s friend, Andrew Coleman, in 1785, the only 17–year-old after 1760. On the other hand the average age for entry was 27, old by 19th-century standards, with the oldest known being John Whitley, entering in 1777 at the age of 55, a farmer of Toils Farm at Eldwick Cragg near Bingley in the West Riding, Yorkshire. Eighty-seven entered at 30 or over. Out of 331 known, this is substantial (26.3%). So far as cohorts are concerned this does not seem to have changed much in Wesley’s lifetime.

Similarly the idea that they died young is not borne out by the figures. Andrew Coleman died at the age of 18. But only ten are known to have died under 30. The average age of death known is over 65 and we have ten who made 90 or more, Joseph Sutcliffe and Thomas Ridgeway dying at 94. It should be admitted that most of these are late entrants and those who stayed in the work. Of the ten 90–year-olds, seven entered in the 1780s and two in the 1770s. The “Early Methodist Preachers” had a tougher time. In addition there are many for whom we don’t know the age but are described as “considerably advanced in age” like Livermore.

These figures compare well with a recent study by Ed Schell of the American Methodist Traveling Preachers, 1773–1799. His 819 compare in size very well to my 800. They belong to a smaller, slightly later generation, including some of my cohorts four and five. He points out that the average lifespan is 65, in an age where the average American male aged 20 would probably be dead by 45. Fourteen reached 90 or more, the oldest being Joshua Wells at 98.

A second point, to go with the more than a quarter who were 30 or over, is that at least 78 entered already married. This was to become very rare in the 19th century. Wesley needed travelling preachers so badly that though he preferred single young men, since he could not get them, he often settled for older men already caring for wife and family. Examples include many of the most famous early stalwarts, John Nelson, Christopher Hopper, William

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13R. H. Gallagher, Pioneer Preachers of Irish Methodism (Belfast: Nelson and Knox, 1965), 58, wrongly says Coleman was 18 when accepted. Adam Clarke in J. Evertt, ed., Miscellaneous Works (London: T. Tegg, 1836), 12;348f. says he was born April 1768. Accepted in the July Conference 1785, he was therefore 17.
14J. Ward Sketches of Methodism in Bingley (Bingley: John Harrison, 1863), 32–35. He left his son Francis in charge of the farm and lasted two years. Wesleyan Methodist Minutes, 1823;496–499. “Average” is explained in Lenton, Appendix Table Five.
15John Livermore entered ministry in 1778, died 1783 after a fall from his horse (Atmore). It should be pointed out that these results are skewed by the fact that the early cohorts and those who died young are less likely to have their ages known. Death dates for those who left usually are not known. Many who “died in the work” are described as dying “young,” but no age is given. The Minutes only begin giving age at death in 1798. See Lenton, Appendix Table Five.
16Methodist History, 38:307. See note 40 below.
17See Beck. Married men were occasionally accepted, but there had to be exceptional circumstances and these were rare.
Shent, and John Haime,\textsuperscript{18} leaders of the middle years like Alexander Mather, Robert Costerdine, John Hampson senior, Thomas Lee, Richard Rodda, and late entrants such as Miles Martindale (1786) and William Smith (1789). Again, there is a contrast with America where Asbury refused to accept men already married and frequently insisted that men should locate if they did marry because of the burden on the stations.

It is possible to follow the question of marriage through the cohorts and see what happens over time. In the first cohort who entered in the 1740s, there were 74 who were married (52%), but some of these married after they left which compares with 69 others. Only 51 were married during their itinerancy (36%). Forty-nine of the 74 are known to have had families (66%). Ten of them married a second time when their wives died, usually within two or three years and often to a friend of the first wife, e.g., James Rogers, John Pawson, and Thomas Roberts.\textsuperscript{19} At least 14 were married at their entry (10% of the total entry), though at least one wife was not dependent (Richard Moss). At least nine were “wealthy wives” (12%) of those who married. The 69 probably includes some who married, but we don’t know about it. The 69 others, i.e., unmarried or unknown, are 48% of the total.

In the following cohorts the proportion of unmarrieds and unknown gradually decreases, while that of married preachers increases. So, in the second cohort (entered 1750s) there are 37 married (45%), while 33 (40%) are unmarried or unknown. In the third cohort (entered 1760s) marriages are 71 (52%) and in the fourth (entered 1770s) 79 (53%). Unmarrieds/unknown goes down in the fifth cohort (entered 1780s, or before Wesley’s death) to 98 (36%).

As we follow through with the cohorts so we can see that Wesley was able to insist more that men should be single if they wanted to enter. So he wrote to Duncan Wright about James Bogie in 1781, “if he is still single, let him travel” (!)\textsuperscript{20} Age at marriage is also higher than the average for the population, which was going down for men from 27.5 in the first half of the century to 26.4 in the second half.\textsuperscript{21} The average age at marriage where known is high. Often it is not known and can be higher still, e.g., John King, born 1752, who married after 1809, so he was at least 57 years-old when he married. Quite possibly he, like others, married at his moment of superannuation, in his case 1811.

\textsuperscript{18}John Furz is not counted among these, but like several others must be regarded as abandoning his wife. T. Jackson, \textit{[The Lives of the] Early Methodist Preachers} (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1865) 5:130-132, gives a harrowing account of how he returned to find her dying, having left her looking after their children by herself in 1758.
Age of marriage of the wives is also often not known. Where it is known, it is clear it is often considerably different from the husbands in either direction. Some wives were considerably younger. Others were considerably older. It is clear that in the preacher’s eyes the most important qualification was religious suitability. Age, in comparison, though seen as important in the 21st century was then of little importance. Again, comparison with the general population is instructive. Age of marriage for women fell from 26.2 in the first part of the century to 24.9 in the second half.

Jonathan Edmondson is a good example of the importance of sticking to the marriage regulations in Wesley’s day. Entering in 1786, he moved circuit each year. In 1789 he married Mary Gunniss of Spilsby from his 1787 circuit, at Otley near his home at Keighley on the 6th of August. He was still “On Trial” and had not asked permission. For these offenses (after all there was no accommodation in York Circuit for her), Wesley suspended him until the next Conference (i.e., 1790). Wesley did not, as he usually had done, deal with it completely himself. This was giving Conference the final decision. So Edmondson and his wife went home from York where he had been sent, back to Keighley. Next year before Conference, the baby was born, a daughter, but the mother died as a result of the child’s birth. Conference listened to the case, had pity on the bereaved Jonathan and continued him “On Trial”, sending him to nearby Bradford where he could visit his daughter regularly. Next year (1791) he was received into Full Connexion a year late, and 30 years later he became President of the Conference. However he had lost almost a whole year, and it was probably only his wife’s premature death that saved him. Is this an example of Conference firmness in contrast with Wesley’s leniency?22

Many itinerant preachers, particularly in the early years, began to travel in their own Circuit. A good example is John Peacock from Lincolnshire. Born at Scatter near Kirton in Lindsey in North Lincolnshire in 1731, he lost his mother at seven. As a young man he made a name for himself locally as a wrestler and boxer. In 1754 he heard George Whitefield at Misterton, was converted, and joined the Methodists. He married and moved to Misterton where he became a Local Preacher. In 1767 he was called out by Wesley and traveled in the West Lincolnshire Circuit. Next year he was in East Lincolnshire and had to leave his wife and two children behind in Misterton, presumably supported by her father’s family. It is not surprising that he then desisted for a year! By being a Traveling Preacher in his own circuit for the first year, he had cushioned the blow to his family.23 It was a logical development. They should know the local language (Gaelic, French) or at least

22 For Jonathan Edmondson, see Telford, 8:279, Methodist Magazine 1818:51, and Bowmer and Vickers, 1:83.
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dialect. It was a Circuit where they were already known. It would ease the difficulty (particularly if there was a wife and family) in that for the first year they would not have to move.

In his own circuit the preacher would at least be able to find the way! If he had to give up at the end of the first year he would have lost less. Travel to a faraway circuit could be a problem. At least 107 preachers began as itinerants in their own circuit. They include such men as Thomas Rutherford in Newcastle, Jasper Winscom in Wiltshire, John Pawson in York, Thomas Maskew in Haworth, Francis Asbury in Staffordshire, Thomas Walsh in Limerick, Jacob Rowell in the Dales, John Whitford and John Murlin ("the Weeping Prophet") in Cornwall, and Charles Atmore in Norfolk.

It tended to happen more with the early cohorts and less with later entrants, though often it was the neighboring circuit in which later entrants began. It was not necessarily a success. Peter Mill from Arbroath found great hostility when he became a Traveling Preacher in Dundee Circuit in 1774. Neither of his two young Assistants (Rutherford and Wilkinson), could persuade the local Methodists to accept him.24

Jasper Winscom is an example of another kind of failure. An irascible and elderly leading layman and haberdasher in Winchester, he refused to be stationed too far away from his business interests. The even older Wesley was prepared to accept this, but not his Traveling Preachers. When Wesley died, they promptly stationed Winscom in faraway Norfolk at Wells, censured him for not deferring to his Assistant, and when he refused to accept their stationing were pleased to see him go back to his Local Preaching. This is another example of Conference inflexibility and Wesley’s lenience.25

One result of the problems over marriage was the fact that many married "wealthy wives." My definition of a wealthy wife is one with an income or property, or a wealthy father. The last may not mean money in practice. Again, as with most other fields, lack of information is most common. However, where there is information, wives tended to have wealth more often than their husbands. Was this deliberate? I would argue that usually it was. They followed the example of their leaders. John Wesley and George Whitefield married wealthy widows.26 Grimshaw and Fletcher married wealthy wives.27 Charles Wesley’s wife was well-connected. The leading

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26 Wesley carefully set up a trust so that he would not benefit from her estate. I am indebted to John Vickers for this point. Wesley did not need the money, so he could afford to do this. H.D. Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast (Peterborough, England: Epworth Press, 1989), 265.
27 Mary Bosanquet had spent £6,000 of her inheritance by 1781. However, she had not been able to touch the other £500 capital. Her brothers approved of her marriage and she continued to receive regularly large amounts of money from them over the 34 years after her marriage. Gareth Lloyd, ed., Methodist Archives and Research Centre Fletcher Tooth Correspondence Catalogue (Manchester: John Rylands University Library, 1997), Vol 1 A-B, 60-61.
preachers set a similar example. Both of Pawson’s wives were well-off, his second inheriting £200 when her brother died in 1794. Samuel Bradburn’s “Betsy” was the step-daughter of a wealthy Dublin jeweler Mr. Karr. His second wife was Sophia Cooke of Gloucester, who had helped Robert Raikes set up his Sunday School there.

The preachers’ letters even have advice in which they tell younger preachers how they should wait for a good woman with money. One example is William Fish’s letter to Alexander Kilham (both came from Lincolnshire) in 1788. Fish listed 16 points a preacher’s wife should have, the 16th being “as much fortune as will maintain herself, her husband and children if need be.”

Thomas Olivers, born at Tregynon in Montgomeryshire and apprenticed as a shoemaker in Shrewsbury, a member of the second cohort, in his autobiography written c1780 about his situation in 1758, is admirably candid. Having answered the question, “Am I called to marry at this time?” in the affirmative, he went on to ask, “what sort of person ought I to marry?” He suggested four qualifications, the last being, “since I was connected with a poor people, the will of God was that whoever I married should have a small competency, to prevent my making the Gospel chargeable to any.” He described Miss Green of Leeds, who he married then as, “a person of good family,” i.e., possessing such a competency.

The reasons for this need were the lack of support from the circuits and the preachers’ need for someone to look after them, particularly in old age (e.g., Valton marrying a wealthy Bristol widow). The most notable example, however, was Thomas Roberts. Born in Cornwall in 1765, he entered the ministry in 1786. In 1793 he married Miss Wogan, heiress of the Weston estate in Pembroke. She died in 1795 after childbirth. His second wife, Mary (married 1796), was the daughter of W. Randolph Esq. of Bristol. She died in 1804, having had seven children. His third wife was the co-heiress of Benjamin Lee, goldsmith of Dublin, whose only sister married a Guinness. In the next generation there was a Benjamin Lee Roberts to match the better known Benjamin Lee Guinness.

At least twelve preachers married women who were either already preachers or began to preach after their marriage. Together they were able to provide for the spiritual needs of the circuits in which they traveled. Despite the work done by Paul Chilcote and others, we still do not know about all the women preachers of the period.

An Assistant was “that preacher in each circuit who is appointed to take charge of the societies and the other preachers” in the circuit, i.e., act for

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*Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, 21:32-33. Fish remained single, so presumably found it more difficult to find such a paragon as Kilham, who married twice.

*Jackson, 2:80.

Wesley in his absence. In America the title soon became "preacher in charge." \(^{31}\)

Wesley regarded Assistants as important people to whom he gave much responsibility. From the earliest days the names of those who were Assistants were recorded, at first more often than their stations. \(^{32}\) In 1796 the Minutes changed the title "Assistant" to that of Superintendent. In the 19th century becoming a Superintendent was similarly important, but reserved for those who had been twenty years in the ministry. In the 21st century it is rare for even a senior candidate to be a "Super" until his/her second station. However, Wesley was concerned that Assistants should be energetic, devoted and not elderly. \(^{33}\) The pattern would seem to be five years travel and most would be Assistants. At the other end those who did twenty or thirty years would often find themselves under the authority of a younger Assistant. Benjamin Rhodes, entered in 1766 at the age of 23. Having done two years at Norwich he was sent to Oxfordshire in 1766 at the tender age of 25 in charge as the Assistant. For the next 12 years until 1778 he was always an Assistant, including important circuits like Newcastle and Hull. After this, now in his late 30s and 40s he's an Assistant for six out of the next 13, i.e., less than half. George Snowden entered in February 1769 aged 31. At 1769 Conference he was received "On Trial" and sent to Enniskillen as Assistant with only six months experience as an itinerant! \(^{34}\) William Jenkins, with connections in the Wrexhain area, first appears in the Minutes as being received "On Trial" in 1789 (aged about 25 though he appears to have been traveling in Bedford during the previous year), \(^{35}\) was at the same Conference sent back to Bedford as Assistant. \(^{36}\) There are two examples of Probationers (to use a later title) acting as Assistants in their first year, in each case over more senior colleagues. \(^{37}\) Andrew Blair, a relatively junior Irish-born preacher, found himself in the late 1780s acting as Assistant in large and important English

\(^{31}\) Matthew Simpson, Cyclopaedia of Methodism (Philadelphia: Louis Everts, 1880), 63, "sub Assistant."

\(^{32}\) The Assistants were listed in 1746 but not their stations. John Bennet's Copy of the Minutes...1744..., Occasional Publications of the WHS No 1, (London: Kelly, 1896), 27. Cf., the Bennet copy of the Minutes of 1749. All these will appear together in the forthcoming Vol. 10 of the Works of John Wesley.

\(^{33}\) Cf., the lack of seniority of those included by Wesley in the Legal Hundred 1784. Rack, 503.

\(^{34}\) This section is based on a study of the Minutes.

\(^{35}\) Telford, 8:159 (July 1789) implies he was in Bedford during the previous year. Wesleyan Methodist Minutes, 1844:775 for age.

\(^{36}\) Minutes, 1789.

\(^{37}\) At Enniskillen it was James Rea (entered ministry, 1785, but left during this year at Enniskillen), at Bedford it was John Ramshaw (entered ministry 1785, but had been missing for two years from 1787). In each case Wesley was clearly more suspicious of the other preacher. C H. Crookshank, History of Methodism in Ireland (Clonmel Tentmaker, reprint, 1994), 1:173 and Bowmer and Vickers, 3:22. Ramshaw was a continuing problem. Mary Barritt described him as "a hindrance to the Gospel, but the Lord forgive him." Mss Diary at Birmingham University Library, Ms 97, 5).
circuits, e.g., Birmingham, Leeds, over such senior preachers as Murlin, Eels, Wright, Costerdine, Story and Jeremiah Brettell. On the other hand, Thomas Mitchell, a senior and most successful preacher (e.m. 1748) who was an Assistant at least 3 times in the 1760s (aged c. 40), was never an Assistant in the 1770s and 80s. Wesley apparently thought he was too old. There were exceptions to this pattern, both those who were never an Assistant and those who after the first 2/3 years were always Assistants, but the commonest pattern under Wesley was Assistant after 4/5 years until middle age and then not again.

My list of Travelling Preachers who entered in Wesley’s lifetime is now published on the internet (www.gcah.org) for the first time. A key is published with it. More details about the criteria for selection for the database and the database fields can be found in my, “My Sons in the Gospel,” published by the Wesley Historical Society as the Wesley Historical Society Lecture for 2000 and available from the author at £3 plus postage.

Only 10 of the 100 fields are shown, two being for the names. 800 names appear below, a total which include some who are very doubtful, especially in the early years.

The first column after the two for names is that of Date of Birth. This is often only known approximately. It is shown in the American way; when day and month are known, i.e., m/d/y. The next column is that of date of entry. This is often doubtful for those who entered before 1765. Even after 1765 the date is sometimes different from that traditionally used which was based on acceptance by Conference. Wesley frequently asked men to become itinerant preachers during the Connexional year. Conference only caught up when it met.

The next column is Date Left. This is for the 52% who left the ministry, a much higher percentage in Wesley’s day, though lower than those who “located” in the American ministry of the 18th century. The next column is date of death. For most of those who left it is not known. Comparing these last two columns shows that few of those who left, left in the 19th century, while among the deaths a large number survived to that century.

Then comes age at death. As with Ed Schell’s group of 819 American preachers of the period, the range of age at death is wide ranging from Andrew Coleman who died at 18 to Joseph Sutcliffe and Thomas Ridgeway dying at 94. But only 10 are known to have died under 30. The average age

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38 Minutes and Arminian Magazine, 1780:313-25, No. 43 in anon. (J. Everett?) Wesleyan Takings (London: Hamilton Adams, 1841). Cf., Jacob Rowell, not an Assistant in his last five years, John Shaw, entered ministry 1763, always an Assistant, 1768 to 1779 but not again in Wesley’s lifetime, or Thomas Johnson, entered ministry 1752, always an Assistant 1765-1773, but not again.
39 Thomas Taylor was always an Assistant from 1765 except for 1769. So was Thomas Hanson, at least while he was an itinerant. Isaac Waldron was never one.
40 See note 16 above.
of death known is over 65 and we have ten who made 90 or more. It should be admitted that most of these are late entrants and those who stayed in the work. Of the ten 90-year-olds, seven entered in the 1780s and two in the 1770s. The “Early Methodist Preachers” had a tougher time. In addition there are many for whom we don’t know the age, but are described as “considerably advanced in age” like Livermore.

At a time when expectation of life at birth was around 36th for the 27-year-olds and others who became Travelling Preachers, the average of over 65 represents a considerable improvement. Schell suggests many reasons for this in America: “hard, active, alcohol-free lifestyles, loving support from spouses and families, and a vibrant religious faith.” Examining how far this applies in Britain is interesting. The hard, active lifestyle applied into the 19th century, though already by 1800 many circuits had become easier with regular country walks and a return to the Preacher’s home each night. Even before there was little in Britain to compare with the harshness of the American frontier. On the other hand “damp beds” are blamed for many deaths, and more withdrawals from the work.

“Alcohol free life styles” is not true of 18th-century or even early 19th-century Britain. Wesley drank alcohol, if abstemiously, and so did his Preachers, for there was little else safe to drink. Certainly “spirituous liquors” were forbidden (e.g., Large Minutes, 1780), as were drams (1765). Tea was still difficult to get in the country areas and water was disease-ridden. It was only after Edwin Chadwick’s development of safe state-provided water in the towns in the next century that temperance could come to mean not drinking alcohol. Often Preachers stayed in inns. Not all were like the Christopher Inn at Bath, where the Methodist owner, who entertained Wesley among others, shut the inn on Sundays.42 At least one Preacher was a landlord; Benjamin Pearce who kept the Cross Keys in Bradford on Avon, where class meetings were held in the little white washed room behind the bar. Most Preachers were abstemious and doubtless their health benefitted from this, but their lives were certainly not alcohol free. Loving support from spouses and families was true in Britain where a higher proportion were married. Vibrant religious faith certainly was a reason. The help they received from local Methodists who gave them their last food when they were hungry was also important. Probably most important was the determination to make what they had last. Many Preachers’ wives, having too little food, made their husbands eat what there was, denying themselves, to eke out the allowance to the next quarter day. Most preachers until Wesley’s death were still looked after by individuals for most of the time as they traveled their rounds. So, in 1788 the Minutes of Conference read, “many of our Preachers have been obliged to go from the house of one friend to another

for all their meals.”

The next column indicates whether they left or died in the work, l=left, d=died. The last two columns deal with place of birth and county, the county codes being explained below. Of the 471 whose place of birth is established nearly 70% came from England, 20% from Ireland, and less than 4% from each of Scotland and Wales. Within Ireland the largest percentage came from Tyrone, especially the Castlederg area in West Tyrone. Compared to membership, the figures for Preachers coming from the Celtic fringe is higher than would be expected. In England the largest percentages came from Cornwall and the north and in the north from the West Riding, Yorkshire. The success in the West Riding can be largely attributed to the labors of the stonemason John Nelson of Birstall and the Rev. William Grimshaw of Haworth.

As with Ed Schell’s list I am still working on the database and would appreciate help. Anyone with information on any of the 800, or wanting to know more about any of them, including possible descendants, please correspond with me. The easiest way is my current email address: jlenton@fish.co.uk. My current telephone is 044 (from the US) 1952 251792. From GB it is 01952 251792. Mail address is: J. H. Lenton, 21 Vineyard Rd, Wellington, Telford, TF1 1HB, UK.